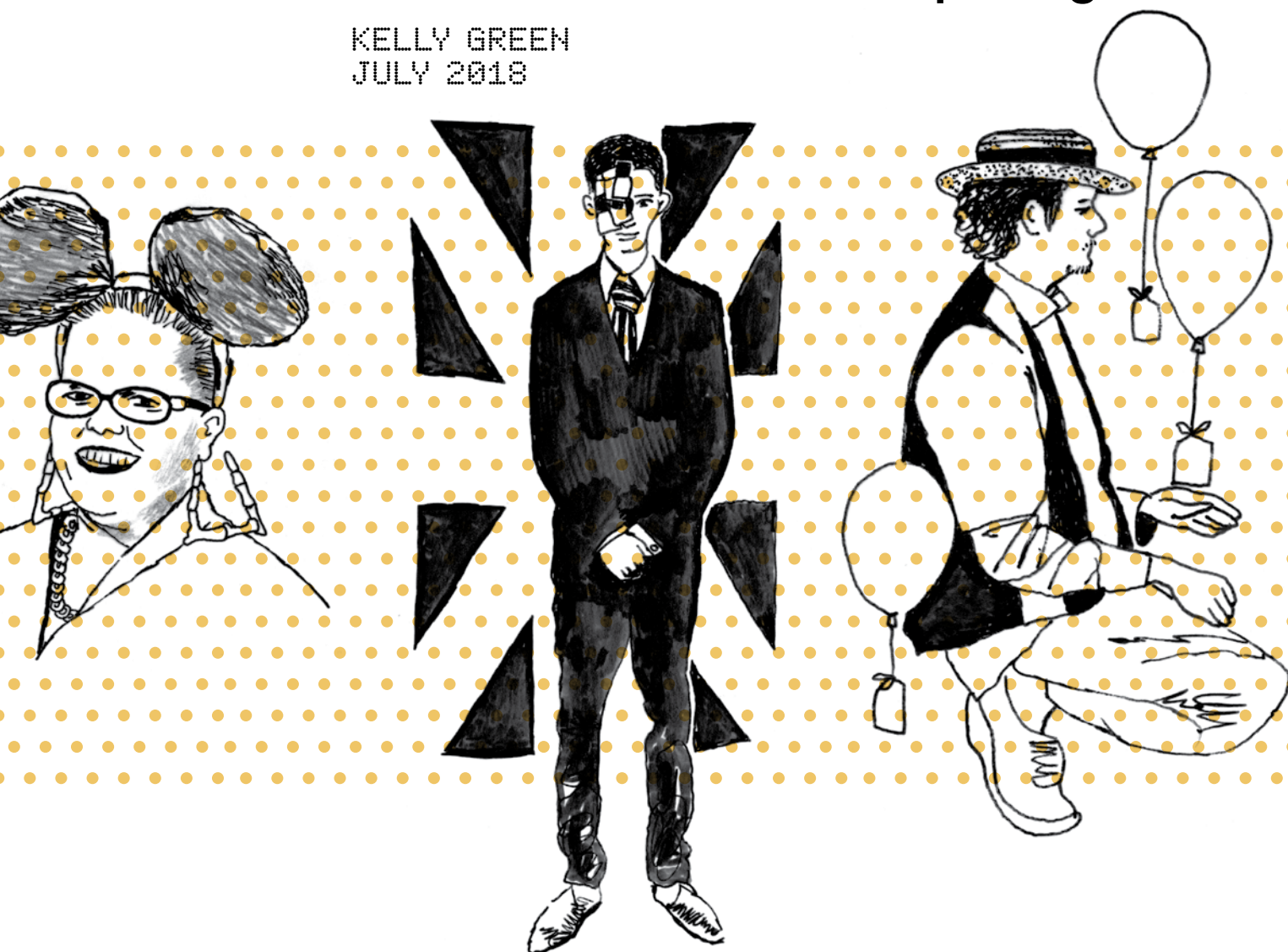


# let's get classy

Live Art, class and cultural privilege

KELLY GREEN  
JULY 2018



RESTOCK  
RETHINK  
REFLECT  
FOUR

ON  
LIVE ART  
AND  
PRIVILEGE

STUDY  
ROOM  
GUIDE

LADA is a Centre for Live Art - a knowledge and research centre, a production centre for programmes and publication, and an online centre for representation and dissemination.

LADA works to create the conditions in which diversity, innovation and risk in contemporary culture can thrive, develop new artistic frameworks, legitimise unclassifiable artforms, and give agency to underrepresented artists, practices and histories.

LADA supports everyone who makes, watches, researches, studies, teaches, produces, presents, writes about and archives Live Art in the UK and internationally through projects, publications, opportunities and resources, including the Study Room, a free open access research facility. As part of the continuous development of the Study Room LADA regularly commissions artists and thinkers to research and write Study Room Guides around practices and issues to help navigate Study Room users through the materials we hold and enhance and influence their own practices and approaches.

This Guide was written by the artist Kelly Green as part of a LADA research residency exploring Live Art practices and methodologies when working with those who are excluded through economic and social barriers, and particularly reasons of class.

*Restock, Rethink, Reflect (RRR)* is an ongoing series mapping and marking underrepresented artists, practices and histories, whilst also supporting future generations. Following *RRR* projects on Race (2006-08), Disability (2009-12), and Feminism (2013 -15), *RRR4* (2016-18): Live Art and Privilege, is looking at the ways in which Live Art has developed new forms of access, knowledge, agency, and inclusion in relation to the disempowered constituencies of the young, the old, the displaced, and those excluded through social and economic barriers.

The residency was also part of LADA's contribution to the Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme (CAPP), a transnational programme funded by the European Union focusing on collaborative practices with the aim of engaging new participants and enhancing mobility and exchange for artists. The residency was realised in a collaboration between LADA, Arts and Culture at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) and Sidney Cooper Art Gallery, Canterbury.

# Contents

1. Introduction
2. Performance Bio from CHAV, 2018
3. The Classy theory-ish bit
4. My Classy Practice and The Residency
5. Classy Artists – ‘Doing’ Class
  - Scottee
  - Selina Thompson
  - Catherine Hoffman
  - Heather Marshall
  - Stuart Crowther
  - Duckie, The Posh Club
6. Acknowledgements
7. Recommended Reads



# Live Art, class and cultural privilege

KELLY GREEN  
2018

## 1. Introduction

*Let's Get Classy* explores the barriers faced by artists who have, or are in the midst of, breaking through and who have been excluded from accessing the arts, and consequently struggle to fit in due to feelings of class inadequacy.

There are chats with the artists Scottee, Catherine Hoffman, Selina Thompson, Heather Marshall and Stuart Crowther and producer Simon Casson where we put the world to rights about engaging working class audiences and artists; what should be done, how can it be done, whose responsibility is it.

There are examples of organisations that are doing it right: Heart of Glass and Duckie's outreach work, *The Posh Club*, which is considered as a way of presenting an example of how Live Art practices can and should be appropriated for working class communities.

As with all LADA Study Room Guides, this guide is not written as an academic text with some posh words and theories in it. The format and conversational style of the guide reflects my methodology and practice with the aim of ensuring accessibility and inclusivity. It is not a comprehensive document but more of a starting point.

*Ways of Getting Classy* is a toolkit offering provocations and methodologies to consider when working with class community groups; those who are from lower social economic backgrounds.

Kelly Green is a London based working class single mother, academic, and performance artist. She is a noisy, feisty, hot mess. Her performance work is fun, interactive and is mostly about class and gender. Kelly's art practice is a mash-up of Live Art, stand up, dance, and bad singing.

## 2. Performance Bio from CHAV, 2018

Hello babes, I'm Kelly Green.

I was brought up in Kilburn in the London borough of Camden, closely surrounded by a large extended family full of dysfunctions.

Nan would always tell me: 'Never say you're from Kilburn, always say West Hampstead.'

Death, criminality, alcohol and secret substances plagued the Gallagher family.

Not my Mum though. She was one of eight and four remain. She is a natural care giver. And she has given, and lost, her whole life.

We went through phases of never having enough, but we were definitely better off than some, but we never fitted in.

Mum and Dad divorced when I was 11, my brother Mark was 5.

I became an angry misfit teenager, listening to metal with dyed black hair.

Secondary school was a challenge, I was never academically bright and left education at sixteen with 4 GCSE's

Drama, Music and double English.

To dancing. To drinking. To raving.

Then I had to get a proper job, pull my weight, and earn my keep.

To not paying bills, to credit card debt.

To helping to care for my mum's youngest sister, who passed away due to cirrhosis of the liver.

To one-night stands. To unhealthy relationships.

To strained sex. To pregnant.

To becoming a single mum at 23 with a 6-week-old daughter.

To benefit claimant.

Joy. Brest feeding. Nappies. Depression.

Back to education. Amber is 8 months old.

I'm expressing breast milk in the toilet on my lunch break at my Access Course.

I'm good at this shit.

Pass.

Started my degree at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama a year later, with all intentions of becoming a Drama teacher.

Lots of Posh Kids. Looking down their noses at me for eating chips.

Musical theatre students. Dancing in the halls. Calls to mummy and daddy. Not a care in the world, except they didn't get that part.

Diagnosed with Dyslexia. LOL.

Decided that I like Queer Theory too much, and I fucking hate kids, so probably shouldn't become a teacher.

Live Art. Feminism. Performance Art. Politics.

But where was I represented?

Where was art about stuff that spoke about my life and my experiences?

Nan moves in with us as she can't manage on her own anymore.

Missed out on mummying.  
Constantly stressed out. Deadlines to meet.  
Too much too soon?

2.1

Opportunities for 16-25 year olds,  
young free and single.  
Single mum, 28, with degree and experience,  
expected to work long hours for free.  
Applied arts. Facilitator. Administrator. Job seeker.  
Nan passes away. An unexplainable loss.  
Back to drink. Drugs. Depression.  
Going out for days and not coming back.  
Needed direction. Back to Education.  
Off to Roehampton, Performance  
and Creative Research, Masters.  
Rich aunty paid the one year annual fee, ta Caz.  
Difficult year, personal shit, full time student,  
part-time work, parenting, life.  
No balance. Time poor.  
Doing lots of things, badly.  
Started engaging with ideas  
of working-class female bodies.  
Issues with the academy,  
working class insecurities?  
Chip on my shoulder?

CHAV was a neon, grey, diamante and hard-hitting  
autobiographical journey presented at Camden  
People's Theatre in 2018, which playfully explored  
and commented on working-class female identity,  
and how we both lose and reclaim ourselves through  
our lived experience of class.

Merit

Signing on, freelancing. Going mad.  
Can't justify wanting to be an artist.  
Get a proper job. Recruitment.  
Admin. Payroll. Shit at it.  
Back to education. Research degree applications.  
Chav Ballet: Developing a working-class  
female aesthetic through performance.  
PhD funding offer, fee waiver, Yes!  
Stipulation of fee waiver, working  
restrictions of ten hours per week.  
Really?  
No other funding opportunities.  
Can't apply for the hardship fund  
as not entitled as a research student.  
No access to benefits, no signing on.  
Precarious freelance work. Poorly child.  
Temping in wanky offices.  
Writing essays on reception desks.  
Justifying wanting to be  
an artist through education.  
But I'm going through the academy now,  
and that makes me middle class.



### 3. The Classy theory-ish bit



I have always had an issue with talking about my class. It's a difficult subject that makes me angry. I am proud to have a huge weighty chip on my shoulder, but not in a romantic way, not in a way that I want to continue to live within it, not in a way that I want my daughter to grow up defining herself by it as I have. But I refuse to deny it. Although the term class is used widely, both in the media and in governmental rhetoric, it has become difficult to define, and to understand the systematic economic and cultural positions of the class system that we have become institutionalized to feel, but yet struggle to understand. I am going to touch on my problem with class, but if you're looking for the answers, or for me to define class, I don't have those answers for ya.

