

CLEAN BREAK 40

FORTY YEARS OF CHANGING LIVES AND MINDS

PRESS RELEASE

'I am a theatre':

40 years of Clean Break Theatre Company

at Swiss Cottage Gallery from 24 June - 31 July 2021

Clean Break celebrates four decades of creating ground-breaking theatre on women's experience of the criminal justice system with its retrospective exhibition *'I am a theatre': 40 years of Clean Break Theatre Company*.

The live exhibition takes place at **Swiss Cottage Gallery** from **24 June - 31 July 2021**, with Covid-secure measures in line with the latest government guidelines. It features:

- **previously unseen archival material**, tracing the origins of the company from two women meeting in HMP Durham's High Security Wing in 1977, to creating plays in prison and setting up Clean Break after release in 1979 as a 'women prisoners theatre';
- **original scripts, photography and artwork** from 40 years of ground-breaking plays;
- **hand-written letters and correspondence** from the founders;
- **original tv and documentary film** featuring and produced by Clean Break from the 1980s to today;
- footage from the **40th anniversary video interviews** with 42 women from across its 40-year history;
- an **installation by artist Miriam Nabarro** inspired by the 2019 production *Sweatbox* – set inside a decommissioned prison van – reimagined for the gallery space;
- a digital events programme, including:
 - ☞ **press and private view on 25 June**
 - ☞ **webinar** with award-winning playwright and Clean Break trustee, **Winsome Pinnock**, on creating her 1996 play *Mules*;
 - ☞ **online screening** of co-founder Jacqueline Holborough's play *Killers*, recorded for Channel 4 in 1984;
 - ☞ **workshop** on creating with archives led by prominent Clean Break artist, **Paula Varjack**;
 - ☞ **finale event on 28 July**, featuring a re-imagining of our 1987 performance, *Voices from Prison*.

Full event listings below.

Jacqueline Holborough and Jennifer Hicks, Co-Founders of Clean Break: "We were dreaming big in 1979, but in our wildest dreams and furthest travels we could not have envisaged the brilliant organisation that Clean Break has become thanks to the talent, love and sheer determination of so many magnificent women."

Alison Frater, Chair of Clean Break: "Since the beginning, Clean Break's advocacy through theatre and Member support has highlighted the policy perversity of imprisoning women - influencing a consensus by successive governments to reduce the rate of incarceration. The announcement of 500 new prison places for women, taking money from much needed community services and the failure to introduce measures to reduce violence against women and girls (yet removing the right to protest) in the draconian Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill, demonstrates that its work is still very much needed."

The exhibition has been curated by **Claire Stone**, Heritage Project Manager at Clean Break, and is co-designed by **Miriam Nabarro** and **Liz Whitbread**. Miriam Nabarro is a visual artist and scenographer with 25 years' experience in socially engaged and participatory settings, both locally and internationally. Liz Whitbread is a Member of Clean Break who joined in 2012 and graduated in 2019 from **Wimbledon UAL** in **Theatre Design**. Their previous collaboration on a mobile exhibition inspired by the archive toured the UK alongside 2019's **Sweatbox**, set inside a prison van, and has been re-imagined as an installation for this exhibition.

This exhibition is made possible by support from the **National Lottery Heritage Fund** and **Arts and Humanities Research Council**. This funding was received to celebrate Clean Break's 40th anniversary year, to document our heritage by: establishing a publicly accessible archive of our work at the **Bishopsgate Institute**; conducting oral history interviews; creating a digital timeline and exhibitions to share its story.

Alongside the exhibition, Clean Break launches a **digital timeline** on its website to provide unlimited access to archival material and the history of Clean Break to online audiences. Further opportunities to engage with the exhibition through its digital events programme include an **online screening** of the 1984 Channel 4 production of founder Jacqueline Holborough's play, **Killers**; events led by multimedia performance artist **Paula Varjack** and award-winning playwright and Clean Break trustee, **Winsome Pinnock**; and a final performance inspired by Clean Break's 1987 production, **Voices from Prison**, reimagined with Clean Break partners and women in prison today.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Clean Break changes lives and changes minds through theatre – on stage, in prison and in the community. It produces ground-breaking plays with women’s voices at the heart of its work. Founded in 1979 by two women prisoners who believed that theatre could bring the hidden stories of imprisoned women to a wider audience, it remains true to these roots; inspiring playwrights and captivating audiences with the company’s award-winning plays on the complex theme of women and crime. Its commissioned playwrights have included Alice Birch, Vivienne Franzmann, Tanika Gupta, Theresa Ikoko, Lucy Kirkwood, Chloë Moss and Winsome Pinnock.

After a year of online engagement, Clean Break has recently announced a season of live and digital events celebrating and reconnecting its community of Members, artists and audiences. The company will be presenting opportunities to experience live theatre in person, plays shared through audio and film, as well as the archive exhibition and digital timeline sharing the company’s legacy. The season includes theatre from Ayesha Antoine, Deborah Bruce, Katherine Chandler, Sonya Hale, Morgan Lloyd Malcolm, Chloë Moss, and Clean Break Members.

