



Exhibition Guide

Mel Brimfield's interdisciplinary and collaborative practice is rooted in scripted performance, incorporating live work, moving image, staged audio, installation and drawing. Operating at the intersection of theatre, live art and film, Brimfield's work aims to bring audiences for the arts together and erode historic distinctions between creative fields.

From This World, to That Which Is to Come takes its title from John Bunyan's 1678 parable *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which describes a fictional pilgrimage from 'The City of Destruction' to 'The Celestial City'. Brimfield reimagines this tale as a loose allegory for a collapse of mental health and the fraught journey to recovery.

This exhibition marks the culmination of two years' work, based on a research residency at Bethlem Royal Hospital's National Psychosis Unit and Kings College Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience in 2018-19. Brimfield conducted interviews and workshops collecting personal testaments from patients, carers, nursing staff, neuroscientists, clinicians and activists. The resulting series of works explore the alienating effects of mental ill health and treatment at an individual, familial and societal level, whilst presenting a celebration of the radical potential of collective creative action and kindness.

After nearly a year's delay imposed by the global pandemic, the opening of this timely exhibition is an urgent reminder of our deep need for community. During lockdown, Brimfield has produced an additional series of introspective, personal works reflecting on her own lived experience of mental illness.

Central to the exhibition is *STAND, 2020*, a sixteen speaker sculptural audio installation in The Tetley's Atrium, co-produced with composer Gwyneth Herbert. It houses a complex choral composition responding to a poignant spoken word recitation by a Bethlem inpatient recorded by Brimfield during her residency. This epic sound sculpture was built and performed by over 100 collaborators, including UK Men's Sheds and Men's Sheds Cymru; mental health service users and staff; and prison inmates. Through this work, Brimfield directly unites and foregrounds the community groups and networks offering vital support at a time of crisis in the provision of effective mental health services.

The exhibition also features a constellation of audio monologues, fragmented theatrical sets, moving image work and large-scale drawings, often casting visitors as both audience and performer in a series of listening stations as static tableaux. Combining autofiction with adaptation, a cast of literary and popular cultural characters perform skewed narratives drawn from Brimfield's own familial history of psychosis, depression and anxiety to darkly humorous, melancholic effect. Tintin's adventures are compressed to an absurdist paranoid fantasy of conspiracy and pursuit acted out within the confines of Bethlem Hospital. The artist consults Peanuts character Lucy in her psychiatrist's booth for therapy. Bunyan's Giant Despair is cast as Brimfield's father as a monstrous purple Hulk in a trilogy of works enacting a comic book origin story of misery, loss, rage and transformation. Elsewhere, a hapless actor in a vocal isolation booth struggles to record an audiobook of Kafka's 'Metamorphosis' whilst slowly morphing into a giant cockroach, menaced by a malign Foley artist. This personal, impactful body of work explores the sometimes toxic legacy of mutually rehearsed family narratives on mental health, and of our vulnerability and isolation in the face of perceptual and cognitive malfunction.

The exhibition is produced in collaboration with Kings College Cultural Community; Arts & Heritage with Kelham Island Museum; Chapter Arts Centre; Attenborough Arts Centre and Somerset House Studios. With support from The Arts Council of England, Kings College Cultural Community and Arts and Heritage.

Gallery 1

Mel Brimfield
Untitled, 2020
Giclée print, 150 × 150cm
Edition of 10

Gallery 2

Mel Brimfield
The Giant Despair – Part 1, 2020
Theatrically staged audio installation
23:12 minutes

A rolling piano soundtrack fills the darkened gallery, yo-yoing between lurid romance and pounding melodrama. A telephone on a theatrical backdrop emanates low-level muttering. Listening to the receiver, the voice reels off a stream of consciousness, stringing together sentimental memories of family life, accusations, and backhanded insults. At one moment the voice is full of rage, but at the next, melancholy. It becomes clear that the monologue is synchronised to the ambient piano score, controlling the emotional temperature of the room.

This work introduces Brimfield's use of autobiographical fiction throughout the exhibition, exploring the toxic legacy of endlessly rehearsed family narratives on mental health. Here, over twenty years of occasional, one-sided and circular conversations with her estranged father are compressed into an experience akin to listening to the sound of the ocean in a conch shell; the distant *Giant Despair* is adrift and diminishing.