I first started writing this Study Guide in 2016 and finished it in 2018. This period saw a lot of change: Teresa May became prime minister, Donald Trump became the president of the USA, we had the Brexit vote and class has become a hot topic to talk about again. The increase of media coverage focusing on austerity in Britain and the disenfranchised poor and their ill made votes, due the political shifts in the country has forced the UK to consider class again as an important relevant subject.

Through my journey of navigating class some people still think of dirty faced miners in flat caps when they think of the working classes. This romantic character no longer exists, due to Thatcher's annihilation of the UK's industry.

For those who nostalgically connect the two together, there is no longer a REAL working class, which I think is utter crap.

Karl Marx wrote the *Communist Manifesto* 1840 when Engels and Marx conducted research into the lives of the French poor during that time. Marx discusses a three-tier class system which enables capitalism to exist and self-perpetuate. The system can be described in simple terms as a triangle: at the top is the aristocracy (upper class): the landowners, at the middle of the structure are the bourgeoisie (middle class), and the proletariat (working class) are positioned at the bottom. For Marx the economic organization which he labelled the modes of production, are best described in two sections. The first is the infrastructure, or the base, which controls the means of production; land, materials. The base supports and dictates the superstructure, which validates the infrastructure, and is the second section. The superstructure is all cultural productions such as: family, religion, moral, scientific, political, social, mass media and the arts, and in part is sustained by the bourgeoisie. If this is the case then art 'is not an independent or autonomous mode of human activity but is conditioned and determined by a society's mode of production and the relations of production it engenders.' Auslander on Marx in *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (Taylor and Francis, 2008, p.17).

Photo: *Working Class* by Scottee



The three-tier class system has been the basis for class theory in the UK, however, it is questioned whether or not Marx's ideas are still valid due to the benefit system and other elements that it fails to take into consideration in the present day. Marx also believed the more capital one has, the more powerful a position one occupies in social life. Which leads us on to the idea of cultural capital.

Cultural capital is a term that was developed by Pierre Bourdieu; who was highly influenced by Marx's, but he develops his idea of cultural capital so that it goes beyond the economic and considers the value of culture, which Bourdieu says is a collection of 'symbolic elements'; skills, education, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerisms, and material belongings, that we acquire through being part of a particular social class. So, my love of trainers, fake tan, raving and hoop earrings, all of which are associated with working class culture, are tastes that accumulate to my cultural capital, which I have acquired through my lived experience of my class.

Bourdieu defines cultural capital as three forms, they love the rule of three these philosophers, that is embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Examples are as such:

- My cockney accent and the slang language I use when I talk is 'embodied', lived experience/ learnt behaviours of class.

- My collection of academic texts or my Nike Air Max trainers are 'objectified', objects of capital.

- My degree from a Drama school, my Masters, and the fact I am doing a PhD is 'institutionalized', these pieces of paper give me credentials as it were, from the institution of education.

The idea of cultural capital informed the BBC's January 2011 The Great British Class Survey with the aim to see if Marx's three tier class system was redundant in the UK in the contemporary moment. The survey considered new ways of defining how to measure peoples class through exploring their different types of 'capitals' which were defined as, economic: the financial, what you earn, what you own. Cultural: what you do for fun, your education, and social: who your friends are, who you know. The experiment claimed that are now seven classes in the UK based on the accumulation of each capital. The seven classes are defined as the following:

- **Elite** – the most privileged class with high levels of all three capitals; their high amount of economic capital sets them apart

- **Established Middle Class** – gregarious and culturally engaged, with high levels of all three capitals although not as high as the Elite



- **Technical Middle Class** – a new, small class with high economic capital but seem less culturally engaged, with relatively few social contacts
- **New Affluent Workers** – a young and active group with medium levels of economic capital and higher levels of cultural and social capital
- **Emergent Service Workers** – young and often found in urban areas, this is a new class with low economic capital but high levels of ‘emerging’ cultural capital and high social capital
- **Traditional Working Class** – although not the poorest, this class scores low on all three capitals; they tend to be older than the others
- **Precariat** – the most deprived class with low levels of economic, cultural and social capital; their everyday lives are precarious

BBC The Class Calculator

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22000973>

Following the logic of the survey, your class is defined by economics, what you own, and who and what you know. I don’t agree with cultural capital, just because you have seen some theatre and read a few books does not mean that you somehow break free from the feelings of growing up with not having enough and not feeling good enough. No matter how we try to theorize class, it becomes more elusive and harder to pin down, to articulate, to explain, to name.

For me, and for many I have spoken to, class is a feeling and knowing. A knowing of some things, and the feeling of inadequacy of not knowing others. It’s about the privilege of knowing what to say, the right things to eat, the right manners, the right language, the right clothes, the right education, and the entitlement to question, to argue, and feel like you belong.

It is interesting to think talk about Bourdieu’s most influential, yet a bit confusing concept, habitus, which considers how our lived experience of class becomes ingrained in the habits and characteristics of our identity, our tastes and how we navigate the world. Our ability to react, or know how to behave in certain situations, is due to our habitus, our sensibilities and our understanding of a situation. So, if you grew up on a dodgy crime ridden estate you may know how to manage a different type of difficult situation, to that of someone who grew up in a luxury apartment with a doorman, due to your habitus.

In Bourdieu’s book, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Harvard University Press, 1984), he discusses French citizens tastes in art in relation to their class, pointing out that our aesthetic sensibilities are shaped by the culturally ingrained habitus. So, those who define themselves as upper class have a taste for fine art because they have had the access to it through their lived experience, they can appreciate it as they have learnt the language and have engaged with it.

Unlike the working classes who have not had access to it due economics and so haven't refined the habitus to appreciate fine art, as they haven't got the tools to appropriate it.

Our habitus then allows us to successfully navigate social environments, in the RIGHT environment for our class. What happens then if you are in the wrong social environment for your class? What happens if you're a working-class person experiencing Live Art for the first time? Or at the opera? Or at a conference?

For me, class and habitus and cultural capital are learnt behaviors, none of which are innate and this is where class intersects with Judith Butler's theories of gender and performativity. For Butler, gender is a system of learnt behaviors 'a reiteration of [social] norms which precede, constrain and exceed [the subject]' Butler in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Routledge 1993 p.234). This is a very basic explanation of her theory, but for Butler you are born your sex of woman, but your gender of female is learnt, meaning that you learn how to dress, behave, sit, talk and act female, which is social construct. Butler calls this construction of meaning "performative", which that we perform our gender, referring back to Bourdieu and the examples of habitus, I suggest that our class is performative.

I am master of code switching, a social chameleon as it were, I perform my class dependent on my situation, I do it less now that I am aware of it. It's a bit like when your mum puts her phone voice on, some of you will know what I mean by that, whenever my mum talks to someone important on the phone she puts on a fake posh voice. It's dragging your class, which as a working artist and academic you have to become exceptional at to be accepted and to be protected in middle class spaces. I have often been told that I don't read as working class, which drives me mad, what does that even mean? Maybe all working class people in middle class spaces should wear a badge. These are questions I ask a lot through my practice, especially through my theatre piece CHAV. It's having a foot in each camp. This is the crux of performing ones classed insecurities as a woman from a lower social economic position. I live everyday in the liminal space of my lived experience, as realistically, no matter what I do, or where I am, I feel inadequate, and I struggle for my footing in this dynamic, and I know that I am not alone feeling this way.

## 4. My Classy Practice and The Residency

My CAPP supported LADA residency was two-pronged: firstly, I was a research resident with LADA based in its Study Room, where I conducted practical research and facilitated discussions, workshops, interviews and chats. I used this element of the residency to define the understanding of class in the arts, from the mouths of working class people. The second element of the residency was practice based with Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU); working directly with lower economic community groups applying my methodologies, informed by the research conducted whilst in LADA's Study Room. This element of the residency is detailed in the toolkit; *Ways of Getting Classy*.

My approach with working class people is by, with, and for the community, which I believe breaks with the hierarchical cultural practice, of talking about, and to, the underrepresented. This creates a space of respect and creativity, which challenges positions of privilege of the artist and the participant; I endeavor to encourage creative agency and take a step back as an artist. During the first few sessions I have with a group, if exploring class, I will facilitate political workshops and then play with different ways to challenge/ explore these ideas through the body, giving the participants tools early on to start to create their ideas and performances. I feel that Live Art provides a space for activism and engagement as it is a platform of expression that is interdisciplinary, which makes way for new representations and meaning. It's about finding nuggets, the good bits that make you tick, that make you angry.

I am angry about class. I am angry about the representations of class, especially for me, of working class women. The solo work I make is all about being a working, classy, single mum, academic, artist, person, and how it feels to be the person in the wrong spaces. My show *CHAV* is a classy, dirty and noisy autobiographical journey, which playfully explores and comments on working-class femininity, and how we both lose and reclaim ourselves through our lived experience of class and gender identity, which was developed through Starting Blocks 2018 with Camden Peoples Theatre.



## 5. Classy Artists – ‘Doing’ Class

Right, there is a difference between being a working class artist and being a working artist that makes work explicitly about class. In 2016 when I started this residency there wasn't a lot of talk about class and the arts, there has been quite a shift in the discussion in the past two years, I put that down to the political climate and these times of austerity.

However, the conversations have been starting, obviously with LADA initiating this residency, and festivals like Camden Peoples Theatre's *Common People* which was held during April 2018 which was dedicated to theatre and performance by working artists, where I performed my piece *CHAV*.

Symposiums like *Uncommon Ground* which was produced by Arts Council England, the British Council, and The Lowry, that took place March 2018, which discussed and investigated ideas of what it means to create socially engaged art in the political contemporary moment, where class was a topic that was considered with importance.

I am also a founding member, along with Scottee, Selina Thompson and Bryony Kimmings, of the *Working Class Artist Group*, which you can follow on Twitter: @WCArtistGroup. The collective of 33 working class artists, was established in 2017, by those working in theatre and performance who are disgruntled about the inaccessibility of the arts, where we call out the appropriation of UK poverty in British theatre and share information.

This section is made up of snippets of conversations with 'arty types' that are doing class through their practice, that I spoke to over the course of the residency, asking them to share their stories, thoughts and feelings about class. There's an intro into their work and there is also info about where you can further research their work in LADA's Study Room or online.

# Scottee



## What is Class?

*A thing that sometimes means you belong,  
but often means that you don't*

## What is Live Art?

*An elitist space where outsiders belong*

Scottee was one of the first artists that I met that declared he was working class, which was really important for me. He grew up in Kentish Town in the London Borough of Camden and makes work that is renowned for elevating the underdog and being in your face.

Scottee's work is interdisciplinary, meaning that he has the ability to use different practices to create work and spans from theatre, performance, socially engaged practice and prints. Scottee has won quite a few awards including, Time Out Performer of the Year in 2010 and Total Theatre Award for Innovation in 2013 for his show *The Worst of Scottee*, for his performance work, but one of my fave pieces is the print above that Scottee created as for me it speaks so much truth.

Scottee's class project is currently in development, as part of that they will be hosting, *The Working Class Dinner Party*, where Scottee is normally joined by Bryony Kimmings plus other guests, to have an open discussion with the audience, using Lois Weaver's Long Table Etiquette, about class

and the arts. Scottee's class project will result in a new solo show about working class identity.

Scottee's piece *Bravado* is a memoir of 1991-1999 working class masculinity from his stories of lived experience. The piece is clever, gut wrenching and very uncomfortable to listen to. The piece was made to be performed in male dominated spaces; pubs, traditional working man clubs and a boxing venue were some of the tours sites. *Bravado* cleverly protects the solo performer, while enabling the violent and difficult autobiographical narrative to be shared with the audience.



Photo: Sign by Scottee

# Getting Classy with Scottee

K: When did you realise that you were working class? Was it when you were like a young person and or when you were growing up as a child?

