

# RISE FLAP LICK

Esther Windsor

*'There is therefore this quite complicated mix between the private and the public worlds...there is always the personal inflection and the private sensibility, and those give meaning to what is being said or written. Least of all should an intellectual be there to make his/her audiences feel good: the whole point is to be embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant.'* (Said, 2003: 32)

*Rise Flap Lick* are words made in coloured masking tape on an Art School Gallery wall during a performance made with artist Anat Ben-David (of Chicks on Speed) and students from Birmingham School of Art and the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. It also expresses bodily interventions of performance art and the messy curatorial and pedagogical happenstance of this event. These were incidental but not accidental.

Academic labour and Art History scaffold the circumstances of this event, some of which I relay here, reflexively drawing on my lived histories in curating and teaching.

Ed McKeon and I curated this event after conversations and collaborations in our Cultural Activisms reading group. Art Schools can occupy a romantic and mythological mid-20<sup>th</sup> century place in popular imagination, where it's imagined that subcultures and subversions gestate and find form and are indeed to be expected and encouraged. The 21<sup>st</sup> century reality is a little different, of course. In 2025, markets and managerial systems press and the artist-teacher role sits uncomfortably between academic and institutional systems, required to make art act productively, as 'research output', 'social care' and 'cultural value', while providing students with practical and employability skills, meaningful engagement with materials and life, and the rite of passage that university education promises.

It is within this context that an Art into Pop Event is planned, months in advance, with Birmingham School of Art and the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. A set of workshops with students is proposed, facilitated by Anat, culminating in a performance with her. Teaching interventions are considered where they might meet student learning outcomes and engagement, starting with a large staff meeting on Teams. In the opening of our first meeting and introductions, Anat reminded me of *Art Bitch*, a project from our shared past. I struggled to think, in a moment of embarrassment, how to explain. This had been part of a long institutional critique, in the early 2000s, of the capitalisation and marketisation of contemporary art, reducing art to objects and titles to straplines, with attendant commodification and gendered practices embodied in the figure of the *Gallerina*. The *Gallerina* was young, attractive, female, well dressed and confident, conveying



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Anat arrived in our School of Art to lead improvised method workshops with students. We sat in a polite circle in the lecture theatre until Anat rolled her body on the floor, suggesting we think like a cat. She circled the room, rattling the historic wood shutters between the lecture theatre and library in our Arts and Crafts listed building, explaining all materials and our bodies were tools and instruments. We closed our eyes and followed sounds in the room, slapping hands on thighs, clicking our tongues or tapping pens on chair legs, with some stamping and loud sighs.

We moved to the gallery and found instructions via moving blinds up and down to activate improvisation. I got coloured masking tape from my office draw and we taped out areas on the floor to perform in. Spontaneous words that came immediately to mind were shouted when action was halted by Anat's clap. A score idea was developed around key songs to actors with Esme Boyle, studying at the Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, and boiler suits were decided as costumes.

The whole Art School was involved in a 'Night School' open to the public, responding to Anat's workshop and the theme of Art and Sound. 'Night school' is a monthly event when the school opens and students run events, exhibitions and open studios, around a theme. It allows for informal pedagogies, play, performance, readings, screenings, dressing up and drinking with friends, along with local art communities and alumni. It's organised by a student committee and celebrates a genuine moment of shared testing of ideas, without the purpose of assessment. However, improvisation and institutions don't go neatly hand-in-hand and speculations on unknown numbers alongside health and safety sat with the knowledge that events would follow a momentum regardless. As the preparations for performance unfolded, it became clear that parts were missing and I executed an emergency curation, assembled from artists across the School of Art's sculpture studios. Alice Ifrim's sculptures of glittering streamers draped from beach balls hung from ceiling to floor, moving with the bodies and air flow in the room. Lia Coello's hairy skin flaps, bright tongues and prosthetics like body parts protruded. Niamh Hill's large cubes of meshed wire, with provocative word holes cut in, piled up and provided blocks for moving bodies to navigate around.



