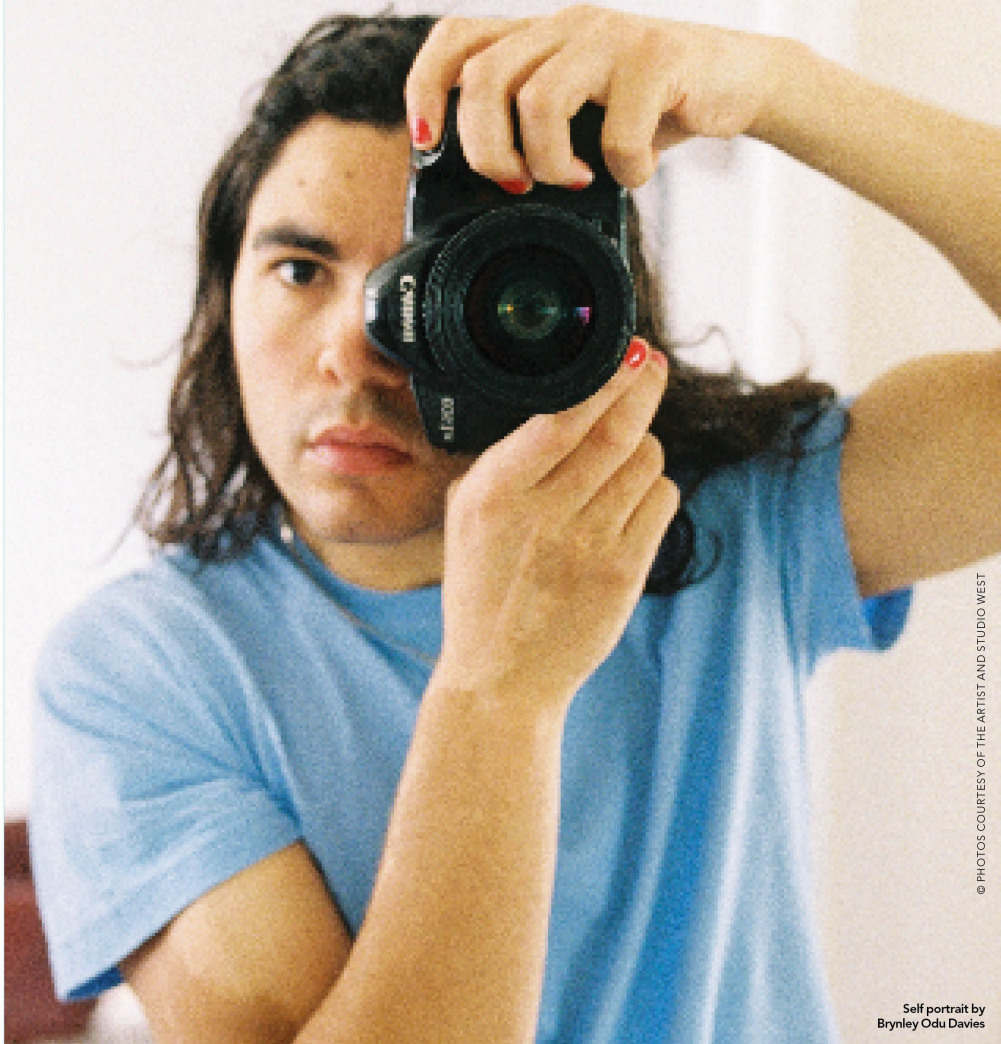


PICTURE MESSAGE

Why Brynley Odu Davies was inspired to photograph 200 artists for a major exhibition



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Self portrait by Brynley Odu Davies

After the first lockdown in 2020, photographer Brynley Odu Davies, who was brought up in Bath, studied photography at Bath College and now lives in London, was inspired to start up a major project. The aim was to highlight the resilience of artists, and now the finished collection, which has just had its first exhibition in London's Studio West, is made up of pictures of more than 200 working artists from across the UK, including Bath. The entire project, which took three years, now exists as an unparalleled archive, presenting a panoptic picture of the creatives who are shaping the UK's contemporary art world, and will determine its future. Here we talk to Brynley about how Bath shaped his career, the making of this project, and his plans for the future.

Before we get onto your incredible and impactful exhibition, let's start at the beginning. You live in London now, but are from Bath...

Yes, and I'm very proud to be from Bath. People are often excited to hear that I'm from Bath as well, as they may have visited and have fond memories of the beautiful city. As I teenager, Bath felt like a safe place where I could freely be a teenager, going out in the city by myself and meeting my friends. To me, Bath is a special place and I'm always excited to go back home.

Where did you live, and go to school?

My family lives in Bathwick, and me and my siblings went to school at Bathwick St Mary's and Ralph Allen school.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Ken Nwadiogbu, Tottenham; Arthur Timothy, Bath; Anna Choutova and Andrea Gomis, Islington



"I learned so much while at Bath College"

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Was the experience a positive one?