S: *I think, for me it was later than most people. I think it comes in waves actually, I don't think there's been like oh, now you're working class! I think the first time that I knew I was slightly different, wasn't where I thought I was from a different class, it was from where I thought we were poorer. I think it's something that I found retrospectively, so by looking back at my childhood, maybe actually I've only really looked at class for the last 5 years, cos it's not something my family have ever spoken about, being like this is what you are and you should be proud of it. Always been like, you come from a council estate, there's nothing wrong with that, make sure you look out for people but never you're working class and that's fine. So, it's something a bit like, you know like fancy words like hegemony, it's a bit like something you work out later in life and it makes total sense for the whole life that you lived before that.*

K: Recently, I think I've identified that my family, if you were looking at in how the media portray it, a lot of my family would have been classed as the under-class at some point.

S: *Oh yeah...*

K: I hate the term under-class but I'm thinking of ways of subverting or playing with it, hence my reclaiming the word chav, this term that you know, the under-class we are now looking at

people who are relying on welfare and I'm finding it problematic but I'm trying to figure it out... I don't know if that makes sense, so yes, I say I'm working class but there's been points probably where it's been under-class, if you know what I mean and how...

S: *I mean I don't have to go that far back, my grandad is like, they're from Irish Famine, where like the kids would like there's these stories of class shame in my family that no one will talk about where like, some of the brothers used to have to go to school in girls' clothes.*

K: Hmmm...

S: *I mean it's a wonder I turned out the way I did!*

K: [laughing]

S: *My penchant for blouses and they won't talk about it and I'm like, this isn't your fault like, you don't have to have the shame attached to it.*

K: See that's interesting, cos I think that shame and pride are two like working class, conflicting aren't they, conflicting... can't think of the word.

S: *Things!*

K: Things is good! Conflicting things, I asked people for their response about what is class and they wrote pride and shame. Yeah, so until 5 years ago where you started to think about class, did it start to fall into place?

S: *And it, um that rage which I think that a lot of working class people have.*

K: Okay, so you kind of identified with class about 5 years ago. Can we discuss your pathway into the arts?

S: *Yeah there was just a workshop on at the Roundhouse cos I was expelled and my mum wanted to like, keep me ticking over and doing things. So she saw this thing and said why don't you go over there and it was like 20p and she gave us the money to go and we went. And that was the first introduction to thinking, oh this could be something! And then there was like my mum was working, was running an elderly community centre and they were doing a community show with a theatre company and they were looking for someone to come in and help. My mum said my son would do it, so there was like this quick introduction like and I knew no one was gonna ask me about my GCSEs.*

K: Didn't matter in that sense?

S: *Talking the way that I did wasn't a problem so, yeah but I by total accident was kind of chose with my attitude towards it cos I think a lot of makers and artists have a respect for the arts. I just see it for what it is.*

K: What is it then? Sorry, that's quite a direct question...

S: *No, its kind of classist, um exclusive space that alienates people and that's reflected in ticket numbers and who goes to see theatre shows. Doesn't have to be that way, of course but I mean we digging into cultural hegemony about like, it kind of suits the middle classes for it, to feel like a new class, elitist as well cos then it's for middle class people made by middle class people.*

K: Yeaaah, uhhh...

S: *Like it's not hard to get working class people to engage in the arts. My mum and dad would go to the*

*Tate cos the Tate has done something catered to them, like its open to them.*

K: Yeah, its not hard I think its hard to get working class people making the art, more so...

S: *Yeah because of, like I'm reading a book at the moment which you should totally read called Goodbye To London, imagine why I'm reading that! Its about radical art practice in the 70s, radical art and politics in the 70s and the fact that working class makers that came through in the 70s and 80s are people like Jude Kelly or people like Spare Tyre and Gay Sweatshop, those kind of like radical companies were able to exist because they could all squat. You didn't have to have an education cos you were making it all up. The universities are the ones whose told us that you need an education to do it cos they profit from it.*

K: Yeah, of course

S: *And so if you haven't got that free space then artists need to twice as hard and actually, you know if you're spending £900 on a room in a house you need to work full time. How can you be an artist?*

K: I agree, cos I think Live Art as well, I think cos this project is looking at making Live Art accessible. Live art is like, the fine art world of the Theatre isn't it, a lot of the time it's quite academic in the way that its read. As you said, universities have made being an artist, you need an education to do that so I think, in terms of Live Art...

S: *...this'll be a good question, I can tell...*

K: [laughing] if I can get there! In terms of making Live Art more accessible, I think it needs to change quite a bit because another thing about Live Art can fundamentally be anything, can't it but it's the way in which we read it, so we need an academic book or lens in order to justify that it is Live Art, does that make sense?



S: I'm not sure that I agree that Live Art can be anything, cos I think it's a very particular type of work or actually I think it's about the artist more than the work. I think I jokingly said before, my definition of Live Art is messy theatre, which I kind of half agree with. It's kind of messy, it exists outside traditional space and practice.

K: So, cos... I can't think of how to say what I'm trying to say properly, it's not coming out...

S: Is it easier to start with, do we think Live Art is an accessible, un-classist space?

K: Okay, so do we think it's an accessible space? What do you think?

S: I think, there's a thing about occupation, I think it often happens in un-classed spaces, like the Roof/Vauxhall Tavern isn't particularly a classed space or the Bethnal Green Working Mans' Club isn't particularly a class space but because of ticket price and how its communicated and the appropriate of those spaces it means that actually, it's not actively communicated to working class people, it isn't actively open to working class people and it doesn't create a space of sustainability for working-class makers. So if you were to do a show in Bethnal, say you get paid £50, then that's not sustainable income for a working class-maker and so you have to have something behind you...

K: ...to be able to...

S: yeah, which means you're bolstered by family or property or whatever. But then the academic side, is more looking at institutional Live Art, I get invited into that space very rarely and I always have to qualify myself as a professional artist for that to happen because I don't have academia, quite often my practice is considered invalid in those spaces. I'm never asked to talk on academic panels or a lecture or a paper, the only time I've ever done that in an institution has been with LADA and not with or for the institution. So the academic world is, for me, like...

K: So, the institution is a privileged space?

S: Yeah, of course it is you have to have £9,000 to have the education and now that's going up!

K: It is yeah, it's a fucking tragedy...

S: My brother's in university and in 2 months he's got to get a job. He's just started and I think he still hasn't had the class awakening where he realised that when it comes down to it he can't just like call up mum and be like, oh I've run out of money for food and she'll be like, you're gonna have to come home ain't ya?

K: [laughing] yeah...

S: And I hope you've got your train fare, cos you know what I mean?! To answer the question, do we live in a classist society, yes therefore of course the Live Art world is going to be classist too. It's part of a class system anyway, you go to a theatre and they ask you how much you can afford and that determines how close you can sit to the performance.

...

S: If artists wanted working class people in their audience, they'd get them there. It's the same with art spaces, like if you want working class people, if you want black people in your space, if you want trans people in your space go out and get them, it's not hard. It's easier for the arts-makers and as a sector and an industry to say [they're] just not engaged cos that's easier to write down on an Arts Council application.

K: Yes.

S: I did a project in Hull the other week...

K: Oh yeah, how did that go?

S: *Great! You wanna get 400 working class people to come to your art project, dare them and put it on their High Street and make sure everybody gets a flyer through their door.*

K: Hehe, fantastic!

S: *400 people through the door in 2 days!*

K: That's a brilliant turnout!

S: *Totally!*

K: I think that's the other issue, with art is it's preaching to the converted a lot of the time. I used to think that with the RVT when I first started researching gender, it was preaching to the converted you know? I think it's about privileged spaces.

S: *Like my mum's not gonna go in the Opera House, for love nor money, she won't do that. But she might go into the National if they ever invited her in.*

...

K: So, when you speak about things you noticed, do you think it was a lack of something that resonated with you? The lack of not having something.

S: *It's not ever having anything, like I don't think oh I've got community spirit on my side! You notice what you haven't got but I think that's human, or maybe that is class. I don't think optimism is particularly a working-class trait...*

K: No...

S: *Realism is.*

K: Yeah! Be a teacher...what did you say you wanted to be, an architect?

S: *Yeah*

K: Would your parents, when you were a kid, if you'd said that to your parents would they've thought that was a realistic aspiration?

S: No

K: And now that you're an artist, how does that... like if I said to my mum, I'm gonna be an artist she'd have been like go and get a proper job. It's only cos I've validated it through academia that it's okay.

S: *Oh, I said to my mum, after doing that workshop when I was 14, I think I wanna be an actor. She said to me, mmm as long as you're alright having no money for the rest of your life...*

K: [laughing] that's intense!

S: *It is isn't it, but it's true! I thought about it, and I was like yeah I don't think money's important and she said, good. But they couldn't fund that dream, in the slightest and actually my mum called me an artist for the first time last year.*

K: Aw, did that make you feel good?

S: *It made me feel like my family understood me better and that they were willing to accept my non-occupation but I've got lots of class guilt about the job that I do.*

K: Yeah, class-guilt is huge. Why do you feel guilty?

S: *Cos I see how hard my family have to work, like my dad carries tons of lead up to a roof every day and I've seen what that's done to his body and how upset my brother was at the veiled threat that he might not go to university and I've never seen my dad so upset and it's not until my dad said I just want him to not have to do what I have to do, that actually really hurt. That's his life he's living now that he doesn't want someone else to have so it was like a real eye opener into how he sees his own life.*

K: That's really quite emotional...

S: Yeah, my mum's continually devaluing herself, not being articulate or educated. So yeah, I have class guilt in terms of I can ask the government to do a show, it's like a Judy Garland film whereas people are sitting around being like, oh god you're so busy, it must be so difficult but it's not really, cos I don't have to wake up at 5am and drive to London. My dad does that, my dad does graft as well, which is different to working.

K: Yeah, I agree with that.

S: I see my grandad's body now, it's fucked because he's been a laborer and a brickie and a coalminer, like the working class body. The guilt is something you always live with and I think that it's something only working class people take with them. Like that's your barometer, for are you working class or not? Do you suffer from working class guilt? No, therefore you're middle class!

K: [laughing] We should do them like diagrams.

S: That's a little graph there!

...

K: So common knowledges, in terms of class, in working class culture we look after each other as you said, middle class culture is that you don't need to do that but there's a common understanding of how certain manners are or how you're supposed to talk. There's common knowledges within the class structure that we don't know in others yet there is an assumption that is common knowledge, I am making sense?

S: Yeah yeah, I've recently had this awakening in reading into Marxist Cultural Capital and if you apply class to that, I think it's really interesting about this idea of there being wealth beyond financial wealth and so if you start to apply your working class-ness to it, it makes sense how we as working class people aspire to have an education and aspire to code swap and let's talk

a bit proper and look/dress in the way we do cos it gives us cultural capital in a way that we'll never have the financial capital.

K: That's stuff I was looking into recently, not really Marx... I think it's this working class aspiration, the social mobility that is the problem.

S: Do you think it's a problem?

K: No, maybe that's the wrong word...is it a problem? Is it a problem, to want to be better?

S: Nooo

K: Does becoming middle class or aspiring to middle class values, make you better?

S: No, I don't think you can actually transcend class, I think that's the working class dream but born working class, you die working class. We don't live in a culture that allows us to move properly. If you're working class and you win the lottery, you're still a working class person. The way that you talk, people will judge if you're a working class person but you might have a lot of money. In my mind, Sir Alan Sugar is a working class person, he's just done alright for himself. The way he talks and the way he behaves and the things he likes, like football, West Ham, very much still being able to communicate with the WC, to me it says that maybe he's cultural capital is still WC but his financial capital is that of an upper class person.

...

S: I think middle class people are rude and they're spoilt and I've told you about that born with entitlement thing...

K: I agree with you and I've found that a lot in academia as well, especially cos of the subject I'm looking at. I think my experience of trying to aspire to be more sometimes it's been difficult and a challenge, but that's what it's supposed to

be, that's the journey and I'm accepting of that but it makes me fucking angry which is why I'm constantly going on about it!

*S: Here's a good question... do you want to be middle class?*

K: I don't want to be middle class but I'd like my daughter not to feel the inadequacies of being working class. So, for me to then instill that in her, do I need to give her this sense of entitlement? I know that you've given me this really good example of children that haven't, but its knowing how to do that well. Like she knows that we can't afford stuff, I make her every aware of our economic position, I want to know the reality of our world.