Lucy Clacher in Rise Flap Lick (2025) performance.  
Alice Ifrim (2025) Untitled. Ceiling hung beach balls with metallic tinsel foil fringe curtains for Rise Flap Lick (2025) performance. Birmingham School of Art Gallery. Exhibition curated by Esther Windsor. Photo Credit Ian Davies

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Lia Coello (2025) *Kiss My Ass*, (Tongue and stool). Paper mache, acrylic, metal stool. Sculpture for Rise Flap Lick (2025) performance. Birmingham School of Art Gallery. Exhibition curated by Esther Windsor. Photo Credit Ian Davies



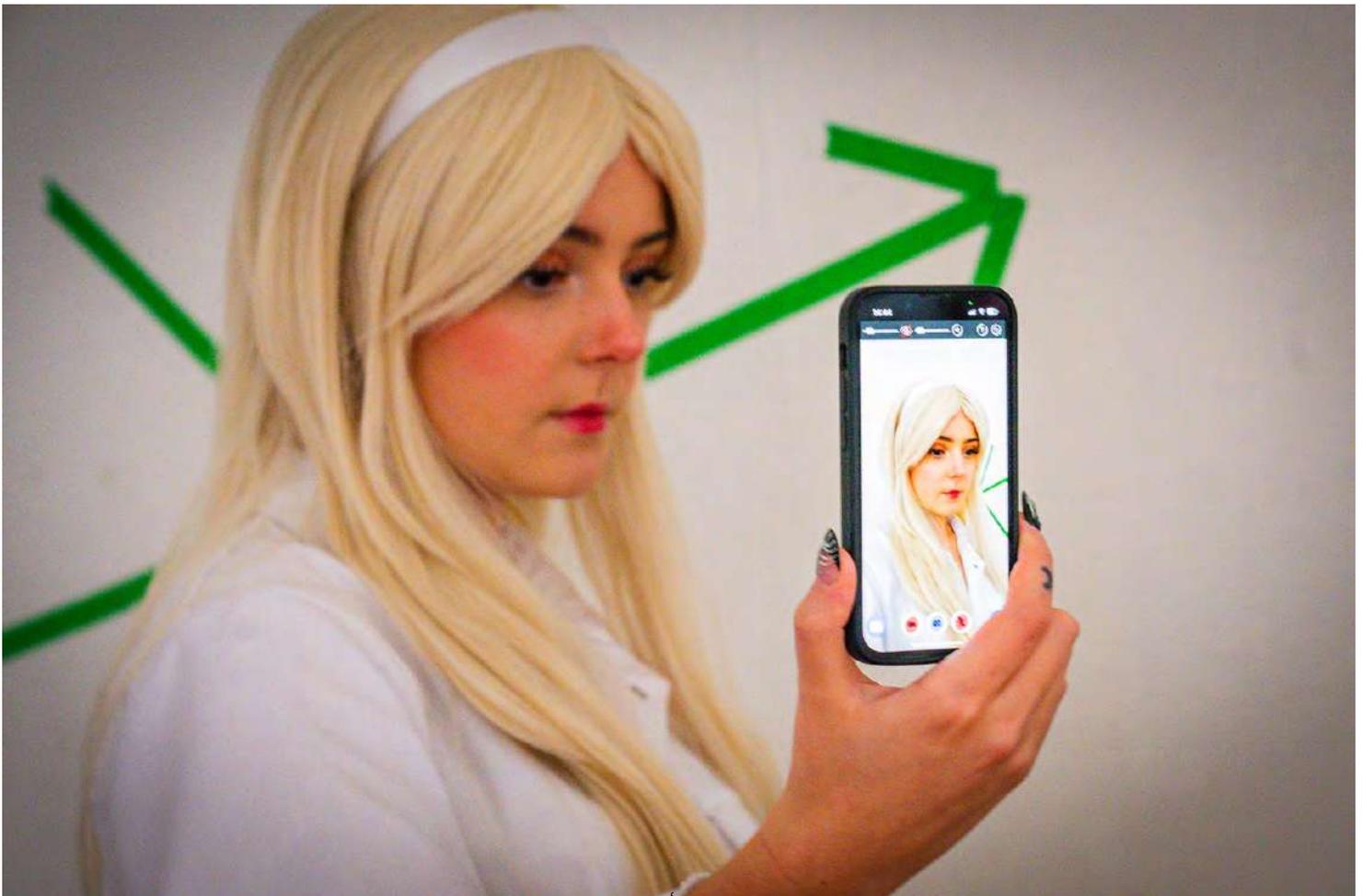
Lia Coello (2025) *Peeling*, Latex and fur. suspended from ceiling. Sculpture for Rise Flap Lick (2025) performance. Birmingham School of Art Gallery. Exhibition curated by Esther Windsor. Photo Credit Ian Davies

