



Chrysalis



Chrysalis

Ben Branagan
May Hands
Bruce Ingram
Elly Thomas

Curated by Bruce Ingram





previous spread:

Ben Branagan
Aggregated Figure 2-6
2020
Assembled found objects,
concrete, wood, rope

this page:

Elly Thomas
Untitled
2020
Papier-mâché, textiles
and latex

Chrysalis

by Issey Scott

Impermanence is a quietly integral part of many exhibitions, whether explicit or implicit. In times of ubiquitous social media and constant, almost unconscious documentation and archiving, impermanence can slip our minds, but exhibitions are grounded in one particular moment of time and thought, and will remain as nothing but documentation after a short time. For *Chrysalis*, curator Bruce Ingram has used the gallery space as a point of departure to create something both malleable and reminiscent of a playground. Sculptural work by artists Elly Thomas, May Hands, Ben Branagan and Ingram himself are part of a revolving curation whereby the layout changes over time throughout the show's duration. This becomes an experimental way of allowing visitors of Wimbledon Space to engage with works, forcing students, staff and visitors to alter their path and, indeed, their gaze in order to observe the finer details.

But what is the legacy of exhibitions? How can we take what we have seen with us? Precarity and a lack of





security are unavoidable, and rather unfortunate, parts of what it means to be alive and functioning in 2020. The balancing act of many of the works in *Chrysalis* is an irony which is not lost.

In times of austerity we have been led to believe that everything must serve a strict purpose or function: make your hobby your career and you'll never work a day in your life. The chrysalis stage of an insect is the period between immaturity and maturity, and the sense of the playground and simple, uncomplicated fun is something that is surely most at home back in the immature chapter. The bright, playful nature of the works in *Chrysalis* is almost a form of respite as they stand and hang in lovingly distracting palettes, while housed in the institutional setting of Wimbledon Space. The idea of functionality, and resulting value, is a sticky topic in contemporary art, but in this transformative stage of the chrysalis, the exhibition looks to poke its head back into the immaturity stage of the pupa, having grown tired of the mature.

This analogy, however, does create an unnecessary binary between the immature and the mature, and Elly Thomas' work dissolves these barriers seamlessly. A review written by the artist of the exhibition *The Playground Project* at Baltic Contemporary in 2016 sees Thomas assess digital play, stating that "all too often games are prescriptive, limiting the open-ended, subversive potential of play."¹ Now that we are fully acquainted with flexible working and hotdesking, gaming and leisure time involving computers can be slightly too close to the world of work to feel like pure recreation; perhaps this is an indication that the next

previous spread:

*May Hands
Washed Out (detail)
2020
Digital prints on
silk organza and silk
chiffon, netting, muslin,
ropes, photographs and
photogram, leftover
fabrics, stoneware and
earthenware ceramics,
jesmonite, hair grips,
cable ties, bottle tops,
paper clip, carabiners,
safety pins, plant label,
cellophane bag, lavender,
fruit stickers, price stick-
ers, paint hook, earring
and mimosa*

opposite page:

*Elly Thomas
Untitled (detail)
2020
Papier-mâché, textiles
and latex*



generation of adults will find it even harder to switch off, technologically and mentally. Thomas' sculptures are universally appealing, with bold layered palettes, crystallised in aesthetically soft shapes. The viewer is left looking at the works carefully, certain that we've seen them somewhere before, when in fact their uniqueness cannot be easily placed. Instead, the artist's playful attitude towards making is contagious, and we see Thomas' sculptures as a bright and warm reaction to the world outside the gallery space.

Wimbledon Space is made especially transient thanks to the work of May Hands, whose hanging sculptural pieces can make the most static of walls melt away; the artist has a unique ability to go beyond enveloping the viewer, creating a magical space that is the envy of many an installation artist. It is with this that "impermanence" takes a somewhat different meaning, and in being immersed in Hands' work we are reminded that time and space is consistent in their movement; an essential moment of mindfulness is carved into our day.

