

Press Release

Tivoli Fish Bar: Susan Adams
7th September - 5th October

“Golem,

I have found a piece of paper with the words, ‘Tivoli Fish and Chip Bar. Freshest Fish in B...’

I don’t understand. What is a Chip? What is Bar? What is Fish? What is Tivoli? Is Freshest like fresh? That’s one of my words. And in. And and.”

TIVOLI FISH BAR is a mythical location that emerged from an exchange of letters between Susan Adams and Jerwood Prize winning author Jo Mazelis. It flickers between the unrelentingly everyday and the carnivalesque progression of an unusual daydream. The exhibition features drawings, paintings, video and a large sculpture that traverses both levels of the Chapel.

The text and drawing exchange with Mazelis took place entirely in the form of letters on ‘champagne’ Basildon Bond paper, and opened up a number of spaces (including mythical woodland, a contemporary university and the Tivoli Fish Bar) in which archetypal characters -such as the trickster, the innocent girl, the golem - interacted and wrote letters to each other. The exchange was part of research funded by an Arts Council of Wales Creative Wales Award. Adams says of the Tivoli Fish Bar drawing series:

Jo wrote me a letter which was really a story entitled “The Moth” which describes a girl working behind the counter of a chip shop having an experience of disassociation from reality during a quiet afternoon. It was this unravelling of her mind that suggested I should allow a surreal flow of images in the drawings. The preparation of food became the division of body parts – became the feeling of being detached from ones own body – became the stiffness of a wooden doll. Then came the sirens, the ‘fishwives’, battered mermaids, memories of childhood deliciously soggy warm fish and chip paper festooned with ‘page three girls’- confusingly weird wide eyed women with no tops on.

“... We have come so far the fish seem to say. This was not what we imagined. We are cold blooded like you. Dip us in batter. Clothe us. Clothe us. Dress us up pretty” (The Moth)

The central giant wicker sculpture emerges from the drawings, evoking folkloric processional figures and the uncanny nature of an oversized peg doll. Adams decided that instead of ‘clothing’ the doll, the wicker structure would develop the maritime theme further by appearing more like a lobster pot, the body as a cage housing its captive interiority. The Tivoli Fish Bar might indeed be a space where people can escape their bodies and journey far out to sea, if just for a minute or two.

SUSAN ADAMS (b. 1966, Kent, UK) works across diverse media, including painting, sculpture, animation and drawing. Her approach is imaginative and questioning, suggesting fragments of narratives that have grown from her love of literature, film and folk arts. She studied Painting at the Slade and Norwich School of Art, also Electronic Arts at Middlesex University. She exhibits internationally and has lectured widely, also working as Artist in Residence in India, the USA and the UK including at ArtsAcre Calcutta, Millay Colony New York, WNO, Bardsey Island, Oriol Mostyn and Gloucester Cathedral.