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Niamh Hill (2025) IDLE wire mesh, cable ties, cut holes in mesh, depicting: I,D,L,E. Sculpture for Rise Flap Lick (2025) performance. Birmingham School of Art Gallery. Exhibition curated by Esther Windsor. Photo Credit Ian Davies

The performers took up occupation of the space. Lucy Clatcher wore a handmade structured wooden skirt, like a scaffold, over a cropped red boiler suit. Chelsea Mildenhall wore a white mini skirt boiler suit with white stilettoes and a platinum wig. She performed her art character, who addressed her mobile phone, held skywards, high above her on a selfie stick. Tammy Woodrow and Evelyn Wenman wore steel toe-capped boots and blue and black boiler suits, with Riot Grrrl-style slogans across limbs and torsos. Words chosen for actions and instruction were made in tape on the gallery walls and floors.



'Vibe check, do we like this?' (2025) performed by Chelsea Mildenhall as her alter ego Belle.' in Rise Flap Lick (2025) performance. Birmingham School of Art Gallery. Exhibition curated by Esther Windsor. Photo Credit Ian Davies



Lucy Clacher in Rise Flap Lick (2025) Performance, Birmingham School of Art Gallery..  
Exhibition curated by Esther Windsor. Photo Credit Ian Davies



Evelynn Wenman in Rise Flap Lick (2025) Performance, Birmingham School of Art Gallery..  
Exhibition curated by Esther Windsor. Photo Credit Ian Davies

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Tammy Woodrow and Chelsea Mildenhall in Rise Flap Lick (2025) performance. Birmingham School of Art Gallery. Exhibition curated by Esther Windsor. Photo Credit Ian Davies

This was not a carefully choreographed event but an improvised, contingent engagement with a tacit agreement occurring between bodies and sculptures, occupying space on a marked-out floor grid. Coloured masking tape has been in my office top draw for many years now. This coming together of bodies, objects and actions is well expressed by another curating collaborator of mine, Peter Lewis, in describing his long-term and often radical work with art students at Leeds:

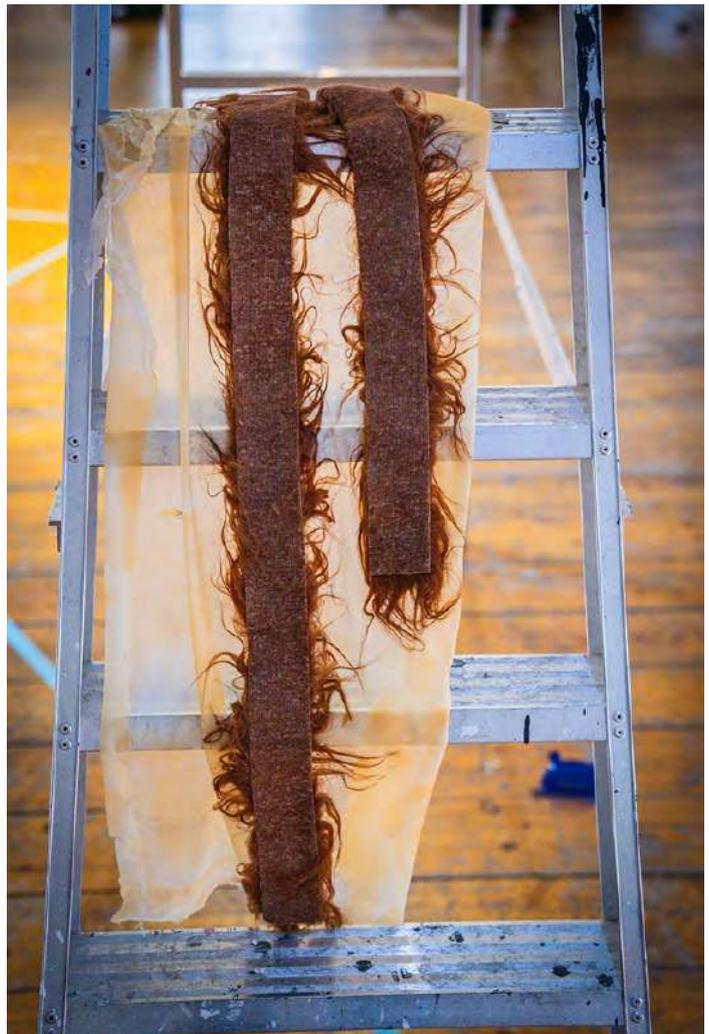
'Tacit' is a kind of knowledge, unspoken, and difficult to express, yet is arguably paramount in reaching agreements of value. A tacit understanding differs from one employing empirical and logical means of communication, predetermined by technology networks. The tacit, or silent understanding between exhibiting artists, is not predetermined by facts, or curatorial will, but by an agreement to open interpretation from many subjective positions of equal value. A tacit agreement will allow for different kinds of experience to be shared, in this case upon a grid marked out on the gallery floor, without demands for categorical description or authorial identification. (Lewis, 2019)



Evelynn Wenman in Rise Flap Lick (2025) Performance, Birmingham School of Art Gallery. Exhibition curated by Esther Windsor. Photo Credit Ian Davies



Above: Carla Busuttil (projection production) and Esme Boyle (music production) for Rise Flap Lick (2025) performance. Birmingham School of Art Gallery. Exhibition curated by Esther Windsor. Photo Credit Ian Davies



Right: Lia Coello (2025) *Peeling, Latex and fur*. (Underside detail installed on ladder) for Rise Flap Lick (2025) performance. Birmingham School of Art Gallery. Exhibition curated by Esther Windsor. Photo Credit Ian Davies

The workshops and performance didn't make it into module teaching as first planned and the performance and its exhibition was only up for one night, but the actions of the evening resonated.

While packing and transporting equipment and props the next day, I appreciated the debris and mess left behind the scene of the event. It was like another exhibition. There was a discussion with a new staff member about leaving it up another day for students to learn from. I thought about events and performance as gaps or ruptures, as an unknowing pedagogy, and was reminded of the powerful way that moving bodies produce shifts and change. I thought about the usefulness of working together, allowing accidents and learning with some risk and why it was so hard currently to encourage experimentation and play with students. I've seen data categorizing student characteristics, which shows commuting, working, and mental health (to name only a few) can provide barriers to engagement. I also know implicitly that packaging up experiences to meet assessment criteria in our current university education model can be a different barrier to learning. The deployment of 'experience' has been critiqued in art curating, as Paul O'Neill refers to in his book *Curating Subjects*:

It is necessarily modern that alienation may now be a necessary preface to experience.... Much of our experience can only be brought home through mediation.... In most areas of experience there is a busy traffic in proximities and surrogates... as with other mediated experience, 'feeling' is turned into a consumer product. (O'Neill, 2011: 52-53)

It is also recognised in critical historical pedagogies, as Paulo Freire writes about in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) on the theory and practice of the 'banking model' of education:

verbalistic lessons, reading requirements, the methods for evaluating knowledge, the distance between the teacher and the taught, the criteria for promotion, everything in this ready to wear approach serves to obviate thinking.... The bank clerk educator does not realise that there is no true security in his hypertrophied role, that one must seek to live with others in solidarity. (Freire, 1972: 80)

The following day, two of the performing students told me of a new student performance collaboration they had started, *Bapz on Crack* (a Midlands take on *Chicks on Speed*). This felt like a radical act of joy and risk, alongside my parallel experience of institutional anxiety, making space for an unknown improvisation.



