



**Edwina Ashton
Bob & Roberta Smith
Matt Stokes**

Commissioned by Foreground
foregroundprojects.org.uk

“Foreground’s new project celebrates the *Independent State of Frome*”

Leading British artists Edwina Ashton, Bob and Roberta Smith and Matt Stokes are preparing to begin work on a major new art project, *Independent State*, commissioned by Frome-based art organisation Foreground.

Independent State is a major participatory visual art project that celebrates Frome’s reputation for independence. Foreground has commissioned the internationally renowned artists to work with groups from Frome’s community from July to September this year to make significant new artworks, which will form entries into the annual Frome Carnival on 26th September 2009.

Independent State explores how we define social distinctiveness and achieve self-determination as individuals and communities. The new works will take a number of different forms, from eccentric historical celebrations to major collaborative performance that will culminate as floats, performances and demonstrations in the Carnival.

Carnival is one of the most distinctive features of Somerset’s cultural identity and generates huge popular audiences to witness its grass roots creativity that range from the spectacular to the eccentrically amateur. As the first carnival in the Somerset Carnival season, Frome Carnival is one of the smallest yet generates an audience of over 20,000 people in a single night.

About the artists

Edwina Ashton’s videos, performances and drawings create oblique and absurd concoctions of character and narrative. They explore the allure and peculiarity of eccentricity and idiosyncrasy, often through the use of insects and creatures given human attributes to ridicule the perversities of British politeness.

Ashton will create one of her most ambitious works to date for *Independent State*. Collaborating with local naturalists and craft and drama enthusiasts, Ashton will manufacture a small army of bizarre insect costumes for performers, creating an alternative society of insects as parallel residents of Frome who will enter their own float into Carnival.

Bob & Roberta Smith fuse humour and serious politics into an egalitarian art that uses the skills of the signwriter, pop group and workshop leader to cajole his audience into a celebratory but often acerbic campaign for more art and greater democracy in our society.

For *Independent State*, Smith will explore ideas of culture, using the long forgotten names of fields around Frome as a mechanism to create discussion and improvised performance with local people.

Matt Stokes creates 'performance based' investigations into alternative and informal movements that bind people together. Music subcultures have been central to the development of his recent projects, which have focused on their ability to shape lifestyle, beliefs, and create collectivity.

For *Independent State*, Stokes will work with Frome's thriving hardcore/metal music scene and Somerset blacksmiths and metalworkers. Drawing on Frome's industrial heritage (in particular that of Singers, a former foundry in the town), Stokes plans to create a semi-permanent monument to the hardcore/punk/metal community of the town and area, which will be paraded through the Carnival procession, flanked and heralded by bands, musicians and fans of the genre, harking back to statues leaving Singers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Further information on the artists and their projects, images of previous works, and information on Frome Carnival is available on request. Interviews can also be arranged. Please contact 01373 888187 or email info@foregroundprojects.org.uk.

Notes to Editors

About Foreground

Based in Frome, Somerset, Foreground is a new not-for-profit commissioning organisation established to realise innovative contemporary art projects in the South West and develop new, socially diverse audiences for critically engaged contemporary art through accompanying outreach and education initiatives.

In 2008 Foreground produced *Intervention/Decoration* - a major multi-sited exhibition set in the historic market town of Frome, Somerset, featuring commissions by internationally recognised visual artists Eva Berendes (Germany), Michael Dean (UK), Ruth Ewan (UK), Jim Isermann (USA), Cornelia Parker (UK), Lawrence Weiner, (USA) and Richard Woods (UK). Please see www.foregroundprojects.org.uk for more details.

Independent State is curated and produced by Tabitha Clayson and Simon Morrissey who founded Foreground in 2007.

About Frome & Frome Carnival

Frome is one of Somerset's most distinctive towns, characterised by steep, winding streets, and has 357 listed buildings, more than any other town in Somerset. The town has a rich history of cloth production, metalworking, agriculture and country market trading and has in recent years witnessed significant economic and cultural revival. Its history dates from AD685 when St Aldhelm founded a mission on the River Frome, which gradually developed into a permanent settlement on land owned by the King. Frome is

the fourth largest town in Somerset with a population of over 25,000 and is steadily gaining a reputation as a centre for arts activity.

Frome Carnival was established as an annual community event in the early 20th century to raise money for the town's hospital. Since then, Carnival has taken place every year, other than during World War II, and has consistently raised funds for local good causes. It is the only remaining Carnival in the South West to oversee the administering of grants to needy causes.

Funding

Foreground receives no revenue funding and must raise 100% of its costs through fundraising.

Independent State has been funded by The Arts Council England South West, Somerset County Council's Local Initiative Budget, Market Towns Regeneration Fund and County Arts Fund and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation. The project has also received further support from The Ernest Cook Trust, Frome Community Lottery, Mendip District Council, and The University of the West of England.



The project has been generously sponsored by Forward Space.

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Legal stuff

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