



[My Five New Friends](#) by Oliver Braid
At [The Royal Standard](#) , Liverpool
Reviewed by [Denis Joe](#) February 2012

There is something very romantic about The Royal Standard. It is not situated in the City but in what used to be a garage workshop just outside of the city, near the waterfront. So it is not easy to find, but it is well worth visiting (and with satnavs and Google maps, it's easy enough). The organisers have made a great job of putting on this event (my first time at this venue) and show a great deal of enthusiasm for the work.

And well they might. I don't know if it was intentional but the three rooms of the gallery space become part of the installation for Oliver Braid's *My Five New Friends 2012*. The initial impression is one of walking in to a student flat. The work is a combined effort, but the brainchild of Braid.

At 26 I don't think that someone else should have to do this for me.



The Problem is that I can't be friends with men, without needing them to love me

In another room we find a bed with Braids rucksack sculpture, *Small Town Boy, Big City Travelling Bag*. Again the design is colourful and detailed. In fact the piece could be seen as functional. Although the face that makes up the rucksack is playful, the piece has many compartments for things, and would easily be comfortable on someone's back.

The video that accompanies this work, a brief piece by David Hoyle and Lee Baxter, of a young man talking about a relationship, called *Bitter Realisation*. The feel of the room is one of solitude, not quite loneliness, but not quite being alone either. It is the video, and particularly the voice of the speaker, that gives the room a sense of despair. The rucksack seems to taunt some invisible occupier, as if offering a solution to the desolation (of a broken relationship) whilst knowing that option will not be taken.

I have to think about the ways I relate to people, Dr Greber says.



The final room is dominated by a circular table, on which is a sculptured desktop toy, *A pig Boat With Humongous Balls is a Desk Toy*.

The accompanying video by Patrick Staff, *What Will Visit Me Tonight?*

was inspired by the My Five New Friends project, and seems like an attempt to cut through much of the confusion that is evident in the other works. Described as “A video work ... using divination, perception, the following of signs, dreams and intuition to examine movements of interpretation, imagery and symbolism”, it could easily add to the confusion. But I think this is where Braid’s vision makes perfect sense.

Each ‘room’ is like a stage in someone’s life. The first bedroom suggests a pre-teenager, where the bed represents personal space within a shared environment. The second is that of a teenager and all the problems that indulges those years, whilst the third room is that of the adult. The fact that the video is situated like a television and the slogan on the wall suggests a need to understand and get to grips with life.

My Five New Friends

This exhibition complements the online archive, created by Oliver Braid and the French art collective, It's Our Playground. The [*My Five New Friends*](#) archive came about as a result of Braid's mission to develop relationships with five of the most attractive young male graduates in Glasgow School of Art.

There is a sense of fantasy about the whole thing, yet the fantasy also has a realistic feel to it. In one sense this is provided by the cans of deodorant that are in each of the rooms. But the whole project does seem to say a lot about the way life is today. The fact that personal relationships now intrude on public life, whether through the changing mores of society and what is tolerated or even through communication technology where it has become the norm to hear the most personal details of someone's life as a result of their mobile phone conversations. Or how bloggers and Facebook users relate their domestic lives for millions of strangers to read and how other bloggers respond as if the person was a close friend.

But even the confusion, that is a theme of the exhibition, speaks to us of a world in which concepts associated with adulthood: responsibility; personal commitment; sexuality, are endowed with a mysticism that only a parental elite have the answers to. What was once seen as a rite of passage is now seen as a conflict that requires the negotiated solution of professionals (this seems to be the suggestion of the slogan on the wall of the 'adult' room). Oliver Braid's exhibition raises many questions and the intelligence lies not in providing answers but in raising the right questions.

My Five New Friends is a fantastic exhibition - which could well be a work in progress as there are so many themes that it could address. The attention to detail is what you would expect in a city centre venue and it is The Royal Standard centre that adds so much to this enjoyable and

thought-provoking work.

Sneak Preview video of the exhibition from Oliver Braid

With *It's Our Playground*, featuring new commissions by David Hoyle & Lee Baxter, Maayke Schurer, Patrick Staff, Tether, Roxy Topia & Paddy Gould. Special Appearances: Sam Ball; Ellie Harrison, Stephen O' Toole and Alex Misick.

At [The Royal Standard](#), Liverpool Unit 3, Vauxhall Business Centre, 131 Vauxhall Road, Liverpool L3 6BN until 3rd March.