

The Children are Now

ii.50

Introduction

A growing movement called "childism" is calling on people to find ways to empower children and allow their perspectives to transform social and academic institutions (a process allied to feminism and decolonising practice). And in Scotland, the drive to recognise children as rights holders gained significant momentum in 2024 when the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was incorporated into domestic law. Drawing from this energy, *The Children are Now* is a group exhibition about rethinking the role of children in shaping our world.

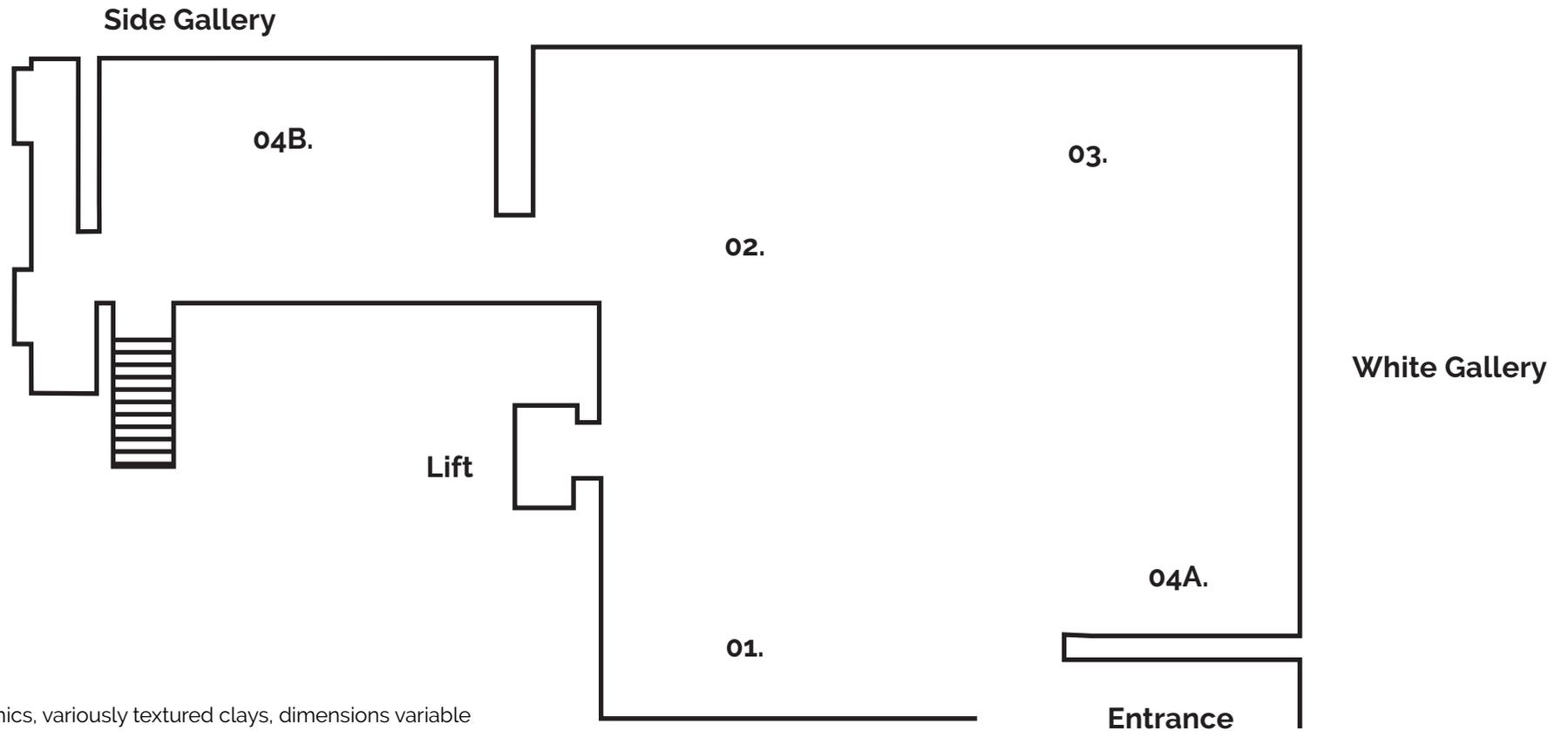
At the heart of the exhibition, a partnership with Children's Parliament allows Child Human Rights Defenders – a group of children who work to recognise and advocate for the rights of children in Scotland – to present new artworks within the exhibition. Supported by Bob and Roberta Smith, they made placards that reflect the key concerns of children across Scotland, namely climate crisis education, mental health and bullying, and vapes.

These works are shown alongside the works of international adult artists, guiding us through different and surprising encounters with children and childhood. We encounter children questioning the rules and routines of school, campaigns to ensure art is central to the curriculum and artists who remind us that education can both empower and disempower children based on their race or circumstances. It shows us how play can connect us to the land, and ground us, whilst generating ideas about faith, fantasy and survival. It introduces us to artists who have found it necessary to reconnect with their inner "child" and artists who turn to children as the deities of a new world.

The children are not just the future, as is commonly declared. Children should not have to grow up before they get taken seriously and are listened to.

The children are now.

**Child Human Rights
Defenders Francis Als
Monster Chetwynd
Ane Hjort Guttu
Kemang Wa Lehulere
Tuan Andrew Nguyen
Mai Nguyễn-Long
Bob and Roberta Smith
Adéla Součková**



01. Mai Nguyn-Long *Vomit*

Girl: Grounding, 2025

Glazed and unglazed ceramics, variously textured clays, dimensions variable

02. Monster Chetwynd

Hell Mouth 5, 2025

Wood, cardboard, muslin, wallpaper paste, paint

03. Tuan Andrew Nguyen

The Boat People, 2020

Single-channel video, super 16 mm transferred to digital, colour, 2.1 sound, 20 min