Post performance celebration image. Rise Flap Lick (2025) performance. Birmingham School of Art Gallery. Exhibition curated by Esther Windsor. Photo Credit Ian Davies

I reflected more positively on the many other Art and Music experiments in Schools of Art, including at Birmingham, which had been part of module teaching and assessment.

For example, *Effigy (2024)* played at a Night school and used their band as part of a module *Live Project*. This module encourages building students' skills to make their own events, start-ups and artists led initiatives. This draws on contemporary and historic models of art enterprise, bringing in local alumni and West Midlands arts professionals, along with learning skills like timetabling, budgeting etc. Students have used this to set up small enterprises, limited editions of clothing and publications or to raise awareness in small campaigns. In this example, students held a mini festival in their garden and made contacts with a Palestinian Solidarity group in south Bristol, to extend their project.



Effigy (2024) Sophia Murray, Freya Hill, Ella Paul. Band performance. B.A .Fine Art 2nd Year in Birmingham School of Art Lecture Theatre on module Live Project 2024

Another example, on MA Fine Art (2017-19), was Jack Miles's installation produced to protest the restricted time for tutorials and metric measurement in the assessment criteria, which didn't recognize collaboration. It was titled *Waifu Fuck Metrics (2018)* and included a drum and bass performance with student George Casewell. This merged institutional critique in spoken word with traditions of the art school band but also Fluxus, Joseph Beuys and John Baldessari, who in 1972 sung lines from Sol LeWitt's *Sentences on Conceptual Art*. This sat alongside Alex Cotterell's *Mobile Furniture STRUCTURE-S*. Alex built a performance stage in the studio as a form of group orchestration. This included a score, instruments and documentation of props and performers, music hardware, amplifiers, pedals and lighting. As well as re-configuring a space, this was a reimagining of

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the educational art space, enabling it to be taken apart and re-configured as a 'stage' for future collaboration, derived from contingencies and ideas in discussion.



Jack Miles and George Casewell for Waifu Fuck Metrics (2018) performance  
Alex Cotterell (2018) Mobile Furniture STRUCTURES F08 Studio Birmingham School of Art

Jack Miles and George Casewell as a drum and bass band both submitted the performance as 'art work', writing that this enabled us to 'find "art" in un-familiar places and be part of this process, if we choose to.' Drumsticks were left on the stage for this purpose and used.

All learning on MA Fine Art at this time was encouraged through relationships and studio culture. Students occupied the studio with their own necessary social or furniture supports: an armchair, kettle, bookshelf, print outs of 'how to' notes on a shared table under the window, some basic cutlery; Alex's stage for a drum kit and impromptu performing; a set of mobile walls on wheels, and a notice board for display. Their module teaching included considering 21<sup>st</sup>-century Happenings as live performance or spontaneous event, associated with Fluxus and Alan Kaprow in 1960s New York, with the idea of blurring the boundary of art and life. Before Health and Safety risks of 'cross contamination' prevented this, we had regular studio lunches so that food, drinks, bodies and discourse sat comfortably alongside found objects, books, and art props. As Tim Ingold (2017) suggests, we need to give attention to enlivened materials and forces.



Morris Dancing in Foyer, Birmingham School of Art. For Clive Roberts performance and installation for MA Fine Art 2018

Clive Roberts, another MA Fine Art student, had left a long career as a schoolteacher. His project celebrated rural English culture and the resistance workers made to traditional overlords in an annual, Bakhtinian 'carnavalesque' pub crawl in costumes inverting hierarchies and celebrating the land. Costumes were handmade, adorned with foliage, one with tampons, and an installation built, translating archive materials, along with Morris dancing routines.



Left: Morris Dancing rehearsal S09 studio, Birmingham School of Art. For Clive Roberts performance and installation for MA Fine Art 2018

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Above: Alex Cottrel in costume, for rehearsal S09 studio, Birmingham School of Art. For Clive Roberts performance and



Left & Above: George Casewell and Yuchen Yang in costume in S09 studio, Birmingham School of Art. For Clive Roberts performance and installation for MA Fine Art 2018

It was a reflexive moment for me, not without risk, as I was primarily a participant and learner in this performance, which led to questioning my own (relatively new at this time) labour conditions and contemporary pedagogy in an institution with roles, responsibilities and measurement.

