

Ruby Wroe | *"no time for business as usual"*

11th - 14th April 2024

"no time for business as usual" marks the first solo exhibition and new film-work by London-based artist, Ruby Wroe (b. 1994, Cambridge). Ruby is the recipient of the Co-Chair's Choice Award by the Swiss Church Art Committee in 2022.

Ruby's practice considers the body as a sponge of social relations. She produces performances with people at their centre. These performances have often included groups of people - groups tied together, groups reading in unison, groups embracing. Over the last few years, she has been making work that sits at the intersection of film and performance documentation, exploring ideas around absurdity, negotiation and community.

Over the past six months, Ruby has been volunteering at the church's weekly breakfasts for people affected by homelessness and getting to know different people connected to the church. Ruby's proposition at the beginning of this process was to make a site-specific film that has the church's communities at its core and involved its frequenters in its making.

"no time for business as usual" plays with the expected roles people have within the community, mixing up who does what, when. Who is receiving, who is making, who is allowed where, and when, are all hierarchies the film disrupts. For example, guests from Breakfasts on the Steps are invited to play the organ, an unwieldy and eternally new instrument.

As Ruby has observed, 'The Swiss Church is a meeting point for many, in both the secular and sacred sense. The erosion of the public realm and years of austerity have seen many churches morph into something more fluid than a place of religious worship. Lots of churches in London provide shelter at night, or hot dinners. This church provides breakfasts, haircuts and a calm environment where papers are provided for people to read.

It is a functional church, with a small but dedicated congregation. When the large choir stands to sing at the Sunday service, there are more people standing than sitting. On these Sundays, there are 20 or so chairs, stacked in 2 sets of rows of 4. There is a reverend at the front, and an organ at the back, whose sound, when played, richly fills the space. The configuration of, and interplay between, people, furniture and instruments make up a church service.

On Tuesdays, the church reconfigures itself to accommodate the Breakfast on the Steps. There are 8 large tables spread out, with chairs around them and papers on top. There are many more people, some sitting quietly, others in conversation. At the back of the space, underneath the organ, there are people serving food and drink. "People affected by homelessness experience so much chaos, so let's keep this a calm and tidy place", says Andreas, the organiser".

In *“no time for business as usual”*, the typical lexicon for the secular and the sacred meeting points are confused. Guests who are usually in the hall for breakfast, are elevated to the organ balcony. An instrument which is usually played only by a select few, is opened up as a site of exploration. What ensues is a collaboration, a discovery of ways to make new sounds, and a proposition of a different way of doing things, destabilising usual hierarchies and roles.

The title, *“no time for business as usual”*, comes from David Cameron’s party conference speech, ‘The Age of Austerity’, in 2009, the year before he became the UK Prime Minister. Cameron announced that the upcoming election, “will shape Britain for a very long time,” adding “So this is no time for business as usual.” Since then, things have become consistently worse for people experiencing homelessness. Direct cuts have drastically reduced support services available to people without a home and local authority budget cuts have further increased the vulnerability of many.

There were many phrases littered throughout this speech which conjured images of renewal and positive change which fifteen years on, can only seem absurd. Ruby is drawn to the adaptability of these phrases when isolated from their context, and how people’s own words can be used against their intended meaning. *“no time for business as usual”* works with people harshly affected by ‘The Age of Austerity’ to create a scenario in which the business of the church is not done usually.

Ruby graduated from BA Fine Art Photography from Camberwell College of Arts in 2016, and was awarded the Jonathan Harvey Studio Award by ACME & The Tomart Foundation, and The Technical Achievement Award by Camberwell College of Arts. She holds an MA in Fine Art Media from Slade School of Art, during which she was a Sarabande Scholar.