



Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast

Curated by Nick Yu and Junko Asano
30 June 2026 - 15 November 2026



Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast By Nick Yu and Junko Asano

“Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast” is a group exhibition which reclaims the complexities, beauty and challenges of childhood through the eyes of British and Hong Kong artists. As a universal human experience that we all share, childhood shapes who we are and how we relate to each other. Fumbling with words, ideas and actions is an integral part of how we learn to be in the world. Inspired by the White Queen of *Alice in Wonderland* who practised believing in impossible things for at least a half an hour a day, we invite children and adults alike to return to this childhood state of suspended disbelief at the British Council's Bookstore Gallery.

For some, childhood was filled with carefree joy and wonder, friendship, imaginative play and indulgences. This memory is so powerful that some of us never quite want to grow up, resulting in “Peter Pan Syndrome” where grown-ups long for the refuge and freedom from adult responsibilities. For others, childhood is shaded by the discomfort of not fitting into one’s skin or not comprehending the world of adults. Longing to be loved, yearning to be taken seriously or be useful, there are those of us who could not wait to grow up, mature, and shed the naivete of being a child.

As English poet John Betjeman intuited, “Childhood is measured out by sounds and smells and sights, before the dark hour of reason grows.” Many artists across different art forms and mediums evoke a sense of childhood, its innocence and turbulence, its strangeness and ever-inspiring awe. In “Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast”, we exhibit a selection of artworks drawn from the British Council Collection in dialogue with works by young Hong Kong artists that capture the sensations and feelings of being a child in the world.

Childhood is a formative time of experimentation, where the joy of pastime can turn into a lifelong hobby. While Lisa Milroy’s large painting collects tens of postage stamps from disparate places, Wendy McMurdo’s photograph captures a young girl entranced by playing the violin - even when the musical instrument has disappeared. Childhood is also a collection of novel experiences, such as Florence Yuk-ki Lee’s bird-eye views of the world gazed at from the airplane windows. A little imagination can even transform monotonous school days into extraordinary moments, as classroom objects come to life in Chan Wai Lap’s drawings of Maths and D.T. lessons.

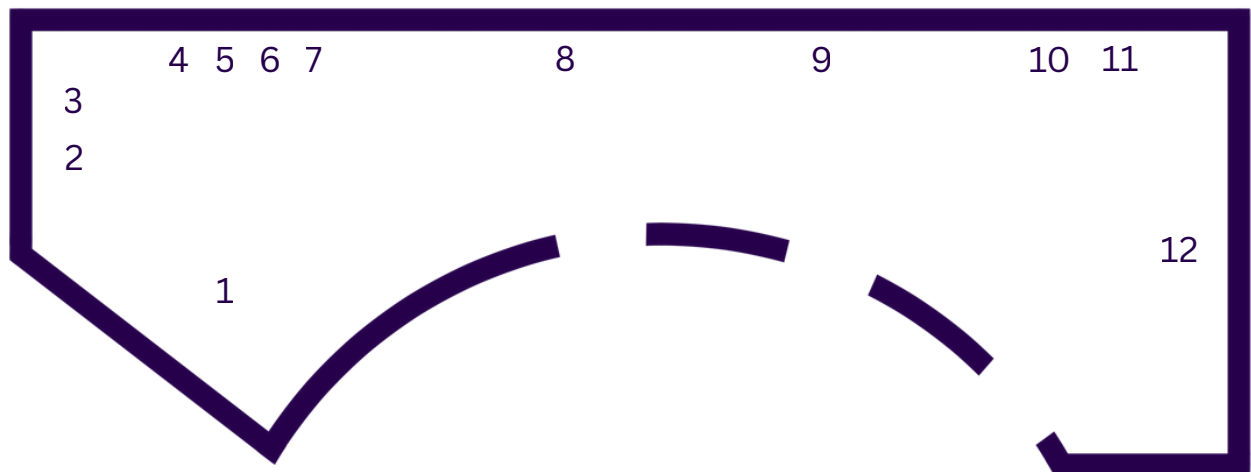
But childhood is not without its growing pains and terrors. Revolting against parents and authority, Michael Heindorff’s *The Baron in the Trees* depicts a young boy who refuses to eat snails and chooses to live life in a forest canopy forever, never stepping foot on solid ground again. Elisabeth Frink’s etching of a man flying in a black cloud channels the artist’s childhood memories during World War II, a poignant reminder of the difficult condition endured by millions of children nowadays who live in war-torn countries.

In this transitional world of adolescence, children metamorphose into adults while seeking the companionship of animals and imaginary beings alike. Cartoon-like caricatures in the works of John Bellany and Tirzah Garwood feature swan ladies and crocodile coteries, reflecting the yearning, angst and fluidity of youth. Canine sidekicks like Justine Smith’s *Wizard* reminds us of the pranks, naughtiness and mischief we love to cause.

These days, children are stressed from growing up in a high-pressure society like Hong Kong, and spend an unprecedented number of hours on screens every day. Some are addicted to digital gaming, others find it difficult to concentrate. “Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast” proposes an urgent and much needed conversation in this city – one that is open to the children and teenagers who come to the British Council for their classes and exams, as well as the adults who care for them. With curiosity and hope, we ask: how can we build a better world for children? What would it look like? Can we come together and dream of six impossible things before breakfast?

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1

Justine Smith

Wizard
1998
Paper Mache
British Council Collection

5

Elisabeth Frink

*I Flew Through a Black Cloud and the
Winds Came Up From the Hills Below Me*
1987
Etching
British Council Collection

9

Lisa Milroy

Stamps
1988
Oil on Canvas
British Council Collection

2

Tirzah Garwood

The Crocodile
1929
Engraving
British Council Collection

6

John Bellamy

Serendipity
1987
Etching
British Council Collection

10

Chan Wai Lap as part of Dirty Paper

Math Lesson
2013
Pencil, colour pencil and ink
on paper

3

Tirzah Garwood

The Dog Show
1929
Engraving
British Council Collection

7

Gillian Ayres

Crystal Fields
1987
Lithograph
British Council Collection

11

Chan Wai Lap as part of Dirty Paper

D.T. Lesson
2013
Pencil, colour pencil and ink
on paper

4

Michael Heindorff

The Baron in the Trees
1987
Lithograph
British Council Collection

8

Florence Yuk-ki Lee

Where Sight Sinks into Starlit Eyes
2026
Archival Giclée print on
Hahnemühle German Etching paper
British Council Collection

12

Wendy McMurdo

*Solo Violin, St Mary's Music School
Edinburgh* 1998
1999
Colour negative print on aluminium
British Council Collection