Claire Colebrook's concept of *Queer Vitalism* (2014) is useful to articulate art practice as grounded in ideas deriving systems from life:

This urgency of the turn to life...far from being a recent, radical and necessarily transgressive gesture, has always underpinned (and presupposed) highly normative gestures in philosophy, literature and cultural understanding. Indeed, the very notion and possibility of the normative, or the idea that one can proceed from what is (life) to what ought to be (ways of living) has always taken the form of vitalism. For the purposes of this essay, then, I will define vitalism as the imperative of grounding, defending or deriving principles and systems from life as it really is. (Colebrook, 2014: 100)



Rhianne Masters and Esther Windsor in costume in S09 studio, Birmingham School of Art.  
For Clive Roberts performance and installation for MA Fine Art 2018

Art School bands often sit outside the curriculum to retain Vitalism and court risk. The legacy of the Art School band, recorded in *Art into Pop* (Frith, 1987) or the dynamic described by Simon Reynolds's in his 1990 *Blissed Out*, reflects this:

If music is like a language, if it communicates some kind of emotional or spiritual message, then noise is best defined as interference, something which blocks transmission, jams the code, prevents sense being made. (Reynolds, 1990: 57-8)

Wherever this occurs, the relational, empathetic and durational solidarities in art and music practices are driven by real relations of learning in the smallest of spaces and gaps, in spite of strictures and demands of market led Higher Education.

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I reflected on this in the pandemic with others in a Cultural Theory reading group, where we held a roundtable public discussion to think about how academics could act in the context of multiple injustices. We decided to revisit Edward Said's *Representations of the Intellectual* (1993) as a departure for examining how and where academic activism can take place. The discussion drew on our experiences of university teaching. This was later published and I wrote:

I would agree that Braidotti's (2019) subverting of the binary teacher-student relationship is a decolonising practice, one which allows a reflexive relationship and facilitates the unpicking and making of new knowledges.

In Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's work, they speculate on thinking through the skin of teaching towards a collective orientation to the knowledge subject, a future project, and a commitment to a prophetic organisation. In my own teaching, in *Fine Art and Critical Theory*, I adopt a critical, reflexive pedagogy, using materials from my own past activism. (Windsor, in Forkert et al, 2022: 19)

It seems fitting to return to where I started and my epigraph from Edward Said, that the purpose of being an intellectual in public 'is to be embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant' (Said, 2003: 32). The unruly art project, experimental pedagogical experiences with music and performance, the illegitimate, annoying, unfitting and unwelcome are of value, even needed, in education. Perhaps aiding the ability to live beyond anxieties of metric measurement, artificial intelligence and neoliberal individualism.

We speak in different academic spheres of 'degrowth' and 'unlearning', in this moment of late capitalism where students – as political subjects – confront ever-growing injustices of sexism, racism, and ecocide. The Art School band is not only a nostalgic allegory but also a model to transgress knowledges and engage in the Vitalism of bodies, minds and matter that can live within the contradictions of contemporary political subjectivity.

## Credits

Artists and performers in *Rise Flap Lick* (2025) Performance, Birmingham School of Art Gallery: Esme Boyle, ( The Royal.....) Carla Busutti, Lucy Clacher, Chelsea Mildenhall, Julia Wenman, Tammy Woodrow, Jack Valstar Smith

Curated Exhibition in *Rise Flap Lick* (2025) performance, Birmingham School of Art Gallery. Curator: Esther Windsor. Artists: Lia Coello, Niamh Hill, Alice Ifrim

Artists: various projects: MA Fine Art students (2017-19) Birmingham School of Art: Alex Bird, George Casewell, Alex Cotteral, Rianne Masters Hopkins, Jack Miles, Emily Scarrott, Vincent Stokes, Clive Roberts, Yuchen Yang.

Artists: BA Fine Art 2nd year (2024-25) in band Effigy: Freya Hill, Sophia Murray, Ella Paul.  
For module: Live Project.

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