*S: It's not her inadequacies, it's our...*

K: It's ours and its life.

*S: ...economic, ya know.*

K: And also that, of a similar economic background but those that aren't as well and we have to put it in perspective and she can understand that. I don't know if I want to be MC, I'd like to have the luxury of being MC and having some savings and owning my own home but if you're looking at it economically...

*S: Those are the things which are about stability which is really human. Is there anything about the cultural capital of what MC is, so like people not judging you by your class or...?*

K: Yeah, haha that would be nice...

*S: People not judging your academia, people you know like, by you just being a given?*

K: Yeah I think that that would be, maybe that would be nice but then I wouldn't be doing the work that I'm doing either and I would lose a lot of my identity I think..

*S: Totally.*

K: And I think that that's the important bit, the juicy stuff otherwise I'd just be boring... maybe?! Hahaha...

*S: Yeah just be like all the other pennies.....all trying to make work about Tamagotchis because nothing has happened in their life so they have to make work about stuff that doesn't actually matter.*

K: I think that's what is interesting, people who have come from a struggle are doing something more political, isn't it?

*S: Someone asked me this question the other day, do you like theatre? I was like, not really and then I changed my mind cos there's certain people I want to listen to and largely they sound like me. I find it rare when I meet someone in this world, who's from a council estate, so off the top of my head, I think of you, Bryony and Selina Thompson.*

...

K: Can we talk about your feeling of inadequacy with regard to education?

*S: Yeah of course.*

K: What do you think that inadequacy is?

*S: I constantly have to justify my position because I don't have formal training and I think some places I bring that baggage but a lot of places it is actual baggage. I think in some places, some people don't give a shit.*

K: If you could say where people don't give a shit, where would that be?

*S: Working Men's Clubs. The Variety Circuit. When I'm workshop leading. Where does it matter? Well, sometimes I feel I'm not a part of it, again some of my own stuff I bring with that but some stuff I'm made to feel. It's a good question...*

K: Where you don't feel it?

S: *Every time I'm asked to talk about something, it comes into my brain. Every time I meet someone with an education, I feel underqualified. When I apply for things, I have to submit my qualifications, when I'm applying for funding or if I'm applying for a bursary or anything, I have to put no formal qualifications cos they want to see the qualifications so you're reminded, oh you're not like everybody else. It always feels like a weak point in the applications, like I can't convince them, oh yes I know I've got no quals and didn't study but even so I'm still good, they still want to know what you've got and what you haven't. then I feel like I have to make up for it in the amount of work that I make, how eloquent I am and how I talk about strategy and practice. I have to talk the language way more*

K: Do you think it's something you'd pursue now? Do you bother with it now?

S: *It's a difficult pill to swallow, that my education was robbed from me.*

K: Mmm, it must be.

S: *That now I'd be considered a post-graduate, that I'd have to start at the beginning, I'd have to get a GCSE I couldn't just go in at MA. I'd have to convince people.*

K: Yeah, that's horrible

S: *Isn't it?*

K: Especially after you've practiced for so fucking long in your field, cos you've established yourself in your practice as an artist.

S: *I'd have to do an NVQ...*

K: You'd have to do an Access course, that's what I did. So, I went back and did an Access Course and then did a degree to be a drama teacher and now I don't know and that's not what I am at all. But I think...

S: *so even the system wants to degrade you, oh all of that non-qualification qualification you have doesn't exist in our world, I'm sorry. I feel if I do it, will I feel qualified?*

K: Would you feel qualified? Interestingly, I had this conversation with a group of other girls I interviewed them on Wednesday. They come from a WC background and they don't do anything in their field of their degree and they all thought that by the time they got to the end of their degree that they would they feel that have accomplished something, that they achieved something and neither did it. That's why I kept going on with education cos it was never enough, so I think it's a really interesting thing around class and education that you feel, this is the thing that is unobtainable and I'm going to strive to get it but once you have it you don't feel, different. You're coming at it from a very different angle, there is this very weird thing with it

S: *If I look at how the famous Lauren Barri Holstein, Lois Weaver, Bryony Kimmings, Selina Thompson, Victoria Melody, if I look how they approach their practice with ease and very rarely have a major crisis of confidence if they can make the work if they're able to do it. They have crisis of confidence if its good work but the way they approach the work in knowing they (A) can do it and (B) they've got the history and the lineage behind them and (C) they've got the words and methodologies and strategies to back them up because they've been taught it, I don't have any of that so I constantly am worried that I don't know how to do this. That, I think goes with an education.*

K: That's interesting because I feel like that but I'm in education but that's because I haven't made as much work as you. But I also wonder if that's to do with dyslexia and our brains working in a different way?

S: *I think its class.*

K: Definitely class

S: *It's the inadequacy again, oh can I occupy this space cos there are other people who are better than me.*

K: Which is horrible isn't it, all the time

S: *Totally, its rubbish.*

K: It's hard to manage that a lot of the time.

S: *It bugs me when you see a middle class maker who has confidence in masses, even if its shit because they're able to talk about how it fits in the lineage of work and into their practice and I just will never have that and maybe that's a good thing?*

K: I think it is a good thing

S: *Maybe it's about measuring your inadequacy and education minimizes your sense of inadequacy. So, it takes a little bit of it away, so it's always there?*

K: Sometimes It can enhance it. I think education's a funny one, I think I'll have to talk about my education in terms of how I constantly feel like I shouldn't be in those academic places so constantly feeling this sense of inadequacy. I think the last time I spoke with you I was feeling really insecure about my position but I'm pushing through that more now, not really sure why. That's good but at the beginning I felt like this is not a space I should be in, I shouldn't be in academia, I can't claim to be an artist but I don't know if education has helped with that or not.

S: *Maybe it's the lethal combination of being a working class academic?*

K: A lot of women that go into being a academic end up writing about it and not doing it, not practicing. It's like it's easier to write about something than to actually do it

S: *Here's something I was just thinking of, I don't know what it means or what it explores but I read the other day, on paper for the first time WC intellectual and it was the first time I thought, I wonder if I could be that?! How I saw that as a sentence, those words look strange together...*

K: Brilliant but strange ha!

S: *You can tell I've been reading all this Marxist theory...*

### **Study Room References**

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# Selina Thompson

## What is Class?

*Class is a system that is used to keep rich people rich and preferably, getting richer everyday) and poor people poor (preferably getting poorer everyday).*

## What is Live Art?

*Live Art is the weird bit between Visual Art and Performance, with a massive dash of politics thrown in.*

Selina Thompson is a performance artist from Leeds who brings the black identity to the forefront by inviting audiences to participate in her pieces, whilst looking at the fat body and eating disorders and food. These themes are explored in her body of work called *Edible Women*, which saw her make a dress out of cake and *Chewing the Fat* (2013), which is an open-air confessional space to share food-stories. Selina's work around food inevitably addresses class and its ability to become a "bodily" element.

*The Job Centre Project* was a major project which was made up of three pieces of work; *It All Burns Clean*, £57.35 and *These Ripples*. For this work Selina, made a game of the job centre, an audio work and a protest performance. For *It All Burns Clean*, Selina recreated her local Job Centre for service users to navigate the ever-changing rules and regulations of benefits as if it were a game. £57.35 was about Selina and her Dad, Delroy, and their relationship to Birmingham and Leeds, the Job Centre and retirement. The final piece of the project, *These Ripples*, she drank tea and quietly protested.



# Getting Classy with Selina Thompson

K: I always find that working with working class participants or my family or other groups that actually getting them to talk and share stories is a really accessible and really interesting way to get people to participate, if that makes sense?

S: *I feel that one of the first things about making work about being working class - similar to making work about race - one of the first things you have to do is break down all of these preconceptions that they (the audience) come with. We're so used to placing this really dehumanising filter on people who are working class and I find that when you have people speaking candidly it can break that down really beautifully.*

K: As we were just talking about ways of working with working class groups cos a lot of your work is participatory isn't it? Do you feel to make working class art that it needs to be participatory, does that make sense?

S: *I think that it's a really interesting question. Does working class art need to be participatory? I don't think it needs to...but my work is, why is that? Cos we don't see as many working class people in culture and you make it participatory so that they are there, do you know what I mean? And also, because sometimes, it's a way that you can sneak money to people...*

K: Yeah yeah yeah, of course.

S: *pay you £500 quid for this! There's that... but I also just feel a bit like working class people have to spend so much time like, being spoken at and being spoken down to and I don't want to make work that is a part of that, I wanna subvert and challenge that. The easiest way to do that is to displace yourself and hand over the mic.*

K: That's lovely, that's great. It's a tricky one I think but I think as you say, it's to do with being spoken at or being spoken to, I don't wanna speak on behalf people whose stories aren't mine, like obviously I'm working class but my working class story is different to other peoples. It's the same with any other topic, as an artist if you're going to talk about it your lived experience is going to be different than somebody else's from a similar situation, I think.

S: *The working class are used as a tool so much like, so I think Brexit is a really good example of media creating this narrative where it's like, oh this is what working class people wanted and it's like... is it?! Are you sure?! And you don't wanna be a part of that and also, I think that with participatory work potentially, not always, but potentially, you can subvert hierarchy and that feels really essential when you're working in that context I think.*

...



K: Can you talk to me a little about how race and class intersect in this debate? It's a bit of a big one so I understand if you don't wanna go into it ... I think this is a tricky question.

S: Yeah, it's really hard...so. I feel like in a UK context you can't just talk about race and class, you have to talk about race, class and immigration status. So, my parents are not immigrants, they were born here and I was born here so that gives my life a layer of ease because we don't have to deal with immigration control. But for so many of my other friends of colour either their parents weren't born here and/or they weren't born here. So, there's this issue of immigration and border control and the ongoing violence that they're constantly negotiating as well. So I think it's the 3 of those that are intersecting, at all times. I keep thinking about this conversation I had with my friend B, who is lovely but super wealthy [laughing] and white and gorgeous and he's like a proper summer baby, so joyful, so joyous and happy all the time. Is it because your life's been easy always B?!

K: LOL

S: He said don't you think it would be easier to just focus on class, rather than race because so many people of colour are working class so if you just focus on making things accessible, you'll surely get more people of colour in. Uh, NO.

K: LOL

S: I don't get to choose between working class, black or a woman, I'm all three at the same time, all the time and I think that... You said a phrase at the beginning of this conversation, 'cultural privilege'?

K: Yeah...

S: There is something really interesting about cultural privilege and race – something about how art that comes from POC and art that centres POC, is valued, how it is spoken about, how it is understood or misunderstood. I feel like when I talk about class issues within the arts a lot of what I'm thinking about is very practical like, this industry is precarious, it makes it difficult for us to pay our bills, it makes it difficult for us to have stability, it isolates us from our communities.

When I talk about race what I find myself saying is there are many times where the work that is made is toxic and reinforces racist values which feed into things like Theresa May pseudo-fascist policies. So, race always feels, for me it always feels really urgent and up there and class always feels more embroiled in shame sometimes. I say that because, say yesterday when I was trying to sort out referencing for this flat which I've got now and its mine. The guy from the referencing company called and said "oh, you're place of work is 2.5 hours of away from where you live," and I said "yeah, my company is based in Leeds but I live in Birmingham" and he was perfectly polite and I explained it all and it was fine but I had a massive panic attack cos just being in that kind of phone call exchange, speaking about proving and justifying

*myself puts me straight back in a place of bailiffs, debts, CCJs, letters that I'm afraid to open, having to call up someone at a venue and be like I need you to pay me that invoice today cos if you don't I can't pay my rent! So, what I find hard about class at times, is that there's this thing where class so often feels like a personal failing.*

K: No, it's a really hard question it was just really nice to speak to you about it. I'm white and I think it's really hard sometimes to have an understanding, you've gotta ask the question, I find them difficult questions to ask cos I know it puts people on the spot.

