

# Kris Lemsalu Tramway / Glasgow | |

## Flash Art

3 April 2008, 12:00 pm CET

Focusing on five different female typologies whose only common trait seems to be the letter *b*, Kris Lemsalu's encompassing and compelling installation at Tramway includes a varied array of materials that stand to signify the remnants of a biker, a bride, a builder, a businesswoman, and a baby. Situated on a pigmented blue sheet reminiscent of rough waters, a hard hat, a suit, a leather jacket, a baby pram, and a bridal gown are sustained by a flock of ceramic birds that hover around.

The birds give an unequivocal dark tone to the composition, and yet their actions are unclear, oscillating between scavenging and breathing new life into the objects that define the characters in question. This ambiguity is further emphasized by a few quirky details that manage to play with the undeniably dramatic pretensions of the piece without undermining them. The starry blanket on the pram, for example, comes across as a reference to the flag of the European Union — a pertinent hint in a country where the last two years of domestic politics have been almost entirely dominated by the Brexit debate. There's also the red outfit worn by the artist during the opening night's sound performance, presented with her partner and collaborator Kyp Malone, which was almost comical in its exaggerated innocence. This latter event, as per usual in Lemsalu's practice, was democratically amalgamated with the rest of the exhibition. It didn't transcend the installation, but rather perfectly fit within it, in a way paralleling the action of the anthropomorphic birds and reinforcing the notion of "Biker, Bride, Builder, Businesswoman and Baby" as a tableaux vivant. In front of a work of such theatrical nature, one wonders about the faith of the five absent figures. Their designated roles indicate a mixed bag of stereotypes, fantasies, and aspirations. Is the decision to leave behind their clothes an attempt to look for a new identity, leaving to society (the birds) the task of trying to revive their old ones? Or are they being abused

for what they are, regardless of the fact that their traits cover a broad spectrum of expectations? There is nothing in the show to suggest that “Biker, Bride, Builder, Businesswoman and Baby” refers to the same person, but perhaps their sharing the letter *b* should be taken as a clue that they are. The intricacies of personality and experience are never to be taken for granted, and it is to Lemsalu’s credit that her work does enough to raise questions without forcing the viewer to accept preconceived answers.