

## Albert Potrony: *equal play*

25 September 2021 – October 2022



This autumn, BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art and artist Albert Potrony will explore the concept of play in childhood development, and the role of men and childcare in the exhibition *equal play*, opening 25 September 2021 and running until October 2022.

*equal play* is a new commission by artist and educator Albert Potrony, featuring a number of sculptural elements and an immersive gallery design that brings the space to life through play. The project explores themes of non-gendered and non-prescriptive play, and takes inspiration from Dutch architect, Aldo van Eyck, to specifically consider the role of men and childcare in relation to feminism.

Between 1947 and 1978 Van Eyck designed hundreds of playgrounds, designing the equipment in a decidedly minimalist way to stimulate the imagination of its users, leading to the appropriation of space through its openness and limitless creative interpretations. Though largely forgotten today, these playgrounds represent architectural intervention at a pivotal time: the shift from top-down organisation of space by modern functionalist architects, towards a bottom-up architecture that literally aimed to give space for imagination. His playground designs focused on finding ways to democratise public space and give its users the agency to decide how to inhabit them.

*equal play* will actively explore these beliefs at BALTIC, designing a number of fixed structural/sculptural elements derived from a small selection of Aldo van Eyck's sculptural 'alphabet', to articulate, transform and activate the gallery space. The exhibition will also highlight the anti-sexist men's groups of the 1970s and 80s which sought to rethink masculinity and provide allyship to feminist principles – including through childcare and play.

Potrony describes part of the exhibition as a 'Reading, Resting and Working Space' – an open-ended gallery space which invites visitors to explore ideas of care and equality through the lens of childcare, and men's involvement in it. Visitors will encounter a selection of writings, poems and

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films by members of the Achilles Heel Collective, articles published in their magazine and various materials related to Crèches Against Sexism.

Potrony commented: *“For a while now, in my practice, I have been drawn to small utopias and movements from our recent past that, in one way or another, have managed to affect some degree of change in our daily lives. I am interested in exploring with others the relevance and possible uses of some of these ideas and strategies to our lives now.*

*Of special interest to me are the anti-sexist men’s groups that sprang up all over Britain during the 1970s and 80s. Formed in response to the Women’s Liberation Movement, they attempted to create a space to rethink masculinity and support feminist goals. These were men trying, collectively, to move beyond traditional masculine stereotypes and towards a more sensitive, emotional and anti-sexist way of being.*

*The Anti-sexist Men’s Movement attempted to support women at a time when most men were explicitly hostile to the growing Feminist Movement. They offer us a window to look back, in order to move forward.”*

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## Notes to Editors:

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## About BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art

BALTIC is a major international centre for contemporary art situated on the south bank of the River Tyne in Gateshead, England and has welcomed over eight million visitors since opening to the public in July 2002. BALTIC presents a distinctive and ambitious programme of exhibitions and events, and is a world leader in the presentation and commissioning of contemporary visual art.

Housed in a landmark ex-industrial building, BALTIC consists of 2,600 square metres of art space, making it the UK’s largest dedicated contemporary art institution. It has presented the work of over 460 artists of 60 nationalities in 220 exhibitions to date.

BALTIC welcomes visitors free of charge, all year round to experience art, talks, performance and activities. Over 8 million have walked through its doors so far. Beyond its bricks, BALTIC connects and exchange with communities, individuals and groups exploring creativity, social connections and wider understanding of the world.

## About Albert Potrony:

Albert Potrony is an artist with a participatory practice examining ideas of identity, community and language. Albert is interested in generating social spaces through his projects, and participation from diverse groups and individuals is a key element of his work.

He is currently developing **Achilles Heel**, researching anti-sexist men’s groups of the 70s and 80s, who were striving for a new type of masculinity that would embrace and support Feminism.

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Albert has worked on participatory projects for galleries and museums including Tate, Serpentine Galleries, Whitechapel Gallery, South London Gallery, Gasworks, Camden Arts Centre, V&A's Museum of Childhood and The Foundling Museum in London, Louisiana Museum in Denmark, Serralves Foundation in Porto, and Fundacion PROA in Buenos Aires.

## **The Achilles Heel Collective:**

From the many men's groups and collectives that were formed, The Achilles Heel Collective was one of the best organised. Between 1978 and 1999 they published *Achilles Heel*, a nationwide magazine that aimed to challenge traditional forms of masculinity and male power. They defined themselves as '*an anti-sexist, pro-feminist writing and publishing collective committed to supporting men in writing about men's politics and socialism*'.

## **Crèches Against Sexism:**

For most anti-sexist men, childcare and their relationship to children was central to the fight for equality. Caring for children was also prioritised as a contribution to domestic labour and as a site for emotional transformation.

Crèches Against Sexism was organised by men who wanted to do something practical about supporting women's liberation. Between 1970 and 1985 various Creches Against Sexism groups appeared in Liverpool, London, Cardiff, Newcastle, Leeds, Manchester, Oxford and Bristol, providing crèches staffed by men at women's events. At the 1977 National Women's Liberation Movement Conference, the crèche hosted around 200 children.

## **Work and Play:**

From November 2021 to March 2022 a group of young fathers from the North East Young Dads & Lads project will meet at BALTIC to work and play with former members of the Achilles Heel Collective, Crèches Against Sexism and Albert Potrony.

Together, they will work to produce a compendium, collection or toolkit of ideas exploring and comparing the experiences of some of the men that were part of the Anti-sexist Men's Movement and the contemporary experiences of childcare and fatherhood of this group of young fathers.