S: *I'm glad you asked it because I'm also aware so that I feel like, anxiety, as I feel I'm gonna be the spokesperson for the working class experience of colour and I know it's more complex than me. I feel like there are tensions between white working class communities and working class communities of colour. I'm aware that I really have that worry, I wish I could answer that question about those intersections more clearly but at the moment I don't quite have it in my head yet. That can be solved.*

K: It can be solved, I also feel like it's one of those questions that we will never really have an answer to, it's kind of an open ending question because race and class is always shifting and as you're saying about intersection with immigration and those borders and those lines are always changing I think it's quite a difficult question to have the answer to. What you did explain to me was brilliant and in terms of this idea for me, cos I identify with this working class shame thing which is inherent. I did an interview with another artist, who makes films about mourning and death and I asked what class was to her and she said its pride and shame and they're constantly married against each other. When you said, well I'm a working class black woman, there isn't a division there, that is who you are, that is your cultural identity and you can only give an answer to those questions from your lived experience

and from what you can see is the way to move forward, as every artist is doing the same. I can understand your anxiety but I feel that actually what you said, I valued what you said there, so don't feel too anxious about it? You just said that race you feel is outside of yourself, is that because it's more of visual...

S: *More visible?*

K: Yeah, but obviously...

S: Like I'm a dark-skinned black woman...  
[laughing]

K: It's like in the theatres we can see there is a cultural difference whereas we wouldn't know necessarily about class. you can see that it's an all-white audience and I think that's what I'm trying to get at. If you go to theatre and you see an all-white cast onstage it's a white story. An all-white audience is watching an all-white cast, its more visible whereas with class it's this innate sense of inadequacy and innate sense of shame but with race we can see it, its visible in our culture and its ingrained in it.

S: *I had a big cry about this last week, so I went to Grammar School, so in Birmingham the grammar schools are free which means that Birmingham has a really weird relationship with class because there are bits of social mobility in a way there aren't necessarily in the rest of the country. I didn't realise how weird this was until I went to Uni but what it basically means is that... so my year in Grammar school was unique because there were 20 black girls in my year, all from working class families, half of us lived on council estates the other half lived in ex-council properties. All of these working class kids and the school was in Handsworth which is a really poor, largely black and Asian bit of the city so I remember there were riots and we couldn't come to school for 3 days and I also remember there was a murder outside the back of the school so we couldn't use the back entrance so in the middle of this area was this super posh school...*

K: LOL

S: ... you know we played hockey, we played the cello and the rich families had to give massive bursaries so poor kids like me could go to Russia and Venice and Germany, so I had this amazing education for free, we all did. But at the same time, I can remember clearly on the last day of year 9 the head of key stage 3 said “we’ve always had problems with your year and I can’t help but think it’s because so many of you are black,” and I think that embodies what my experience of that school was like, like came out with an excellent education, it took me to a Russell Group Uni that put me into the job I’m doing now and gave me a nice posh voice, which means you don’t know I’m working class unless I tell you, I spend a lot of time worrying that because of all of this, I’m not working class enough.

K: Yeah!

S: Every now again, my ex will be like can we look at your bank account, can we talk about cash and can we talk about financial needs of your dad, mum and sister, can we talk about how money flows within your family because those are the things that define what it is to be working class, it’s about flow of money, it’s that relationship to money, that relationship to the stakes rather than cultural signifiers that can be picked up and put back down. I don’t agree with that in an uncomplicated way but I do find that I do spend a lot of time like...I paid my rent this month, am I really working class?

K: LOL I’m finding it hard, a lot of the time now people are like, you’re doing a PhD you can’t be working class and I’m like no, I am working class cos I’m still skint and I’ve got no money. I think that it’s really interesting how society views cultural, I wanna say privilege but it’s not as well, if you know what I mean, but this kind of access to education, to culture that defines your class, whereas your ex said look at your finances.

S: I also think it’s a bodily position, as well. I was writing in this article for Striker about how my toes

are a tiny little bit deformed cos for about 3 years I was wearing shoes that were too small...

K: Yeah, same...

S: And thinking about how loads of things from the experience of not a lot of money stays in the body, at all times. What that entails as well...

K: A lot of your work is around food and this relationship and you just said about staying in the body and always being healthy and working class being able to access food and exercise. So, we were talking about your relationship with food, is that a relationship to class as well?

S: ABSOLUTELY. The big body of work, the big show about fat that I did, which was my degree piece. It was called Chewing the Fat and I can remember it really clearly the first day of rehearsals, obviously not really like rehearsals but watching Sex and The City with my friend Jess, being like “I want like, poor food”, I wanted like doughnuts and white bread and all of that stuff that is stodgy and sits in your belly, kind of gives you mild constipation. When you’re broke it’s what you buy because you can buy large amounts of it and make it last a long time and be full and getting the kick of fat, salt and sugar. There is so much about class in Chewing the Fat that I kind of put it in there without realising it and I’m rewriting it at the moment because we’re taking it to China which is really weird. I’m aware of sort of globs of salty beige food, or globs of sugary beige food. So, my friend and producer Emma lives in Saltaire, a little village in Bradford and it’s really, really rich, really, really white and they have a community garden so there’s loads and loads of fresh fruit and veg, it’s got a little orchard and 2 little allotments. All of these rich white people who can afford their own fresh fruit and veg, can really easily go and get fresh fruit and veg free. I remember sitting and listening to them talk about this community garden and thinking, why is it that the people that need this stuff for free the least, have access to it? Like, what is that? What is going on there? Or going away to Uni, coming back home, looking in the fridge and freezer and realising how

*much of the stuff was from Iceland and how much of it wasn't actually very nutritious. That my mum and dad who were like legends with money, like very, very, very good and controlled and sensible with money but they ate a small amount of beige food 3 times a day. I never really saw that when I was little but I did when I came back from Uni when I was surrounded by middle class people or going to stay in their houses or blown away with the amount of food they seemed to have. In Fat is a Feminist issue, a Suzy Orbach text about binge eating and overeating, she speaks about how it's really important to make sure that your cupboards are full so you don't have to panic about running out of food or about there being no food. I remember reading that and thinking LOL.*

**K:** LOL

**S:** *That is absolutely hilarious!*

*Even through being older and being in therapy, I've learnt things – so basically me and my sister being adopted and both of us hoarding food and binge eating or hiding the food is a very like common sort of thing that kids do and there's a class politics in adoption as well. Again this ties really beautifully with this idea of working classness in the body from very young, small ages. Yeah, foods always been about class for me, always. Also, in the way in which eating disorders are*

*coded, right? I did a project with Wellcome Collection and LADA and I was looking at eating disorders in people who use the food bank because I volunteered at a food bank and found it really triggering. But was also aware that if you had an eating disorder before you were in a place where you had to use the food bank, how hellish that would be or how you could quite easily end a period of food poverty with an eating disorder and while I was making that, the last house that I lived in, I lived with these really posh Tories who used to do my head it even though I do quite enjoy doing impressions of them – and they were terribly wasteful with food but also thought that using a foodbank was a choice, and shouldn't be an option, even though they had no idea how the food bank system worked? Like didn't know there was a limit on it, or that you had to be referred, or how little food you got? So, food and class for me is like... I never forget being sat in the Worst of Scottee and listening to Scottee talking about nicking money from his mum's purse to go and buy chips and I was like, wow, where was my trigger warning! Because that was me.*

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Selina Thompson - *Gender, Performance, Identity*, Create (2016), P3184

# Catherine Hoffman

Catherine Hoffman makes works for the stage as well as interactive one-to-one performances. She explores the intersection between performance art, theatre, comedy and music, combining process-based actions, texts, visuals and extended use of the voice in a number of solo and collaborative projects.

Catherine's solo piece for the stage, *Free Lunch with the StenchWench*, explores her very personal experiences of growing up as one of the feral underclass, commenting on the class ingrained issue of pride and shame. Catherine's *Human Flea Circus* which was part of LADA's DIY scheme in 2017 and held at The Arc in Stockton, builds on her ideas/themes of survival and parasitism within the arts and capitalism.



# Getting Classy with Catherine Hoffman

KG: So, could you just give me a bit of a run-down on what the piece is about?

CH: *Basically, about shame and poverty, which relates to class. That was sort of my main thrust, in terms of confronting my own shame, of where I came from and how it was still affecting my life.*

KG: Okay...

CH: *So, I confronted that head on and dissected why I was feeling that and where that was coming from, in terms of it's a societal thing not just a personal thing. It's related to family history and what triggered it off was that I was living in a flat in Bow and I decided to rent out one of my rooms to an Air BnB, the usual stuff so I decided to go down that route. You know how it is being an artist, it's a survival game so I was doing that for quite a while and it was quite good and I'm also aware this was in a really rundown tower block, which was really scruffy so already there was a feeling of 'Oh God...' what will they think, all this kind of stuff which relates also to how I was as a kid. And then what happened was, this thing unfolded where basically my friend left his cat with me to look after and then took it back home and left a whole bunch of fleas...*

KG: Oh God

CH: *...and it turned into this big drama where she was in the middle of the night crying [laughing]*

KG: [laughing]

CH: *...ringing her mother you know, on and on so terrible, all this stuff and um she basically left distraught, taking the fleas with her which then infected her friends' house, so for me it was quite full on for me, my reaction was to be ashamed...*

KG: yeah of course

CH: *...and to feel like dirty and awful and in a way that experience brought up a lot of stuff for me, in terms of stuff that I'd carried with me and that's what provoked me to make that piece, cos I just felt like this oh this is really interesting, I'm really wrapped into this in quite a big way and for me that was really fascinating to kind of see this kind of reaction. From that I started getting into the idea of fleas and being parasites and this idea of the poor and parasites of society and this idea of feeling like you're a waste of space which of course we know is untrue. I started getting interested in this idea of being a host and feeding and food and nourishment and all of that kind of world.*

KG: Do you think that class, sorry it's a different question but I spoke to Selena Thomson about class and food and this thing about nourishment and feeding and food, there's a really strong connection between class and food and what those bodies look like, is that kind of what you're talking about in hosting and feeding and food or is this about, I don't know what my question is really, sorry Cath...

CH: *I am definitely interested in that for sure and I think there's a lot to do with class in relation to food yeah and I actually cook onstage as well and I end up cooking dropped scones, which is what we used to eat when we didn't have anything in the house and that sort of relates to my mothers' role cos we had loads of brothers and sisters and bringing up these kids and feeding them... What I like about the idea of dropped scones, they come from Ireland originally and its this idea of poor man's food. I also talk about food in general in the house and this idea of scarcity, this all sounds all sort of oh God, poor me, I'm not doing it in that way, I'm not doing it in a kind of, oh you know this is terrible, I want you to feel sorry – that's not really my aim.*

KG: Yeah, Scottee wrote an article ages ago about working-class artists need to bleed for their supper effectively, in terms of we need to go onstage and say how awful everything was and I think you were kind of going onto that, from what your comment was there, what your feelings are about that and whether you feel that's something that has to happen obviously you're saying that's not what you're doing so...

CH: *Yeah, I mean that's a difficult one that cos I do understand that as well but I suppose because I am dealing with shame you can't help but, there's this idea that I'm travelling through it so I'm coming out the other side so I'm being defiant and going I don't need to feel this and neither does anyone else and we should be proud of who we are.*

KG: Yeah

CH: *I feel really, really strongly about that but at the same time I am displaying the shits in order to get through it, if that makes any sense so um, I believe in celebrating but I suppose coming from me, from my own personal experience of making work I do tend to go into a little bit of the dark stuff cos I feel like well, this is my personal experience and I'm just sharing it but I'm also sharing it with humour and with uh, what else I don't know..*

KG: Yeah, I think it's true I think you're right in what you're saying I think that that's the point of the story. I just wanted to, um about these stories you have to tell the reality of it for it to have any, it has to be real or it hasn't got any value

CH: *Yeah exactly because I have to be honest about my personal experience, so I was talking about travelling through something and the idea that that reality isn't always gonna be an easy ride, so I had to glaze some of that shit, cos that is the truth. But then to display it and then relinquish it and then, as a way of going well if I can do it maybe that'll strike chords in other people. Oh yeah, I've felt shit about that but maybe I can also not feel so bad. I think particularly when it comes to class, its so knotty and its so hidden, it's never talked about its never really, you know these things are very rarely out in the open.*

KG: Yeah, I agree.

