

Press release
For immediate release

Who Do We Think We Are? First artists announced as b-side Festival to return with theme exploring ancestry and migration

The first artists for the much loved contemporary arts festival announced as it returns to Portland from 5th - 8th September 2024

b-side Festival, Dorset's internationally-recognised celebration of arts and community, is returning this September for four days of incredible artworks, performances, and experiences created by artists of national and international acclaim.

The first three installations have been announced including outdoor artworks inspired by Persian myths of migration, tiny artworks with gigantic meaning in the form of SIM cards, and the transformation of £5 notes into portraits of festival-goers.

This year's theme Who Do We Think We Are? explores the many stories that make up the lives of the residents and visitors of Portland. The magical place is no stranger to the topics of migration and identity, as the island has been home to the floating asylum containment site, the Bibby Stockholm, for almost a year. The barge has been docked on the isle since August 2023 and has been at the centre of many conversations around the topic of migration, home, and belonging since its controversial arrival.

This year's festival is a poignant and inspirational celebration of how we might tell our stories of movement and migration, from around the corner to across the globe. The first three artworks explore this question through an eclectic mix of mediums and origins...

Face Value Portland - Harald Smykla

German-born Harald Smykla's work combines offbeat approaches to 'traditional' art-making with site-specific installation, performance and socially engaged practice. His work frequently involves the public realm, engaging people from all backgrounds and age groups as incidental audiences and active participants in shared art experiences.

For his work at b-side Festival, he will invite visitors to sit for a pecuniary portrait, in which he will 're-face' real banknotes, transforming the heads of figures such as Winston Churchill, Jane Austen, and the late Queen Elizabeth 2nd, to become the face of the sitter.

Mimicking their graphic styles and colour schemes, Smykla's work will see him engrave meticulous likenesses of visitors into the banknotes' plastic surfaces so that the currency is representative of the nation's increasingly diverse population.

Harald Smykla, artist, said: "Face Value is a personal project that brings the theme of identity to something we see and handle every day - money! Each portrait takes only 20 to 30 minutes to create, and each sitter can 'buy' their portrait at the note's face value, but it will now be much more valuable to them. b-side Festival will be the first time I have publicly

refaced the new British plastic banknotes, giving the concept a new meaning and representing a new group of diverse individuals on the Isle of Portland.”

SIM Project - Liz Hingley

A creation by artist and anthropologist Liz Hingley, the SIM Project gives tangible meaning to people’s virtual networks and explores how the images we create and exchange through our smartphones map our place in the world.

SIM cards have become crucial to opening up channels that connect people to their loved ones and provide a portable sense of belonging. In workshops, which combine analogue and digital photography with jewellery making, residents of Portland including residents of the Bibby Stockholm, will come together to create unique glass prints from personal screenshots using a bespoke camera, framed in metal. Each person will make one to keep and another to add to the festival installation.

Liz Hingley, artist, said: “It’s amazing that something as small as a SIM card can be such a lifeline for people, and can stir up strong connotations of connection and identity. Bringing the SIM Project to b-side adds another dimension to this meaning; Portland is a place where many identities exist, so enabling them to feel connected to this through art is a very special opportunity.”

One Night, One Dream, Life in the Lighthouse - Mohammad Barrangi

Mohammad Barrangi is an Iranian born artist and former Paralympian, whose work centres around his experiences of travel, migration and disability.

His work heavily derives from his personal heritage and memories, inspired by Iranian mythological stories and contemporary events of social development. The project being exhibited at b-side is a combination of elements of Persian calligraphy, old scientific illustration, storytelling, text and humour. Using a creative process that includes drawing and printing on handmade paper, Mohammad creates works that often become large-scale murals using traditional calligraphy pens and marking styles.

In tandem with the theme of identity, Mohammad’s work often combines elements from classical Western paintings with Eastern stories or imagery, reflecting his own journey from Iran to Europe.

Mohammad Barrangi, artist, said: “I try to invite the audience to visit Iran by looking at my artwork and getting familiar with my process of thinking. I create images that come from my soul and feelings in which I show a part of my homeland. I was born with the use of only one arm, and I work directly on the floor using my legs to steady my work when cutting or printing. Reflecting on my lived experience, my works also include characters with missing limbs. Identity is such an important part of what I create, and I love how this project will help to amplify the theme of Who Do We Think We Are this year at b-side Festival.”

b-side will take place across various sites on Portland, offering something for everyone, with many events being free of charge to ensure the celebration is accessible to all. b-side Fringe

will be taking place between Saturday August 31st - Sunday September 8th, with events spanning eight days of creativity and artistic celebration.

Rocca Holly-Nambi, Director of b-side, said: “This year’s festival will pay homage to the incredible cultural and creative diversity the UK has to offer. We are so lucky to have such an eclectic array of talent in attendance for b-side every year, and this year’s line-up is particularly diverse in both medium and messaging. Identity and community run strong through Portland’s veins, and we’re proud to bring this to light with our theme for 2024.”

For more information, please visit the b-side website <https://b-side.org.uk/> and Follow b-side festival on Instagram [@bsidefestival](https://www.instagram.com/bsidefestival), Twitter [@bsidefest](https://twitter.com/bsidefest) and Facebook [@bsidefest](https://www.facebook.com/bsidefest).

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