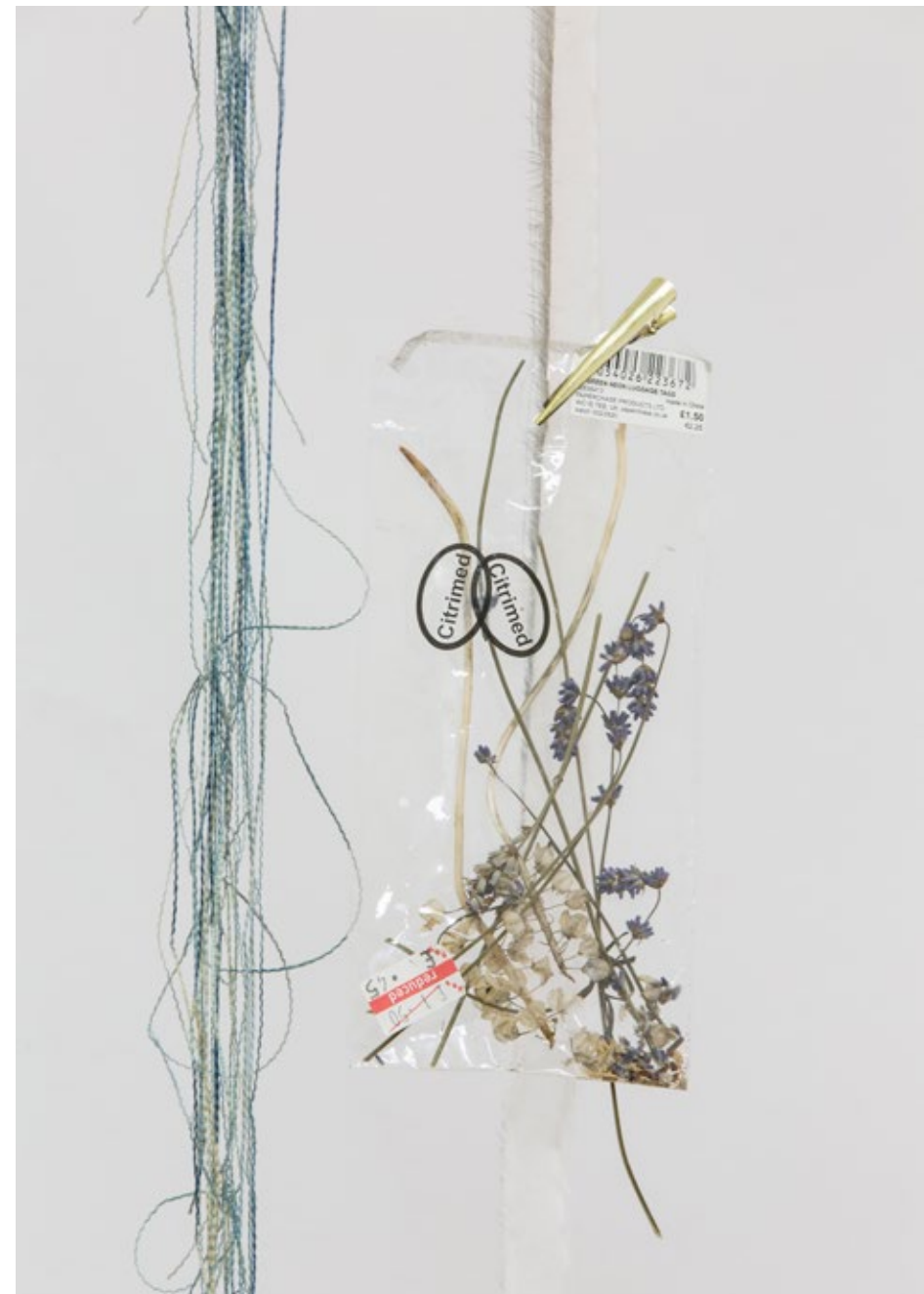
Making play a compulsory part of one's day can now take different forms – rest and play are happy bedfellows and it truly is an idyll to experience them together. I have never thought about this more than when I recently saw a meme of a cartoon figure on their laptop with a sad expression with the caption "at work" followed by exactly the same image except the figure had a smile on its face, above the caption 'not at work'. When our work and our play are both grounded in virtual, online spaces, how can we possibly hope to separate them? Is experiencing art, in particular

previous spread:

Elly Thomas
Apparatus (Heaped)
2011
Papier-mâché and latex

opposite page:

May Hands
Washed Out (detail)
2020
Digital prints on
silk organza and silk
chiffon, netting, muslin,
ropes, photographs and
photogram, leftover
fabrics, stoneware and
earthenware ceramics,
jesmonite, hair grips,
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paint hook, earring
and mimosa



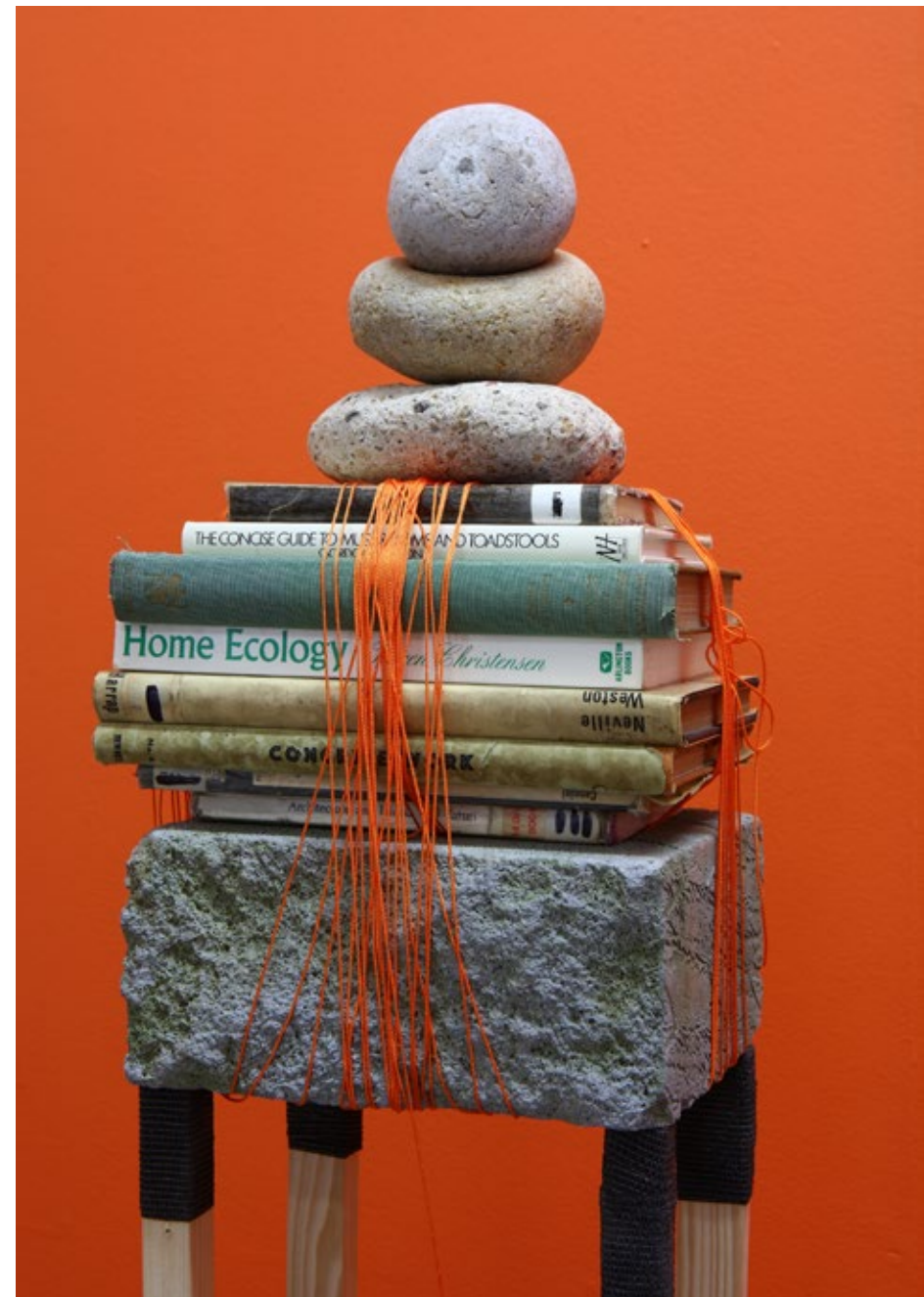


art that really resonates with oneself and one's senses, to be considered rest or play? Navigating the show at Wimbledon certainly feels like a recreational pursuit, an almost dreamlike “non-place” as the works are reconfigured by the curator periodically, feeding from responses from the viewers.

Being a transit space from one part of Wimbledon College of Arts to another sees the exhibition toy with the idea of “non-place” and place; Ben Branagan's work adds further complexity given that the artist's work is comprised of casts of other locations he has exhibited. Books acting as plinths also give another impression of impermanence, and the flexibility of one's role in life: while the books remain intact and certainly functional as reading material, they are also bearing the weight of a new symbol, a new meaning. Subjective meaning is in itself impermanent and open to new life. Observing Branagan's work in this new setting, we are projecting our own reading onto them, shaping and re-contextualising the exhibition inside our minds, much as Ingram is within the space.

Curator Bruce Ingram also has work in the show, which feels like a thorough engagement with not only the themes, as they are made flexible and challenged by the respective artists, but also the flourishing potential of how impermanence, play and recalibrating ideas can make the viewing experience all the more meaningful. Ingram's installation, *Midway, Shifting, Forward*, again plays with the boundaries of work, rest and play. The artist and curator will surely have different views on which elements of the making, displaying and viewing processes fall into which “boundary”. Given