CH: *So that's why I felt like I needed to do it, particularly cos now we're in a society, over from hundreds of years ago but even more so it's this morality thing of it's your choice if you're not working or it's your choice if you're poor or you know...*

KG: Yeah

CH: *And it's like oh really? I think it's more complicated than that thank you very much...*

KG: [laughing]

CH: *So therefore, you're made to feel guilty and made to feel less than, we're the scapegoats for everything that's going wrong and it's like well sorry but no, that's not what it is*

...

KG: In terms of class, how do you define it? Cos a lot of people say cultural capital. I just wanted to hear your opinion on that and whether you think it's cultural or economic or is it both or, what you think about?

CH: *Well it's quite interesting because artists themselves generally speaking, apart from 1% who make a lot of money, the rest of us are sort of scrabbling about working their asses off. In some ways you could say that we are the working class. We are working, we are doing labour for very little money.*

KG: Yeah exactly [laughing]

CH: *You know, if you think about it the majority of us aren't, we're not the elite that's for sure, we are labourers a lot of us. Not unless you've come from, you know people who have their families who help them or whatever.*

KG: But you hear less, well I'm hearing less and less of that within the Arts...

CH: Yeah, oh Christ I mean...

KG: Or maybe it's the friends that, the people you don't associate with the Arts. I'm more drawn to the people that are struggling.

CH: *I mean I've found over the years that I've ended up migrating more towards the people that are kind of from those backgrounds, struggling. When I was in my 20s I found myself actually surrounded by the middle class and I didn't sort of realise the difference until later, oh shit yeah no wonder I was always exhausted and they were all swanning about. Oh okay of course!*

KG: Yeah, no I get it.

CH: *Oh okay, the penny's dropping now, why it seems to be so much harder for me and easier for you lot. But there is a sense of privilege in artists as well, I do think it's a privileged position, in terms of, I find it privileged cos I'm thankful I'm not in the system of working 9-5 so for me, I feel privileged because of that but it's I mean, it's not really privileged we are still...*

KG: working ridiculous hours...

CH: *No, it's not an easy path, it's not easy. It's that whole thing, once you go to University or Art College you might be considered middle class. The majority of artists, a lot of them go through that system before they start making work so there's that to consider.*

KG: Does education make you middle class? Growing up my mum was always like once you get a degree, once you go into the education system then you're, well cos our family never went to University, the first generation and she was like, then you're going into the middle class. Actually, nothing's changed economically, being a single parent in social housing in constant debt and then trying to be an artist on top of that, or being an artist on top of that it's perpetuating itself in terms of not being sustainable.



CH: *I agree and I can see in my life that that's what's happened, I've just perpetuated the same cycle. I haven't actually progressed any more than [laughing], I mean I've been in temporary housing for 20-odd years.*

KG: Blimey

CH: *You know?*

KG: Yeah

CH: *Literally going from one place to another to another and that's what I did as a kid. I've done exactly the same thing. So, in terms of like the cycles of your own pathology then yeah, that's still in you, that's still part of where you've come from and that's hard to...*

KG: God, we've probably depressed ourselves after this conversation.

CH: *There are people that have gone on to do TV that are working class and are making money and doing alright for themselves. I know that a lot of those people will also consider themselves to still be working class cos that's where they came from.*

KG: Yeah

CH: *It's a tricky one, a really tricky one, cos even I'm like, am I working class? Who am I, I don't know?! I don't particularly like to define myself, to be honest with you in that way...*

KG: No that makes sense, I do but I'm aware a lot of people don't. I don't know why but it became a massive chip on my shoulder and I've been really angry about it and I think maybe different people get different things in their psyche I suppose. I think staying in education is probably made me really resentful cos I found that that's where I felt class more, maybe than in the Arts, which is why I feel I've got to do something about it.

CH: *It's kind of what I also feel as well which is why I stuck my head up a little bit out of the parapet...*

KG: Yeah definitely.

CH: *So, I have made a kind of claim but it is complex.*

KG: Definitely, it's a complex issue. Don't wanna say 'issue' but it's such a complex thing, it's like a massive beast. I'm trying to figure it out, it's a tricky one and everyone's got such different takes and feelings and emotions that are connected with it. I think it's interesting to talk about but sometimes it can get people angry or different things

CH: *I think it's a really touchy subject because we are in such a classed-country.*

KG: Society, yeah definitely

CH: *To hear that it doesn't exist is absolute rubbish.*

KG: Yeah, I've had those debates a few times

CH: *I think that's why it's so touchy, it's cos it's so prevalent and we've kind of pretended it isn't but it really is. Sorry, I probably haven't been very clear.*

...

KG: *Stench Wench*, who is the piece for, who was the audience? Would you have done that piece for a working-class audience or was it for an arts audience?

CH: *For me the audience is both, that's the optimum and I have had both but it's still bloody frustrating because in a way all these venues that I do it in are a nightmare.*

KG: [laughing]

CH: *I have had people that have never been to the theatre before come to see it so that's amazing-*

KG: Brilliant

CH: *-and gone because of the subject matter cos it related to them. I had a great conversation afterwards about all of that, but we have to be realistic, a theatre-going audience is generally a middle-class audience, that's the reality.*

KG: Yep

CH: *And I had tried to take it to different places but it's really hard because it's not just a conventional theatre piece, it makes it really tricky cos I'm playing with nudity and its challenging in terms of its content. I don't think its that challenging, there's a lot of accessibility there but a lot of people are like oh! It's just not a conventional piece and its Live Art so therefore it makes it really, really difficult to find another home for it without help. Basically, I could do it if I had help to do that, but I don't.*

KG: No.

CH: *And it's too much to take on.*

KG: Yeah, I think that's completely understandable. That's the other massive problem, well for me in terms of being a working-class artist then venues or institutions expect you to bring in a working-class audience like you know all the working class people in the world. I think that, you're paid as an artist, I don't have the time or the resources to do your outreach, that's not what I'm here to do.

CH: *That's what I mean, going back to the idea that actually we are at the bottom of the pile. Its that whole thing of, fuck sake, well we have contacted some but yeah right, probably only one. Sorry I'm a bit cynical about all these people.*

KG: That's alright, that's okay, so am I.

CH: *It's only because they're on wages and it's like, market things really well, have less of a programme instead of packing us in like sardines, have less people and really support them. It's simple, in a way.*

KG: That's good cos I was gonna ask you about working-class artists and how we can support them better and I think that's probably a good point to start on.

CH: *Just find ways to support us a bit better rather than going we have this platform but by the way you're gonna have to do all the work to get your audience... oh really! Of course you do it, cos you don't wanna feel embarrassed with only 3 people turning up then you find yourself doing it when really I shouldn't have to. I don't mind doing some-*

KG: No but we all do a bit of some anyway and that's kind of expected to do some but to send you a list of people they want you to contact and what they need to do is a bit different.

CH: *If they sent me a list at least I'd know who I was contacting but there's not even a list! It's up to me to then research who all those people are and that takes hours.*

KG: Yeah that does take hours.

CH: *If it was a list then it'd be quite easy, okay bang I'll contact them.*

...

KG: Let's talk about Live Art a little bit, so your practice, would you say that you're a Live Artist or you use Live Art in some of your work or does it feed into each other?

CH: *I mean I started using the words Live Art because, you know I just find it easier cos it encompasses everything. You know Live Art is about playing with different forms so that's kind of what I do, so I said okay I'll stick with that. I'm more of the theatre side of Live Art, I'm not doing durational installations or anything like that. Although I do do a lot of one-to-one work and I have done other stuff that isn't just stage-based.*

KG: What do you think Live Art offers working class artists?

CH: *Well, I personally think there are more working-class artists in Live Art, from my personal experiences I could be wrong, I've found more working class artists in Live Art department than in theatre because Live Art attracts the outsiders and the freaks. Haha, Sorry!*

KG: Nah, it's alright, it's true!

CH: *-not saying that we're freaks, we're not. Beautiful freaks. I think that I found more kindred spirits that are from less middle-class backgrounds in Live Art than I have working in theatre. That's just my personal experience probably cos I haven't done any theatre in so long. I think it allows that voice, of not the norm. Who said that middle class is the norm anyway, like hello?! Cos it's not yet its become, in theatre and art, those are the voices we hear the most. I think that comes down to economics.*

KG: Definitely.

CH: *Whereas Live Art does seem to attract, it just has the space for different experiences and actually welcomes it.*

KG: Yeah, it's more encompassing.

...

CH: *Recently I did a DIY last year, artists from working class backgrounds and we created a human flea circus with freaks and that's something I'm really interested in, this idea of pop up flea circuses. As a way of giving presence to this idea of economics and parasitism within our culture.*

KG: No it's fine, so in terms of it being pop up performances, what happens? The human flea circus, what kind of performances are they?

CH: *Well it originally stemmed from at the very end of Free Lunch with Stench Wench I jump up and down, continually to a PJ Harvey track and it's that thing of relentless jumping, that goes on and on and on. I sort of carry on into the dark, so this idea of jumping became this idea of repetition in so many people's lives and survival of just getting through in relation to bear life as well. This idea of just existing because there are so many people doing that. You know, millions on this planet. It's about giving this ability to these lives that, maybe it's different to class but kind of encompasses it, not directly.*

KG: For me, jumping through hoops, continual thing of everyone trying to get places.

CH: *Yeah jumping through hoops, jumping cos you've got hope but how long do you keep going for? This kind of constant sort of struggle.*

KG: And that goes out into the street, pop up performances in the street?

CH: *Yeah, we made a little video in Stockton which was quite sweet, just did a lot of these actions, constantly repeating and driving.*

KG: OK cool, I'll have a look at that one. Was there another one you mentioned as well?

CH: Yeah, I've got a soup kitchen idea which is the idea of bringing two strangers together. I did it in relation the whole Brexit thing, there's this divide going on in a country, the idea was to bring two people who'd never met each other to then find ways to open up the idea of the lack, what they need, ways they could find and share resource. How can we find better ways to share things as opposed to polarity. This is all happening whilst I'm feeding them soup and they make their own bread to go with the soup...

KG: That's really nice.

CH: ...making their own sustenance as they talk through all their stuff.

KG: Is that set up with just 2 people and yourself?

CH: Yeah, I did it in Chisenhale where it was a group thing, which was quite nice. We all had soup and broke bread together, it just opened up this whole

conversation about different people telling what it is they needed or were struggling with and then how the group could then find ways to come up with things to help.

KG: That's really lovely

CH: It's like practical ways or philosophical ways, you know things actually get done where phone numbers are exchanged, people go oh you need to speak to that person. It's like a mixture of different ways of helping I suppose.

KG: Like bartering, how people exchanged before money. If you needed your roof fixed and they needed milk, that kind of exchange.

CH: Yeah, except bartering with resources and help.

### **Online Resources**

<https://www.cathoffmann.com/>

# Heather Marshall

Heather is a Live Artist, director and facilitator who often works under the company name Creative Electric. She creates accessible socio-political Live Art and performance for people that may not traditionally attend main stream arts events. Her recent work includes:

**Leith is where the heart is...** a pop up tea party featuring stories, dance and Live Art created and performed by Leithers for Hidden Door 2018.

**Sinking Horses:** a performative space, in which to explore, create and discuss what mental health is to an individual. Sinking Horses featured 3 40min performances of autobiographical work per day.

**Glittershit** an audio installation for public toilets that explores the effects of MDMA on a young person over a 3 day period.

**Desperation Bingo:** a Live Art gameshow where audiences compete to win Heather's Mum's weekly disability benefit of £82. The production aims to highlight the cruel PIP tests disabled people are put through by ATOS and recognises the 3286 people who died since being declared 'fit to work.'

