

some rocks & a hard place

An exhibition of art by Ben Coode-Adams and Freddie Robins at the Sentinel Gallery
Chapel Road, Wivenhoe, Essex, CO7 9DX

30th April-30th May: Wednesday to Sunday, 10am - 5pm and Bank Holidays

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Husband and wife Ben Coode-Adams and Freddie Robins stars of Grand Designs episode no.93 bring their paintings and sculptures to the Sentinel Gallery 30th April-30th May 2016.

some rocks

Freddie Robins is a true artistic heavy weight, an authentic 'badass'. She questions all your assumptions about wool, women, comfort and nurturing by undermining and exploding them in her art. But then the truth of our existence, as opposed to our rose-tinted hopes, is unmanageable, often unapproachable and always ominous. For Robins nestling up to truth is an artistic goal where art is the shadow of life.

Her new work involves the use of flints. These stones, geologically enigmatic, their formation a mystery, litter the farm where Robins lives. She collects the ones that look like witches' gnarled fingers. The oscillation between cosy warm fluffy wool and flinty hard unyielding stone is surprising, uncomfortable and pregnant with secret power.

Robins lives in the area of Essex scourged by Mathew Hopkins the self-styled Witch-Finder General. He executed roughly 300 women for witchcraft in three short years. These severed witches' fingers, cherty fragments of murdered women, retain their crystalline power multiplied by being restored to their hand sister form.

Dr. Catherine Dormor, who is an artist, Lecturer and Research Co-ordinator at Middlesex University, writes of Robins' work:

Freddie Robins offers a challenge to the notion of knitting as a passive, benign activity. Robins brings conformity to subversion, setting knitting not as an activity of safety and comfort-production, but rather as a series of actions and processes through which identity and subjectivity can be formed and expressed. Robins upsets notions of utilitarianism in favour of artistic expressionism, function, and form in favour of conceptual rigor. In so doing she rejects craft-art arguments as irrelevant and misplaced borderlines.

a hard place

Ben Coode-Adams is the hard man of watercolour. His paintings do not conform to the stereotype of old-fashioned amateurish *en plein air* landscapes. His paintings are rigorous and uncompromising even dangerous. Coode-Adams likes it when things are unexpected. The paints he uses are ground up gems stones that have unpredictable chemical reactions. On one level he is painting just to see what happens. His imagery bubbles up through the paint surface.

In Coode-Adams' paintings small-time gods emerge from the warp and weft of a multidimensional universe. For him the act of painting is a spirit-journey where he blindly gropes towards a fully formed image that he can't quite grasp. The image has to be painstakingly constructed of veils spun from the lower world.

George Ferrandi, Director of Wayfarers Gallery in Brooklyn New York writes of Coode-Adams' work:

Ben Coode-Adams makes mystical watercolour paintings of spirit world / Sasquatch – like figures adorned with or comprised of tribal patterns that seep off of the characters and into the spaces around them. The figures are often defined by solid colours and patterns, but rarely by outline, leaving them ephemeral and weightless. It's as if the landscape were passing through them while they were passing through it. They are edgeless - both with regards to the laws of physics and with regards to the limits of Ben's inventive mark-making. These watery spirits co-exist with giant magical trees and small crying people – presenting boundless sorrow, but also unlimited joy. The resulting vibrant works on paper look beautiful. But they feel beautiful, too.

These painting come from a body of work made while Coode-Adams has been suffering from Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (M.E). This disease meant he could not undertake any physical work but he has been able to paint. As his health has improved he has been bingeing on paint.

biography

Freddie Robins studied at Middlesex Polytechnic and the Royal College. Ben Coode-Adams studied at Edinburgh University and Edinburgh College of Art. Both artists exhibit internationally. Ben is from Essex. They moved to the family farm eight years ago where they built their own house and studio. They both share a deep love of Essex, a maligned and under appreciated county; which can't escape being between a rock and a hard place.