



## ARNOLFINI

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## Introduction to the exhibition

### Brian Griffiths THE MAN WHO LOVED ISLANDS

11 April - 27 May 2007

#### Gallery 1

Brian Griffiths's work brings together ideas of craft, collecting and storytelling. He gathers the materials to be used in the creation of his work - from old furniture to kitschy knick-knacks, antiquated ornaments and general bric-a-brac. Most of these are from car boot sales, charity shops, furniture auctions and junk shops.

As well as an interest in found materials and objects, Griffiths is fascinated with stories and narratives drawn from the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth centuries. The work in this exhibition takes its inspiration from Daniel Defoe's classic novel *Robinson Crusoe*, but the exhibition title is taken from a short story by D. H. Lawrence.

Written in 1719, *Robinson Crusoe* is the fictional autobiography of a castaway who spends 28 years on a

remote island. For Griffiths, the story is an important literary representation of Eighteenth Century England's obsession with ideas of curiosity. Whether that be the collector's impulse to seek out curious artifacts or the curious explorer embarking on voyages of discovery.

In Lawrence's story, written in 1926, the main character has a very different relationship to islands than that of shipwrecked Robinson Crusoe. It tells the story of a man who buys an island in order to escape the chaos of daily life in the city.

Griffiths is not interested in re-telling the Robinson Crusoe story or in illustrating it. Instead, the exhibition uses the novel as a starting point, imagining what other kinds of curious activities Robinson Crusoe may have been involved with had he not left his island.

Although the exhibition is made up of a number of individual works, they are intended to be viewed together here as one installation. They could be viewed as a group of islands, each related to its near neighbour, but with its own characteristics and associated stories. They could also be thought of as representing people, perhaps performers, or as Griffiths has suggested, musicians in an imaginary band, led by Robinson Crusoe.

At the entrance of the space is **Some Search After Happiness**. It initially appears to be a barricade constructed from pieces of old furniture. There is a feeling of being 'behind the scenes', as though coming into the gallery the wrong way. Upon this assemblage of cupboards, wardrobes and other elements sit three pianos arranged at different heights. Like the nearby work, **Performing Ambition (For Robinson Crusoe)**, which includes another musical instrument, the pianos make no sound, are out of reach and cannot be played.

In front of this work is a smaller sculpture, **Monday to Thursday (After Daniel Defoe)**. Two heads representing African American singers dressed in white suits sit on top of a drawer. The heads belong to half of an old ornament found by Griffiths. The other two heads are on the other side of the gallery. If the sculptures here are thought of as a band, these could perhaps be backing singers.

Robinson Crusoe was written during the time of the Transatlantic Slave Trade and

so negative Western attitudes towards different races and ideas of colonialism of the time are reflected in the book, particularly in relation to Man Friday, a Native American 'savage', rescued and 'civilised' by Crusoe. The title of this work is a reference to his name.

In front of this stands a wardrobe with a section of its doors cut away. **Love in Excess (After Elizabeth Haywood)** has a carved head sitting on top and a collection of furs hanging inside, suggestive of a person. This work references Elizabeth Haywood, a romantic novelist working in the Seventeenth Century producing populist, racey fiction. In this sculpture, the wardrobe doors have been cut out to resemble wings and therefore the figure might be thought of as an angel. If this group of sculptures can be considered a band of musicians, this work can be thought of as lead singer.

Furniture with a life of its own, is a familiar storytelling device. One of the most famous examples being C S Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe*, where the wardrobe provides a sometime gateway into another time and place. Inside Griffiths's wardrobe is a pile of sawdust, perhaps left over from the making of the work, and here, resembling a thin, sandy beach.

In the corner, **To the Wonder and Satisfaction of All People (Pirate)** uses a series of visual puns. The pirate leans on a crutch and the stool below is propped up by a piece of folded card. The pirate stands on top of a drum,

perhaps he is the drummer of Crusoe's band? The other part of this work, **(leg)**, is to be found at the other end of the gallery, maybe it is the pirate's lost leg?

Like all of the works in the exhibition, this playful sculpture has an improvised appearance with objects placed in a spontaneous manner; much like an enthusiastic Nineteenth Century amateur collector might have amused himself amongst his collection.

***A map showing locations and titles of the works in on the reverse of this guide.***

*This guide is intended as an introduction to the exhibition. Please feel free to ask a Steward any questions you have.*

*There is more information in the Reading Room on the Second Floor which is open every day 12.00 - 6.00pm*

*A free Family Pack is available from Arnolfini reception.*

*A discussion between Brian Griffiths and Arnolfini curator Martin Clark can be downloaded from Arnolfini's website.*