

News Release Feb 2022

Play Full

Adam James and Elly Thomas

4 March – 7 May 2022

Art & Design Gallery, University of Hertfordshire

UH Arts + Culture is thrilled to present *Play Full* – a two-person exhibition celebrating the animated works of artists Adam James and Elly Thomas. The show considers the relationships between art, play and playfulness, and invites us to pay attention to these integral, yet often overlooked, components of our culture.



Consisting of soft sculpture assemblages, costumes, drawings and video works, the exhibition showcases intuitively constructed installations that consider the importance of play in our lives.

Adam James' work sets up a relationship between site, artist, audience and artwork that explores how a sculptural form can promote play and encourage forms of dialogue. His textile costumes and larp (live action role play) video works reference events which the artist facilitates as a means for fostering new forms of communication, empathy and compassion between participants. In **Elly Thomas'** installations, sculptures function as toys, animated through a variety of processes. Using methods of childhood play, Thomas' work explores the creativity of an adult artist. Free from finality, her improvised assemblages are 'active' objects that can exist in any number of configurations.

The playful approaches adopted by Adam James and Elly Thomas create unique and inviting works that transform the Gallery at the University of Hertfordshire into a playground of art, and allow us to rediscover our hidden playful selves.

Curator of the exhibition, Inna Allen says, "Playfulness is about being present, responsive, and open to the moment. After such an intense period in our lives, this exhibition embraces joy, pleasure and fun. This is a rare opportunity for us to bring together the works of two artists who capture the essence of play, and we can't wait to see how our audiences respond".

UH Arts + Culture began working on this exhibition two years ago, before Covid-19 turned the world upside down. The exhibition was postponed, and tragically in July 2020, Elly Thomas passed away at the age of 42 after a long illness. "We are deeply saddened by the loss of Elly and are committed to delivering this exhibition to celebrate her remarkable artistic practice, developed in collaboration with her friends and family," Allen commented.

Adam James says that the two artists had been hoping to collaborate for some time. "It is such an incredible honour to show alongside Elly. Although it is of course so very sad to have never had the chance to meet her, it makes me happy that our works have."

In addition to the exhibition, UH Arts + Culture is delivering a dynamic programme of events – providing opportunities to develop fresh perspectives, new skills and alternate ways of working. The programme includes workshops, 'Meet the Artist' videos and other digital activities designed to encourage creative thinking and collaboration between participants.

Ends

For further press information or images please contact Hayley Lewis on 01707 286065 or email h.lewis4@herts.ac.uk

Image credits:

Elly Thomas, Untitled, 2019, Papier-mache, latex, fabric

Adam James, An Extension of Us. Photography Tim Bowditch

Notes for Editors

Exhibition details

4 March – 7 May 2022

Open Mon – Fri 10am – 4pm, Sat 11am – 3pm

[Access may be limited due to restrictions relating to Covid-19]

Art & Design Gallery, University of Hertfordshire, College Lane Campus, Hatfield, AL10 9AB

'Meet the Artist' videos and 'Create It Share It' digital activities available at www.uharts.co.uk

About Adam James

Adam James (born 1978) is a British artist based in Sweden. At the heart of his practice is a desire to bring people together in order to understand the self and to open up new ways of being and interacting. He uses non-verbal play to encourage forms of dialogue, mediation and the reconsideration of sameness and difference. James graduated with an MA in Fine Art from the Royal College of Art, London in 2007. In 2017 he enrolled as a PhD candidate at the University of Kent, where he is researching LARP as a tool to explore empathy. James has exhibited widely across UK and Europe. His most recent solo show 'Kemeneth' finished at Tate St Ives in February 2022. www.mradamjames.com

About Elly Thomas

Elly Thomas (1978-2020) was an artist and independent scholar whose work explores childhood play as a continuous, evolving presence. By concentrating on play processes and methods, Thomas's work engages with childhood play that evolves to inform the creativity of an adult artist. Thomas graduated with an MA in Contemporary Visual Arts from Falmouth School of Art in 2005 and gained her PhD from the Slade School of Fine Art, UCL in 2013. Thomas' thesis 'Play and the Artist's Creative Process: The Work of Philip Guston and Eduardo Paolozzi' was published by Routledge in 2019. Thomas exhibited widely in the UK and contributed to several scholarly articles about the late Scottish sculptor Eduardo Paolozzi. Thomas' work is currently exhibited in a major exhibition 'Beano: The Art of Breaking the Rules' at Somerset House (until 6 March 2022). www.ellythomas.com

About UH Arts + Culture, University of Hertfordshire

UH Arts + Culture offers a vibrant arts and cultural programme for the University of Hertfordshire's campus and local communities, working cross-arts with artists and performers. With a programme of exhibitions, performances, residencies and engagement projects, UH Arts + Culture delivers innovative arts and culture with associated research; offering space for artists and performers to experiment, and audiences to engage and co-produce. Working in collaboration with St Albans Museum + Gallery, and other key partners, UH Arts + Culture presents off-campus exhibitions and events, displaying works from around the world in new contexts. For more information, visit www.uharts.co.uk