



Artists
in Focus



The New Art Gallery Walsall

Celebrating
Museums & Wellbeing

17 MARCH - 2 DECEMBER 2018



The New Art Gallery Walsall, Gallery Square, Walsall WS2 8LG
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Walsall Council



Supporting public funding
ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND



ACCREDITED
MUSEUM



Age-friendly
Standards



Robert Priseman

(b.1965, Derbyshire)

Never Knowing Why drawings, 2015

Pencil and crayon on paper

Cleveland Elementary School
Frontier Middle School
Columbine High School
Sandy Hook Elementary School
Westside Middle School
Red Lake High School
Louisiana Technical College
Rocori High School
Virginia Tech



*The silicon chip inside her head
 Gets switched to overload
 And nobody's gonna go to school today
 She's going to make them stay at home
 And daddy doesn't understand it
 He always said she was as good as gold
 And he can see no reason
 'Cause there are no reasons
 What reason do you need to be sure...*

Bob Geldof,
I Don't Like Mondays, 1979

On Valentine's Day the 18th school shooting of 2018 in the United States occurred at the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida.

Currently a new movement spearheaded by young people who attend the school and who lost classmates in the attack is high in the global consciousness. One of the students wrote: *I am so angry that I'm not scared or nervous anymore.* **#NeverAgain**

It is within this context that we show works from the *Never Knowing Why* series by British artist Robert Priseman.

On 29 January 1979 Cleveland Elementary School in San Diego, California, was subjected to a barrage of gunfire coming from the house opposite. The 16 year old occupant on being asked why she carried out the attack replied 'I Don't Like Mondays'.



On 2 February 1996 at Frontier Middle School in Washington, a 14 year old killed his teacher and two students and held the rest of his classmates hostage before being stopped by his PE teacher. (One month later a gunman entered the gymnasium at Dunblane Primary School, leaving the UK reeling in the same shock and distress.)

On 24 March 1998 an 11 year old and a 13 year old conducted an armed ambush on their teachers and students at Westside Middle School near Jonesboro, which resulted in five deaths.

In 1999, on 20 April (the date chosen as it was Adolf Hitler's birthday) two high school seniors in Colorado carried out a complex, pre-meditated plan which killed 12 students and a teacher and injured a further 21 people, at Columbine High School. This led to a high-profile public debate around gun control in the States, and Michael Moore produced the award winning documentary *Bowling for Columbine*.

In 2003 at Rocori High School, Cold Spring, Minnesota a student, described as being quiet and withdrawn with severe acne, shot and killed 2 students. In 2005 a 16 year old boy killed his grandfather, a police officer, then took his weapons, vest and police car and drove to his old school, Red Lake High, and shot and killed 7 people.

In 2007, 32 people were killed and 17 wounded in 2 attacks, 2 hours apart at Virginia Tech... In 2008 a nursing student opened fire at Louisiana Technical College, fatally killing 2 fellow students... In 2012, 20 children aged 6 and 7 years old plus 6 adults were killed at Sandy Hook Elementary School...And so it goes on...

The recurrent discussion points relating to these despicable tragedies focus on gun control laws and mental health care. To use the much quoted and interpreted US gun lobby slogan - 'Guns don't kill people, people do.' Easy access to fire arms is obviously crucial, however many commentators mention poor mental health services in the US and the state of the mental health of the perpetrators of these crimes, often the result of bullying or some other form of disenfranchisement or social isolation.

Using Ruben's *Massacre of the Innocents* as his starting point, Priseman looked at these massacres of our time, of innocents, by innocents. In this work he reflects on what caused these at one time 'nice kids' to commit such atrocities.

**Artist's Talk – Saturday 19 May, 3pm
(see Events Programme)**