Swiss Cottage Library is the central library of the public library service in the London Borough of Camden and is housed in an architectural landmark building designed by Sir Basil Spence on Avenue Road, opposite Swiss Cottage Station. The library is home to a dedicated Gallery space run by Camden’s Arts Development Team, who focus on strategically growing and protecting arts and culture in the borough by developing and supporting cultural and community projects and organisations, including the curation and management of Swiss Cottage Gallery. The gallery programme includes solo exhibitions by artists and arts organisations based and/or working in the borough area and beyond, reflecting the contemporary cultural community in Camden; exhibitions that draw attention to the artistic history of Camden and artists that have lived or worked in the borough; regular exhibitions to mark local or national initiatives such as the WWI centenary and Camden Council’s annual arts programmes; and the Annual Open Exhibition, which is open to all public submissions including professional and non-professional artists alike.

Swiss Cottage Gallery (inside Swiss Cottage Library), 88 Avenue Road, London, NW3 3HA
<https://www.camden.gov.uk/swiss-cottage-gallery>

LISTINGS

I AM A THEATRE – 40 YEARS OF CLEAN BREAK

at Swiss Cottage Gallery, 24 June – 31 July (booking opens 12 May)

Monday to Thursday: 11am-6pm

Friday and Saturday: 11am-3pm

Booking: www.cleanbreak.org.uk/productions/iamatheatre

Tickets: Free

Creating Mules: In conversation with playwright Winsome Pinnock and Hibiscus founder, Olga Heaven MBE

Online on Thursday 1 July, 5-6.30pm

Booking: <https://www.cleanbreak.org.uk/events/creating-mules/>

Tickets: Free

Killers: Live Stream and Post-Show Discussion with Clean Break founder & playwright, Jacqueline Holborough

Online on Wednesday 7 July, 6-8pm

Booking: <https://www.cleanbreak.org.uk/events/killers-screening-and-discussion/>

Tickets: Free

Creating from Clean Break's Archives with Paula Varjack

Online on Monday 19 July, 5:30-7pm

Booking: <https://www.cleanbreak.org.uk/events/creating-clean-breaks-archives-paula-varjack/>

Tickets: £10

Voices From Prison celebratory event with performances and panel discussion

Online on Wednesday 28 July, 6pm

Booking: www.cleanbreak.org.uk/events/voices-prison

Tickets: Free

Covid-Secure Measures: The exhibition has been designed in line with the latest government guidelines and Camden Libraries Covid risk assessment to protect the safety of staff and audiences. This includes reducing audience capacity to enable social distancing, by booking audiences in for 1-hour slots via Eventbrite to ensure a maximum of 5 people in the gallery at any one time. Audiences will be asked to wear masks at all times, and spare masks will be provided for audience use. Our Clean Break Exhibition Guides will monitor audience numbers in the gallery, and support with the disinfecting of surfaces between audience visits. Audiences will also be provided with personal PPE for interacting with the exhibits, including disposable headphone covers for listening to audio and disposable gloves for audience use. Our exhibition events have moved online to enable audiences to participate from home, and further content on Clean Break's history will be available through the digital timeline on our website.

Miriam Nabarro is a visual artist and scenographer with 25 years' experience working in socially engaged and participatory settings, both locally and internationally. She was lead artist for *Processions with Clean Break* (2018/ 1418 Now!) and is Creative Associate for 20 Stories High in Liverpool, Artist in Residence at SOAS, and a core team member with Art Refuge UK, regularly working in Northern France with people in transit. In 2017-8 she created a pop-up archive installation for the Award winning *The Welcoming Party* (Theatrerites/ MIF/ RURH) and divides her time between theatre making, public and participatory art practice. www.miriamnabarro.co.uk

Liz Whitbread is designer and a Member of Clean Break since 2012. Gaining experience and confidence through support from Clean Break, she found a passion for working behind the scenes, and graduated from Wimbledon UAL Theatre Design in 2019. She has experience working as a Set and Costume Designer on Clean Break's education programme for Sabrina Mafouz 'A Casting Call For Arms', 2016 and a celebration of 20 Years of Clean Break's Education Programme with Jelena Budimir, 2018. She assisted artist Miriam Nabarro to create a mobile exhibition celebrating Clean Break's 40th Anniversary that toured alongside 2019 production *Sweatbox*, set inside a prison van. She is proud to be taking on the role of co-designer for '*I am a theatre: 40 Years of Clean Break Theatre Company*' exhibition and aims to exhibit the spirit and success of how voices can and must be heard through women in the criminal justice system.

Bishopsgate Institute is a cultural institute in the City of London located near Liverpool Street station and Spitalfields market. Established in 1894 "for the benefit of the public", its motto is "I never stop learning" and its purpose has not changed. It continues to be a home for ideas and debate, learning and enquiry. It is a haven in the city, where culture, heritage and learning meet, and its mission is to inspire independent thought, connect past and present. Set in a beautiful historic building, Bishopsgate Institute is open to all, and provides welcoming spaces for people to learn and flourish through an exciting programme of cultural events, study and adult learning. The Bishopsgate Library contains 150,000 books, and holds nationally important archives on London history, socialism, activism, feminism, LGBTQ+ history, freethought, and humanism.

Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, Spitalfields, London EC2M 4QH
<https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/archives>

The National Lottery Heritage Fund

Using money raised by the National Lottery, we **Inspire, lead and resource** the UK's heritage to create **positive and lasting change** for people and communities, now and in the future.

<https://www.heritagefund.org.uk>

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Arts and Humanities Research Council established in April 2005, is a British research council supporting research and postgraduate study in the arts and humanities.

<https://ahrc.ukri.org/>

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