

## Gallery One and Two

### Jonathan Baldock

#### *Facecrime*

**30 Jul – 01 Nov 2020**

*These artworks are made of clay and are very fragile. Please enjoy walking through the gallery but do not touch the art works in Gallery One & Two.*

*Facecrime* is an exhibition of ceramics by London based artist **Jonathan Baldock**. The exhibition asks us to think about how we use objects and our bodies to communicate. Baldock made the work in 2018 during a residency at Camden Arts Centre in London and at Bluecoat.

Often when we think about clay, we think of pottery, vases and cups or other useful objects. Baldock is interested in a much older use of clay. Some of the first examples of writing were made using clay tablets. The tips of reeds were used to mark symbols in wet earth, which would dry into solid, long-lasting objects. We call this language of symbols cuneiform. These ancient tablets have inspired the artist to communicate ideas and feelings with ceramics.

Rather than using cuneiform or text in his ceramics, Baldock makes expressive faces. He uses simple elements to create exuberant personalities. In Gallery One a series of expressions on rectangular slabs stare out at us. We might ask, what are they thinking about? What are they trying to communicate?

The title of the exhibition *Facecrime* refers to George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, in which a menacing regime tries to control every action and reaction. Revealing true thoughts and feelings through faces is a punishable offence in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The idea of a law controlling how we smile, nod or yawn makes us realise just how uncontrollable our facial expressions are.

There are yet more faces in Gallery Two - on the high stacked ceramic columns and on the clay discs that spill across the floor. These discs have been embossed with emojis. Use of these symbols is growing rapidly and they are changing the way that we write. Usually we only see emojis on our phones or computer screens. For *Facecrime*, Baldock has turned them into physical objects that ooze from the mouths of sculptures. His handmade ceramic works are set within a blue sand strewn landscape which resembles an archeological dig - a ruin that feels both ancient and futuristic. Here, Baldock reminds us that, just like cuneiform, our emojis will eventually be studied as history.

Baldock's ceramic characters also express themselves with occasional audible laughs, whistles, sighs and groans. Often galleries are quiet and serious places. But in Baldock's world, scowls, winks and laughter ripple through space. The artist's creations reveal a range of feelings without spoken or written language. His exhibition playfully reminds us that communication keeps evolving, from cuneiform to modern alphabets to emojis.

# Facecrime Glossary

## Residency

Residencies are one of the ways that we support artists at Bluecoat. Typically, an artist-in-residence spends between one month and a year in a studio at Bluecoat, developing new ideas and making new work. An artist might work in residence in order to work with a specific group of people or community. Or, they might simply need the time and space to focus on a specific project.

## Cuneiform

Cuneiform is the oldest known system of writing. It contains between 600 and 1,000 different characters used to write words or syllables. These characters are formed by pressing a reed, which has been cut into a point, into wet clay. The clay dries to leave wedge shaped marks. The earliest known cuneiform tablets are nearly 5,500 years old. This way of writing was used for around 3-4,000 years, which also makes it one of the longest lasting writing systems. Cuneiform originates in ancient Mesopotamia, modern day Iraq.

## Emojis

Emojis are graphic symbols used in text messaging, social media and other forms of contemporary writing. Prior to emojis, punctuation symbols had often been used to create emotive images such as :-). These symbols were called emoticons.

## Nineteen Eighty-Four

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a novel written by the British author George Orwell and published in 1949. The novel's protagonist, Winston Smith, lives under a brutal government that uses mass surveillance to control its citizens. Citizens are expected to give total loyalty to the government known as The Party and the leader, known as Big Brother. Anything other than positivity towards The Party is an offence, referred to in the book as a 'thoughtcrime'. A 'facecrime' is an offence of showing one's true feelings through facial expression.



Facecrime is commissioned by Camden Arts Centre with Tramway. The work was developed through the Freelands Lomax Ceramics Fellowship and is funded by the Freelands Foundation. The 2020 installation at Bluecoat is supported by the Henry Moore Foundation.

Funded by



Supported using public funding by  
**ARTS COUNCIL  
ENGLAND**



**Liverpool  
City Council**

Supported by

**Culture  
Liverpool**