

GRASS ROUTES: Presenter Biographies

Keynote speaker, **Bobby Benjamin** is a visual artist, curator and educator based in Middlesbrough. Bobby is the director of Pineapple Black Contemporary Art Space, and has organised events, happenings, and grass roots organisations across Teesside, through his curatorial projects including Dovetail Joints, Picasso Baby, House of Blah Blah, and currently Spaghetti Northern. Bobby's visual arts practice is rooted in hybrid practices ranging from sculpture, painting, installation, and performance, through which he explores the intersections between working-class culture, masculinity, and place. Bobby has recently shown in VANE Gallery, mima and The Auxiliary. His work is held in the mima Collections.

Jenny Batchelor, a co-organiser of **GRASS ROUTES** conference is currently studying MA Art, Culture & Curation at The Northern School of Art. She has a background in photography where she specialised in conceptual photography – often drawing inspiration from philosophical concepts and her strong interest in horror literature. Her first exhibition – *Divine Machinery* – used visceral and abstract imagery mixed with heavy metal lyrics and poetry fragments to convey niche aesthetic concepts. Jenny's theoretical inquiries explore photography as a mode of a disseminator of unreality; her conference presentation explores the cause and effect of platform censorship of NSFW material and the consequence this censorship has had on the ability of online subcultures to maintain community archives.

Co-organiser of the **GRASS ROUTES** conference, **Claire Bentley**, is an artist-educator with extensive experience leading arts provision across EYFS, Key Stage 1, and Key Stage 2. She works freelance across arts-education contexts, developing and facilitating community-focused collaborations at the intersection of education and industry. Claire currently works at The Bowes Museum, delivering creative outreach sessions that engage diverse audiences with the museum's collections. The spirit of community underpins Claire's curatorial practice; her current research explores the intangible cultural heritage of communities through art-based action research and performative practice, with particular emphasis placed on celebrating women's intergenerational knowledge and domestic traditions through the sharing and passing down of recipes.

MA Arts Practice student, **Isaac Elgey**, is a photographer whose practice-based methodology centres on traversing through, and across, spaces and landscapes. His work is particularly concerned with exploring queer phenomenology through place-based practices. Isaac has recently exhibited as part of *NE:Where* at The Star and Shadow Cinema, Newcastle, contributing to a multidisciplinary exhibition examining working-class identities in the north east.

MA Design Practice student **Ell Hockney** is an animator, community educator, and director of HAM, Hartlepool Animation Meet. Ell's practice is community-focused, centering on the importance of third spaces as a way to build connection, improve well-being, and combat social isolation.

Keynote speaker, **Richard Allaway** is an artist, researcher, and lecturer in fine art and photographic practices. His practice, encompassing experimental photography, installation, and site-specific performance, is deeply rooted in the rural landscapes of northern England and explores how soil and 'ground' hold speculative energies. Through his practice, Allaway gives form and voice to hidden networks that shape ecological relationships, bringing them to the fore. Richard has exhibited nationally and internationally and has presented his research at West University of Timișoara, Romania and Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland.

MA Arts Practice student, **Ellie Shelton**, explores spaces of wellbeing through participatory workshops that encourage people to reflect and connect, using nature and biophilic design as stimuli. Ellie comes to the MA from a background in Production Design and is now working to apply her skills and knowledge to spatial design in health and wellbeing contexts.