

EVENTS

EXHIBITION-RELATED EVENTS

PANEL DISCUSSION: BRISTOL
LEGACY FOUNDATION
with Bolanle Tajudeen, Cleo Lake
and Dan Guthrie
Thursday 27 February, 6–7.30pm

BSL TOUR: DAN GUTHRIE AND
DANIELLE DEAN
with Martin Glover
Saturday 5 April, 2–3pm

FAMILY-FRIENDLY EVENTS

DREAM AND MAKE:
POP-UP STORIES
with Laura Phillimore
Thursday 20 February, 10am–12pm

BABY ART HOUR
with Éilis Kirby
Friday 21 February and
Friday 21 March, 10–11am

BRING YOUR BABY TOUR:
DANIELLE DEAN AND DAN GUTHRIE
with Jane Porter
Wednesday 12 March, 11am–12pm

OTHER EVENTS

BEHIND THE SCENES: BUILDING
TOUR AND STUDIO ARTIST VISITS
with Iris Thorsteinsdottir and
Jo Lathwood
Saturday 15 March, 11am–12.30pm

PANEL DISCUSSION: FROM
PUBLIC(S) TO CIVIC(S)
with Polly Brannan, Marley Starskey
Butler, Natasha Kidd and
Marianne Mulvey
Thursday 13 March, 5.45–7.30pm

SPIKE ISLAND OPEN STUDIOS 2025
Opening Night, Friday 2 May, 6–9pm
Saturday 3 and Sunday 4 May,
11am–5pm

Visit our website for more information
on the events programme

INFORMATION

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Facebook: SpikeIsland
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OPENING HOURS

Gallery: Wednesday to Sunday, 12–5pm
Café: Tuesday to Saturday, 10am–5pm
Sunday, 10am–4pm

Spike Island

DAN GUTHRIE

Empty Alcove / Rotting Figure

8 February to 11 May 2025



Image Caption: Dan Guthrie, *Rotting Figure* (2024). Production still. Courtesy the artist

Spike Island presents *Empty Alcove / Rotting Figure*, a new moving image commission and exhibition by Dan Guthrie. Working primarily with moving image, Guthrie's practice explores representations and misrepresentations of Black Britishness, with a particular interest in examining how these manifest in rural areas.

Empty Alcove / Rotting Figure continues his ongoing exploration of the Blackboy Clock, an object of contested heritage on public display in his hometown of Stroud, Gloucestershire. The exhibition presents two newly commissioned videos that put forward the 'radical unconservation' of the clock—a new theoretical concept

proposed by Guthrie to describe the acquisition of an object with the express intent to destroy it. Central to this new body of work are questions about what society chooses to memorialise and how we do so.

Commissioned and produced by Chisenhale Gallery, London and Spike Island, Bristol. This exhibition is supported by the Henry Moore Foundation.

Tour Diary I – Prologue
Dan Guthrie

The first instalment of a five part series by Dan Guthrie giving an insight into the making of *Empty Alcove / Rotting Figure* and what it's like to exhibit work alongside the real world conversations taking place about its subject.

It's a cold January day in London but it feels humid, as if a thunderstorm's about to break. The install for your show approaches.

You've known exactly what you wanted to make before this project even became a project. After skirting around the subject in your previous work, vaguely referencing real world conversations in throwaway lines of script, now was the time to confront it head on.

For a number of years, you'd been involved with what you called 'an ongoing conversation' about a clock, after spotting it on a walk when you moved back home at the start of the pandemic. You wrote a letter to the council about it and after that, things took off – hours spent delving into research rabbit holes, scrolling through microfilm reels, and buying local history books off the internet. Plenty of unpaid hours in council meetings about surveys, survey responses, plaques, and plaque drafts. Speaking to the press without any media training, and weathering the storm of comments sections, unsolicited emails, and far-right threats.

When you were approached by the curators for an online studio visit, months have passed and things had gone quiet about the clock. But it was still on your mind. You and some local residents had just had the first of many meetings to sketch out an information plaque for the clock, but it didn't feel like the object itself was going anywhere anytime soon. A lot had happened, but not a lot had changed.

You knew that these studio visits were sporadic opportunities, so after a bit of chit-chat about your previous works you decided to pitch them your moonshot idea, the one you knew you couldn't make by yourself. You opened the video file that you'd prepared in advance; a janky animation you spent days grinding away on, and set it to loop.

The curators asked you a few off-the-cuff questions and seemed intrigued, yet remained poker faced. Once the call finished, you closed your laptop screen and took a midday nap. Besides the courteous thank you email, you heard nothing from them for a couple of weeks. You mentally filed it away as one of those conversations that might not lead to anything, as things often do in the art world.

You were in Paris on a research trip, back when you still went on trips like that, when the follow-up came through – an invitation to develop new work for a touring show, and a set of dates a year and a half away. You called your parents that evening, who were back in Stroud, to tell them about it for the first time.

You've worked on this commission for the last eighteen months, starting the project with two uninterrupted weeks on a residency to flesh out the proposal, before switching

to one day a week upon starting an arts-adjacent office job in London. The first few months were pretty smooth sailing, and you had another week's residency in the middle, but as you got closer to the deadline, the one day a week became weekends, and evenings, and mornings, and lunch breaks too.

