

Manifesto for Sustainable Experimentation Reading Groups curated by Fran Painter-Fleming

Reading Groups for Sustainable Experimentation

Responding to the exhibition *Manifesto for Sustainable Experimentation*, this reading group series draws on Beaconsfield Contemporary's 30 years of production. Each session is anchored by a particular exhibition or performance, with each signalling different strategies for thinking otherwise.

Working with film, performance and installation, each of the selected archival projects use these artistic mediums to challenge the often-hostile environments we find ourselves within, and to cultivate more compassionate ways of existing in the contemporary.

In opposition to dominant, capitalist or colonial constructions of time, each of these sessions also posits more elastic readings of time, bringing in scholars and artists who unpick how landscape, memory, language and gender each leave their own temporal markings.

Bringing together archival materials from the selected projects with contemporary texts, this series fosters dialogue between the recent history and the now, encouraging participants to continue to wield tools of rebellion against dogma or oppression.

Practical notes on each session:

*For those who want to read in advance, the selected extracts for each session will be made available to attendees ahead of each session. We will read the texts out loud together however, so no reading ahead is not compulsory. (Reading aloud is also not compulsory during the session).

Part Three: 'Act of Creation', Tackling Gendered Time Saturday 2nd August 2:30-4:30pm.

"At the beginning of her life, she did not know how old she was.... But gradually, the word punctuality, meaning exactness to the minute, comes to rule her life.... Now, everything around her is designed to save time so she can squeeze more and more into her day.... She invests in a modem, a food-processor, a CD-ROM drive, a TV remote-control, voice-mail, e-mail, fax, home-shopping service, a remote-diagnosis machine, voiceconferencing, video-on-demand, the Daily Me, home-banking, virtual education and an electronic camera.... Living so perpetually in the present, she wonders where her past and future went..."

Bush, K. 1995. *Cottage Industry*, Beaconsfield 4 November-3 December 1995. [Exhibition catalogue]. London: Beaconsfield.

This third session responds to one of the first exhibitions held at Beaconsfield's current site, *Cottage Industry* (1995). Bringing together seven female artists, (Sonia Boyce, Kate Bush, Mikey Cuddihy, Siobhan Davies, Elsie Mitchell, Clare Palmier and Naomi Siderfin) Curated by the female member of Beaconsfield, this group show invited artists to share their experiences of navigating gendered domestic and economic constraints within the art world, looking at how invisible labour and care was often paralleled or blurred within professional settings.

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Whether tackling curatorial positions alongside fine art practices, supporting children or, students, this emphasis on hosting or guidance often slips into the workload of female creatives. Held across four sites, the gallery space, the exterior walls of Beaconsfield and two private homes of the featured artists, *Cottage Industry* broadened the scope of how exhibition making could be conceived and received, evolving in tandem with individual artists' capacities and needs.

30 years on, this reading group looks at how the experience of female artists has changed, reflecting on radical histories of collective action, as well as carving space for generous ways of working. How can the art world create sustainable ways of working for its female artists and how can we tackle the realities of gendered time?

Hettie Judah's text surveys key art historical examples of art and motherhood, pulling from both canonical art history of mother and child imagery and socially engaged projects. Irmeli Kokko and Nina Möntmann's conversation champions communal residencies which provide necessary childcare and foster meaningful collective exchange as a fertile antidote to the fast-paced world of contemporary art. Finally, an excerpt from Camille Henrot's *Milkways* brings a raw, first-person perspective to the challenges of being an artist-mother.

Archival materials from *Cottage Industry* (1995) will be on display for participants to sift through and return to after collectively reading the texts.

TEXTS:

Extract from Hettie Judah, 'Maintenance' in Judah, Hettie, and Hayward Gallery, associated with work. *Acts of Creation : On Art and Motherhood*. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd, 2024.

'Residencies as Programmatic Spaces for Communitality: An Interview with Nina Möntmann, Irmeli Kokko' Contemporary Artist Residencies interview

Excerpt from *Milkways*, Camille Henrot, Hatje Cantz, 2023.