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***How We Live Now: Reimagining Spaces with Matrix
Feminist Design Co-operative***
Mon 17 May – Thu 23 Dec 2021, Level G & online

barbican



Left: Members of Matrix in the 1990s. Back row (left to right): Mo Hildenbrand, Sheelagh McManus, Raechel Ferguson. Front row (left to right): Janie Grote, Annie-Louise Phiri, Julia Dwyer. Photography by Jenny Burgen. Right: Matrix promotional poster. Source: Matrix Open feminist architecture archive.

Throughout 2021, the Barbican's Level G programme will present ***How We Live Now: Reimagining Spaces with Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative***, a multi-layered project comprising an installation, publication and events programme. Using the previously unseen archive of the **Matrix Feminist Design Co-operative** as a jumping-off point, the project will explore a series of important social questions: who are our buildings and shared spaces designed for? Who is excluded from our designed environment, and what effect does this have on the communities who live there?

Co-curated by Matrix founding member **Jos Boys**, *How We Live Now* introduces archival and contemporary approaches to design that aim to empower voices and groups often excluded in the design of buildings, including Black and Asian women's organisations, community and childcare groups and lesbian and gay housing co-operatives, to propose and explore more inclusive ways of designing, building and occupying spaces. With the Covid-19 pandemic only sharpening the existing inequalities within our cities and homes, such as a lack of access to safe, affordable housing, community facilities and green spaces, the question Matrix began to explore of how we can reimagine these spaces in more equitable ways, feels increasingly urgent.

Active in London from 1981-1994, Matrix was a women's co-operative with a non-hierarchical structure. The collective worked solely on state-funded, social building projects including women's and refugees centres, facilities for women and children, construction training workshops and lesbian and gay housing projects. They also provided publicly funded architectural advice; helped establish educational programmes to increase access for women into architecture and building; as well as giving talks and writing about how space and gender are related through a variety of events and publications.

A free installation on the Barbican's Level G will feature rare films, drawings, photos and architectural models from the Matrix archive, presenting the co-

operative's use of radical participatory and collaborative methods across a range of projects and programmes alongside more recent examples of feminist design practices. The installation has been designed by feminist collective **Edit** and built in collaboration with **Elouise Farley**, founder of the **Lady Wood** project which describes itself as aiming to "teach and encourage womxn in woodwork". The wooden structure incorporates a curtain designed by **Rachel Jones-Jones** and **Ciara Callaghan**, fabricated by **Cawley Studio**, which is dyed using a site-specific colour palette based on plants in the Barbican's gardens.

The accompanying exhibition catalogue, **Revealing Objects**, is an experimental publication that combines reinterpreted materials from the Matrix archive with contemporary responses to the key themes of the project. Contributions include a manual for understanding how the layout of our homes impacts how we live in them, conceived by **Edit**; a map highlighting buildings designed by women in London produced by collective **Part W**; a poster by the research project **Manual Labours** reflecting on ideas of care and support in the workplace; and writing by **Decosm (Decolonise Space Making)** considering how the legacies of colonialism affect the design of our cities. It also features an activity sheet about how senses other than the visual play a role in our experience of space, designed by **DisOrdinary Architecture** which co-develops inclusive design processes with disabled artists; as well as a visual essay exploring how the London borough of Tower Hamlets manifests certain ideas of power and control through built space, produced by **Afterparti**, a platform for underrepresented voices in architecture and design.

Jos Boys, Matrix founding member, said: *'At the core of the work by Matrix was a recognition that building and urban design often fail to consider the richness of our multiple ways of being in the world, or the various ways in which societies have devalued certain groups across different places and times. A persisting reliance on 'standards', 'universals' and 'norms' that often continue today, reinforce stereotypes about what certain people do and how they should behave – that a 'woman's place should be in the home', for instance, or that it is possible to 'be in the wrong place at the wrong time.'*

Jon Astbury, Assistant Curator (Architecture and Design) and Co-curator of How We Live Now, Barbican, said: *'These stereotypes have, and continue to result in built surroundings that do not take account of people's very different needs and desires. This might be as obstructive as a lack of wheelchair access, as obvious as a 'poor door', a separate entrance for a housing block's socially-rented tenants; as seemingly innocuous as the way a door is hinged to control a room's privacy; or the height of a kitchen worktop or chair. These decisions affect what types of buildings get funded and built, and who feels comfortable or able to use them.'*

