

Spike Island

LARGE PRINT EXHIBITION GUIDE

FLO BROOKS

HARMONYCRUMB

10 June to 10 September 2023

This new commission by Flo Brooks explores trans and gender-nonconforming histories through painting and assemblage. The exhibition includes seven acrylic paintings applied onto found fabric, and six assemblages comprised of lino flooring cutouts and handmade objects. Together, these works explore speculative entanglements between Brooks' own life and the experiences of different historical figures, including military leader Joan of Arc (1412-31), 'female husband' Charles Hamilton (1721-c.46) and physician Michael Dillon/Lobzang Jivaka (1915-62).

Embedded in the materials of domestic space, which Brooks describes as 'the first space of dreaming, fantasising, worlding,' each work originates from

fragments of these people's lives, gleaned from newspaper clippings, autobiographical descriptions and visits to the places they lived and worked. In one painting, Michael Dillon/Lobzang Jivaka is depicted riding a motorbike through the countryside. He is surrounded by images and ephemera that relate to the former college motors garage in Bristol, where he wrote a ground-breaking book about transexualism, *Self: A Study in Ethics and Endocrinology in 1946*.

In another, Charles Hamilton, who worked as a quack in Somerset, is shown at a market cross, assembling and selling bottles of 18th-century medicines with mysterious-sounding names, such as 'Sovereign Elixir' and 'Viper Drops'. Motifs from Brooks' own life also appear throughout, forming layered and interweaving narratives that span time and space. Extending out from the paintings, the floor assemblages support a range of objects and ephemera that are either appropriate to, or out of step with, the period. Some of these objects are placed on and around the lino, which undulates across the

floor. Others, such as a broken candlestick and one of Joan of Arc's sabatons (plate armour shoes), emerge from cut out 'windows'.

Collaging together different places, eras and individuals, Brooks' works resist simplified representations of trans and gender nonconforming lives. Rather they open up a flexible space for the unfolding of multiple perspectives, shifting identities and evolving relationships. They are not historical portraits but dream-like scenarios: fragmented, mutable, incomplete.

Harmonycrumb is commissioned by Spike Island and is part of the West of England Visual Arts Alliance programme, supported by Arts Council England. All works courtesy of the artist and Project Native Informant.

Spike Island is an international centre for the development of contemporary art, located in Bristol's harbour area. Admission to the gallery is free. Visit our website to explore upcoming events and activities.

spikeisland.org.uk

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