

THE GALLERY OF
EVERYTHING

THE GALLERY OF **EVERYTHING**
4 CHILTERN STREET
LONDON W1

Full of Days

HERMIONE BURTON & ANDY HOLDEN

SUNDAY 19TH MARCH TO SUNDAY 30TH APRIL 2023

WITH MUSIC BY SAINT ETIENNE



Andy Holden, Still from *Hermione: Kingdom of the Sick* (2022)
Supported by Hayward Gallery Touring for British Art Show 9 and NN Contemporary Art



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In 2017 the artist **Andy Holden** came across a curious group of eclectic paintings in a charity shop in his hometown of Bedford. The bold signature declared the author's name: *Hermione*.

Accompanying the artworks were framed photographs of the artist and a self-published autobiography, *Hermione Burton: A Journey Through the Paintings*. This thin booklet described the major events of the artist's life, her creative evolution and her ongoing struggles with ill health.

Sensing instinctively that this was a meaningful body of work, with a personal relevance, **Holden** purchased the entire group of artworks. The paintings appeared to him as if they were frames from a film. If they were not kept together, the artist's story would be lost forever.



Andy Holden, Still from Hermione: Kingdom of the Sick (2022)

Hermione Burton's paintings read as both therapy and diary. They describe the past and commemorate the present. The artist frequently paints herself, becoming the primary audience for her own experience. Titles are often celebratory, yet the disjunctive compositions and melancholic shimmering of the paintings allude to a different story.

Critically, the images which chronicle **Hermione**'s journey are both interior and exterior. They reveal a sense of urgency - the artist is recording her life before it is too late. She re-imagines memories and even anticipates a future audience. A key painting shows a fictional salon hang of her opus, some works known, others lost, some perhaps invented. This picture, *Hermione's Art Exhibition*, provides the starting point for **Holden**'s own exhibition.

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Hermione Burton, *Hermione's Art Exhibition*, 69 x 59 cm

Full of Days is **Holden**'s personal response to another artist's life. It is framed not as a monologue, but as a dialogue, giving **Hermione** a voice, a platform and an audience.

The exhibition opens with two short films by **Holden** which discuss the work and provide context and commentary. These lead the visitor into an upper gallery installation of over twenty original artworks by **Hermione**, curated alongside additional works by **Holden**. These works draw upon **Hermione**'s imagery and history, with the act of interpretation becoming a work in and of itself.

At the centre of the project is **Holden**'s forty minute film, *Kingdom of the Sick*, titled in reference to Susan Sontag's 1978 essay *Illness as Metaphor*. Alternating between documentary, biography and fiction, *Kingdom of the Sick* uses digital technology to re-animate **Hermione** as narrator of her own history, guiding the viewer through her life and work with language excerpted from her unpublished autobiography.

Hermione's voice and facial expressions have a strange otherworldly quality. The role is provided through motion capture by Sarah Cracknell, vocalist of the band Saint Etienne. Saint Etienne also provide the film's original soundtrack, lending the project a sense of reflective, ethereal drama.

Hermione's narrative is intercut with interviews with people who appear in her paintings, tracked down by **Holden** from names recorded on the reverse of several canvases. Through these interviews, as much as through **Holden**'s familiar and inquiring voiceover, a more expansive understanding of the artist begins to emerge.

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Holden's film then shifts from an interpretation of Hermione's art into his own ongoing enquiries as to how we experience time. When disrupted by sickness or grief, our temporal senses are ruptured; for Holden, this becomes the unacknowledged subject of Hermione's paintings. Few of these works are dated and perhaps they can be read as depictions of the experience of living outside of time's flow, and reveal, in Holden's words, 'the time of the sick'.

Holden's exegesis acknowledges the significance of perspectival shifts in Hermione's composition as choices which articulate her particular worldview, rather than formal idiosyncrasies, technical limitations or the vernacular of self-taught art. Hermione's paintings are interpreted by Holden as the possibility of painting to describe a world in which time no longer moves - an enunciation of non-linear time, which the sequential unfolding of language works to obscure.

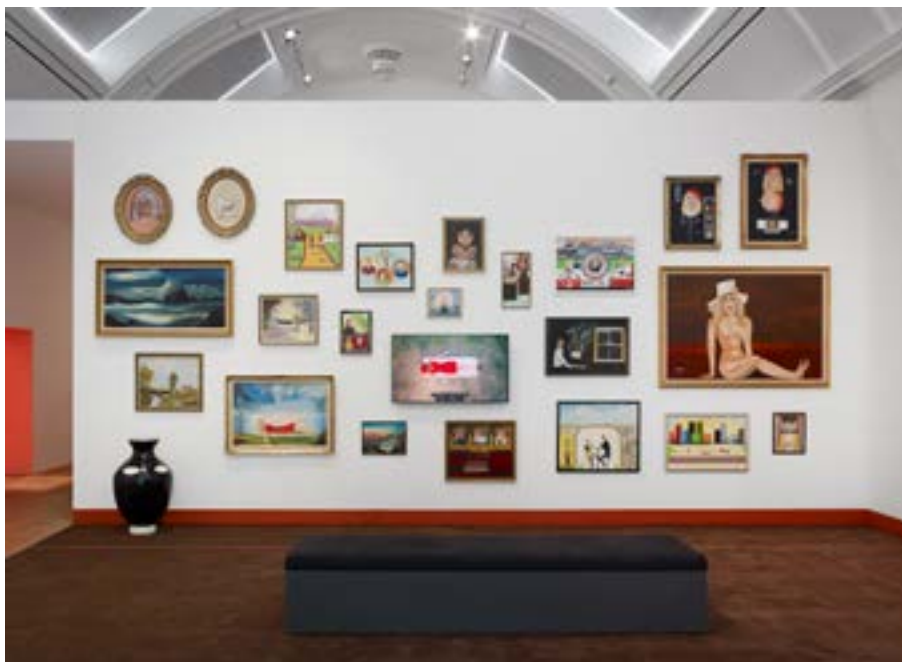
Through rescuing and retelling her story, Holden asks how much a person can be understood by interpreting the work they left behind, and positions art as a tool which can express an interiority that cannot otherwise be voiced during a lifetime.