The *Giant Despair*: David Cann
Score and sound design in collaboration with Paul Higgs

Atrium & First Floor Corridors

Mel Brimfield with Gwyneth Herbert
STAND, 2020
Multi-part sculptural audio installation
8:46 minutes (activated at half hour intervals)

The central sculpture takes the form of a giant music box. In the middle of the hand-painted platform, a voice recites a poignant spoken word poem via a speaker embedded in the gold-leafed tree. This is a recording of Patrick, a long-term inpatient at Bethlem Hospital, recorded by Brimfield during a two year research residency. 15 chairs encircle the sculpture, each uniquely built by groups from 'UK Men's Sheds' and 'Men's Shed Cymru' incorporating whittling, marquetry, mosaic, woodturning, patchwork and stained glass making.

A speaker is built into each chair, relaying parts of a multi-channel choral composition performed by members of Harrow-based More Than Just a Choir. The writing process for this composition was guided by an extensive series of songwriting workshops across the UK led by the artists, with diverse groups all who work collectively to support mental health, including inmates at HMP Parc, Kings College researchers and the Maudsley Hospital choir.

Brimfield's faithful reproductions of the idiosyncratic HQ signs made by participating Men's Shed groups appear throughout the space.

A notional trade union banner gives a backdrop to the sculpture, celebrating the collective creativity of a network of over 100 community members participating in the making of *STAND*.

Design and build of sound system: in collaboration with Mike Winship
Design and build of sculpture: assisted by Keith Moore and members of the following Men's Sheds chapters: Maesteg; HMP Parc; Kemp Town; Andover; West Bletchley; Loughborough; Bognor Regis; Forest of Dean; Camden; Squirrel's Nest; Norwich; St Olave's; Kempston and Kelham Island Museum volunteers

Layout and design of wall piece in collaboration with Ryan Gillard

Gallery 4

Mel Brimfield
The Giant Despair – Part II, 2020
Giclée print on sculptural frame
150 × 270cm

Combining the narrative conventions of comic book origin stories and allegorical maps, this large-scale graphic work charts the birth of a troubled anti-hero torn apart by grief, frustration and loss.

In this absurdist adaptation of Puritan preacher John Bunyan's 1648 parable *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the artist's father is cast as the monstrous *Giant Despair*, incarnated in the form of Dr. Bruce Banner a.k.a. the Incredible Hulk from the 1970s TV series. The drawing chronicles young Terry Brimfield's journey from adventure on the high seas as a carefree sailor to the dull suburban grind of life ashore as a reluctant father and police constable. Driven to the brink of sanity by the insatiable demands of his family, he slowly transforms into a mindless destructive force embodied as the

colossal purple-skinned, rage-filled *Giant Despair*. The flattened narrative arc of the piece recalls the simplification of religious tracts to Sunday school bible stories for children, presenting the giant in a suitably heroic light.

Layout and design in collaboration with Ryan Gillard

Gallery 5

Mel Brimfield
NUTS – The Remembrance of Things Past, 2018
Giclée print
150 × 150cm
Edition of 10

In a vulnerable moment of self-portraiture, this graphic work examines the performative nature of the analysand (a person undergoing psychoanalysis), repetitively describing their life experiences to a therapist in an attempt to shape traumatic narratives into a tolerable arc. Brimfield consults Lucy, the self-appointed psychiatrist from Charles M. Schulz's 'Peanuts' comic strip; her booth occupies the centre of the image, but 'The Doctor is Out'. A field of hundreds of floating heads with speech bubbles (all the artist imagined as a Peanuts character) rotate around it confessing, wheedling, remembering, lying, fantasising, complaining, crying and dreaming in an image of ongoing therapeutic dialogue. The constellation of heads and speech bubbles are held inside a cross-section profile of Lucy's head, as the therapist.

Layout and design in collaboration with Ryan Gillard

Initially commissioned as part of 'Good Grief, Charlie Brown' an exhibition at Somerset House and the Charles M. Schulz Museum

Gallery 5

Mel Brimfield
Tintin and The Lost Marbles, 2019
Giclée print
150 × 150cm
Edition of 10

In this large-scale graphic work, Tintin's recollections of his outlandish adventures as an investigative journalist are slowly revealed as a series of absurdist paranoid fantasies of conspiracy and pursuit, acted out within the confines of Bethlem Hospital. International kidnappings, secret messages, assassination attempts and dark plots populate the imaginative landscape of a young man in the grips of a psychotic break, accompanied only by his dog Snowy, who is in fact a pillow from the ward. The strip ends with clinician Prof. Cuthbert Calculus recording the particulars of Tintin's symptoms, and recommending a course of medication as the youngster exits through the window in pursuit of an unseen foe.

