

HUMBER STREET GALLERY

EXHIBITION GUIDE
PROJECT SPACE

ELLA DORTON

*JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF THE COUCH
(COUCHES AND OTHER GOOD IDEAS)*

25 MAY – 7 JULY 2019

Hull-based artist Ella Dorton expands her fabric collage-based practice with her first major project at Humber Street Gallery.

Typically using found fabrics, old clothes, bedsheets, curtains and paint, the artist composes portraits that reflect the people of Hull. Dorton's work has recently explored fictional future landscapes, depicting the potential drastic ecological changes that may take place, with rising sea levels and other environmental damage.

For her project at Humber Street Gallery Dorton has developed a new series of large-scale fabric collages depicting individuals and groups of people that make up the social fabric of Hull, drawn from the communities that comprise her neighbourhood. To create these, Dorton composed portraits from sketches and notes taken during time spent with her subjects in their homes. Through this technique the artist brings the voices and personalities of her subjects into the finished works, often including quotes from conversations.

Ella Dorton is one of seven artists who collectively run *Ground*, an artist run workshop, gallery and community space on Beverley Road, Hull.

Journey to the Centre of the Couch (Couches & Other Good Ideas)

ESSAY BY, EMILY HESSE

There is a space in which you watch chickens, a space to hear the murmurs of a garden growing, the space you would rather forget; then there is the sofa. I'm not sure we think anything of note ever takes place in our own front room but here, in six new tapestries, Hull born artist Ella Dorton, opens our eyes to the sacredness of this familiar yet everyday space.

The faces staring back at us from the sanctuary of their own homes, full of tactile expression are our families, friends and neighbors. They are the people we pass by running to catch the bus or stand next to in the checkout queue. They are everyone we know and everyone we do not know but in them and their dwelling places, we hear voices that could be our very own. The bourgeois art of portrait making has carefully had its thread unpicked in this work and been replaced by the portraiture of everyday life. The values of a community have been sewn into history. It doesn't look like they have had it easy these folks, but with the comforting aid of Dad's worn shirt, your favourite old duvet cover and a child's outgrown trackies, Ella captures that which makes humanity precious, simply through the visible wearing of a hand entering a pocket.

Much of her artwork up to this point has involved more traditional portraiture, in oil paint and line drawing but having once found herself with a collection of old clothes piling up too worn for a charity shop, Ella began to utilise the pallet of fabric around her as a painterly medium. There is a visible chaotic charm to her making, material cut into form, joyfully applied like blobs of paint which bloom quickly into the whole, of many layers and textures, personal and shared stories, told through both mimesis and physical wear. The ecological benefits of reusing materials are not only very physically demonstrated, they are the work itself, but the wider concerns for the future of our planetary environment and the capitalist society we are residing within are evidently not only on the mind of the artist, but on the minds of most of the individuals depicted.

In the work, *Care-Taker* (2019) a family's concerns for the plastic in the ocean and melting icecaps are stitched into the very fabric of the sofa itself like a banner given pride of place following a demonstration. Mother's worry of how to play like a child again highlights the overbearing weight of responsibility felt as a parent in this state of even now, parliamentary declared, 'climate change emergency.' Her young son beside her ironically draws car parks, 'a million of them'. Too young to know the car is a commodity that has eaten the world, it's bite marks only now becoming more visible. In, *Tell the Truth* (2019) a three-armed woman facing us from her living room, the text again appears part of the sofa's fabric, that which makes it, but this time flowing like a stream of seemingly endless consciousness. Here is a woman asking for her truth to be told:

'We are all grieving about the state of the planet. It's ok to be frightened. I default into depression. What to focus on? We need to learn to listen, set up groups, keep active, keep telling the truth. A major shift has to happen. We've got to hold hands, go through this together and find answers.'

One of her arms holds a cup of tea; one appears to be holding a document whilst the third she is using to hold onto herself while outside the window behind her, a fictional landscape where feet are seen to be trampling on the rooves of the houses over the road.

The addition of extra limbs continues in, *Bloody Minded* (2019) a five-armed man sits meditatively on his floor, surrounded by plants, his arms each operating individually, three to make music, one to smoke and one to hold a drink of sorts. His thoughts floating about his head as he multi-tasks to the extreme. The multiplicity of arms causes the figure to appear like a Hindu deity, battling

cosmic forces. The reality of what he is battling requires a great strength; the finest British tradition of self-organising bloody mindedness.