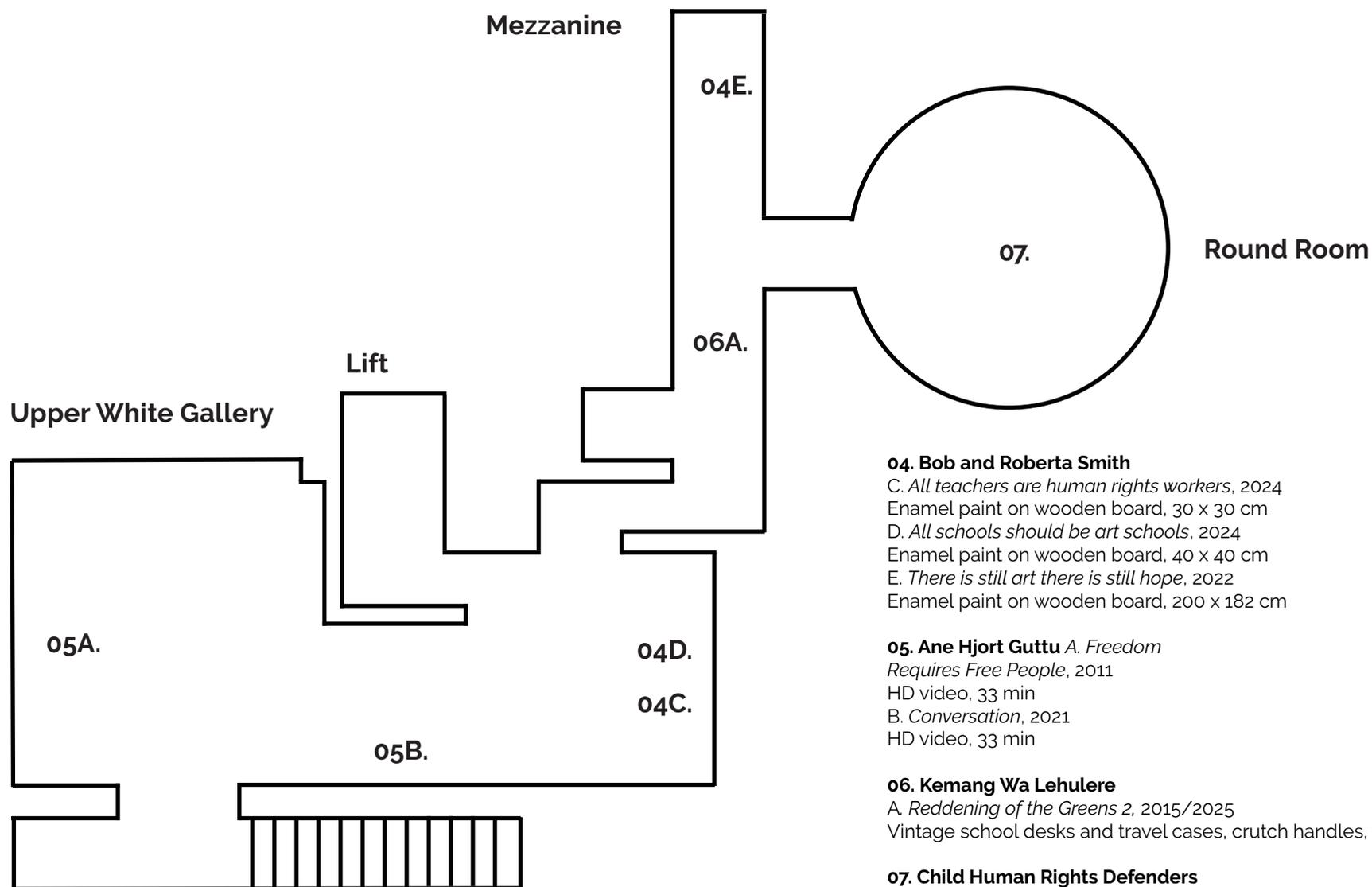
04. Bob and Roberta Smith

A. Art makes children powerful, 2015

Enamel paint on wooden board, 178 x 200 cm

B. Letter to Michael Gove, 2011

Enamel paint on wooden board, 240 x 240 cm



04. Bob and Roberta Smith

C. *All teachers are human rights workers*, 2024
Enamel paint on wooden board, 30 x 30 cm
D. *All schools should be art schools*, 2024
Enamel paint on wooden board, 40 x 40 cm
E. *There is still art there is still hope*, 2022
Enamel paint on wooden board, 200 x 182 cm

05. Ane Hjort Guttu A. *Freedom*

Requires Free People, 2011

HD video, 33 min

B. *Conversation*, 2021

HD video, 33 min

06. Kemang Wa Lehulere

A. *Reddening of the Greens 2*, 2015/2025

Vintage school desks and travel cases, crutch handles, wing nuts, bolts and rubber feet

07. Child Human Rights Defenders

Including: Amber (12), Cara (12), Ella (12), Eva (11), Evie (13), Fallon (10), Flynn (12), Hamza (11), Michael (14), Kati (11), Rida (15) and Tate (13)

Placards reflecting the concerns of children across Scotland, 2025

Acrylic paint and emulsion on wooden panels, with wooden stick

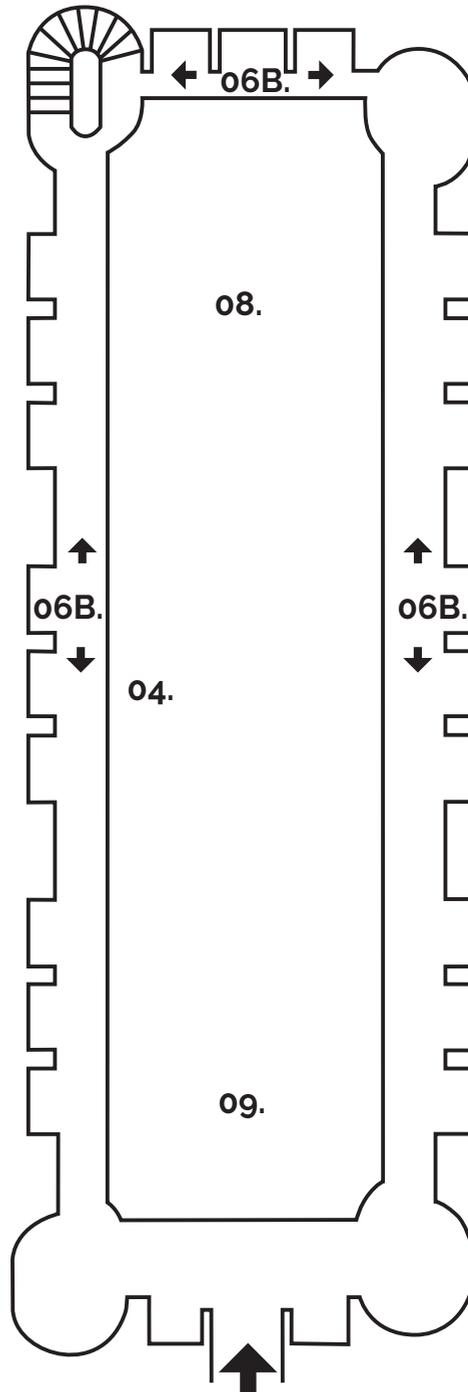
Georgian Gallery and Balcony

04. Bob and Roberta Smith
E. *You have got to speak, write, dance*, 2025
Enamel paint on wooden board,
220 x 147 cm

06. Kemang Wa Lehulere
B. *Black Beauty (after Anna Sewell)*, 2025
Bricks, paint and 3D printed hands with
spray paint

08. Francis Al
Reel-Unreel, 2011
Single-channel video with stereo sound,
19 min 32 sec

09. Adéla Součková
hopscotch, 2025
Floor-glazed emulsion, silkscreen prints on
cotton with copper support, digital print



Events

Talbot Rice Gallery invites audiences of all ages and backgrounds to connect with contemporary art. All our events are free and can be booked via our website.

After Hours Making

Explore the exhibition after hours with a hands-on workshop. Spend time with the artworks, meet our team, enjoy a complimentary drink and express yourself.

Little Creative Mornings

A family friendly session where children aged 5+ can explore our exhibitions and get creative with their own hands on activity.

Academic Tours

These informal events invite a specialist from the University of Edinburgh to take a selective route around an exhibition that expands key themes through their research interests.

British Sign Language (BSL) Tours

Join us for a deaf-led tour in British Sign Language. Explore the exhibitions, exchange and share your ideas.

Sensory Friendly Mornings

We welcome children and adults with sensory needs to enjoy the galleries with adjusted lighting and sounds within the exhibition.

Activity Books

Activity Books for young people aged 5+ are available at the front desk and online.



Scan to check out
what's on and
book a free ticket

Mai Nguyn-Long

Vomit Girl: Grounding, 2025

The artworks Mai Nguyn-Long is presenting emerge from her search for her cultural roots and a reconnection with her childhood self. With Vietnamese, Australian and Irish heritage, born in Tasmania and growing up in the Philippines and Papua New Guinea, her work comes from a process of navigating a complex identity and histories and experiences of suppression, estrangement and intergenerational trauma.

Vomit Girl first emerged through drawings in Nguyn-Long's diary: a visceral character who she realised was linked to a sickening feeling of being erased and silenced. And this related to both the history of Vietnamese cultural identity and a specific event that happened 20 years earlier that made her feel cast out for speaking with a north Vietnamese accent (which led the Vietnamese community in Australia to reject her, presuming she was their enemy). Having silenced her Vietnamese identity, *Vomit Girl* signalled that to heal Mai would need to make the journey back to Vietnam and her eight-year-old self, who had witnessed her father's war-torn country in 1978.

Nguyn-Long's journey to Vietnam was guided by an article written by her mother – a cultural historian – about *dinh* wood reliefs. The playful, raw carvings that fascinated Nguyn-Long date between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. They carry folklore that was challenged in turn through Chinese occupation, French-colonial rule, the American-Vietnam War, the communist government taking power after the war (pre-1986 reforms), and the subsequent anti-communist values that would follow the Vietnamese diaspora. Through the surviving examples of carvings, now celebrated as defining the cultural centre of Red River delta villages, Nguyn-Long found connection with a defiant mother goddess culture. Adopting clay, a material the artist says she began to dream and think in, this tactile journey led to the production of an array of spirits conjured through an aesthetic known as *moc-mac* (literally translating as "rustic") as an expression of defiance. They are akin to talismanic protectors but also keepers of more uncomfortable secrets that can never be shared. With some of these objects being made intuitively in Edinburgh – thanks to the kind support of Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop – the installation emphasises the importance of spontaneity and unlocking a more grounded inner self not restricted by bullying.

Nguyn-Long works across a range of media, with a recent focus on ceramics as a tool for exploring her heritage and healing from intergenerational trauma. Her work has been shown in major international exhibitions including the 11th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art and the 12th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art: Still Present! Solo shows include *Doba Nation*, John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University, Perth Festival (2025); *Kôgôbînô*, Wollongong Art Gallery, NSW (2024) and *Vomit Girl Stories*, Michael Reid Sydney, NSW (2024).