Layout and design in collaboration with Ryan Gillard

Gallery 5

Mel Brimfield
XENOBATH – Part I
Theatrically staged film installation
16:39 minutes

Theatre-style false walls define a featureless surveillance station, somewhere between a set and an outsized architectural model complete with dummy vintage equipment. On a circular screen, a collective hallucination recounted by a swarm of competing voices (all performed by the same actor) is displayed in oscilloscope waveforms. This composite monologue and 'remembrances' of unusual experiences are drawn from Brimfield's conversations with dozens of voice-hearers and perceivers of phenomena unseen by the general population, combined with clinical records and historical accounts spanning centuries. Resisting pathology, it is a record of extraordinary lost 'events' hovering in uncertain liminal space.

Camerawork and postproduction: Lukas Demgenski, Ewan Jones Morris and Milo Creese

Vocal performance: David Cann

Ines De Clerq as Faye Dempsey as Olivia Newton

Sound design in collaboration with Paul Higgs

Gallery 7

Mel Brimfield
These Foolish Things, 2021
Giclée print
150 × 150cm
Edition of 10

Continuing the series of deeply personal graphic works appearing throughout the exhibition, *These Foolish Things* recalls a hoard of sentimental treasured objects lost in the wake of the death of the Brimfield's mother. Adopting the style of illustrated diagrams featured in children's educational magazine *Look and Learn* (collected in red leatherette binders throughout the 1970s and 1980s by the Brimfield family) the drawing maps a lexicon of grief, loss and shared familial memory. The lost objects are notionally found and collected here in a gentle act of remembrance and memorial.

Gallery 8

Mel Brimfield

UNGEZIEFER, 2020

Theatrically staged audio installation

18:45 minutes

The darkly comedic *UNGEZIEFER* focuses on a hapless voiceover artist in a recording studio attempting to make an abridged audiobook of Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, directed by a bored producer. The narrative of Gregor Samsa's nightmarish transformation into a giant cockroach, and the inability of his horrified family to deal with it, is taken as a loose metaphor for the onset of schizophrenia and its frequently alienating effects. The actor performs and re-performs truncated fragments of Kafka's text, following directions from the sound booth. To his mounting horror and confusion, the playback of his recorded voice increasingly morphs to narrate the story of his own monstrous transformation until he has effectively replaced Samsa as its subject. In a recording studio comprised of a theatrical set, the viewer takes up the position of the actor in headphones poised at the microphone, to listen to this densely layered audio work, completing a static tableau.

The Ungeziefer: David Cann

The Producer: Joanna Neary

Theme and sound design: in collaboration with Paul Higgs

Gallery 9

Mel Brimfield with Milo Creese

XENOBATH – PART II

Digital film

11:26 minutes

The partner piece to *Xenobath – Part I*, this moving image work comprising found audio and film footage, CGI animation, and performed action explores accounts of the altered states of perception frequently associated with psychosis, and its treatment. The sounds of an MRI scanner imaging a hallucinating brain become the backbeat to a hypnotic score interspersed with fragmented interviews with those who hear voices and see things that others do not, and the clinicians who help them. A stream of loosely associated images describing in and out of body experiences accompanies this narrative to complete a fluid visual essay. The piece reminds us that the human condition is one of uncertainty and fragility, and that the spectrum of mental wellbeing fluctuates for us all throughout our lives.