Ben Branagan
Aggregated Figure 5
(detail)
2020
Assembled found objects,
concrete, wood, rope





*Bruce Ingram
Midway, Shifting,
Forward
2020
Mixed media sculptures,
paintings and studio
ephemera*

that in this case Ingram takes the role of both artist and curator, it will be of great interest to see how his work is influenced by the gallery over time, as the layout changes. Ingram's sculptural piece is a range of incomplete fragments which come together to make a complex whole, but resists the urge to become entirely final, in favour of versatility. There is always another reconfiguration they could take, based on the artist's whim. It is with this celebration of the two joys of potential and viewing progress as a non-linear journey, that *Chrysalis* takes its shape and creates its identity. Ironically, its knowing impermanence and defiance against the expected form of a traditional exhibition will firm its legacy.

¹ <http://thisistomorrow.info/articles/the-playground-project>



May Hands
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2020
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chiffon, netting, muslin,
ropes, photographs and
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paper clip, carabiners,
safety pins, plant label,
cellophane bag, lavender,
fruit stickers, price stickers,
paint hook, earring
and mimosa



Ben Branagan (b.1978) is a visual artist based in Hastings. He graduated with a MA in Visual Communication from the Royal College of Art in 2004. Solo exhibitions include: *A Stick to Ward Off the Inevitable*, The Chopping Block Gallery, London (2019); *On the Banks of the River Peck*, The Chopping Block Gallery, London (2017). Group exhibitions include: *Modern Finance*, Thames Side Studios, London (2019); *Everything Happens So Much*, London Design Festival at London College of Communication (2018) and *Craft Emergency*, Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth (2016).