**Hey, I'm Alive!** an endurance performance that explored the isolation of life shortening conditions by placing performers inside giant zorbs.

**Fragility:** a performance with & for young men that explores the pressures of sex.

**re:place** a continuous art project that provides a creative outlet and basic living essentials for people living on the streets of Edinburgh. Heather was recently awarded the Local Hero Award for her community work with a focus on mental health.

In 2017 she was awarded the Fringe Zeitgeist Award and Creative Edinburgh's Creativity Award

## What is Live Art?

*To me Live Art is accessible. Its experimental.  
Its questioning. And its often challenging of form.*

## What is Class?

*Class to me is more than money or status. Its cultural. Being a working class Scottish woman is a huge part of my identity. When I say I'm from Leith and people aren't sure where it is I ask them if they've seen Trainspotting? Often the reaction is a shocked 'but that's not real right?' It was and still is a big part of Leith. Leith is a proud working class community that is incredibly supportive. The Hindu Mandir welcome people of all faiths to join them for lunch on a Sunday. The Sikh Kitchen serve free food in the Kirkgate on a Wednesday night. A 12 year old boy Joseph runs Socks for the Street collecting socks for homeless people. I run a community arts café for people who are homeless or are affected by benefit cuts or low income- people across the Leith community pop in with donations of food, clothes and toiletries and to share food and conversation with one another. There is more support and love in working class communities than I've seen in any other- I think it's because we know what it is to struggle and so we want to support our friends and neighbours when they are struggling too.*



# Getting Classy with Heather Marshall

K: When do you first remember experiencing theatre/art of any kind?

HM: *Growing up in Leith meant that I experienced theatre from a young age. We're 15 minutes from the city centre and so the Edinburgh Festival was quite literally on our doorstep. My Mum would take me up town every day during the festival to watch free performances on the Royal Mile, theatre in the closes and squares and dancing on The Mound. We very rarely went to anything ticketed or in proper theatres. I think that's where my interest in Live Art comes from- I enjoyed the lack of formality, that you could start watching half way through a performance or leave if it wasn't for you. You could be pulled up to join in or you could sit on a wall at the back and view it quietly. Those aspects of the festival that I loved as a child are present in my work today, I very rarely create art or theatre for traditional arts spaces preferring to work in community spaces like laundrettes or clubs and encourage audiences to view my work in the way that best suits them.*

K: OK great thanks. Does your practice directly engage/comment on issues of Class?

HM: *Yes. Probably the most obvious in terms of the class divide was Desperation Bingo, which looks at how the Tory Government has systematically killed 2380 disabled people between 2011-2014 by declaring them 'fit for work' against medical professional's recommendations.*

*We often talk about working class but forget that there is a class that is deemed lower and that is the benefits class. This is a class the Tories would have you believe are scroungers, thieves and liars when in reality they are predominantly people with physical and/or mental disabilities who need support from their government and not judged through the Daily Mail readers ignorant eyes. When my Mum was told that she would be moved from DLA to PIP and would have to be assessed I watched her go through humiliating assessments that made her anxious and at points scared. I started to look further into people's experiences of PIP assessments and found that she was not alone. I wanted to make people aware of how inhumane the assessments are and the only way I knew how to do this was to create work about it.*

K: Does you engage with community groups through your practice?

HM: *I work with community groups in a variety of different ways. With Leith is where the heart is... I set up a stall in the Kirkgate offering people £1 in return for a memory of Leith. From there we met people who invited us to their community groups including the Hindu Mandir, Bethany Hostel, Crisis Scotland and the Dockers club. With each group I work in a different way but the one thing that is constant is that I believe it takes time to get to know a group and for a group to get to know me. It's not about parachuting in, grabbing a story and leaving again.*

*There's a great deal of trust involved in community work- participants need to know they can trust me and that takes time. So, with Leith is where the heart is... I drank with the retired dockers in the Dockers Club, bought a few rounds in and waited till we all felt ready to share stories. Both the Bethany Hostel and the Hindu Mandir invited me to join them for meals. Sharing food is a huge part of so many cultures and something that I now use quite regularly in my work. For other groups I'd visit them during their workshop times introduce myself, ask if I could participate in their workshop and spend time getting to know them before facilitating any work. I don't believe in a hierarchy when working with community groups, participants need to have ownership over the work created and so I like to be on an even footing with them and create together.*

### **Online Resources**

<https://www.creative-edinburgh.com/OurMembers/details/6874>



# Stuart Crowthur

Stuart is an artist, writer and gender dis-combobulist with an unhealthy obsession with (pre-Tory) Kate Bush. He makes work which explores ephemera, utopia, the femme queen and the body as a conceptual framework to redress abjection and objectification. Stuart asks what is beautiful and what is ugly and if, actually, might they be the same thing?

## What is Live Art?

*Live Art lives in the ephemeral - that special moment when the audience and performer connect for a brief second and achieve pure clarity, when the performer's body is exactly (however briefly) in sync with where the observer is and the two converge in understanding - "I see you".*

## What is Class?

*Class is a tricky one because I think of it as both as starting point and a destination but also a way in which my life is coloured - it's the prism I see my life through and a way of communicating about a shared cultural experience. I think that to be working class is to be angry and to remain angry and then to spend your life trying to find a way of addressing that. Class is a way of feeling in a situation - a way of being othered but also sometimes of choosing to other oneself, of being simultaneously proud and ashamed.*

When do you first remember experiencing theatre/art of any kind?

*SC: Theatre for me as a kid was at Christmas and we would go to the pantomimes in my home town - they had a scheme where kids whose families didn't have money could see it for free and I was instantly*

*spellbound. I still love panto to this day. Other than that it would have been Christmas concerts at school, which I was obsessed with.*

Does your practice directly engage/comment on issues of Class?

*SC: I suspect it's more indirectly - it's about the cultural references I make and the structures of relation I identify with. It also colours the language and slang I use and I find it fascinating to see how people respond to this and either relate subconsciously through shared experience or look at it as though fascinated by a different species.*

## Online Resources

You can follow Stuart on Twitter @stuARTcrowther and on Instagram @stuRa27 where he posts about his work.



# Duckie: *The Posh Club* Live Art in the Community

Duckie are 'a post-queer performance and events collective that create Good Nights Out' (Duckie.co.uk), claiming to be the 'purveyors of progressive working class entertainment', however producer Simon Casson whispers 'but we're not really'. Duckie deliver a mixture of Live Art and entertainment aiming to bring communities together. They are most famous for their 21-year weekly Saturday night residency at the legendary Queer performance venue, The Royal Vauxhall Tavern. Duckie also delivers socially engaged projects; *The Posh Club*; 'a dinner and dance for glamorous older folk with cabaret acts' in a church hall in Hackney and Crawley.

The performances at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern are aimed at a predominately middle class, educated, gay and Queer audience, who go specifically to the RVT to be 'challenged and shocked' in the words of Simon Casson, by the disruptive performance art. How then, can these aesthetics be brought to a working class, older audience comfortably?

*The Posh Club*, their socially engaged projects which I have had the opportunity to volunteer at; the glamorous older folk are traditional London working class, and they come dressed up, for an afternoon of conversation and dancing. The acts who perform there are fun and light entertainment; Charleston dancers, singers, Chinese Elvis, stand up acts, with a modest striptease being the most dangerous provocation. *Posh Club* is an incredibly successful art cabaret held in Crawley and Hackney for older members of the community. It features high tea, a strictly posh dress code and cabaret sideshows such as opera singers, comedians, acrobats, Elvis impersonators and many other forms of fabulous entertainment. *Posh Club* has been working with Queen Mary University since 2017 to research the effects of the project on health, engagement and wellbeing.



# Getting Classy with Duckie producer Simon Casson

K: Okay, so how long has *Posh Club* been going for?

S: Um, I'd say it's been going for about 4 years so the first pilot was about 4-5 years ago and its been running full time for about 3 years in Crawley. Full time in Crawley for about 3 years.

K: Ok and why did you guys decide to start running *Posh Club*? What was it that kind of...

S: It was, uh a bit like what Lois Keidan would call an act of passion. When we started *Duckie* in Vauxhall Tavern 21 years ago, that too was an act of passion. What that means is that we sit around in pubs or flats or whatnot so what we really liked to do, as a group of friends or family or mates or you know, we don't really do it professionally like, um we do it like as if you were doing a party for your son or something. Have you got a son or a daughter?

K: Daughter!

S: Daughter, and if you're doing a party for your daughter, it would be kind of like, what would be really good to do, this is how it works, its not like professional so it's kind of Lois Keidan calls it an act of passion. What it was, my mum moved from Hackney to Crawley, she was 84 and there was loads less to do in Crawley than Hackney. In Hackney there was lots of things for old folks to do, in Crawley it was a lot less. In Hackney it was quite good for it and stuff.

When she got there, there wasn't anything for her to do so my sister organised a tea round her house where she made sandwiches, did it all nice and served it in a teapot. With her, Esther who was 99 and uh, Farida. There were 3 of them, Farida, Esther and my mum who's called Reeni and they all led a tea party together and they really enjoyed it and they were all having a chat. Anyway, I said to my sister ooh that's interesting and we aware all aware that mum was a bit lonely and she moved to Crawley in order to be near my sister so my sister could keep an eye on her and look after her as she was round the corner from her. So that's good but you can't be with them 24/7 or every night so we invented this, she did this tea-thing, and I said why don't we combine what I do and what that is and we'll put some shows on. You'll do the tea and the cakes and the nice service, I'll do the cabaret and everything, a bit like *Duckie* but without booze for the old folk and without the sort of, visceral performance art but with the singalongs and the kinda, the variety. The things that people might like rather than, you know cabaret, performance that is comforting rather than challenging. Something that holds you and comforts you and you know, we grow up, me and you Kelly especially, a Live Art Development Agency, thinking that performance should be something that challenges you, that stretches you. But if you're 90, you don't fancy that you actually want to be comforted and held um, it was very interesting yesterday talking to Emily who used to work with LADA funnily enough. She was saying this thing about *Posh Club*, you'll see it when you come and volunteer whenever it is, but these people

that we care for and are our punters, they are the carers, when they were working they were the carers, they were cleaners, they were washer-uppers, obviously they were mums and things like that. It might be 80% female and 20% male and all very working-class and doing all very working-classy jobs like carers, cleaners, nurses. Always looking after other people, what the Posh Club does is it reverses it, it says today we look after you.

...

K: What kind of age group is it focused for?

S: Its specifically aimed for older older people, so it's aimed towards people in their 90s, 80s or 70s. We focus on the older, retired folk rather than the younger retired folk. We like the younger ones, in their 60s but they're there mainly for glamour reasons to make the place look good..

K: Brilliant

S: You know the thing is the service, for people that aren't served by the commercial world. It's like a public service that aren't served by the commercial world, so people in their 60s especially if they've got a couple bob they can go to their own cabaret club, they can go to the theatre, they can go to see a matinee show at the theatre. Now actually our punters don't do that really, but you know so we provide a service for the people that don't get to see West End shows or what else might they like, or stuff that's available in the commercial world. Cos of disability, cos of not knowing about it, because of not having any confidence, because of not having the money cos the never did. These are not people that have not eaten in restaurants much. So, all these things are available to the cultivated middle classes and all we're doing, and that's why it's called the Posh Club, we're playing with class and comfort and actually its quite nice being posh and nice toilets and nice outfits and nice glasses of champagne that's ice cold and actually you know, everyone likes that. And especially, as they get a bit older they like that so the thing cheerfully,

tongue in cheek plays with concepts around class because we are provocateurs, theatrically and always have been. It's an immersive, theatrical event where basically the punters, they are coming to a community service that is to alleviate loneliness in older folk. They don't think that, they think they're coming to the Ritz. They don't think they're coming to the community centre, they think they're coming to the Ritz, they're coming not because we're trying to help them, they're coming because its really good and great and exciting and fun. Same reason as why you'd go out, not because you're lonely or hard up because you want to go to something really nice. So that's the key, so it doesn't sort of overly clothe itself in like, worthiness it looks to fun, glamour and these things that are associated with the commercial world not with the voluntary world.