Monster Chetwynd

Hell Mouth 5, 2025

Monster Chetwynd's *Hell Mouth 5* provides a gateway through the gallery. This green, monstrous presence brings an immediate, irrepressible sense of play, mischief and joy into the exhibition – whilst necessarily eating all adult and child visitors who wish to explore. As is typical of Chetwynd's work, this exuberant form also links to a wealth of iconic and cultural references: from beasts depicted consuming non-conformists, to subcultural groups who appropriated monstrosity for their own liberatory endeavours. In medieval Europe, the hellmouth image became entwined with Christian values and the idea of the Last Judgement, God's verdict on the virtuous (who would be saved) and the sinners (who would be damned).

In childhood studies there has been a critique of how the construction of childhood in modern Western societies (exported through colonial practices) can lead to the idea that children can only be "innocent" or "evil". This polarisation rests on the idea that children exist in a space separate from the adult world, and that if they do something violent – for example – they must either have been corrupted or be inherently bad. Bound up with this are judgements about a child's responsibility, rights and freedom. Scholars Allison James and Chris Jenks trace this attitude back to the Enlightenment and make reference to Francisco Goya's 1799 print, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*. Here, an undisciplined imagination and lack of rational reasoning – stereotypes of childhood – are depicted as the potential gateway to the nightmares of the world. This is an idea that Monster Chetwynd has vibrantly challenged through her carnivalesque celebration of radical, critical and creative practice. In a world of judgement and censorship, exuberance and joy become political modes of resistance.

Hell Mouth 5 echoes the power of portals in children's stories that allow other ways of existing to become possible. Here it connects campaigns to assert children's right to be heard and be taken seriously with a campaign to prioritise art in schools – both important steps for shifting reductive characterisations of childhood.

Chetwynd's practice spans interactive performances, film, collage, painting and installation, and incorporates subjects as diverse as subcultures, fashion design, socialist theatre, ethical capitalism and mycelium (fungi) networks as social models. Her artworks are made with a sense of impatience, anarchy and joy and have featured in the Turner Prize, British Art Show and the Winter Commission for Tate Modern, with solo shows in Zurich, Copenhagen, Vienna, Paris, Frankfurt, Hong Kong and Paris among other places.

Monster Chetwynd, 'Hell Mouth 5', 2025, 'The Children are Now', exhibition view, Talbot Rice Gallery, the University of Edinburgh. Photo: Sally Jubb







Tuan Andrew Nguyen

The Boat People, 2020

The Boat People is set in the future, in the place once called Bataan (the Philippines). It follows five children – perhaps the last survivors on Earth – who travel the world to piece together its histories.

Presented as creative world-builders, the children have developed a ritual of reproducing the objects they find in wood, then burning them and sending their ashes out to sea. In doing this they seem to be channelling elemental powers and reinscribing the material remains of the world's former (adult) inhabitants. We see that Bataan's empty museums are full of the remains of wars, migration and evidence of colonisation. The children pass memorials to some of the estimated 800,000 to 2 million people who fled Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos in the wake of the American-Vietnam War.

They also encounter the statues of gods and goddesses, and the girl leading the group strikes up a conversation with the severed head of a Quan Yin statue. This is the Buddhist goddess of mercy, whose name means "one who sees and hears the cry from the human world." The girl and the goddess are on an equal footing, trying to figure each other out through a debate about life and death. Nguyen thinks of the child protagonists as standing on a threshold to the future, in a sense gods and goddesses themselves, having the potential to create the world anew.

Nguyen is interested in how objects carry traces of the past and how ghost stories gather in places that have witnessed as much as Bataan. And the images of fire in his film also evoke for him the horrific scenes from the American-Vietnam War, including the iconic image of the Buddhist monk Thich Qung Đc who set himself on fire in protest. Nguyen was a young boy himself when his parents fled Vietnam to become one of the refugees derogatorily referred to as "the boat people". Set to the other-worldly sounds of Gamelan Salukat, a band mixing traditional Balinese and experimental music, the video tries to reclaim this term, whilst reckoning with humanity's many ghosts.

Tuan Andrew Nguyen explores the power of storytelling through video and sculpture, reworking colonial histories and supernaturalisms into imaginative vignettes. He has had solo presentations at the New Museum (2023), Fundació Joan Miró (2024), Zeitz Museum of Contemporary Art Africa (2024) and Smithsonian American Art Museum (2024). His work is included in the collections of MoMA, Singapore Art Museum, SFMoMA, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum and Whitney Museum of American Art, among others.



Tuan Andrew Nguyen, 'The Boat People', 2020. 'The Children are Now', exhibition view, Talbot Rice Gallery, the University of Edinburgh. Photo: Sally Jubb





Bob and Roberta Smith

Letter to Michael Gove, 2011

Art makes children powerful, 2015

All teachers are human rights workers, 2024

All schools should be art schools, 2024

There is still art there is still hope, 2022

You have got to speak, write, dance, 2025

Bob and Roberta Smith believes that everyone is an artist and that "art makes people powerful". Campaigning for decades for art in schools and free expression, he works across different media, but is perhaps best known for his distinctive hand-painted signs. Six of Bob and Roberta Smith's iconic works appear in this exhibition, which also features the work of children he worked with during a weekend residential in Edinburgh (see Child Human Rights Defenders).

Bob and Roberta Smith's statements follow you through the exhibition, advocating for our fundamental right as people to access art and to be empowered by it. In his *Letter to Michael Gove* (2011), an open letter to the then serving Education Secretary, he paints: "Give a child a piece of paper, a brush and some colour and you put them in control. Children's art is so appealing because they have no problem with being in control of images. [...] From Galileo to Darwin, from Caravaggio to Amy Winehouse creativity is rebellion."

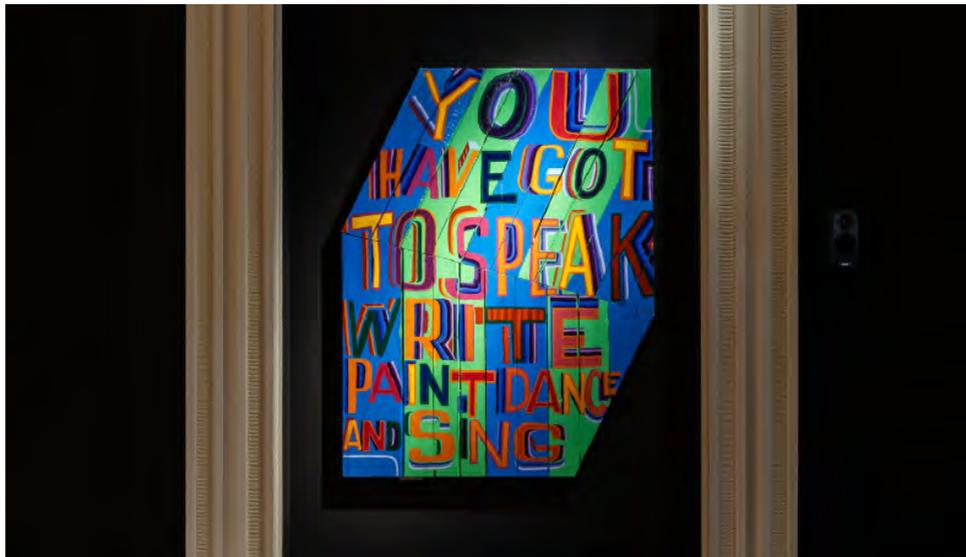
Bob and Roberta Smith stood against Gove in the 2015 election to oppose his promotion of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc) system, which undermined the status of art in schools. EBacc is a performance indicator that requires children in England, Wales and Northern Ireland to undertake specific academic subjects at secondary school. Linked to rankings and focusing on english, maths, science, a modern language and either history or geography, it undermines the value for schools supporting art, music and the performing arts.

When Labour won the election in 2024 they promised to increase opportunities for working-class children by bringing back more arts education. However their suspension of copyright protection for artists in favour of Artificial Intelligence led many creatives – including Bob and Roberta Smith – to feel betrayed. The scrapping of EBacc continues to be central to the artist's campaign for more inclusive and arts-based learning.

Bob and Roberta Smith OBE is known as an artist, writer, curator, author, musician and art education advocate. Bob and Roberta Smith has shown at MoMA PS1, New York, Tate's Britain, Tate Modern and Tate Liverpool. In 2019, Bob and Roberta Smith had major retrospectives in La Panacée, Montpellier, curated by Nicolas Bourriaud and The Harris, Preston.



