

Broken Grey Wires
Two Plus Two Makes Four
The Auxiliary Project Space, Middlesbrough, 2023

Text taken from the exhibition catalogue.

Curator Notes

In 2016 after a long period of mental health crisis, I founded and developed Broken Grey Wires, an arts organisation working alongside communities to build lasting relationships with audiences, in an attempt to cure our institutions and aid recovery from within. Two Plus Two Makes Four is a project exploring mental illness, mental health and in some ways, recovery. Like all Broken Grey Wires projects, I aim to open-up some sort of dialogue surrounding ill mental health. Curating critically acclaimed artists alongside ambitious, emerging artists and sharing my personal experiences of living with bipolar. It is vital to me, that I am continuously open, honest and vulnerable when making the curatorial decisions, and choosing artists to exhibit.

The project responds to distance and communication, especially thinking of themes of isolation. This exhibition has been postponed twice due to the COVID19 pandemic. At times I wanted to give up, curl into a ball and sob. My dad passed away as I waited for the right moment to rearrange, he will never see the final works, but he knew how hard I was working to get it right.

Lots has changed since those tiny shoots of a North East idea began, in my personal and professional life. But one idea continues to burn brightly, the absolute intense desire to create space for communities to explore their emotional state. For audiences to relate to others, to relate to art and to engage with experiences that could one day encourage them to be open about their own mental health.

I hope you enjoy the show.

Feedback.

Evaluation forms often feel invasive and insensitive, and when approached by staff after visiting an art gallery, there is often instant friction and resistance. We are living in a culture which demands feedback and data, instead of allowing our audiences to appreciate the art as it is.

It is important to protect the integrity of visitors, and their experiences throughout the project. This includes the workshops and other community engagement areas.

Where and how I collect data, therefore, is an important thing to consider and there is scope for this to be quite radical in safeguarding the sanctity of the space and experience.

Accessibility.

Seating and comfort for audiences is integral in how we understand and approach accessibility in art spaces. How much of this is the artists or the curator's responsibility, and how much should it be the institution's responsibility to incorporate it as part of their

framework? By making noise about these concerns now, means we can be agitators for change in the future.

The use of park benches across this exhibition fits in with the curatorial ideas surrounding the project, exploring communication, connection and isolation.

Meeting friends/strangers in the park and sitting on a bench to chat about our day, sitting down to feed the ducks or just to have a break from walking.

These simple moments can be integral to our mental health yet during the Covid19 pandemic, sitting on our park benches was prohibited, with dangerous looking red tape across them so people could not utilise them when out for their daily stroll.

We will encourage connection during the exhibition, promoted through the use of seating. Take your time when viewing the artwork, arrange the cushions, wrap up in the blankets provided, discuss themes with other visitors and use the gallery as an ambitious, welcoming, passionate space.

Within Two Plus Two Makes Four, there will also be a dedicated chill out area called The Comfort Zone, for audiences to relax and reflect on the artwork and exhibition topics. Enjoy the Zine Library, laze about in the chairs/bean bags, admire the plants and feel comfortable in a space which has been created for you.

What is Mad Studies?

I am currently studying for a Masters in Mad Studies at Edinburgh University, and through this course, I'm exploring historical and contemporary examples of madness, activism, and treatment.

Mad Studies is a radical voice exploring madness and disability, listening to those who identify as mad and being passionate about creating safer spaces and better support networks for communities.

Jijian Voronka (professor on the History of Madness course, Ryerson University, Toronto) explained that her students *'start to think about their own bodies, genders, races, sexualities, and if they're sane or mad. They start to think about the power dynamics and language around madness as a social issue, rather than madness as only a medical problem within an individual.'*

I am interested in exploring systems that seek to provide transparent and non-hierarchical treatments for madness, comparing the Broken Grey Wires' ethos to those in a historical and contemporary structure.

Developing frameworks that simultaneously treat mental illnesses and give individuals the independence and morality to make their own decisions regarding their own health and treatment is still often deemed profound and experimental.

The Broken Grey Wires model aims to combat the conflicting feelings around this, by creating a wholesome environment with minimal hazards or distractions and providing a labyrinth of inviting settings to enhance social, emotional, and cognitive transformation. And most importantly by building and advocating for the community.