

Contemporary Intervention by Leading Artist Arabel Lebrusan Opens at The Higgins Bedford: Blunt Blades

Submitted by: Arabel Lebrusan

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Blunt Blades (https://www.thehigginsbedford.org.uk/Exhibitions/Blunt_Blades.aspx), a new display exploring our complex relationships with knives and their variety of roles by leading visual artist, Arabel Lebrusan (<https://www.arabellebrusanart.com/>), opens at The Higgins Bedford (<https://www.thehigginsbedford.org.uk/Home.aspx>) on Thursday 11 November 2021.

Knife crime in the UK is the highest it has been in over a decade. Informed by years of research after Arabel received three crates of confiscated knives and weapons from Bedfordshire Police in 2013, this display explores whether the meaning of an object can be re-established and transformed to evoke different emotions.

The display features seven new works in a variety of mediums, including photography, sculpture, jewellery, drawings and audio, delving into the commonly held perception of knives from specialised tools in everyday jobs to status symbols and deadly weapons, and transforming their meanings.

Drawing from a selection of over 40 historic examples of blades from The Higgins Bedford's collections, the display will be accompanied by a publication (https://www.thehigginsbedford.org.uk/Whats_on/Blunt_Blades_Short_Stories.aspx) of short stories. Members of the public and amateur writers were invited to pen new histories and narratives for the culturally significant objects, giving a voice to individuals in the community with a story to tell, as well as encouraging them to consider the varied roles of knives.

Arabel Lebrusan said: "Since that day eight years ago, my mind has been occupied with the idea of transforming the metal from these confiscated objects into works that could evoke other emotions. What makes a kitchen knife become a deadly weapon? What makes a deadly weapon become a one-of-a-kind jewel, or a beautiful home ornament?"

"Objects and materials have the potential to hold memories. I'm fascinated by this idea that matter can vibrate, communicating with us as human beings; with the ways materials carry inherent meanings and how those meanings can be reshaped."

Councillor Doug McMurdo, Portfolio Holder for Leisure and Culture, said: "Arabel Lebrusan's display is really interesting and both explores and challenges some of our views on knives and the role they play."

"The display opens on the 11th November 2021 and I'd like to encourage visitors and residents to come along, find out more and take part in one of the workshops that will be starting from next year."

Detective Inspector Mark Pugh, from Bedfordshire Police's Boson guns and gangs team, said: "We are happy to support this project as it's wonderful to see these confiscated weapons being used in a positive way."

“We will always look to support new and creative ways to raise awareness of the consequences of knife crime, particularly amongst young people.

Visitors can view the Blunt Blades display in-person and online from the 11th November at www.bluntblades.com (<http://bluntblades.com/>). The display is free to visit in-person at The Higgins Bedford until the 30th October 2022 and is supported by Arts Council England.

There will also be a programme of workshops exploring the various roles of knives to accompany the exhibition which will be scheduled for 2022. Visit www.thehigginsbedford.org.uk for more information.

Blunt Blades is the progression of Arabel Lebrusan’s Blunt Blades Exchange (<http://bluntblades.com/bb-exchange>), a community art project that invited women from vulnerable backgrounds to come together to customise confiscated knives into rings with their own empowering designs for personal wear.

Notes to Editors:

Copyright and credit information for attached images:

Image 1: A selection of police-confiscated knives and utensils, © Arabel Lebrusan

1. Arabel Lebrusan

Arabel Lebrusan is a leading artist, award-winning jewellery designer and pioneer of the ethical jewellery movement. For the past 25 years she has been creating works that belong to one of these realms - or bridge the gap between them. As an artist Lebrusan’s sculpture, one-of-a-kind art jewels and site-specific interventions function as social commentary. Focussing her lens specifically on material culture and the ‘feminine’ tactile environment, her works investigate wider issues of power relationships, exploitation and inequality. Meanwhile, the jewellery that she designs and sells under her eponymous sustainable jewellery brand, Lebrusan Studio (<https://www.lebrusanstudio.com/>), encapsulates traditional artisanship and ethical design practices. www.arabellebrusanart.com

2. The Higgins Bedford

The Higgins Bedford is a Bedford Borough Council cultural service that showcases wonderful and varied collections of fine and decorative arts and changing exhibitions drawn from the nationally significant collection of British watercolours, drawings and prints. Displays of archaeology, social history and ethnography explores stories of local people and demonstrates how Bedfordshire has developed over time. www.thehigginsbedford.org.uk

3. Bedford Borough Council

The Higgins Bedford is a Bedford Borough Council cultural facility. Bedford Borough values cultural provision as a vital component in making Bedford a better place to live, work and visit. In particular The Higgins contributes to making Bedford an 'Inclusive Borough' - where people, whatever their background, feel part of the wider community and are proud to celebrate its rich diversity; where inequalities are reduced and all people are able to participate in the sporting, artistic and civic life of the Borough. www.bedford.gov.uk