

George Morl: **Precious Boys**

Press Release

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Beecroft Art Gallery

Curated by Kevin Marsh

Co-curated and works selected by George Morl



'No girl would kiss you, But then No girls would ever kiss the earth. In the manner they hug the lips of men: You are not known to them in this, your second birth' Harold Monroe, *Youth in Arms IV: Carrion*

This summer to commemorate the centenary of the First World War at the Beecroft Art Gallery, emerging Basildon born artist George Morl will be tackling a central concern: What is the contemporary effect of the First World War on the vulnerability of today's young men, assessing and revealing how performance and body psychologies are entwined with masculinity with particular focus on Basildon and Southend.

Precious Boys, in homage to Grayson Perry's ceramic of the same name, is dedicated to exploring young men's body image. Exploring and assessing the vulnerabilities of young men, Morl reveals how body image and sexuality are entwined with the masculine nature of 'performance'. Juxtaposed with works from the Southend Museum Fine Art Collection, this show investigates the representation of men within the historical canon of art, examining how societal concepts of masculinity have manifested. Notably it will be assessing how following World War One, men's abilities to overcome loneliness in the face of death during service led to an influx of new ideas of communication as means to seek companionship, such as advertisements put up by soldiers in media for pen pals from women on the home front leading to blind proposals. Today, under digital media, this has resulted in constructed online dating platforms and romanticised television presenting ornate muscular men contributing to the effect on men's body image and poor self-esteem.



The wide range of works and subjects on display in the exhibition reflect the complexity of the social issue, presenting artworks across 400 years from the rarely seen Beecroft's Fine Art Collection including William Etty, Bartolomew Esteban Murillo, Le Nain Brothers, Nicola Grassi, as well as Sir Joshua Reynolds. Displayed alongside Morl's portraits of men with eating disorders or who have died as a result of steroid usage, they are painted in whey protein powders in a brutalist manner referencing the architecture of Basildon, portraying contorted and fragmented bodies. Presented resting against walls on ceramic tiles their highly varnished surfaces emulate war graves of soldiers. Additionally, a purposefully orchestrated 'shrine' showcasing a copper of beggar boys and an allegory of love by Joshua Reynolds front a copper filamented painting by Morl, depicting and memorialising a young man who has been murdered as a result of violence through meeting up with another dating app user. Other works include a floor of sculptures coated in industrial paint, whereby resting on glistening crystals they become a physical nursery rhyme depicting a post-industrial landscape documenting the plight and remembrance of men who have taken their own life.

Morl's focal interest in affection and how that is interpreted or changed by psychological or neurological conditions informs his universally humanistic subjects. Using the seductive aesthetics of industrial and domestic materials he works across a wide range of mediums including sculpture, ceramics, wall hangings, photography and installations. His practice often one of concern, examines the varying modes in our notions of affection, particularly assessing an individual's plight in seeking emotional reverence from another. Morl said "In not understanding affection, I have always been interested by the means and lengths in which individuals seek it, which may include changing one's body image whether physically with protein powder to increase muscle mass or by constructing online dating profiles to attract others. However, the struggle for young men to combat loneliness in a social landscape that is portrayed and pressurised by media is often eclipsed by the exploitation of consumerist imagery, often resulting in issues such as body dysmorphia, eating disorders, addiction, steroid usage, male rape, or violence via dating apps".



Developed whilst and currently studying at University for the Creative Arts, and following on from being shortlisted for the CVAN Graduate Platform Award and exhibiting at the Turner Contemporary in Margate, this nearly two year curatorial project was an outcome of the UCA Darren Henley Scholarship. Highlighting Southend's history in which the Palace Hotel was renamed *Queen Mary's Naval Hospital* to temporarily treat soldiers, the collection has been selected by Morl in conversation with his contemporary artworks. Produced whilst the artist was receiving art-psychotherapy treatment this show has been designed as a process of investigation in presenting the representation of men in history from nude male cherubs to academic studies, examining how societal concepts of masculinity have manifested in both controlled consumeristic appearances and emotional parameters of men today. This has been organised to put focus on the process of art in parallel to health and abilities in revealing our understandings of individual's needs, or rather how art in particular can be utilised to facilitate this. Ultimately, *Precious Boys* is a testament to the emotional stability of men and visual voice for isolated and lonely young-men presenting them as their vulnerable selves and providing a platform to relent.

About the artist (Orange Boy)

George Morl aka *Edvardo Shadalow* (b. 1994, Basildon) lives and works in South Essex. Morl completed his foundation at Southend College (2012-2013), currently studying MA Fine Art at University for the Creative Arts. Solo exhibitions include *Paradise Hotel* (2015) at UCA Canterbury. In 2016, his sculptures *Precious Boys#2* (2016) investigating the aesthetics of the post-industry and masculinity in relationship to male suicide was previewed at Herbert Read Gallery, subsequently selected for 'Platform 2016' at the Turner Contemporary Gallery in Margate (2016). 'George Morl: *Precious Boys*' (2018) at Southend Museums, his first public solo show, will be dedicated to exploring how men's body image and sexuality are intertwined with the performativity of masculinity. Morl was awarded the UCA Vice Chancellor Prize in 2016 and shortlisted for the CVAN South East Graduate Platform Award, subsequently becoming a recipient of the 2017 Darren Henley Scholarship.



Beecroft Art Gallery

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