

Uncertain States

2009 – 2019

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When I look back at the news from 2009 nothing stands out as particularly foreboding. There was heavy snow, flooding and then more heavy snow. Labour looked set to lose the next election, there was an MP's expenses scandal and swine flu, Barak Obama became US president, Israel invaded Gaza - the year wasn't without its tragedy. While the UK felt stable, the rumblings of change and the accelerating pace of life were clearly having some destabilising effects. As we named 'Uncertain States' it was obvious to us that the name reflected the instability of our time, and we wanted to create an arts platform which would reflect some of these key social and political concerns. Now I wonder if it was a premonition of things to come or maybe 'uncertain states' is simply a human condition at all times and as such is always the business of art. Whatever possessed us to name the broadsheet 'Uncertain States' couldn't seem more relevant ten years later when the UK really feels a different place. We discover that battles that we thought had been fought and won were just lying dormant. Here we are again on the streets with racism, anti-semitism, islamophobia, homophobia, sexism. We couldn't have imagined this, or Syria, the migration crisis, Brexit, Trump and we were still ignoring the climate emergency. No more illusions. It's no wonder that our mental health has never been so bad. The state of the world is anxiety provoking and you'd have to be mad not to feel it.

The role of the artist has always been to defend 'Uncertain States' and to critique certainty: the certainty of authority, the certainty of knowledge and to challenge received information. Art embraces the unknown, doubt and mystery. The artist inhabits a space both from within and simultaneously outside their world. This offers a unique perspective with the self awareness gained from felt experience. From this position the artist can explore their relationship to their world, through a process of reflection and creation - the marrying of thinking and doing. Not knowing and mistakes are crucial for the development of the creative process but to let go of certainty requires courage, it is counter culture, even more so in our pressurised society. It is easy to feel lost. The name paradoxically refers to a state that is free of old constraints, something in movement and change. Yet there is a disturbing, unsettling, quality to the uncertain state and the fear it can evoke gives rise to more defensive response systems. Art can moderate between these tensions by helping us to understand how the world is and could be. It is a platform to safely explore the pressing issues of our time.