Bob and Roberta Smith, 'Art makes children powerful', 2015, 'The Children are Now', exhibition view, Talbot Rice Gallery, the University of Edinburgh. Photo: Sally Jubb



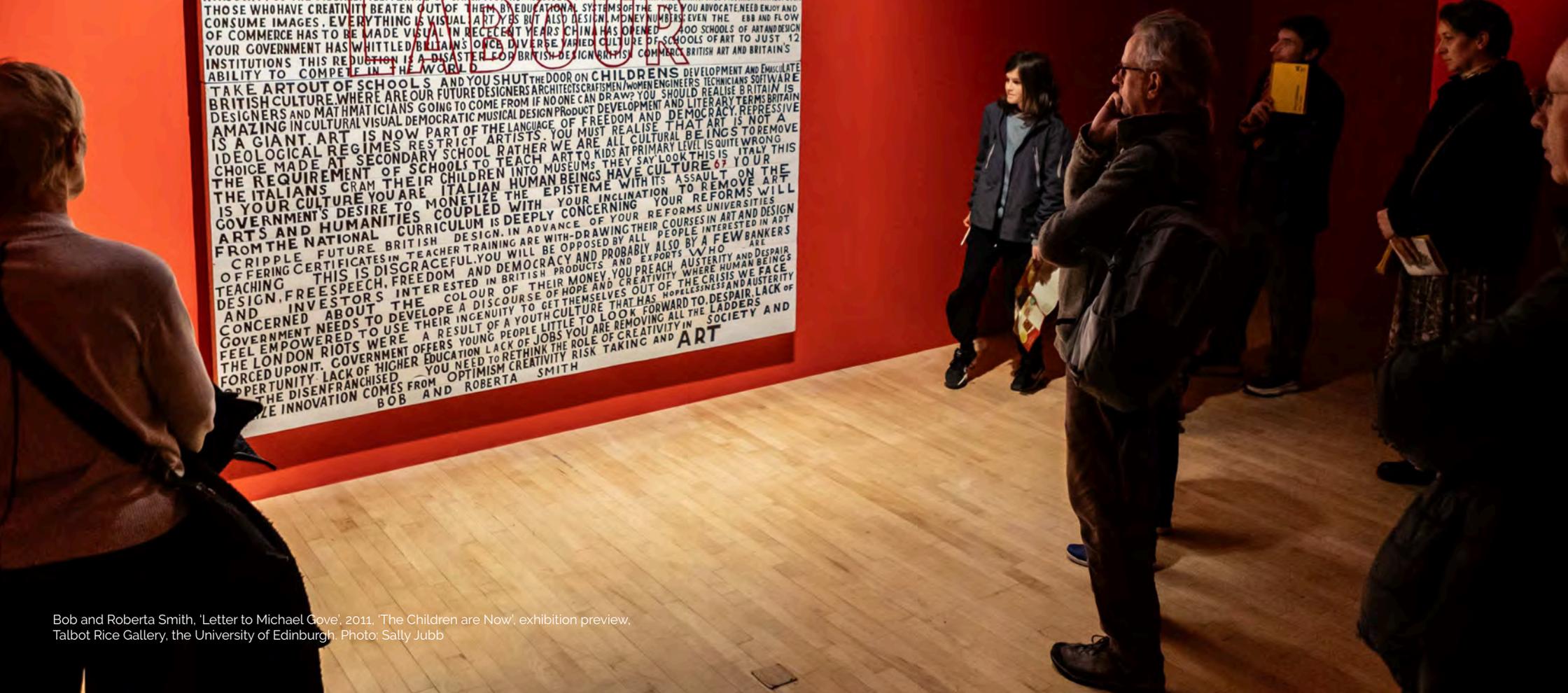
Bob and Roberta Smith, 'Art makes children powerful', 2015, and 'You have got to speak, write, dance', 2025. 'The Children are Now', exhibition view, Talbot Rice Gallery, the University of Edinburgh. Photo: Sally Jubb



Bob and Roberta Smith, 'There is still art there is still hope', 2022, and 'All teachers are human rights workers', 2024. 'The Children are Now', exhibition view, Talbot Rice Gallery, the University of Edinburgh. Photo: Sally Jubb

LETTER TO MICHAEL GOVE MP SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION
 25 JULY 2011 IN MEMORY OF LUCIEN FREUD AND AMY WINEHOUSE WHO DIED THIS WEEK END
 DEAR MICHAEL GOVE ART IMAGES ARTIFACTS SONGS CULTURE ARE THE PRINCIPLE MEANS BY WHICH HUMAN BEINGS DEFINE
 THEMSELVES. MICHAEL A LOOK AT YOUR TIE AND SHIRT COMBINATION INFORMS ME YOU ARE
 NOT A VISUALLY MINDED PERSON. YOU DO NOT CARE HOW YOU LOOK. LOOK AROUND YOU. WHAT DO YOU SEE?
 EVERYTHING IS MADE. EVERYTHING HAS BEEN FASHIONED BY HUMAN BEINGS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED ALL
 ASPECTS OF WHAT THEY HAVE MADE. IMAGE IS EVERYTHING. VISUAL WORTH IS CONSIDERED ALL
 MORAL VIRTUE AUTHORITY AND INTEGRITY. FROM BIRTH HUMAN BEINGS SEEK TO UNDERSTAND. FIND THEIR PLACE
 IN SOCIETY AND CONTROL THEIR WORLDS THROUGH LOOKING AND UNDERSTANDING THE CHILD INTERPRETS
 THE WORLD. GIVE A CHILD A PIECE OF PAPER. A BRUSH AND SOME COLOUR AND YOU PUT THEM IN CONTROL
 CHILDRENS ART IS SO APPEALING BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO PROBLEM WITH BEING IN CONTROL OF IMAGES. AS SCHOOL
 PROGRESSES POOR TEACHING IN SOME SCHOOLS IMPRESSES ON THE CHILD THAT THEY ARE NOT IN CONTROL
 ONLY ARE THEY NOT IN CONTROL. BUT THEY ARE THE MOST INSIGNIFICANT COG IN A SYSTEM OF CONTROL WHICH THEY MAY
 NEVER PLAY AN IMPORTANT PART FROM GALILEO TO DARWIN FROM CARAVAGGIO TO AMY WINEHOUSE THE ARTIST
 REBELLION. YOUR INITIATIVE AWARDS CONFORMITY AND WILL CAUSE STAGNATION. THE REBELLIOUS CHILD. THE ARTIST
 THE INNOVATOR THE INVENTOR THE ENGINEER THE ARCHITECT. CLINGS ON TO THEIR PROWESS WITH PAPER. DOES ART & MUSIC AT
 SCHOOL GOES TO ART SCHOOL OR STUDIES DESIGN AND CONTRIBUTES TO THE LIBRARY OF IMAGES AND FORMS. THE RELATIONSHIP
 BETWEEN SHEETS OF BLANK PAPER PENCILS AND INNOVATION IS UNDENIABLE. ART SHOULD BE THE CENTRE OF A
 NATIONAL CURRICULUM BASED ON CREATIVE THINKING. PITY THE OBEДИENT CHILD IN A SYSTEM OF EDUCATION.
 OBSESSED WITH VOCATIONAL SKILLS HE OR SHE GIVES IN. THE CHILD WHO BECOMES INHIBITED IS INDUCED INTO THE MIDDLE
 MAJORITY OF THE VISUALLY ILLITERATE. OF WHICH YOU MICHAEL GOVE (IN YOUR UNFITTING SHIRT AND UNMATCHED TIE) ARE A PART. BUT EVEN
 THOSE WHO HAVE CREATIVITY BEATEN OUT OF THEM BY EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS OF THE TYPE YOU ADVOCATE. NEED ENJOY AND
 CONSUME IMAGES. EVERYTHING IS VISUAL ART. YES BUT ALSO DESIGN. MONEY NUMBERS. EVEN THE EBB AND FLOW
 OF COMMERCE HAS TO BE MADE VISUAL. IN RECENT YEARS CHINA HAS OPENED 400 SCHOOLS OF ART AND DESIGN
 YOUR GOVERNMENT HAS WHITTLED BILLIONS ONCE DIVERSE VARIOUS CULTURE OF SCHOOLS OF ART TO JUST 12
 INSTITUTIONS THIS REDUCTION IS A DISASTER FOR BRITISH DESIGN BRITISH COMMERCE BRITISH ART AND BRITAIN'S
 ABILITY TO COMPETE IN THE WORLD.

