

"JOHNNY FOREIGNER"

New Art by
Ben Coode-Adams
Freddie Robins
Jakob Roepke

Essenheimer Kunstverein
1st September –

"Johnny Foreigner" is an old fashioned xenophobic term used by posh twits to disparage foreigners. We have called our exhibition this because there seem to be layers and layers of strangeness – foreignness – at work here. We are all from somewhere else. Ben and Freddie live in London. Jakob lives in Berlin. But he worked for many years in Edinburgh where he and Ben met and became friends. They both worked in Colchester, in Essex, where Ben comes from. Freddie and Ben worked in Berlin in 2004 reconnecting with Jakob. Some of Freddie's work shown here was made in Bangladesh. In this exhibition all the artists' work is out of context wrenched from their studios and exposed away from home. It is a cliché that artists are strangers in their own land, outsiders looking in, trying to make sense of it all and then off they go and make themselves strangers in someone else's land.

When artists exhibit they are inviting you to travel in the foreign land of their imaginations. You will be the strangers, having to work out where you are and what it all means! Like any travelling this is an exhilarating experience. Hopefully you enjoy this journey.

For Ben Coode-Adams drawing and taking photographs are obsessive activities. The photographs document his movements round the world but also a crazy collecting impulse. All the photographs are catalogued under headings like "Chairs in danger", "Men up ladders" "Through windows - /office/domestic/restaurant/shop". While his photographs show the outside world his drawings are all made indoors, usually watching television in the evenings. Sometimes he notes down the programme he was watching. "Crime Scene Investigation – Las Vegas" (not Miami) and "Law and Order – Special Victims Unit" being particular favourites. Both the drawings and the photographs have a formal consistency with innovation occurring incrementally. Their purpose is not to be "new" but to be anchors. They say "This is me on this day, and it ain't so different from yesterday".

Jakob Roepke similarly has sets of work that reveal different aspects of his personality and his observations. These series continue over years and years. Repetition is a key force in the work. The series almost seem incompatible but the fact that one man produces them forces us to accept their confluence – that they are different sides of the same coin. Little suited men wrestle beside austere white reliefs obsessively sanded to a beautiful finish. Crazy animals cavort next to large abstract paintings. We each identify with one of the series. Jakob deals with modern life by separating out its strands for us, revealing its totems and archetypes. Living in the city, little suited men do in fact walk mythological beasts through white concrete jungles.

Freddie Robins' work is textile based. For her the anchor is wool, a material that she has always loved and taken great comfort from. Here she is showing a series of sculptural objects, which like all her work uses humour to subvert our expectations of everyday materials and objects. Many of the works originate from an artists' residency that she did in Bangladesh. Her "Common Enemies" series illustrate everyday, overlooked encounters such as insects and drinking water which, when in a foreign land pose serious threats. The moth is a constant enemy to her, forever trying to destroy her work. The huge embroidered face, was taken from the cover of one of the many children's alphabet books bought whilst in Bangladesh. The lips, represented by a leaf embroidered onto a round bamboo sieve, was an image taken from an educational chart, showing the parts of the human body, where the lips had been mis-labelled as "leaf". For Robins this mistake symbolised the many cultural misunderstandings that exist and represented her inability to speak even the simplest word in Bangla whilst everyone around her could speak English. So like the other two artists she has many strands to her work but unlike the other two her strands are combined in each individual work.