Shirley Cooper Gallery

Mel Brimfield

THE GIANT DESPAIR – PART III

Digital film

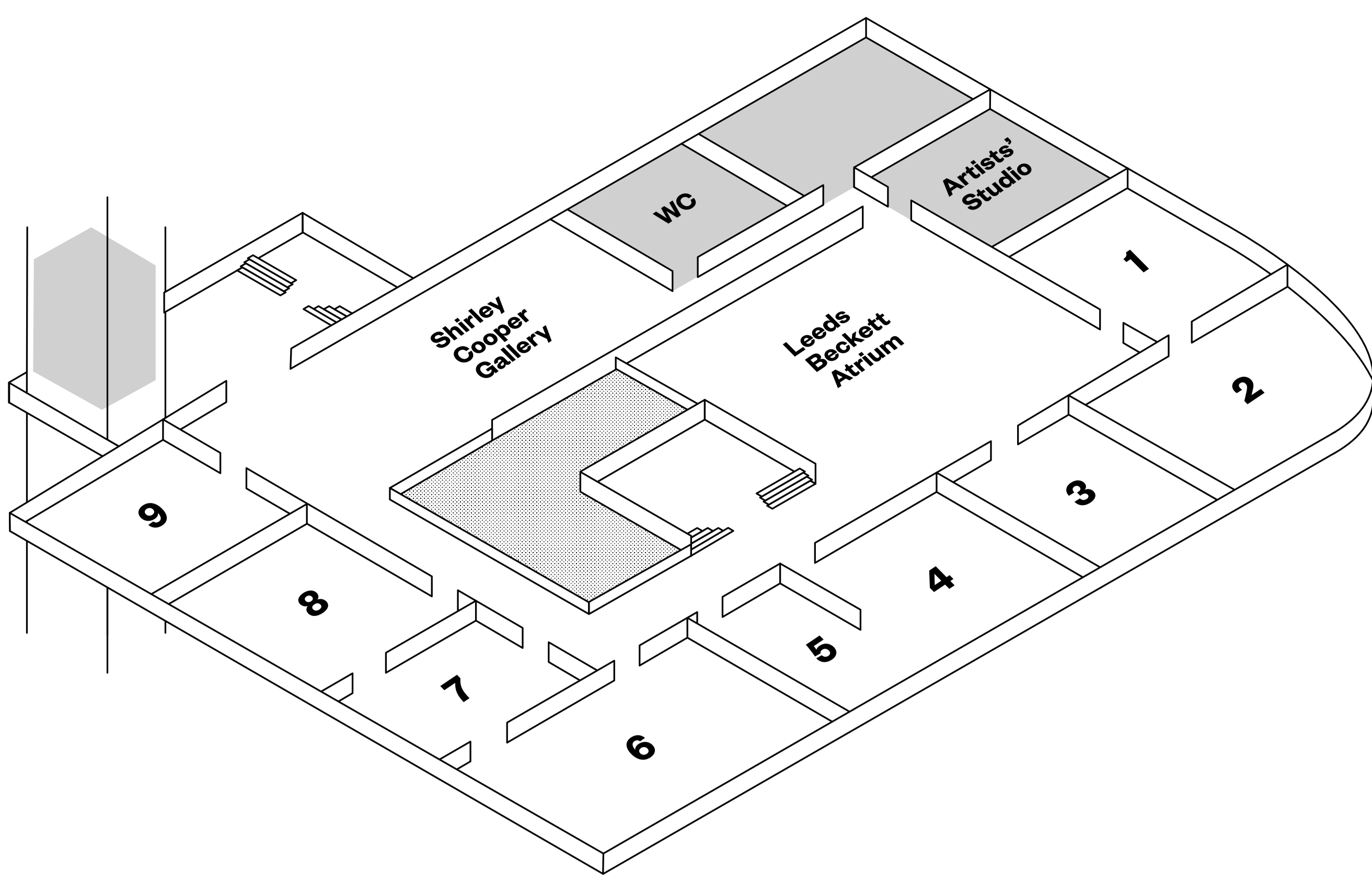
9:04 minutes

In a moving portrait of the artist's father, and final part of *The Giant Despair* trilogy, Brimfield continues to repurpose, augment and extend footage drawn from *The Incredible Hulk* 1970s TV series. In each episode after a frenzied rampage, The Hulk inevitably lumbers to the nearest forest in a bewildered state to recover; having thwarted the fiendish plans of criminals by throwing, crushing and splintering a succession of large objects and environments. As *The Giant Despair*, the throbbing purple menace is frozen alone in an extended in-between state, traversing woodland, sand dunes and beaches in search of relief to the accompaniment of an epic cinematic score. Interacting tenderly with animals and his baby daughter between bouts of existential crisis, he must nevertheless leave to walk the earth alone to uncertain ends.

Camerawork and postproduction: Lukas Demgenski and Milo Creese

Score and sound design in collaboration with Paul Higgs

Additional footage filmed in The Sonian Forest and De Panne, Belgium



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