

**Broken Grey Wires**  
**ARE YOU A WOMAN IN AUTHORITY?**  
**Phoenix Art Space, Brighton, 2023**

*Text taken from the exhibition catalogue.*

**Thank you**

'ARE YOU A WOMAN IN AUTHORITY?' has developed at a quicker rate than usual. Typically, the Broken Grey Wires projects will take at least a year to become reality due to figuring out what my ideas mean, sitting with thoughts and allowing them to simmer. It is a slow process, from those initial connections to artists and institutions, beginning conversations and allowing the collaboration to develop organically.

However, this project seemed much simpler in terms of imagining what it could stand for. I think this is possibly due to the current societal situation we find ourselves in - an international mental health crisis, the increased homophobia/transphobia, sexism and misogyny. It is often challenging to read, see or hear about how difficult it is for so many people, and how disillusioned parts of society are with the government, making it almost impossible to change how the system works for us.

It is, therefore, more vital than ever, to develop an environment where communities can feel empowered. The burning desire that I have, to create a space for people to interact and collaborate, to relax, to learn and to connect, has amplified. Because it is vital to explore all these issues, it is vital to communicate just how fragile our emotions can be, and to develop opportunities for local communities to become involved, to support one another and to be inspired.

I hope that by building this vulnerable, strange, joyful, precious, somewhat broken space, I can convey the power of conversation and show just how healing it can be when we can relate to others who are going through similar experiences to us.

Thankyou as always to those who have supported and encouraged me over the past year. In early 2023, I curated the biggest Broken Grey Wires project to date in Middlesbrough. At the same time, I was plotting this one and I don't think that I would have made it here without the support of my friends, my family, my partner, my puppy and my old man cat (!)

Sometimes I take a step back and look at what I have achieved in the last six years. Sitting on that bed in the psychiatric hospital all the way up in Sunderland. Ashamed, devastatingly sad, in the midst of chronic depression and intense suicidal thoughts. The little spark that I had, for making something like this, those four lines that I jotted down in a notebook.

And then her head cracked open.  
There was nothing inside.  
Nothing, except for tiny black spiders.  
And Broken Grey Wires.

Sometimes I am proud of me.

## **Curator notes**

When I begin to think about a new Broken Grey Wires project, I tend to start by formulating ideas and asking myself difficult, vulnerable questions about my own mental illness and how I share those experiences with audiences.

A starting point for this exhibition was when my sister (an occupational therapist) told me how tired she had been on a long, late-night shift. A man who was experiencing psychosis was being aggressive, loud and rude, mainly to the female staff.

My sister was doing her best (as always) to help the situation, to keep him as comfortable and safe as possible. She left the room for a moment and on her return, he screamed towards her.

*"ARE YOU A WOMAN IN AUTHORITY?"*

There are all sorts of thoughts clattering around in my head when thinking about these circumstances. The fine line between being conscious of those in desperate need and allowing ourselves space to heal from our own trauma. Keeping ourselves healthy so that we are more able to support others. (Friends, family or in this case, patients.)

Another important and inspiring catalyst for ARE YOU A WOMAN IN AUTHORITY? was the documentary film 'Women Art Revolution' (2010) directed by exhibiting artist Lynn Hershman Leeson. (Thanks to Roxy for bringing this into my life!)

How much does identity, gender, sexual preference and disability impact our opportunities in society? Do women, or those identifying as non-binary need to work harder to be successful?

This project aims to communicate the powerful discourse behind key social issues: mental illness, class struggles, race, queerness and feminist discourse, and how these concerns intersect.

I hope that the incredible artwork in this exhibition inspires audiences to speak out about injustices they may be facing in their own lives. I hope that the normalisation of relaxing spaces in galleries, like The Comfort Zone, is a stimulus for change. I hope that women can recognise their worth and demand support, respect, autonomy and encouragement. We should celebrate ourselves!

## **Accessibility.**

About six years ago, I read about the Japanese philosophy, Wabi Sabi and was instantly inspired by the teachings of acceptance towards imperfections and the reality of impermanence. Being able to relate this to my own life, my own deficiencies and fear of death was important. There was almost a reassuring rhetoric surrounding this wisdom, that it was ok to break; we have permission to try and patch it up, and that healing doesn't need to be perfect, it can be tinged in gold paint.

I adopted these ideas when I was trying to figure out how to get the Mad Manual Toolkit board to Brighton, and I decided to cut the board in half. Now it would fit into my car! I used

shimmering gold paint, like the Japanese would, to 'mend' the board. Crafting something new from the broken.

### **Seating.**

In August, I drove five hours down to Brighton from the North West to take some images of Phoenix Art Space to help my curatorial process, and to meet the gallery director, Lucy Day.

Whilst browsing Facebook that morning, an advert from a seller on marketplace popped up. 'Four lots of four, vintage blue velvet cinema chairs.'

I mentioned to Lucy in our meeting that it would be exciting to have cinema seating in the gallery due to my obsession with film and she pointed out that I was wearing a Lost Highway (David Lynch, 1997) t-shirt.

That was the catalyst, and I made my decision!

### **One last thing!**

Enjoy the exhibition, ask questions, support a friend, read a zine and learn more about the needs of the queer community, read another zine and discover a new illustrator. Drink a cup of coffee on The Comfort Zone sofas and wrap yourself in our Protest Blankets (handmade by artist and activist Kaiya Waerea.) Take a folder from the Mad Manual Toolkit area and work your way round the artwork with some extra encouragement. Pop down a number on the Evaluation Station to recognise your emotions today.

This space is for you.

Lizz x