

## Large print exhibition guide

### The Temperament Index, Melanie Jackson

19 January - 1 April 2024

Aspex Portsmouth is delighted to present The Temperament Index - the latest incarnation of Melanie Jackson's travelling project 'Spekyng Rybawdy'.\* In her installation, the viewer is invited to wander amongst projected animations, cut-out figures and body bits, handmade clay objects, drawings and more.

Jackson has rallied together a procession, a carnival of conceptual nomads that jostle and jive, pleasure, fight and take flight across a trans-historical plane of existence, in which we are as much participants as voyeurs.

Pilgrim Badges were small cast tin or lead alloy brooches that were mass-produced in the medieval period and sold along pilgrim routes, and at fairs and carnivals. Easily affordable, made by and for working people, they were part of a vast and profitable pan-european trade. A group of these were known as

the bawdy badges, the secular badges, the sexual badges, or the erotic pins. There are persistent images of locomotion, and motility, farcical assemblages, dissolutions and transformations of gender and class. They delight in hybridity - an extravagant imaginary of social and sexual reproduction, joyfully rendered with absurdist, deflationary humour. It is a world of absurd and inventive beings, rich with humour, dissent, subversion, delight, hilarity, titillation, surprise.

Recent theories have sought to attribute 'personality' to the dominance of dopamine, serotonin, testosterone and oestrogen in the brain, and designate subjects as 'temperament' types - reminiscent of the mediaeval theory of the four humours. Such projections coincide with new technologies of high definition electron micrography that can now image hormones and neurotransmitter crystals with extraordinary detail – their polarising filters bathing their structures with polychromatic spectral hues. The badges are found always tarnished and monochrome, but would originally have been shiny, enamelled,

augmented with coloured glass. Jackson has redrawn and reimagined the figures as an assembly, reinstating their spectral effect with ink and pigment: a sparkling of yellows, pinks and greens underlaid with flashes of gold and umbe, creating a spectrum of a-subjective and affect-laden opportunity.

Using the badges a kind of collective commons from which to add in the present, new narratives of dissent and empowerment around sexual and reproductive bodies are revealed. The work opens up an important lineage of visual methods and vocabularies of resistance and ways of imagining alternative power structures for self determination, as well as challenging ways images may be used to uphold violences of control and exclusion.

*\*Spekyng Rybawdy MED s.v. “ribaudi” (n.), (b): “obscenity, scurrility, bawdry; coarse speech; an obscene story”;*  
*DMLBS s.v. “turpiloquium” (n.): “foul or offensive speech.”*

*“Melanie Jackson has been developing an aesthetic that allows her to reflect on the manner in which she is implicated in the condition of her subjects...She tries out tactics of representation which remain provisional rather than definitive, treating the gallery as a stage for experimentation with art roles. Here is mimicry, documentation, myth fabrication, cultural voyeurism, performance, animation, political commentary, music, installation, craft and the cultivation of aesthetic delight. The irresolvable contradictions in this set of manoeuvres keeps her own complicity visible as part of the circulation of meanings around her art.”*

Mark Harris