TAKE ART OUT OF SCHOOLS AND YOU SHUT THE DOOR ON CHILDRENS DEVELOPMENT AND EMULATE
 BRITISH CULTURE WHERE ARE OUR FUTURE DESIGNERS ARCHITECTS CRAFTSMEN WOMEN ENGINEERS TECHNICIANS SOFTWARE
 DESIGNERS AND MATHEMATICIANS GOING TO COME FROM IF NO ONE CAN DRAW? YOU SHOULD REALISE BRITAIN IS
 AMAZING IN CULTURAL VISUAL DEMOCRATIC MUSICAL DESIGN PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT AND LITERARY TERMS REPRESSIVE
 IS A GIANT. ART IS NOW PART OF THE LANGUAGE OF FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY. IT IS NOT A
 IDEOLOGICAL REGIMES RESTRICT ARTISTS. YOU MUST REALISE THAT ART IS TO REMOVE
 CHOICE MADE AT SECONDARY SCHOOL RATHER ART TO KIDS AT PRIMARY LEVEL THIS IS ITALY THIS
 THE REQUIREMENT OF SCHOOLS TO TEACH ART TO MUSEUMS THEY SAY LOOK THIS IS ITALY THIS
 THE ITALIANS GRAB THEIR CHILDREN INTO MUSEUMS THEY SAY LOOK THIS IS ITALY THIS
 IS YOUR CULTURE YOU ARE ITALIAN HUMAN BEINGS HAVE CULTURE. YOUR
 GOVERNMENT'S DESIRE TO MONETIZE THE EPISTEME WITH ITS ASSAULT ON THE
 ARTS AND HUMANITIES COUPLED WITH CONCERNING YOUR REFORMS UNIVERSITIES
 FROM THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM IS DEEPLY CONCERNING YOUR REFORMS UNIVERSITIES
 CRIPPLE FUTURE BRITISH DESIGN. IN ADVANCE OF YOUR REFORMS UNIVERSITIES
 OFFERING CERTIFICATES IN TEACHER TRAINING ARE WITHDRAWN BY ALL PEOPLE INTERESTED IN ART
 TEACHING THIS IS DISGRACEFUL. YOU WILL BE OPPOSED BY A FEW BANKERS
 DESIGN. FREESPEECH. FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY AND EXPORTS WHO ARE
 AND INVESTORS INTERESTED IN BRITISH PRODUCTS AND EXPORTS WHERE HUMAN BEINGS
 CONCERNED NEEDS TO DEVELOPE A DISCOURSE OF THEIR HOPE AND CREATIVITY WHERE HUMAN BEINGS
 GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO USE THEIR INGENUITY TO GET THEMSELVES OUT OF THE CRISIS WE FACE
 FEEL EMPOWERED WERE A RESULT OF A YOUTH CULTURE THAT HAS HOPELESSNESS AND AUSTERITY
 THE LONDON RIOTS WERE A RESULT OF A YOUTH CULTURE THAT HAS HOPELESSNESS AND AUSTERITY
 FORCED UPON IT. GOVERNMENT OFFERS YOUNG PEOPLE LITTLE TO LOOK FORWARD TO. DESPAIR. LACK OF
 OPPORTUNITY. LACK OF HIGHER EDUCATION LACK OF JOBS YOU ARE REMOVING ALL THE LADDERS
 THE DISENFRANCHISED YOU NEED TO RETHINK THE ROLE OF CREATIVITY IN SOCIETY AND
 INNOVATION COMES FROM OPTIMISM CREATIVITY RISK TAKING AND ART
 BOB AND ROBERTA SMITH



Bob and Roberta Smith, 'Letter to Michael Gove', 2011, 'The Children are Now', exhibition preview, Talbot Rice Gallery, the University of Edinburgh. Photo: Sally Jubb

Ane Hjort Guttu

Freedom Requires Free People, 2011
Conversation, 2021

Ane Hjort Guttu's two films centre on Jens Flakstad Vold, one showing him as an eight-year-old, struggling with the rules imposed at his school, and one of him reviewing the film with the artist at 18 years of age. Together, they platform a child's voice and offer an insight into individual and general experiences of freedom and its repression, the performance of childhood and the role of art in representing it.

Freedom Requires Free People begins on the first day of school, when Guttu – taking her own son – watched Jens bring out his own camera to photograph the gathered parents, in effect returning their gaze. Intrigued by this defiant act, Guttu undertook to make a documentary film interviewing him and following his movements. The result is an insight into an astute, critical mind, questioning what it means to be a child within an institutional setting. Jens is not afraid to be different, he says, and criticises pointless rules, lessons based on repetition and the way others follow instructions "like sheep". In *Conversation*, the older Jens reflects that he remembers playing up to the camera and repeating things that he had heard and that he thought might be expected of him, given that he'd been singled out for his behaviour. This second look at the film makes it clear that children also have to navigate the social construction of childhood, working with received ideas rather than simply being an innate "child".

Whilst the bold statements made by the eight-year-old Jens are carried by his wily charisma, the 18-year-old questions the romanticising of certain notions. Fundamentally, he reflects, he was unhappy at this specific school and wishes that none of this had happened to him. Through *Conversation* he can question the artist and is critical of how the original film focused on him as an individual, making his dissatisfaction seem exceptional. At the same time, he recognises the way the film gave him a platform to expose issues that he continues to recognise: the limitation of independent thinking, unnecessary rules and moments of being physically restrained. In the final scenes, Jens and the artist openly talk about the challenges of filming children – in relation to their consent and understanding of the consequences – against the necessity to elevate children's voices and make them present in the world.

Guttu explores identity, social norms and human behaviour through video, photography and installations. Solo exhibitions include *On the Ground*, K4, Oslo (2025); *Conversation*, 2021, Stavanger Art Museum (2023) and *Time Passes*, South London Gallery (2015). Group exhibitions include *The Practice of Everyday Life*, CAPC Musée d'Art Contemporain Bordeaux (2025); *A Little After This*, A4 Arts Foundation, Cape Town (2024); *Spring Never Comes Again*, Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw (2023) and *Smile! Emotions at Work*, Musée d'art de Joliette, Quebec (2021).



Ane Hjort Guttu, 'Conversation', 2021, 'The Children are Now', exhibition view, Talbot Rice Gallery, the University of Edinburgh. Photo: Sally Jubb





