

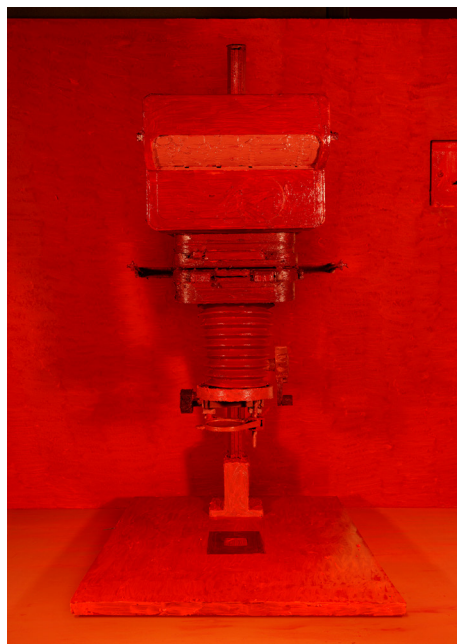
Unpalatable Truths

Jonny Briggs

Jonny Briggs' art might be thought of as a reinterpretation of family photography. As an adult he is concerned with the idea of questioning his familial context and the role he was 'socialised into' by his parents and siblings. It is in fact his dislike of the experience of being photographed that draws him to the medium as an artist taking centre stage to direct family members – both the living and those memorialised in archives – in photographic scenes that 'attempt to revive an unconditioned self.' Briggs is acutely aware of the fictive properties of photographs: as images, materially and in particular relation to the family as a social construct based upon what is selectively photographed and/or kept for the archive.

As *Archisle* Photographer in Residence, based within the Société Jersiaise Photographic Archive in the island of Jersey in 2017, Briggs has shifted his viewpoint from his immediate family into an insular societal context. For his Jersey project Briggs has directed his artistic enquiry towards this island's history, establishment and archives. The exhibition *Unpalatable Truths* deals with issues of authority, censorship, disgust, concealment and that vexed question over the status of photography itself: fact or fiction?

The exhibition title is extracted from a statement issued by the Chief Minister of Jersey, Senator Ian Gorst on 3 July 2017 responding to the findings of the Jersey Care Inquiry, '...set up to establish what went wrong in the Island's care system over many years and to find answers for people who suffered abuse as children.' In an apology to victims of abuse in Jersey in which he resolved, on behalf of the Jersey Government, to prevent future institutional abuse, Senator Gorst said that: 'Too often, children were not believed. Unpalatable truths were swept under the carpet because it was the easiest thing to do.'



Briggs' photographs for *Unpalatable Truths* are visual responses to becoming aware of the social and political context of the Jersey Care Inquiry and its reporting in the media. Among other influences are the experience of viewing evidence of the history of conflict and military occupation in the island's landscape and archives: castles, forts and Nazi German fortifications, photographs of German troops and written and oral testimonies of islanders from the German Occupation of Jersey 1940 - 1945. Certain motifs recur throughout

Cover:
The Un-carved Block, ear grafted onto Neolithic menhir, 2017.
546 x 800 mm
Reverse:
Speaking Through an Object, mouth speaking through a photograph, 2017. 417 x 593 mm
Left:
Black and White Series; Enlarger Covered with Lipstick, 2017.
503 x 702 mm

the exhibition: the mouth, the colour red, the circle, pixelation, and the use of lipstick as paint. They refer as Briggs explains, 'to the importance, but equally the danger, of having a voice, issues of censorship and the use of art as method for saying the unsayable.'

The pervasive theme of *Unpalatable Truths* is the importance of questioning authority and the dilemma of dealing with difficult histories. As Briggs claims, 'usually it's the topics that are the hardest to voice that are the ones that need to be spoken about the most.' In the image *Black and White Series: Enlarger Covered with Lipstick*, a projection enlarger in the black and white printing darkroom of the recently vacated States of Jersey Police Headquarters is masked with lipstick, creating the effect of a red safelight used in these spaces. For Briggs the use of red lipstick 'evokes the inside of a human body and references the closed mouth and the use of make-up in covering up.' In *Safelight Series: Police Headquarters Photography Lab Sink*, a small circular cyan coloured photograph of a section of the corner of the sink has been re-placed in precise register on its subject, re-photographed and colour balanced back to neutral. This process throws off the colour balance of the image, giving the illusion that the red safelight is on, when in fact it is off. Within these rooms where photographic evidence was once produced and scrutinised Briggs asks: 'what is real and what is fake?' and turns the question on the authority of photography itself. •

Gareth Syvret, 2017



Safelight Series, Police Headquarters Photography Lab Sink, (with circular cyan photograph re-photographed and colour balanced to neutral, falsely rendering surroundings red), 2017
730 x 494 mm

Unpalatable Truths
Jonny Briggs
8 - 22 September 2017
CCA Galleries International, St Helier, Jersey
ccagalleriesinternational.com / archisle.org.je

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THE JERSEY CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY PROGRAMME



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