

FRESTONIAN GALLERY

WELCOME TO FRESTONIA

PRIVATE VIEW

WEDNESDAY 11 OCTOBER, 6-9PM

Exhibition dates

12 October – 4 November 2017

For its forthcoming exhibition Frestonian Gallery presents 'Welcome To Frestonia' – an exhibition both examining and celebrating the Free Independent Republic of Frestonia – founded 40 years ago, in October 1977 by a group of disparate inhabitants of the abandoned, run-down Victorian terraces and expanses around Freston road and Olaf street, that formed the Republic's territory in the western outreaches of Kensington & Notting Hill.

The space now inhabited by Frestonian Gallery is within the 1902 red-brick 'People's Hall', which served as something of a de-facto capital building and cultural centre for the Republic and its citizens.



The Republic was broadly speaking an alliance formed in opposition – in this instance against the eviction notices and threats of the Greater London Council – from which flowered an extraordinary breadth of communal output – both practical and cultural. Artists, musicians, poets, engineers and builders mixed their skills and outlooks in an environment of material scarcity but creative abundance. Various social idylls and lifestyles clashed and blurred within the tiny Republic, from the excesses and anarchy of the punk movement (The 'Apocalypse Hotel' being a favourite venue) to the hippy-esque feel of the communal gardens and farm, through to the Dada / Surrealist nature of the Frestonian National Theatre and its troupe The Provisional Theatre Company.

Many strong characters contributed to the founding and the guiding principles of this fledgling Republic, which had begun to produce its own stamps, currency and had already petitioned to the United Nations for full membership. Chief among these were the Frestonian Ministers of State – including the actor David Rappaport (Foreign Affairs), Enrico Weber (Chancellor of the Exchequer), Bryan Assiter (Industry) and Josefine Speyer (Transport). Other figures key to the founding and development of the Republic included the social activist Nicholas Albery and the playwright Heathcote Williams. Each of these ministers and citizens adopted the suffix 'Bramley' to their names (after Bramley Road, one of the streets of Frestonia), and united under the banner of the Republic's motto – *Nos Sumus Una Familia* ('we are all one family'). One of the most comprehensive documents of the Republic, celebrating its triumphs and laying bear its social issues, is the photographic series 'Welcome to Frestonia' by Tony Sleep, this will be shown alongside archive material that is still maintained under the custodianship of the wider Frestonian community.

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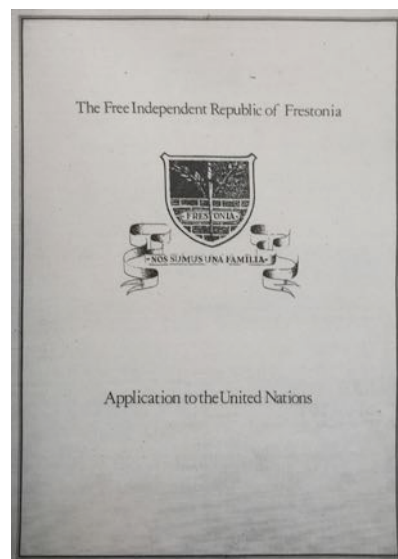
**EXCERPT FROM THE INTRODUCTORY TEXT TO TONY SLEEP'S
'WELCOME TO FRESTONIA' BY THE WRITER AND CURATOR
HELEN LITTLE:**

Shot between 1974-82 but not exhumed from the artist's archive until the late 1990s, *Welcome to Frestonia* is an electrifying record of the daily and often disastrous rituals of this community from within its tangle of boarded-up Victorian houses that in 1977 would famously declare independence from the British state. Intimate and forensic, austere and playful, documentary and touchingly elegiac, it is a remarkable picture of this part of the city; crumbling, poetic, archaic, in social transition and as close-knit communities were being fractured by urban development.

Shot in a gritty, realist style and accompanied by quick witted commentaries, *Welcome to Frestonia* blends 1970s conceptualism's use of image and text with the anthropological tradition of Mass Observation, Henri Cartier Bresson and Bill Brandt. Sleep's strong visual sensibility for the surreal and for creating images with a heightened sense of atmosphere is also visible throughout, notably in *Boy with trompe l'oeil*, *Ken's Pin Ups* and *Abandoned garment factory, Olaf Street*, a Dada-esque study of a dismembered doll's arm left in a window.

Opening debates around authenticity, truth, evidence and reality within his medium, Sleep's position as both observer and peer not only allowed him to use his camera as a tool to challenge prevailing social hierarchies and alterities but in a more unmediated way, convey humankind's fundamental need for a home.

Interwoven with periods of social and political upheaval, squatting has a long and persistent history in Britain. Sleep's images make a connection with this past and ask us to examine our environment and place within it. 'Whether we like it or not,' he concludes, 'we are all becoming Frestonians now'.



For further information on the exhibition please visit

www.frestoniangallery.com

or email
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