K: So, in terms of this being a kind of immersive event, just for you to talk through the theatricality of it, does that make sense? If you could talk me through that a little bit, is that ok?

S: We're all playing a role, everyone's playing a role, its sort of not real life really. We're playing the roles of fancy waiters and waitresses and we're all done up in dickie bows and suits, posh frocks, hair done vintage-style, done back. We talk with them, we flirt with them, we talk in a fake posh accent or in a very friendly way and you know it's a role, a role. Danny Baker said on the radio once, he said to be a host is a wonderful thing to be and he prides himself in his, you know the DJ Danny Baker and prides himself in being a good host. It's a lovely thing to be a good host so we are really good hosts and its about the whole event of it, its not just about the content of the work, you know short-format performances that are on. That the whole theatre of the whole game, so they are playing in a way, posh guests at a nice party, not quite as formal as Buckingham Palace but a fancy do at a fancy place. They're playing the role of the people who go to the fancy do at the fancy place and we play the role of people who serve them at the fancy do at the fancy place. We're all playing but you know Kelly, when you go into a normal restaurant, or particularly if you go to a posh restaurant, everyone's

*playing a theatrical role. You're playing a punter, I'd like this please and I'll eat with my knife and fork in a particular way and I'll talk in a quiet voice and there's all these rules in culture about how you behave so we're just theatricalising that and playing on the notion of politeness, warmth, generosity, the glamour and the excitement and the big day out and all that, that's what it is. So it's a role play.*

K: Yeah...

S: *It's a role play...*

K: *It's a role play, that's a lovely way to describe it.*

*S: In terms of the interior, its specifically styled like 1940s or 50s cabaret club or a 1930s Palm Court Hotel. There's this concept of vintage, this idea that its vintage which sort of means a little bit formal, little bit fancy, little classy, little bit old-fashioned, little bit suity and dresses. I mean everyone's gender-bender so its women in suits and men in dresses and that's one of the other things we do, we queer it a little bit. But there's this sort of pre-war, post-war formality about it which you know, not informal like modern discos or modern pubs, we're not informal, we're formal.*

K: *Why do you think you do that?*  
*Why do you think it is formal?*

*S: We like to play the role. If you want informal, go to a garage night, that's not what we do. We do vintage and nice suits and compliments.*

K: *Its part of the whole experience of it, there's this the way its set up and cos there's this exchange with food and drink as well, isn't there? Like people are sitting around and sharing a meal together and meeting people, do you think that that's a key concept to it? Obviously, the experience of this formal event but also sharing food together and stuff there's something in that as well, I suppose.*

*S: This is a Duckie thing, if you're gonna do working class entertainment you got to host people and do food and drink, so whatever you do refreshments are very important. Now those refreshments might be Saturday night getting pissed or Tuesday afternoon having a tea. You'll find that whatever Duckie does, there's always refreshments involved, they're a key part, essential part of the event. We don't just give them Art, we're not the Tate Britain! We give them the whole package because we think, if someone came into your home you would feed and water them and we do that, it's a whole thing. I mean sometimes we only do drink but more and more these days we do food as well and the Posh Club is obviously food but I mean Duckie in general, we believe in food and drink as part of the thing, often used in a theatrical way and the Posh Club is a good example of that. I don't think you can do, well I think you can do working class entertainment without those things but you'd have to be blood good.*

K: *You would! I think maybe that's another thing, we've had this conversation before where you spoke for me at Anglia Ruskin but maybe talking about how this is more of a comfort where the cabaret is more of a comfort thing, could you talk a little more about that?*

*S: Yeah, I mean you know I don't know if you've been to Duckie on a Saturday night, often it will be visceral art - people who are at home in the LADA world would be really offended if we put on a show on Saturday night that didn't challenge the audience. They want to be challenged, they desire to have their perspectives shifted to think differently about the world, to maybe even be a little bit shocked or thrilled or in some way to have their prejudices confronted. This is what often young people, educated people who have been to universities they often want this from art. Often, people who haven't been to university, don't want that from art because it's too much and this is a big conversation about what art and class is, and education and that's a big conversation. At the Posh Club, it doesn't mean that we don't have things on that aren't interesting or*

*illuminating and shine a light or show beauty but I suppose it's slightly more old-fashioned idea of what art is so yeah, art will be more about.*

K: So, Posh Club is more about beauty?

S: So most of the performances on Saturday wouldn't work at Posh Club and I've learned that when we started the Posh Club I really wanted to challenge them, but who's that pleasing? Its pleasing me or the bloody Arts Council, what good's that?

K: Yeah...

S: I don't mean that I don't want to give people rubbish and fob them off but I want to hold them within a forum or format of artistic practice and the pleasures of life and music and comedy and connection and pathos and storytelling. All these things are good you know, we're not saying to an 85 year old, forget everything you've learned before, watch this show and we're gonna really confront you!

K: GOOD!

S: This week for instance at Posh Club, was a typical bill – we had a singer on who's a lovely soul singer, it was an all-black lineup interestingly. A soul singer, a burlesque act which is terrible popular. Now if you put burlesque on Duckie on Saturday night people think you're taking the piss cos it's too simple, whereas on Posh Club it works really well cos its sort of glamorous and reminds you a tiny bit of sex but not too much. Sort of just nice, just nicely done whereas I think in Duckie we're too desensitized to things like that, if you're gonna talk about sex talk about sex! And we also had a poet on, he's called Dean Atter he's a young queer guy, black guy, he's doing this poetry to people who would be his great-grandmothers and its working really well, I mean he's the sort of Maya Angelou end of poetry, he can understand it and there's a beauty to it. But it is actually about identity and culture and being a human, things like that. So, you know it's not the X-Factor, we're not giving people the X-Factor but we are mixing

*in entertainment which is terribly important. We're mixing in this feel-good wow-factor of entertainment, woah she's got a good voice, I know this one, oh this will get me up dancing! We mix that up with nuances of artistic practice but I suppose it would be sort of you know, 70% wow factor, 30% nuances of art practice, haahha! Whereas in the theatre its like 95% nuances of artistic practice, 5% wow factor. And on the X-Factor its 100% wow factor and nothing else!*

K: No, haha!

S: Do you know what I mean? I think its wholly relevant to your thing about class, about what art is and what class is. Duckie's own version of that is going down the entertainment route, the catering route, the catering where I'm hosting and catering and really providing something nice for people, that they can't resist. Actually, how middle class people go to the theatre is that they go to the theatre like they go to the library, you know they go there sober without any food or drink and they go in there with their ticket and they sit in their chair and no one else's and they watch the show on their own and they leave in the interval and they go back in and then they go home. And we don't do that, we do something else which is more akin to working mens' clubs to the music hall, in contemporary culture clubbing, gigs or comedy clubs are a little bit like it. Especially, like black comedy clubs, where there's an informality of the audience in terms of... The modern theatre-goer is a consumer that buys their ticket and they own the seat and they're buying that show. That's not what we do, you're coming to an experience where you're a guest or a member. You're a participant, not a consumer. There's a breakdown... we're hosting you as if your coming round our house.

K: You're creating more of a community experience, I always feel that what you're talking about is not that you can go in as an individual, you have to participate in it.

S: You have to take part in it. That's part of the reason why middle class people don't like it, if middle class

*people come to Posh Club, bless them, they don't like it because the entertainment's a bit too broad. Comedy and dance is a bit too broad of them and then you've got to kind of mix and people aren't used to doing that, people are petit bourgeois and not mixing. So this thing sort of encourages you to mix and then you'll see that there's a communality about it.*

K: yeah...

*S: It's not for everyone and of course there's loads of miserable working class people, especially men that hate it because it infringes on your, you have to put on your good face and go to a do. For some people that's really hard. And actually to go to the theatre with a face like a smacked arse and not talk to anyone, that's easier!*

K: Yeah!

*S: If you come to our dos you have to say hello and vaguely open to the possibility of talk and communality and conviviality, you know celebration together. In a way, that's so female cos women like that and men are scared of that cos men are afraid of the world and each other and they're not socialised, they're beasts. Whereas women are often, you've got sisters and children, they're used to other people and they're not afraid of them, they like them. They don't want to go the betting shop and smoke themselves to death, they actually want to meet people.*

K: That's about class and gender isn't it, d'you know what I mean?

S: Yeah, you tell me.

K: There's this kind of white, working class male and that kind of behaviour and smoking themselves silly and not being able to communicate and that kind of, I think that's a big thing at the moment that people are trying to identify and break down white working class males.

S: My dad went to the betting shop every day.

K: Yeah, same.

*S: And he didn't have any friends, he just had the family. There were blokes he would see up the pub, but he wouldn't arrange to meet them, very interesting how they work. My parents didn't have friends, often middle class people and the younger generation have friends. The Posh Club is dealing with a particularly demographic that's both pre- and post-war, so people born in the 1920s, 30s or 40s just the end of the early 50s, not really but yeah, the early 50s. Mostly they're born in the 30s and 40s, the people that come and in the 20s. Although we do have 1 lady, Irene Sinclair is 108 and Nelly is 104. And Gladys is 105.*

K: How do you get the older groups involved? Cos I work with young people and engaging young people, you go around youth clubs, you speak to them to get them onboard – for this demographic, this age group, is it a different process? How does that work?

*S: Its word of mouth, usually word of mouth and there's also recommendations from Doctors – we've got relationships with some local Doctors.*

K: That's fantastic!

*S: We've started this new thing, social prescribing and if someone goes to the doctor and says, in Crawley, and says oh I feel a bit fed up, they might say, instead of giving them tablets they might send them to Posh Club!*

K: That's brilliant!

*S: It's a sort of new thing, we've only had a few people come through that way. We're trying to get integrated with other services, so people see it as an option because you know, yeah if you're fed up or you're feeling a bit lonely or grim come to Posh Club.*





# LADA Study Room

## Recommended Reads

Ben Davies, *9.5 Theses On Art and Class: And Other Writings*, Haymarket Books (2013) P3153

Pablo Helgurerá, P. 2011, *Education For Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, Jorge Pinto Books Inc. (2011) P3154

John McGrath, *A Good Night Out. Popular theatre: audience, class and form*, Methuen (1981), P3155

Imogen Tyler, *Revolting Subjects: Social Abjection and Resistance in Neo Liberal Britain*, Zed Books (2013) P3156

Rhiannon White, *Class - the elephant in the room*, article in Red Pepper (2018) A0823

Lois Weaver and Jen Harvie, *The Only Way Home Is Through The Show: Performance Work of Lois Weaver*, Intellect Live (2016) P2847

Lois Weaver, *Are We there Yet? A Study Room Guide on Feminism* (LADA, 2015) P2654

Scottee, *Bravado*, Oberon Books (2017) P3466

*Forest Fringe: The First Ten Years*, Oberon Books (2016), P3038

Selina Thompson - *Gender, Performance, Identity*, Create (2016), P3184





The Collaborative Arts Partnership Programme (CAPP) is a transnational cultural programme (2015 - 2018) focusing on the field of collaborative and socially engaged arts practice across artform and context. CAPP is made up of a nine organisation network, led by Create the national development agency for collaborative arts in Ireland.

CAPP is a diverse range of dynamic cultural and artistic organisations supporting the development of artistic projects of excellence. Partners include: Agora Collective (Germany), Create lead partner (Ireland), hablarenarte (Spain), Heart of Glass St Helens (UK), Kunsthalle Osnabrück (Germany), Live Art Development Agency (UK), Ludwig Museum, Museum of Contemporary Art (Hungary), m-cult (Finland), and Tate Liverpool (UK).

The overall goal of CAPP is to improve and open up opportunities for artists who are working collaboratively across Europe, by enhancing mobility and exchange whilst at the same time engaging new publics and audiences for collaborative practices. The different strands of the CAPP programme consist of national and international professional development opportunities, artist residencies, commissioned works, touring and dissemination, and a major showcase in Dublin (Ireland) 2018.

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