Kemang Wa Lehulere

Reddening of the Greens 2, 2015/2025

Black Beauty (after Anna Sewell), 2025

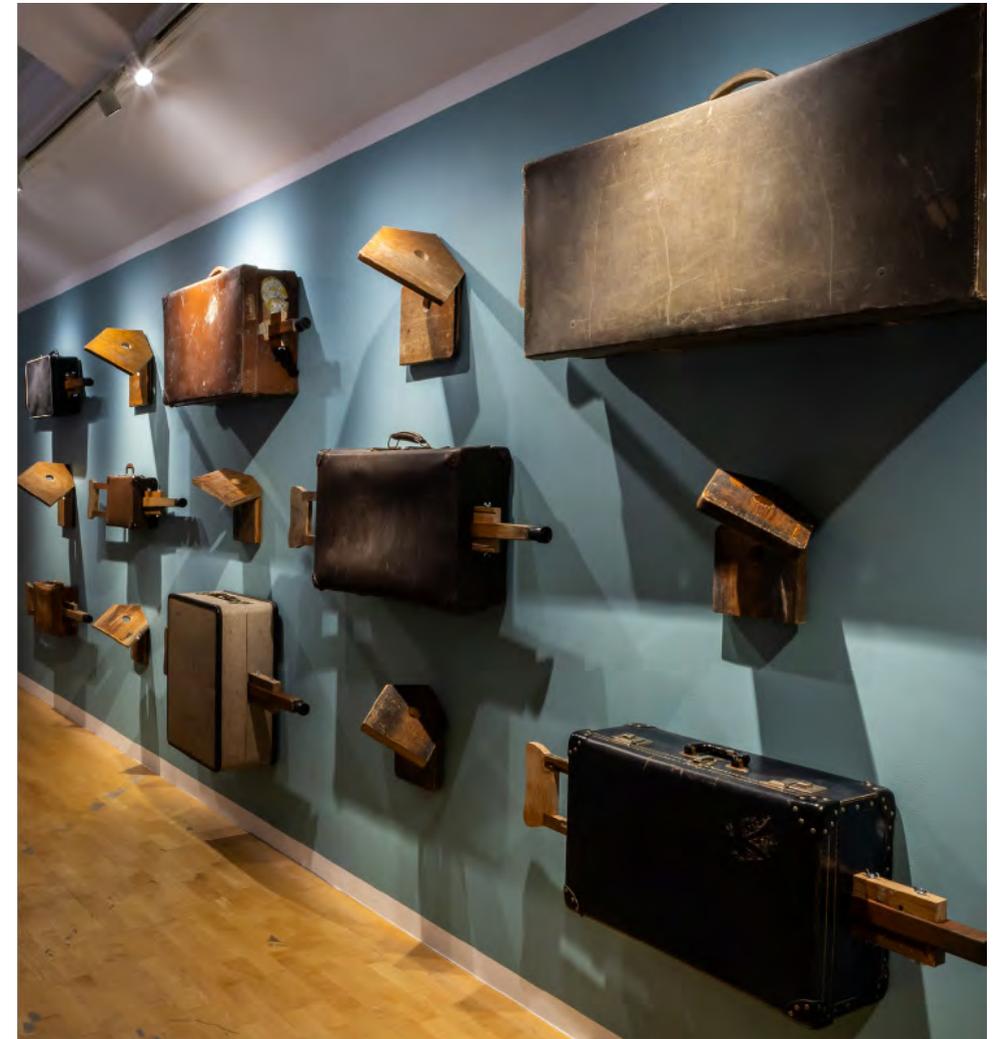
Kemang Wa Lehulere works through the ongoing effects of apartheid in South Africa, often using materials sourced from educational settings to comment on the way institutions can (re)produce social inequality. For *The Children are Now*, Talbot Rice Gallery worked with Wa Lehulere to produce *Reddening of the Greens 2* (2015/2025) – made from travel cases and locally sourced antique school desks – and a new work called *Black Beauty (after Anna Sewell)*.

For *Reddening of the Greens 2*, school desks are cut down and rebuilt as crutches. Where education can be enabling for some, Wa Lehulere is keenly aware that it can be debilitating for others. In South Africa, the Bantu education system (active from 1954 to 1994) was central to apartheid and mandated black children to go to government schools where they would learn only manual and menial labour - what the regime deemed suitable work for their subordinate position in society.

Whilst Wa Lehulere's hometown of Gugulethu was populated by black people who had been forcibly removed from their homes. The title of this artwork abstractly evokes the broader historical forces at play: the red in the South African flag can be interpreted as blood and (alongside the white and blue) colonial violence; whilst the green can represent the fertile lands from which people were cleared. As with all his works, the resulting objects are allowed to speak on multiple registers: here to dispossession and itinerant lives, but also to dreams and hopes for the future. The open bird boxes evoke ideas of home and migration, whilst seemingly spreading their wings.

Black Beauty (after Anna Sewell) is a monument to the thousands of books banned during apartheid and colonial rule in South Africa including *Black Beauty*, which is widely reported to have been banned because the censors misunderstood the title. Told from a horse's perspective, it is a fable about animal welfare that reflects upon human acts of kindness and cruelty. The hands in the piece are replicas of the artist's aunt's hands, signing the alphabet in South African Sign Language (a language that was only officially recognised in 2023). Wa Lehulere was inspired by a film about a photojournalist during apartheid who had a deaf daughter she couldn't communicate with, reminding him of his aunt's silence around a traumatic experience. Sophia Lehulere was shot in the head during the 1976 student uprising, a protest led by black school children during apartheid in response to the introduction of *Afrikaans* as a medium of instruction, which they considered to be the oppressor's language. Sophia survived, but she chooses never to speak of apartheid. Incomplete and encoded, her hands evoke different aspects of this story of silencing and bearing witness.

Wa Lehulere uses drawing, video and installation to reflect on themes of history, memory and post-apartheid identity. He has had solo exhibitions at Göteborgs Konsthall, Tate Modern and Centre Pompidou. Group exhibitions include the 58th Venice Biennale, 14th Sharjah Biennial, 8th Berlin Biennale and 11th Lyon Biennale. He has won many awards including Deutsche Bank's Artist of the Year in 2017.



Kemang Wa Lehulere, 'Reddening of the Greens 2', 2015/2025, 'The Children are Now', exhibition view, Talbot Rice Gallery, the University of Edinburgh. Photo: Sally Jubb







Child Human Rights Defenders

38 placards, acrylic paint, white emulsion on wooden boards, 2025

Children's Parliament was established in 1996 to support the realisation of children's rights in Scotland. Children's Parliament's dream is that children grow up in a world of love, happiness and understanding. Their mission is to inspire greater awareness of the power of children's human rights and to support the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) across Scotland. Through their rights-based creative practice, Children's Parliament provides younger children from diverse backgrounds with opportunities to share their experiences, thoughts and feelings so that they can influence positive change in their lives at home, in school and the community.

Some of the hundreds of children they engage with become Child Human Rights Defenders and work together to advocate for the rights of children at local, national and international levels. As experienced Members of Children's Parliament they present the issues facing children across Scotland to the government, talking to the First Minister and their Cabinet about what needs to change. This Cabinet takeover is unique to Scotland and with Defenders serving for a few years, it means that some of the older children have now met three different First Ministers.

The Child Human Rights Defenders worked with and listened to hundreds of children about the issues most concerning to them. The top three issues were climate crisis education, mental health and bullying, and vaping. Children want to have a say in how they learn about the climate crisis, get involved in positive local projects and want the government to tell them what they're doing to combat climate change in Scotland. They want a better understanding of mental health and bullying in schools with adults improving their awareness of how to check-in and help children be healthy, happy and safe; they know that bullying can result in a lifetime of fear and anxiety and that more needs to be done to combat it. Finally, they are concerned about the way vapes are being marketed to children – in bright colours and sweet flavours – and that they are damaging children's health.

 **Children's
Parliament**

Child Human Rights Defenders
Courtesy of Talbot Rice Gallery, the University of Edinburgh.
Photo: Sally Jubb

From the 19 to 21 September, 12 Child Human Rights Defenders met at Edinburgh College of Art to make artworks about these issues. Supported by Bob and Roberta Smith, who shared his experience of making impactful images, slogans and protest placards, they explored how art could help make their messages powerful. These works appear across the exhibition and focus at its heart, in the Round Room. The Child Human Rights Defenders are: Amber (12), Cara (12), Ella (12), Eva (11), Evie (13), Fallon (10), Flynn (12), Hamza (11), Michael (14), Kati (11), Rida (15) and Tate (13).

Francis Alÿs

Reel-Unreel, 2011

Francis Alÿs' *Reel-Unreel* was made in Kabul, Afghanistan, during the Afghanistan War. His film follows children rolling two film canisters – unspooling and spooling – through the war-torn streets of a city otherwise known to westerners through news footage, Hollywood films and post 9/11 narratives. Playing on the sound connection between reel and real, it provides a contrasting portrait of these surroundings, with the children enabling us to become peripheral witnesses to their more immediate, decentred relationship with the environment.

