

RUTH BEALE LIKE GODS

SWISS COTTAGE GALLERY

First Floor, Swiss Cottage Library, 88 Avenue Road, London NW3 3HA

Preview Thursday 9 February 6-8pm

Exhibition open 9 Feb – 30 Mar 2023, Mon-Thurs 10am-8pm, Fri-Sat 10am-5pm

Ruth Beale presents a new body of work that includes installation, paintings and video created in collaboration with their father, David Beale. *LIKE GODS* draws on David's lifelong passion for science fiction, and the act of rescuing and keeping books both personally and publicly. The iconic Swiss Cottage Library is also a character in the exhibition, which treads a line between celebrating and questioning the science fiction literary canon, whilst constantly returning to the materiality of books.

For the duration of the exhibition, the entire science fiction section of Swiss Cottage Library is relocated to eight letter-shaped bookcases. *LIKE GODS* is a tribute to the creators of other worlds and futures; an ambiguation of *Men Like Gods*, an early scientific fantasy novel by HG Wells set in a parallel utopian universe. A set of small paintings is inspired by spaceship illustration and the iconic Swiss Cottage Library building, designed by Basil Spence in 1959. They are dedicated to three queer women sci-fi writers who published under male pseudonyms, highlighting the misogyny and prejudice in twentieth century science fiction publishing.

In a new video work, *The Stacks*, David explores the basement bookstacks of Swiss Cottage Library, selecting science fiction titles for the exhibition, and explaining how he accumulated nearly 2000 of his own books over sixty years. Playing simultaneously is *22BBY, 2022 AD, 2049 AD*, in which manipulated film footage from the 1970s to present depicts libraries in imagined futures and galaxies. Two vitrines hold a carefully curated selection of vintage paperbacks from David's collection, saved in its entirety by Ruth from being discarded in 2019. Themes of time and travel, colonisation and domination, technology and the human race speak to the preoccupations of popular science fiction in the twentieth century.

Together, the works in *LIKE GODS* are a constellation of books, relationships, collecting and libraries, as tools for speculative thinking and world-building, asking who controls the narrative of the future.

Ruth Beale is an artist based in London whose socially-engaged and collaborative practice explores how culture, governance and social discourse create society, and how society creates culture. They use dialogue, drawing, publishing, performance, film and installations - and themes of sci-fi, pedagogy, education and public space - to examine institutions and grassroots activity, from prisons to common land, to schools and libraries. Current and recent projects include Editorial Tables: Reciprocal Hospitalities, on at The Showroom, London until 18 March 2023, Library as Memorial, as part of Brent Borough of Culture, 2021-22, The Farmhouse Library at Wysing Arts Centre, and The Hundred Club with TACO! in Thamesmead, London. Ruth also works collaboratively with Amy Feneck as The Alternative School of Economics and on Rabbits Road Institute Library, and with Simon Elvins on All the Libraries in London. Contact: studio@ruthbeale.net / www.ruthbeale.net

Swiss Cottage Gallery is based in the Grade II Listed modernist Swiss Cottage Library, designed by Basil Spence in 1959 and nearing completion of a £4.6m eco-retrofit. The gallery is run by Camden Council. Contact: Karl.England@camden.gov.uk / Annum.Salman@camden.gov.uk

Dates & events

Thursday 9 February, 6-8pm – opening event / preview

Weds 15 March, 7-8pm – Project Zed, online event

Saturday 25 March, 2-4pm – community day

