

Class Matters

Curated by Elizabeth A. Hodson & Deborah Jackson

Hayley Dawson / M&T Devenny / Graham Fagen / Laurie Figgis / Michelle Hannah
Laura Haynes / Victoria Haley / Mandy McIntosh / Trackie McLeod / Michael Mersinis
Fiona Robertson / Son&Son / Jane Topping

2 – 21 May 2024

Class Matters is the sixth and final exhibition in the inaugural Annex Gallery programme. It brings together thirteen artists whose work and/or practice focusses on – or is born out of a relationship with – ideas around social class. The show builds on an event of the same name that was held exactly one year ago in the Reid Lecture Theatre, in which twelve artists and writers each made a presentation that considered how we might think notions of class in a contemporary creative context. There were film screenings, panel discussions and Q&A sessions that allowed for a variety of positions, articulations and aesthetic approaches to be placed in relation to each other, thereby offering new ways to look at systemic problems that are seemingly baked-in to the way we do things – or are done to us – as artists, that might be a result of class relations; or to identify new urgencies, new allegiances, or new possibilities to disrupt or reconstitute the status quo. Six of those artists who presented in 2023 have contributed works to the *Class Matters* exhibition and have been joined by seven new artists, many of whom were present in the audience last year and some of whom are here for the first time. But apart from marking the one-year anniversary of the *Class Matters* event, there are other reasons the timing of the exhibition is pertinent within the gallery programme.

It has been a feature of Annex Gallery's programme to question the nature of exhibiting and the exhibition form itself. Regular visitors will no doubt remember the question that adorned the far wall of the space in anticipation of – and then during – the opening show, *Proposals for a Beginning*, which asked the seemingly simple question, 'what could a gallery be?'. Each of the exhibitions that has taken place over the programme has thought this question slightly differently, and over time I have attempted to use, as curatorial material, the infrastructure that is both *visible and self-evident*, or that which is either *invisible or hidden* in the process of bringing art to a public. There have been shows that ask what exhibitions actually are, shows that reveal the backstage of art/exhibition production, shows that consider what form art-research might take, shows that address art pedagogy, and shows that challenge the stability of the exhibition as a space of explication and revelation and more. You, the audience – and you are a specific audience, that of an art school community – have been invited to join in by intervening in the process of

display, by working directly with exhibiting artists, by showing your own work, or by considering how you might care for the gallery and co-exist with it in a meaningful (or non-meaningful!) way. In the wake of these experiences, we arrive at *Class Matters* in a moment of both reflection and of facing forwards to an unknown future (more of that in a minute). On an experiential level, we might ask ourselves what this exhibition can do that the event last year could not, and vice versa. In Annex Gallery, the objects and accompanying statements (see the separate sheet) are designed to be present in their authors' stead, each acting on their maker's behalf and in parallel on-going relationships with the works of others that surround them. The ideas present within each object are released slowly, and their audience moves past them, inspects them, returns to them; whereas the *Class Matters* event occurred in linear time, and was delivered to a static audience through the bodies of the contributors, who were able to respond, adjust, disagree, get stage-fright. Neither format is 'better' than the other, but each represents a different kind of labour, a different type of invitation, a different mode of engagement (consumption?)...a different structure of relations, and thus a different opportunity to think about *matters of class*.

If I appear to be talking in general terms, rather than about *this specific exhibition*, it's because what *this specific exhibition* perhaps allows us to see is that *all* artworks (and art practices) are themselves a product of class relations and that by analysing them through a set of criteria that unpack how they came into being, how they reached a viewership/market, how they are paid for, and how they circulate in the various economies – financial, intellectual, social – we come to better understand how we as people exist within a social sphere and to better understand how the structural relationships that govern what we are able to say and do are formed. This doesn't mean that we shouldn't examine what these objects are and what they are trying to say on an *individual* level....precisely the opposite, in fact; such a close examination is an essential first step in the world-making process that *Class Matters* demands. What are these objects and their authors trying to tell us about their experience of the world? What are the conditions in which they live? Where will they go when their time here is up? And what about you...what are you bringing to the equation? What do you understand and misunderstand about what is being presented? Where will you go and what will you do when you leave the gallery? Our experiences in this space over the last eight months, which I listed above, should help us consider why these questions are important to ask, and potentially even answer some of them. They are questions that are specific, and also that are general.

For many of you visiting this exhibition, the next steps in your GSA life will be the construction of your degree show, and it is this that will replace *Class Matters* when it closes, and will take over the entire building. It may feel like an ending, a goodbye, but it is not; because if – as the Annexerati – we've learnt anything in our time together it is that exhibitions are *not the end of a process, they are a beginning!* The next time those of you who are presenting in the degree show take part in an exhibition, you'll no longer be classified as a 'student', but will instead be seen as an 'artist', a *worker*, a member of the so-called *creative class*, a contributor to the so-called *creative industries*. You will begin to find, if you don't know it already, that *class matters* in so many different ways, some of which are entirely predictable and some which are not. And this is why the present exhibition has come at exactly the right moment. You can use what you've learnt in the past to consider what's in your future for sure, but right now you're sharing a space with a set of objects – nae, *comrades* – and whether you agree or disagree with what they're say to you, you can rest assured that they've got your back. So welcome them, listen to them....work(er)s in all exhibitions, unite!

- James N. Hutchinson

Thank you to the curators and all the exhibiting artists. Thanks also to Russell Lamb, Dylan Esposito, Evie Baldwin, Chris Barrowman for finding space in the workshops at such a busy time of year!