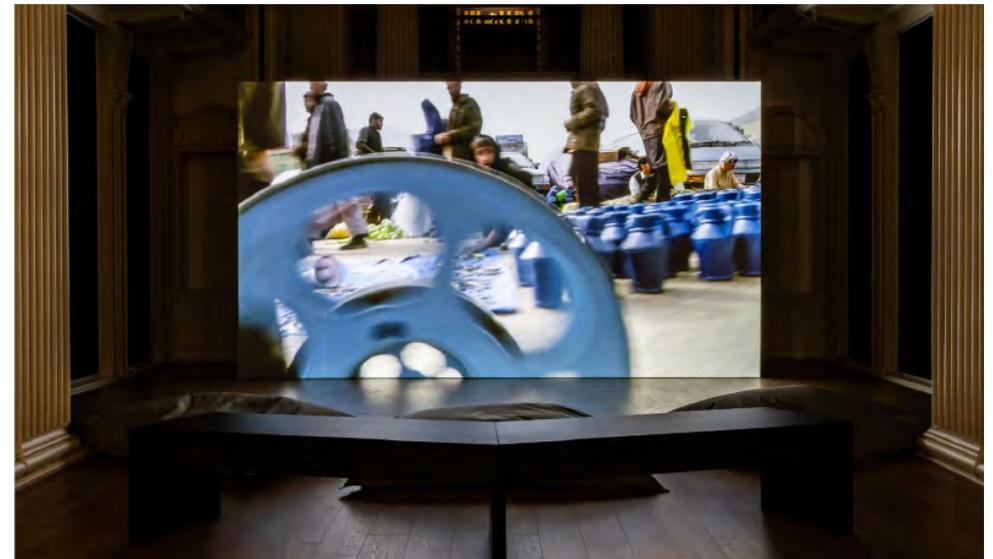
Children have become central to many of the projects Alÿs has produced in the last decade, naturally supporting his questioning of artistic practice. His work takes an idea (a proposal, proposition or what he terms an axiom) and then evolves through the observation of what happens when that idea comes into conflict with the reality of a specific location. From this point of view, Alÿs finds children to be much better actors for him because – being accustomed to play – they know how to take a scenario and creatively evolve it into something else, working through unspoken rules and fantasies. What emerges in *Reel-Unreel* are the links between this process and the artist's preoccupation with everyday life. Here the physical film on screen appears vulnerable, as it is dragged through the streets, against sharp objects and even through fire – with the cameras filming everything and struggling to keep up with the children dashing through sometimes narrow and dark spaces. Like an open composition, the "score" develops through the sound of the canisters clanking off the stones, the changing pace and energy of children's footsteps and the sound of the city itself. The reeling and unreeling echoing Alÿs' interest in doing and undoing.

Captions towards the end of *Reel-Unreel* tell us that on 5 September 2001 the Taliban confiscated film reels from the Afghan Film Archive and burnt them on a fire that lasted over two weeks (perhaps not realising all the films they had been given were copies and could be remade). This adds a layer to the motif of doing and undoing and in today's world might be read against the humanitarian crisis enveloping Afghanistan since the 2021 take over by the Taliban.

Alÿs is known for his poetic approach to art making as a means of creating understanding around some of the most pressing issues of our time – especially themes of movement, borders and urban space – through his film, performance, installations, paintings and drawings. Exhibitions include *Ricochets* at the Barbican (2024), the Belgian Pavilion at the 59th Venice Biennale and a survey at Tate Modern. Recipient of the Wolfgang Hahn Prize, Alÿs has work in major international collections.



Francis Alÿs, 'Reel-Unreel', 2011. 'The Children are Now', exhibition view, Talbot Rice Gallery, the University of Edinburgh. Photo: Sally Jubb





Součková's practice encompasses drawing, natural dyeing on textiles, performance, text, sound and video installation, and works between spirituality and politics, alienation and belonging, as they manifest in the landscape. Adéla Součková's exhibitions include *Survival Kit 14*, Riga (2023); Kaunas Biennial, Kaunas (2023); Living Art Museum, Reykjavik (2023); Museum of Applied Arts, Prague (2021); Trafo, Budapest (2022) and CCA TRAFÓ, Szczecin (2019).



'Adéla Součková, 'hopscotch, 2025, 'The Children are Now', exhibition view, Talbot Rice Gallery, the University of Edinburgh. Photo: Sally Jubb

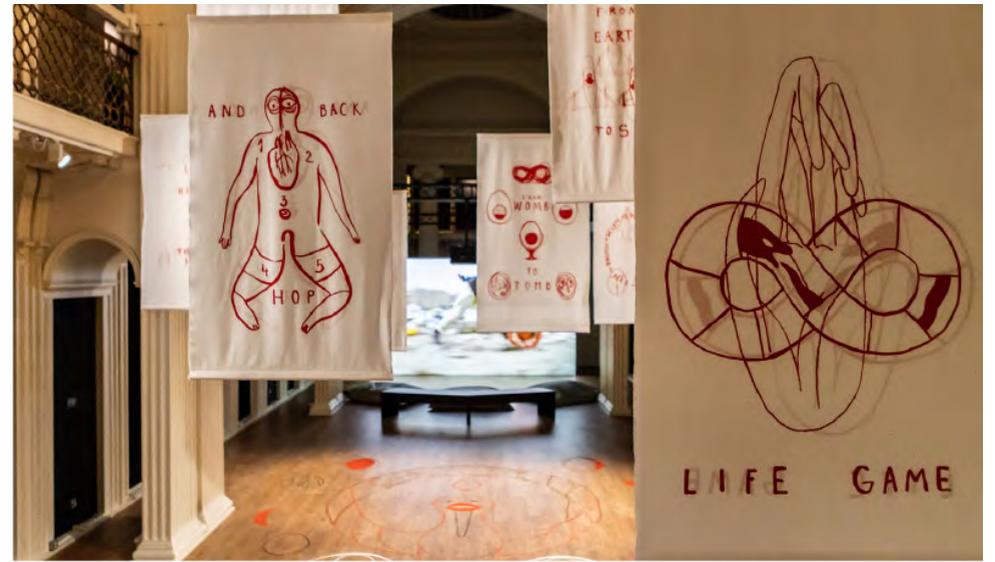
Adéla Součková

hopscotch, 2025

Adéla Součková's ritualistic drawing and printing practice seeks to reconnect people to the land through forms of play and embodiment, something directly linked to the children's game of hopscotch (where the scotch refers to a scratch made in the dirt). It is the enigmatic appearance of this game throughout different eras and world cultures that provides Součková with the rich source of ideas for this imaginative installation.

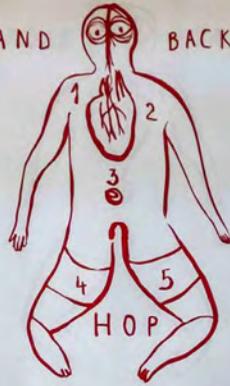
Součková is fascinated by the many forms hopscotches can take, and how they link to a kind of shapeshifting story-telling practice that can be equally spiritual, profound and nonsensical. She was also motivated by hopscotches as a tool that can help people switch between different temporalities or world views: between the linear and rational, and the circular and relational. The uncertain and ambivalent history of hopscotch gives Součková the space to be playful in its presentation, speculating and experimenting with its origins and possibilities. Perhaps – her poetic printed guide tells us – it was invented by Roman soldiers in Britain and is therefore linked to military training and conquest? Perhaps, it is merely a distraction from the pursuit of mindfulness, as the Buddha thought of similar games described in Buddhist scripture? Or could it echo an ancient labyrinthine form that has simplified and mutated over the years? A once maternal body shifted through patriarchal monotheistic societies into the sign of the cross? Or did it emerge from alchemists trying to hide their dark discoveries in coded symbolism? Of course, Součková's images and forms encourage people to adopt all or none of these theories to enhance the imaginative possibilities of hopping numbers, that can, in some cases, be connected with powerful phrases: jumping between the past and the future, the earth and the sky, or life and death.

Brian Sutton-Smith's analysis of play (*The Ambiguity of Play*) argued that games are tied up with competing worldviews that centre on unreconcilable values: progress, fate, power, identity, the imaginary, the self and frivolity. And relatedly that they are assigned different functions for: adaptation, magic, status, co-operation, creativity, experience and play for play's sake. In *Homo Ludens*, Johan Huizinga famously argued that play is innate, that it precedes and underpins culture and that "life must be lived as play, playing certain games, making sacrifices, singing and dancing...". Součková's installation is intentionally open and cryptic, forcing people to embrace, adapt and invent their own games. Just as her guide uses prose-poetry to navigate the striking difference between *describing a game* and *playing a game*, she invites us to move between an understanding of hopscotch and losing ourselves in the mutating, happening, all-at-once-ness of play itself.

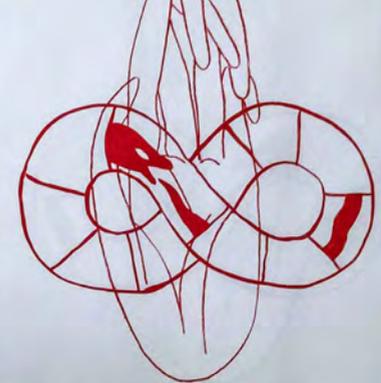


IS
WATCHING

AND BACK



FROM
EARTH
TO SKY



LIFE GAME

LOOP
TO
HEAVEN

HOP
THROUGH
HELL



FROM
WOMB



TO
TOMB



What are Children's Rights?

By Children's Parliament

Children have the same human rights as adults and have special rights that recognise their need for additional protections. The specific human rights for children are set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which helps to safeguard the dignity and equal rights of all children.

