Baa is a limited edition artists' book, the result of a collaboration between artist Bryan Illsley and poet Christopher Reid, based on Reid's re-imagining of the nursery rhyme 'Baa Baa Black Sheep', and produced by Tatjana Marsden. Alida Sayer has taken the resulting book of 28 pages, measuring a diminutive 19 x 21 cm, and re-produced it as an immersive room-sized environment.

Illsley and Reid have been occasional collaborators for over 20 years. Long-standing friends and admirers of each other's work, the books are a little-known outcome of their activities, primarily made as gifts for friends and supporters. The starting point has always been the poem, to which Illsley responds intuitively, even irreverently, adding his own notes of emphasis or disruption. Yet his accompanying paintings or drawings are always mindful of Reid's rhyme schemes and, in this case, his sequences of variation.

The earliest examples of their books were reproduced very simply and cheaply as black and white photocopies; but, as the creative possibilities offered by economical forms of print have increased, and with the involvement of friend and gallery director Tatjana Marsden as producer of the books, their aesthetic has developed.

Visual designer and typographic artist Alida Sayer's installation translates Baa the book from the condition of intimate study to a transporting immersive experience, where visitors enter into an environment of Illsley's images and Reid's poem, overlaid with animated text. An experimental project, the starting point for Sayer came from assisting in the process of scanning Illsley's images for Baa and her idea of reproducing them on a much larger scale to create a sense of entering into the book. The resulting work brings the joint activity of Illsley, Reid and Marsden to a wider public, but at the same time the project retains much of the spirit of the original production, driven by a sense of admiration of the work of the others and an exploration of possibilities. It is the next stage in a chain of work linked by the generous collaborative attitude of all its creators and their curiosity about what might emerge.

Tessa Peters

The first verse of Baa, the poem, starts on the wall facing the stairs with the traditional nursery rhyme ‘Baa Baa Black Sheep’ and continues clockwise around the room.

The exhibition is kindly supported by the Anthony Shaw Collection. www.anthonyshawcollection.org

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Alida Sayer and Tessa Peters would also like to thank Chris Webster for his significant contributions to the realisation of the project and Dana Lazarus-Cass for her assistance in the early stages of its development.
Bryan Illsley (b. 1937) studied at Kingston School of Art and was based in St Ives from the early 1960s until his return to London in 1986. In St Ives, alongside his own studio practice, he worked for the Leach Pottery before forming a partnership with Breon O’Casey making jewellery. Public collections that hold examples of his work include the Arts Council, Crafts Council, Contemporary Arts Society, Victoria & Albert Museum, Kettles Yard, Cambridge and the Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto.

Christopher Reid (b. 1949) has worked as a poetry editor at Faber & Faber and Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Hull. He was awarded the 2009 Costa Book Award for A Scattering, written as a tribute to his late wife, the actress Lucinda Gane. Previous books produced in collaboration with Bryan Illsley include The Memres of Alfred Stoker (1991) and Broken Bones (2003).

Alida Sayer (b. 1985) studied Visual Communication at Glasgow School of Art. Her work has been featured in numerous magazines and in books including 3D Typography by Jeanette Abbink and Emily C.M. Anderson (Mark Batty, 2010), Lettering - A Reference Manual of Techniques by Andrew Haslam (Laurence King, 2011) and Typoholic (Viction:ary, 2012). Exhibitions include There is no why [solo] in the Marsden Woo Gallery Project Space (2010) and Presence-Absence (2011) at Kingsland Road Studio. In 2009 she won a D&AD Best New Blood Award and has recently been shortlisted for the Design Week 2012 Rising Star Award. www.alidarosie.co.uk

Marsden Woo Gallery opening hours are Tuesday to Friday 11:00 - 18:00 and Saturday 11:00 - 16:00

For more information, images or to arrange an interview with the artists please contact Tatjana Marsden or Alida Sayer by telephone: +44(0)20 7336 6396 or email: press@marsdenwoo.com