May Hands (b.1990, Brighton, UK) is an artist based between London and Brighton. Hands graduated with a BA in Fine Art: Painting from Camberwell College of Arts in 2013 and is currently studying for an MFA in Fine Art at Goldsmiths, University of London. Solo exhibitions include: *Best Before End*, White Crypt (2019); *May Hands: Artist-in-Residence*, Bosse & Baum, London (2018); *I've Loved You For A Long Time*, Supplement, London (2018); *Horizons*, Coachwerks Gallery, Brighton (2017) and *Freschissimi*, T293, Rome (2015). Group exhibitions include: *The Real Thing*, Fashion Space Gallery, London (2020); *The Romance of Flowers*, Kingsgate Project Space, London (2018); *SURPLUS* (w Sean Roy Parker), Peak Art, London (2018); *Counter Quality*, 650mAh, Brighton (2018); *On Cold Spring Lane*, Assembly Point, London (2017); *Sell Yourself*, East Street Arts, Leeds (2017); *Maybe your lens is scratched?*, The Averard Hotel, London (2016); *Not Every Thread Ties Down/ Your Split Ends Are Showing*, DKUK, London (2016); *Artificial Arcadia*, Bosse and Baum, London (2016) and *Women's Art Society II*, MOSTYN, Llandudno (2015).

Bruce Ingram (b.1981, Falmouth, UK) lives and works in London. He graduated with a MA in Sculpture from the Royal College of Art in 2008. Solo exhibitions include: *Upturning*, Lungley Gallery, London (2020); *Broken Pictures*, No Format Gallery, London (2018); *Duets*, Bell House, Dulwich Village, London (2018) and *Arrangements*, Vitrine Gallery, London (2011). Group exhibitions include: *Blemish and Beyond*, New Art Projects, London (2019); *Oriel Davies Open 2018*, Oriel Davies Gallery, Newtown, Wales (2018); *Ever Changing Moods*, Nunn's Yard Gallery, Norwich (2018) and *The Collectivists*, The Brand Library and Art Centre, Los Angeles, USA (2017). He also curated *humdrum* (2019) a group exhibition and education project at Dulwich College, London. His work has been selected for the Jerwood Drawing Prize and he was a finalist in the Dazed/ Converse Emerging Artist Award (2011).

Elly Thomas (b.1978, London, UK) is an artist and writer based in London. She received her PhD from the Slade School of Fine Art in 2013. Solo exhibitions include *Kits and Building Blocks*, ASC Gallery, London (2016) and *Tôy*, Vitrine Gallery, London (2011). Group exhibitions include: *Silly Symphony* curated by Andy Holden, Ex-Baldessarri (2019); *Re-Assemble*, Collyer Bristow Gallery (2019); *Summer always has its flies*, Subsidiary Projects (2019); *Tailbone*, The Artesian Well (2019); *Ludo (also known as Trouble)*, The Rectory Projects (2018); *Solo Award, Finalists' Exhibition*, Chiara Williams Contemporary (2018) and *Sketchy Remarks*, Floating Island Gallery (2015). In 2018 and 2016 she was shortlisted for The Mark Tanner Sculpture Award. Publications include *Suwasa in Eduardo Paolozzi*, exh.cat., The Whitechapel Gallery, 2017; *Meccano Work: Eduardo Paolozzi's kits*, Sculpture Journal, Vol. 25, No 1 and *Eduardo Paolozzi – Why Now?*, The British Art Journal, XVI, 2. Her book *Play and the Artist's Creative Process: The Work of Philip Guston and Eduardo Paolozzi* was published by Routledge in 2019.





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Published on the occasion of an exhibition of the same title at
Wimbledon Space

9 March – 5 May 2020

ISBN: 978-1-9993085-0-6

Text © Issey Scott, 2020

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Wimbledon Space would like to thank:

Ben Branagan, Charlie Fegan, May Hands, Rob Harris, Bruce
Ingram, Clare Mitten, Nick Manser, Kes Richardson, Issey Scott,
Elly Thomas and Mark Walsh

front cover:

*Elly Thomas
Apparatus (Heaped)
(detail)
2011
Papier-mâché and latex*

inside cover:

*Bruce Ingram
Midway, Shifting, For-
ward (detail)
2020
Mixed media sculptures,
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Wimbledon Space
Wimbledon College of Arts
Merton Hall Road
London
SW19 3QA

wimbledonspace@wimbledon.arts.ac.uk

