

By NEIL D'ARCY-JONES

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ARTIST and sculptor Ben Coode-Adams is used to Grand Designs.

After all he was on the popular Channel 4 programme when he and his wife, the renowned textile artist Freddie Robbins, converted a 16th century barn into a home for their family and a workshop for their art.

Now both he and Freddie are back with another grand design, re-inventing the idea of an art exhibition into a piece of art itself.

That's what the couple and a number of other local artists are currently doing at the Minorities Art Gallery in Colchester as part of their *Between Things* show.

"I'd been going to a lot of art fairs," Ben says, "and thinking about the way you show pieces of work there."

"I got to like showing art in spaces that were not white cubes, that had some kind of interesting structure to them. There was also that idea of how you see art in your own home and possibly organising an exhibition a bit like that."

Certainly when you walk around the main space at the Minorities, Ben, along with the gallery's curator Kaavous Clayton, have created a show that is so much more than just the sum of its individual parts with its wooden panels, almost like whopping great big bits of driftwood, screening off different sections.

The approach certainly challenges the standard staging of such exhibitions, combining methods that might more commonly be found in museums or retail outlets, creating structures and divides to control the path of the viewer, and devising new ways to present work and engage the audience with it.

It almost makes the space an art work in itself but one which still manages, rather cleverly, to compliment the individual pieces.

As well as Ben's ethereal, dream-like watercolour paintings, that also includes amusing knitwear installations by Freddie as well as the colourful 'Crazy Blankets' by art duo Paris Essex, designer Stafford Schmoor's reconfigured bicycle seats and handlebars and re-constructed furniture sculptures by Clare Iles, among others.

In fact there's nine artists in all taking part with works by Celia Pym, Sharon Leahy-Clark and Will Cruickshank also on show.

Ben adds: "I've known all of the artists taking part in the show, apart from Clare, for quite some time now. Clare got involved when I was discussing the idea of

# A Grand Design put together for everyone's work of art



■ Spirit journey - Ben Coode-Adams with one of his paintings at the Minorities

6

"I remember when I first came into the gallery, and I saw how hard they were

final exhibition took shape."

Born in Little Baddow, but growing up in Feering, Ben studied Fine Art at Edinburgh University of Edinburgh and Art in Architecture at the University of East London.

Most of his career he has produced large scale sculptures for housing associations, local authorities and private clients but it was only when he became ill with chronic fatigue syndrome that

an exhibition in New York. I suppose it was only when people started buying the work, I thought 'hey, perhaps it's worth carrying on with the paintings' so now I do both."

Exhibiting alongside Ben is a Colchester artist who knows the Minorities very well since up until February she used to work there.

That's Clare Iles, who grew

to Western India and Jerusalem.

Her work is made-up of cut up, painted and reconfigured items of furniture which come together to form abstract sculptural pattern-forms.

She says: "I've always been interested in the idea of deconstructing items such as furniture and turning them into something very different from the initial intention that was designed for them.

"Over the years most of my work has been from either found items or bits of furniture people have given me but these new works are slightly different because of the colour. These are very colourful mainly because someone gave me a whole load of cans of paint and I couldn't really turn them away. Of course in the end I didn't have enough paint so I went out and brought some more but initially it was pretty interesting experimenting with the different

colours that I had no control of. These colours were given to me, much like the bits of furniture themselves so it was fascinating making the sculptures with those differing constraints."

Dotted around the various spaces that make up the exhibition, Clare is delighted with the way her pieces sit within the other work.

"I remember when I first came into the gallery," she adds, "and I saw how hard they

were working. It was quite intense but you could see they were putting together something rather special."

## BETWEEN THINGS

■ Minorities Art Gallery,  
High Street, Colchester.  
Until June 10. 10am to 5pm,  
Mondays to Saturdays.  
Free. 01206 712437.  
[www.theminories.org.uk](http://www.theminories.org.uk)



■ Reconfigured furniture - Clare Iles, above and inset left, with some of her 'found' sculptures at the Minorities.