Illness is the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship. Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick.

Susan Sontag, 1978



Hermione Burton, *Pleasant Thoughts/ Jacqui on a Plinth* (1993), 105.5 x 75 x 5.5cm



Andy Holden, *Estate of Hermione*, British Art Show 9, (2022)

Andy Holden

B 1982 (United Kingdom)

Andy Holden's work comprises large installations, sculpture, painting, pop music, performance, animation, curating and multi-screen-videos. His work is often defined by very personal starting points, used to arrive at more abstract philosophical questions.

His first major exhibition was *Art Now: Andy Holden* at Tate Britain (2010), in which he exhibited *Pyramid Piece*, an enormous knitted rock based on a piece of pyramid that he stole from the Great Pyramid of Giza as a boy and later returned. Solo exhibitions of his work have included *Chewy Cosmos Thingly Time* (2011) at Kettle's Yard, Cambridge and *Cookham Erratics* at the Benaki Museum, Athens (2012). Holden's exhibition at Cubitt, London (2011) took the form of a library which explored the notion of *Thingly Time*. As a teenager Holden wrote a manifesto for art titled *Maximum Irony! Maximum Sincerity*, and this was revisited as a video installation at the Zabudowicz Collection (2013), Spike Island (2014) and Kunsthalle Winterthur (2015).

Between 2011 and 2017, Holden worked on *Laws of Motion in a Cartoon Landscape*, a hour-long animated film which explored the idea that the world was now best understood as a cartoon, and examined how physics works in an animated universe. The film was first shown at Glasgow International (2016) and Venice Biennale (2017).

Natural Selection (2017), commissioned by Artangel, was made in collaboration with his father Peter Holden, and utilised a detailed exploration of bird nests and egg collecting to explore questions of mankind's changing relation to the natural world, as well as the father-son relationship. The exhibition toured to a number of museums including Bristol Museum & Art Gallery, Leeds Art Gallery, Towner Art Gallery and Inverness Museum and Art Gallery.

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Holden curated *Beano: The Art of Breaking the Rules* at Somerset House in 2021 and has previously curated *World as Cartoon* at Tate Britain (2017) and *Be Glad for the Song has No End* at Wysing Arts Centre (2010). In 2021 a book of interviews with **Holden** was published by Slimvolume under the title *Collected Free Labour*. His work is in the permanent collections of Tate, Arts Council Collection, Bristol Museum & Art Gallery and Leeds Art Gallery and numerous public and private collections in Europe. His work was recently included in British Art Show 9.



Andy Holden Still from *Hermione: Kingdom of the Sick* (2022)

Hermione Burton

1926 - 2007 (United Kingdom)

Hermione Burton was born Hermione Quilter in Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire in 1925. One of twelve children, her childhood was a happy one, until diagnosed with the rheumatic heart disease which was to plague her throughout her life.

In 1952 **Hermione** took over the running of a guest house in Ramsgate, where she met and married an American serviceman, James W Hailey. On completion of his tour of England, the couple moved to America, living on military bases in Michigan, New Mexico and California.

In America **Hermione's** health deteriorated; until, following the birth of her daughter Jacqueline, she went into a coma and almost died. She subsequently became one of the first patients in the country to undergo what was then experimental open-heart surgery. **Hermione** survived, and it was during her recovery that she attended occupational therapy classes and began to paint in oils. These early compositions depicted the major events of her life and often included herself and her immediate family.

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According to **Hermione**, it was Tom Jones singing *Green Green Grass of Home* on TV which prompted her to divorce her husband and leave America. She returned home to Aylesbury, and within six years had met and married her third husband, Frank Burton. The couple moved to Bedford in 1979, where she began to promote her paintings and portraits locally. **Hermione**'s health continued to decline. Although doctors feared she might *not survive the next winter*, **Hermione** again received life-saving heart surgery and made a full recovery.



Studio portrait of **Hermione Burton**, 1952

It was at this point that **Hermione**'s imagery took a notable turn. Memory paintings emerged, imaginative pictures with a dream-like quality. Together with her daughter Jacqui, who now painted in a similar style to her mother, **Hermione** attended the Bedford Art Society, seeking an audience for her work; and mother and daughter now appeared at art events together, **Hermione** regularly adopting her signature red beret. **Hermione**'s work came to the attention of James Lynch, an established portraitist and teacher. He instigated an exhibition at The Gallery in Wellingborough in 1987, which featured paintings by both mother and daughter. Within a short time, however, **Hermione**'s only daughter passed away unexpectedly. **Hermione** continued to paint, including a memorable and surreal series of dark floating heads entitled *Phoenix Rising from the Ashes*. She was never to exhibit again.

Biography based on the essay *Facets of My Life*, published in *A Journey Through The Paintings* by **Hermione Burton** (1989). Additional research and interviews conducted by **Andy Holden**.