This gathering of lives, beliefs, hopes and experiences, these people, brought together here in this show are quite literally screaming a call to arms. It is the limbs of everyday folks themselves fighting here for the future of this planet and the homes we make upon it. The battles are shown in the wearing of the threads in equal proportion to the weariness of the words or the lines painted onto a face. Nobody is trying to be right here. At a time of what seems like great division within our society it appears it is still possible to carve a space for humanity, to make room for the thoughts of another.

There is no place for hatred on Ella's sofa, (as the crow says: PRACTICE), only love.

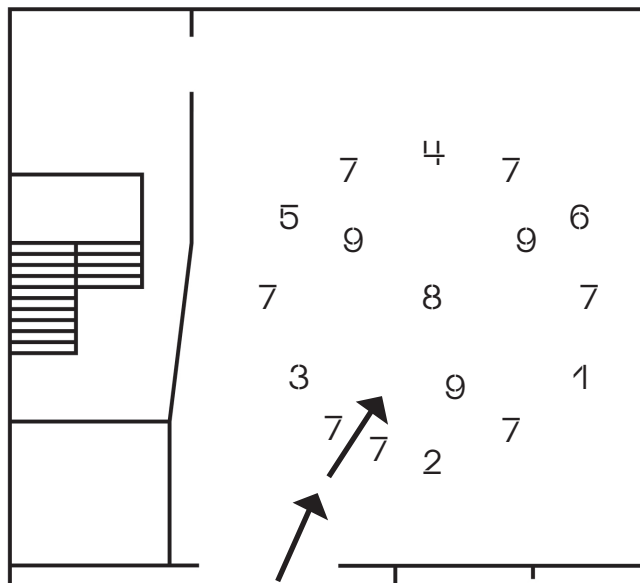
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Emily Hesse (b. 1980, Middlesbrough) is a Writer, Artist and Activist based in the North East of England.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Ella Dorton (b. 1991, Hull) is an artist and founding member of Ground collective. She studied at Det Jyske Kunstakademi (2014) and Newcastle University (2011–2015). Dorton has exhibited in various spaces around the north east of England and her work is concerned with portraiture as a form of sociological research, working mainly with found fabrics and household paint.

WORK DETAILS



1. *I am a honey badger*, 2019
found fabrics, aluminium rod, eyelets and fabric ties
195h x 254w cm

2. *Bloody-minded*, 2019
found fabrics, aluminium rod, eyelets and fabric ties
195h x 255w cm

3. *Tell the truth*, 2019
found fabrics, aluminium rod, eyelets and fabric ties
195h x 255w cm

4. *Simple it down sweetheart*, 2019
found fabrics, aluminium rod, eyelets and fabric ties
195h x 237w cm

5. *Grateful*, 2019
found fabrics, aluminium rod, eyelets and fabric ties
195h x 244w cm

6. *Caretaker*, 2019
found fabrics, aluminium rod, eyelets and fabric ties,
195h x 259w cm

7. *Fabrics dividers x 6*, 2019
found fabrics, aluminium rods,
195h x 90w cm

8. *Cushions*, various

9. *Lamps*, various

GLOSSARY

Artistic language can at times be difficult to interpret and hard to define. Here are some definitions of terms that are relevant to this exhibition. We hope these will spark debate and help you to better understand the work.

MIMESIS: Imitative representation of the real world in art and literature.

ABOUT US

Humber Street Gallery is an Absolutely Cultured project, bringing a vibrant, high-quality contemporary art space to Hull. The gallery's free programme of exhibitions is supported by a series of talks, performances, screenings and workshops.

Absolutely Cultured puts culture at the heart of Hull's ambition and aspirations, commissioning and producing a programme of events and projects which are ambitious, surprising and imaginative. In addition to the gallery and our broader cultural events, we continue to develop our world-class volunteer programme, to deliver initiatives to support the cultural sector and to offer access to creative learning opportunities.

OPENING TIMES

GALLERY & CAFÉ

Mon: Closed

Tue – Sun: 10:00 – 18:00

First Thu of the Month: Until 20:00

(During Exhibitions)

CONTACT US

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