Your previous work has been described as 'creative non-fiction', a somewhat amorphous label, but this project feels more like fantasy – a pair of video works, imagining two futures, one unlikely and the other impossible. What you've made aren't really films. They don't have storylines and feel more like scenes, or videos that illustrate a point. They have to be experienced together for maximum impact, two sides of the same coin that represent the process of what you call 'radical un-conservation'.

When the curators asked you about doing a publication, you told them you wanted to make a website instead as the project and its reality are still ongoing, and you didn't want to draw it to a close with the printed word. You said the traveling exhibition could be a catalyst and fuel a feedback loop for the ongoing debate underpinning the work. It could start new conversations about the subject matter, or any of the other topics orbiting it, despite nothing moving forward in the real world conversations about the clock since you started working on the show.

Exhibition announcements went out in November, and as you were wrapping up production, things picked up as the year was drawing to a close. After a prolonged silence, the council got back in touch to say they were finally planning to put up the plaque that you'd written the year prior. On the two year anniversary of that very first meeting of drafting the plaque, it was actually being put into the ground in front of you.

It went up without much visible fanfare. No ribbon cutting, no talking to the cameras, just a press release and a bit of local news coverage. You came down to Stroud to see it go up, and when you went back for Christmas the following week, you walked past it a couple more times to see people looking and talking about it. Friends and family who'd gone by to take a photo remarked on how people had struck up conversations about it with them, which weren't always positive interactions. That left you with an interesting feeling, because you knew that the new project about the clock was much more visceral than a diplomatically worded plaque. The feeling you held wasn't fear, it wasn't nerves, but something else. Something to keep you on your toes.

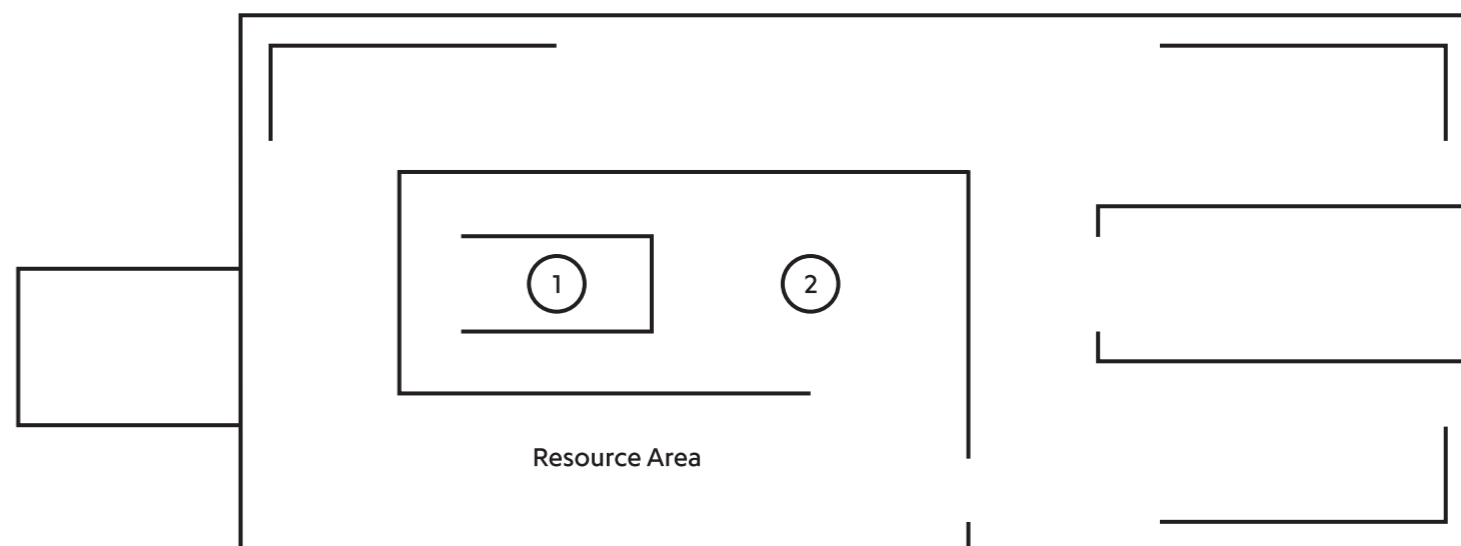
It's mid-January. It took two years to see through the installation of the plaque, and now you're about to head down to Bristol to see through the installation of the show. The weather's about to turn.

This text was originally published at earf.info



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FLOORPLAN



LIST OF WORKS

1 *Rotting Figure* (2025)
4K video with sound
5 minutes, loop
Courtesy the artist

2 *Empty Alcove* (2025)
4K video with sound
5 minutes, loop
Courtesy the artist

BIOGRAPHY

DAN GUTHRIE

Dan Guthrie is an artist who often works with words and the moving image to explore representations and mis-representations of Black Britishness. Selected exhibitions and screenings include: *Empty Alcove / Rotting Figure*, Spike Island and Chisenhale Gallery, London (2025); *Absent Forces*, Open City Documentary Festival (2024); *Two Films*, Devonshire Collective, Eastbourne (2023); *Spirit Messages* touring programme, aemi (2023–2024); Selected 13 touring programme, FLAMIN and videoclub (2023); *wave 4*, Prismatic Ground, New York (2023); Forum Expanded, Berlinale, Berlin (2023); *Right of Way*, LUX, London (2023); and Short Film Programme, Whitstable Biennale, Whitstable (2022). In 2024, Guthrie was shortlisted for The Arts Foundation Visual Arts Award and awarded a DRABL Artist Grant.