The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 came into force on 16 July 2024. As a nation this legally commits us to creating environments where children grow up loved, safe and respected.

Children's human rights, at their heart, are about ensuring that children are healthy, happy and safe at home, at school and in their community. Children's human rights, correctly enacted and effectively communicated, protect children and recognise the importance that children must have a say in their lives. Children feel it is especially important for children and adults to be aware of children's rights. They view children's human rights as a way to ensure that children live free from harm and are able to thrive. Children highlight that they cannot and should not be considered as a single group. They are individuals with unique needs, experiences, opinions and dreams.

Children's human rights start with adults. It means we listen, we try to understand and we make sure we always respect every child's human dignity. It doesn't mean children always get what they want but it does mean adults have responsibilities to recognise these rights and share their power with children. Children's human rights means that we bring children up in an environment of love, happiness and understanding and remember that we are talking about people who are growing, developing, learning and making mistakes who need our love and support to thrive and flourish. With care and dignity as central principles, many adults may already be taking a children's human rights approach without having realised it.

While legislation like the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act is powerful, it is a starting point for cultural change, supporting a culture that values children and recognises them as equal, where their views are sought in all matters that affect them. There needs to be change across Scotland away from adults assuming they know what children want or asking children their views and then ignoring what they say. Children are a valuable part of our nation now and they represent the future of Scotland. Children care deeply about the country and community they are growing up in.

"Your rights can change your life. Be yourself and make sure you are heard."

Child Human Rights Defender, aged 10

Childism - Seeing Children Now

By Dr Fiona Morrison, Reader in Childhood Studies

What would happen if our society included and valued people of all ages? What if we treated children not as citizens-in-waiting, but as people with important perspectives deserving recognition now?

Understanding Childism and Adulthood

Childism is a movement that challenges adulthood - the systematic discrimination against people because they are young. Adulthood operates pervasively like ableism, racism, or sexism, yet remains largely unrecognised in our society.

Adulthood stems from beliefs about children's capacity and difference from adults. It manifests when we speak about children in their presence as if they cannot hear, when we dismiss their concerns as trivial, when we use "childish" as a slur, or when we create systems that prioritise adult needs over children's rights and dignity. It results in children's political disenfranchisement and exclusion from places of power and decisions that affect them.

Adultist influences persist across cultures and institutions - in educational systems that prioritise compliance, in media that sensationalises youth while ignoring their concerns, and in public spaces where children are often unwelcome or restricted.

In my work on children and the law, I found children offer crucial insights about their experiences of legal processes that adults overlook. Even when children have explicit legal rights, adultist assumptions about what is best for children, or perhaps what is easier for adults, lead to these rights being systematically sidelined in practice. In legal decisions about children following parental separation, children consistently describe wanting to give their views. However, they need time to build trust with adults working in courts before they can do so. Courts struggle to accommodate this. The Children (Scotland) Act 2020 was meant to bring in advocacy for children to help address this, yet it remains unimplemented. This lack of urgency about children's rights exposes how adulthood operates within our institutions.

Changing this requires more than new policies or laws - even well-intentioned legislation fails when adultist assumptions persist. Childism asks us to reimagine and build a society where children are respected as individuals with inherent rights. This requires shifting from adult domination towards partnership with children, and ensuring accountability for children's rights.

A Childism Lens for Art and Culture

Adultist patterns exist in art and cultural institutions. Children are often depicted as symbols - of innocence, future potential, or adult nostalgia. But art also creates space to reimagine society. What would our institutions look like if they were based on respect for children's rights and inherent dignity? What would we, the adults, do differently?

As you move through this exhibition, consider: How are children represented in these works? Are they shown as contributors to society or as symbols serving adult narratives? What power do they have and how is it expressed? Which children are represented and how does this affect your response to the works?

Look for moments where artists disrupt traditional power dynamics between adults and children. Notice how they engage with children's emotional and intellectual lives. Consider how cultural and political contexts shape both what childhood means and what power children have.

Most importantly, consider how childism might shift your understanding of children and open possibilities for creating a more just society.

See Children Now

Childism challenges us to see children not as projects to be perfected or problems to be solved, but as fellow humans navigating the world with their own rights, experiences, interests, and knowledge.

The art in this exhibition offers an opportunity to practice this new way of seeing. It encourages us to think imaginatively about children and power across diverse contexts - reimagining relationships, institutions, and society itself.

Childism might change how you view these works and how we adults move through the world with greater respect for children.

This writing draws on my research on children's rights (supported by the Royal Society of Edinburgh) and the University of Edinburgh's College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Childhood and Youth Theme exploration of childism. It builds on foundational work by Professor John Wall and colleagues.

Special Events

Special Event | *The Children are Now: Assembly*

Friday 28 November 2025, 2-4 pm / Playfair Library

We are calling all adults who want to know more about children's rights and how they can better recognise, respect and advocate for children's rights in their communities and beyond.

Please join us for a playful assembly led by children in partnership with artists and researchers, which showcases art and performances linked to *The Children are Now* exhibition. Be prepared for an afternoon of music, theatre, academic lightning talks, den-building and critical conversations, MC-ed by children.

Keynote Talk | Childism, Children's Rights and the Challenge of Children's Empowerment

Friday 28 November 2025, 5:30-7 pm

Distinguished Professor John Wall, Rutgers University-Camden, USA

Part of the Stewart Alan Robertson Lecture Series

This talk introduces the concept of childism. Childism has emerged in academic and social movements in the past decade as a critical theory akin to feminism, anti-racism and decolonialism. What is distinct about childism is that it focuses on the specific empowerment of children as children. Children are a third of the world's population, yet they find themselves marginalised in many domains of politics, economics, climate policy and cultural expression. How would greater responsiveness to children transform deeply-rooted beliefs and power structures?



Scan to book a free ticket

This public lecture is hosted by the Children and Young People Thematic Hub and partners.

We would like to acknowledge the support and collaborations for this lecture and the symposium. This includes: The Binks Hub, CAHSS Challenge Investment Fund, Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, Children's Parliament and the Childhood & Youth Theme (CAHSS).

Thanks

We extend our sincere gratitude to all artists in *The Children are Now* for their contributions to this group exhibition. With special thanks to those who made new works in Edinburgh for the exhibition and who entrusted us with the creation of exhibition copies of works.

A huge thanks to Children's Parliament whose support and patient guidance has helped to shape the thinking around this project and made the inclusion of children's work both possible and politically powerful. Our thanks to the brilliant Child Human Rights Defenders: Amber, Cara, Ella, Eva, Evie, Fallon, Flynn, Hamza, Michael, Kati, Rida and Tate. And to Bob and Roberta Smith for helping them develop their artworks.

Many thanks to the Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop team, especially Laura Simpson, Dan Brown and Uist Corrigan who supported Mai Nguyn-Long's residency to produce new ceramics works in Edinburgh.

We would like to thank our academic colleagues who consulted on this project: Dr Fiona Morrison, Reader in Childhood Studies; Dr Marlies Kustatscher, Senior Lecturer in Childhood Studies; Professor Kay Tisdall, Chair of Childhood Policy; Dr Emma Davidson, Senior Lecturer in Social Policy and Qualitative Research Methods/ Co-director of the Binks Hub; Katarzyna Kaczmarek, Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations.

Thanks to all the galleries representing the artists who supported this exhibition: David Zwirner, James Cohan, Galerie Tschudi and Michael Reid.

Thanks to our colleagues at Edinburgh College of Art who champion the gallery and its programme, particularly Professor Juan Cruz and Dr Francine Shields. We are grateful for the additional financial support of the Edinburgh College of Art Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, which enabled us to commit to our engagement with

children through the project.

Thanks to our funding partners, Creative Scotland, for their long-term support of our programme. Also thanks to Museums Galleries Scotland, who funded our project to produce artworks with Child Human Rights Defenders and Czech Centre, London, for their support of Adéla Součková.

Warm thanks to the A-team who have supported Rachael Champion in planning, and Holly Morton and Melissa MacRobert in the delivery of the exhibition: Kit Craig, Frances Gallagher, Oisín Gallagher, Pavlos Georgiou, Giulia Gentili, Casey Miller, Paige Silverman, Oran Wishart. Thanks also to Andrew Crichton and Verity Coward.

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As always, a huge thanks to our brilliant community partners and our fabulous volunteers, who bring the exhibition to life.

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