How We Live Now will also include a public events programme to further explore the historical and social context of Matrix's practice, including its origins in radical architectural and community action movements, as well as building on conversations around the inclusivity of design and space raised by the work of Matrix, particularly in relation to people of colour, disabled, queer, as well as trans and non-binary people. This will involve a walking tour led by feminist spatial practice **taking place**; a discussion around women's work by **Part W**; screenings of archival films and discussions and workshops with contemporary collectives and research groups working on the intersections of the design of the built environment with class, race, gender and sexuality. Dates and further details about the public programme will be announced soon and are subject to Covid-19 government guidance at the time.

How We Live Now is made possible with Art Fund support.

The Barbican believes in creating space for people and ideas to connect through its international arts programme, community events and learning activity. To keep its programme accessible to everyone, and to keep investing in the artists it works with, the Barbican needs to raise more than 60% of its income through ticket sales, commercial activities and fundraising every year. Donations can be made here: barbican.org.uk/donate

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Notes to Editors

Press Information

For any further information, images or to arrange interviews, please contact:

Benno Rembeck, Communications Manager

T: 020 7638 4141 ext. 5055

E: benno.rembeck@barbican.org.uk

Jemima Yong, Communications Assistant

T: 020 7638 4141 ext. 8280

E: jemima.yong@barbican.org.uk

About the Level G Programme

The Barbican's Level G programme is a platform for experimental projects that ask social and cultural questions, spark conversations and bring people together. Primarily taking place across the Barbican's foyer spaces and online, the programme comprises installations, research projects, residencies, architectural commissions and a range of events and talks. Central to the Barbican's mission to nurture new forms of cultural activity, the Level G programme creates space for perspectives from the arts and beyond. Our projects are rooted in collaborative practice and often borne from dialogues between unlikely communities of people from a range of sectors and disciplines gathering around a question of shared interest.

About the Barbican

A world-class arts and learning organisation, the [Barbican](#) pushes the boundaries of all major art forms including dance, film, music, theatre and visual arts. Its creative learning programme further underpins everything it does. Over a million people attend events annually, hundreds of artists and performers are featured, and more than 300 [staff](#) work onsite. The architecturally renowned centre opened in 1982 and comprises the Barbican Hall, the Barbican Theatre, The Pit, Cinemas 1, 2 and 3, Barbican Art Gallery, a second gallery The Curve, public spaces, a library, the Lakeside Terrace, [a glasshouse conservatory](#), conference facilities and three restaurants. The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre.

The Barbican is home to Resident Orchestra, [London Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Orchestra, [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Ensembles the [Academy of Ancient Music](#) and [Britten Sinfonia](#), Associate Producer [Serious](#), and Artistic Partner [Create](#). Our Artistic Associates include [Boy Blue](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), Deborah Warner, [Drum Works](#) and [Michael Clark Company](#). The [Los Angeles Philharmonic](#) are the Barbican's International Orchestral Partner, the

[Australian Chamber Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble at Milton Court, and [Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble.

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About Art Fund

Art Fund is the national fundraising charity for art. It provides millions of pounds every year to help museums to acquire and share works of art across the UK, further the professional development of their curators, and inspire more people to visit and enjoy their public programmes. In response to Covid-19 Art Fund has made £2 million in adapted funding available to support museums through reopening and beyond, including Respond and Reimagine grants to help meet immediate need and reimagine future ways of working. Art Fund is independently funded, supported by the 130,000 members who buy the National Art Pass, who enjoy free entry to over 240 museums, galleries and historic places, 50% off major exhibitions, and receive Art Quarterly magazine. Art Fund also supports museums through its annual prize, Art Fund Museum of the Year. In a unique edition of the prize for 2020, Art Fund responded to the unprecedented challenges that all museums are facing by selecting five winners and increasing the prize money to £200,000. The winners are Aberdeen Art Gallery; Gairloch Museum; Science Museum; South London Gallery; and Towner Eastbourne www.artfund.org