Massively positive. I have lots of fond memories of attending Ralph Allen; it was a great and very friendly school where I made lots of friends. There are quite a few schools in Bath and for me, when I was growing up, these all felt very connected to one another – I would play sports or meet up in the city with friends from all over. I really valued this, feeling like I had friendships with other young people throughout the city.

At about what age did you start to become interested in art and photography?

Around age 15 I started wanting to be a photographer, and even then was actively working towards this goal. I have always been a visual person; even before I got into photography, I was always looking at books and magazines and searching the internet for iconic images of my favourite artists or musicians.

And when did it become an academic pursuit?

I did a year of photography AS level at Ralph Allen. The photographer teacher was really encouraging; he said I should look into pursuing it in more in depth. With this in mind, I transferred to Bath College and studied there instead of the sixth-form of school.

How did things progress at Bath College?

Studying at Bath College felt freeing – they have great courses in photography, and I suddenly had time to research and learn more about the great and legendary photographers of the past and present. I spent so much time looking at, and learning from, this kind of material whilst there. I learned so much at college, and I'll forever be grateful to the lecturers, Aaron, Jo and Ozzy.

"I spent most days from July 2020 onwards photographing artists in their studios"



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: Xu Yang, Chelsea; Adebayo Bolaji, Croydon; Callum Eaton, Bath and Tower Hill,



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT: Tristan Buckland, Bath; Andrea Cryer, Bath (who also happens to be Bryn's aunt); Tracie McLeod, Glasgow; Favour Jonathan, Lewisham

What were the courses like?

The courses were taught really well and I enjoyed all aspects of them. There was also a course taught on art history, and the knowledge I learned from that class still pays dividends in my life today. I think it helped put me on my current path, working within the UK's contemporary art world. Thank you to my teacher, Sally, for making that happen.

Did you pursue photography immediately after leaving school?

I was given an unconditional offer to go to Ravensbourne University in London and studied digital photography for three years. Once I graduated, I worked very hard towards being a full-time professional photographer – I achieved this by reaching out persistently to lots of places and sometimes just getting lucky. I got my first job straight out of university as the in-house events photographer at a Peckham venue, Bussey Building. Not long after this I got another in-house job at the Ministry of Sound.

Is Peckham, in South London, where you live now?

Yes, I moved in with friends from Bath and a lot of people from Bath seem to live in this area of London. We all seem to go between Peckham and Bath, which is a funny juxtaposition.

Tell us a little about your career development...

I quickly got jobs in photography and was able to do it full time immediately after uni. I worked mainly in the music industry, shooting at venues and doing press shots for musicians and magazines. When the first lockdown happened, which I spent in Bath, I lost a lot of my work in the music industry and I knew I needed to change direction.

Is this what led you to this project?

When I came back to London, I approached an artist called Conor

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Murgatroyd who I had seen a lot around Peckham. I photographed him and this led to photographing many more artists. I saw this as a new direction, drawing on my background in art history from my course at Bath College, and the general interest I had in artists and their worlds.

How long did it take you?

I spent most days from July 2020 onwards photographing artists in their studios. First I went all over London taking pictures, and then began travelling around the UK to find more artists to document. I did it full time, and was intensely dedicated to it. I photographed more than 200 artists in three years. Some of them multiple times. I was drawn to documenting these talented artists and showing them off with the work that they had created.

What would you say was the inspiration and motivation to keep adding to the project?

I wanted to demonstrate the resilience of young creatives throughout the pandemic, as well as in the face of recent fundings cuts to arts budgets and the national cost of living crisis – now more than ever, it is vital to platform and support the UK's artistic talents.

You came back to Bath to photograph some artists...

Yes, I knew I wanted to document artists in Bath for my project. My aunty, Andrea Cryer, was my first go to artist; she is based in Bradford in Avon. I then reached out to Arthur Timothy, as I had seen his work on a platform highlighting amazing Black British Artists. It was an honour to meet and document Timothy with his work – he is a great man.

How did you select the other Bath artists you photographed?

The other artists I found through searching online and finding artists who had tagged Bath in their Instagram biographies, or through word of mouth. It took me a while to track down the Bath Artist community. When I realised a lot of them were based in the Bath Artists' Studios, near Victoria Park, it was a lot easier.

I shot Tristan Buckland, who is a very talented photographer, and I also photographed artist Callum Eaton, who is an incredibly successful young artist, and has gone on to do amazing things since I first photographed him back in 2021. He recently sold out his first solo show, which opened in Paris, showing these amazing paintings of photo realistic ATM machines.

What are your future plans?

I would love to show the series in Bath. I would also love to do a talk with images from the project in the future, when it hopefully gets made into a book. Doing a talk at Toppings would be a dream; I would love to do that one day. ■

For more: www.studiowest.art

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Christian Quin Newell, Kentish Town; Olivia Sterling, White City; Connor Kawaii, Lewisham



“I wanted to demonstrate the resilience of young creatives”

