The following is a conversation between Dr Adam Hines-Green and Dr Alan Baban about Adam's exhibition *In Practice* at the Royal College of Psychiatrists in 2025.

Adam is the Artist in Residence at the College from 2023–2028.
Alan is a writer, psychiatrist and psychoanalytic psychotherapist, and is the Chair of the Art and Psychiatry Special Interest Group at the College.

Alan: Could you start by introducing your project?

Adam: So the project consists of works in fourteen locations around the College. They are essentially tracings of fragments of text on A4 paper. I have made frames for all the works in oak, coated with a liming wax then covered in graphite. There are also printed A4 documents next to each work stating that they are composed of bits of text from the College's library and archives, and that therefore the language and messaging used is not in keeping with the College's current language or messaging. I have framed these documents too. Finally, there's one additional work by someone from the nineteenth century.

Alan: Perhaps you could also give a bit more background to the project?

Adam: Well I began by looking at books in the antiquarian library at the College. Over time, I began to think about who psychiatrists are meant to be, what we're meant to value, what we're meant to do. It's more than just knowledge, in the same way that much of what we do day to day is not really about knowledge. Many of the texts relate to the values and characteristics we might aspire to, but they also relate to all sorts of other issues connected to our work, including management, administration, competence, standards, responsibility, accountability, blame, delegation, regulation, learning, facilities, workloads, hierarchy, independence, teamwork. And I don't think these themes are only relevant to psychiatry, they're relevant to medicine, and to other professions, and to work more broadly. So I've focused on fragments of text that approach those issues, and I've put them into the works. The older sources from as far back as the mid-nineteenth century are from the antiquarian book library in the College, and the material in the archives is from up to the later twentieth century. To some extent you can see how the profession has evolved. I think we have an idea of what our role is, what it means to be a psychiatrist and a doctor, and to do it 'well' and to be 'professional'. Some of this is described in guidelines or taught or modelled in our training, and much of it is moulded over time by forces from outside and inside the profession. The works are testament to that. You can see how some values have remained relatively constant, while others have shifted over time. I think you can see a developing professionalisation of psychiatry, and the bureaucracy that accompanies that. It doesn't always mean values have changed, sometimes it feels like a shift in how those values might be enforced or demonstrated.

Alan: The works are made up of pieces of text and they seem very deliberately arranged. I was wondering if you could you speak about how and why you did that?

Adam: Yes, I traced different fragments of text onto single sheets of A4 paper. So you get a variety of sources in each work. I wanted these fragments to exist in dialogue with each other, to generate the sense that there can be differing opinions and conflicting viewpoints on this kind of

material. In fact, that's often what occurs in practice – the best or right way forward is not always clear. So in the works it starts to feel a little like a conversation. Did you ever read *Lincoln in the Bardo* by George Saunders? There are fragments of text across the page where characters are contributing to a conversation, but there is no attribution of who exactly said what. I read it in parts over a period of time, always when I was sleepy before bed, and I repeatedly lost track of who said what. It felt to me that the voices came from unknown positions and accumulated into a broader narrative. In my project, sometimes it feels messy, or attributions are unclear, but what is significant is the gathering of perspectives. The result is not a pristine position statement that an institution like the College might publish. They're a different kind of position statement, maybe one that suggests a variety of positions might exist and have existed, and acknowledges debate rather than any sense of resolution.

Alan: There's another author that reminds me of called David Markson. In his later life he published a lot of 'novels', but made entirely out of fragments of other novels or pieces of art. So he'd pull across the centuries like you have, but he'd order them to create a sort of emotional response rather than a more coherent and conventional narrative. My other thought is about how you've done your own deep dive or excavation to find all of this work. But what you've pulled up you've arranged in the building, so I think the audience can also do their own kind of excavation work and come to their own conclusions. I was interested if you could talk more about the idea of effectively making the College space an interactive exhibition.

Adam: Well this is one of the reasons why I like the idea of doing exhibitions at the College and why I applied to do the residency. I'm interested in doing exhibitions where coming into contact with the work might be unexpected, or when it's unclear where the art might be, or when you might encounter it, or how it might reveal itself. I like the idea that the work can sneak up on you, or that you might not notice it at all. I think it transforms your experience of the space, perhaps it makes you more sensitive to your environment and more observant of its conditions. It also feels appropriate to this project because the content of the works often relates to values and responsibilities that are essential to the discipline but might not be explicitly stated, and so exist somewhat in the background. The works also echo the sort of printed documents that are often found on the walls of working environments, which are deemed valuable and guide behaviour but are not always directly attended to. I suppose these works are also really a regurgitation of written material that's already in the building. I haven't added any new words, I've just reframed and repositioned them. You're aware of this idea of the white cube gallery space where work can exist with minimal distraction. The College isn't a white cube, and it's not a space created or maintained for artworks. But I'm interested in what art can contribute to disciplines or spaces that aren't necessarily concerned with art. The works are made to live alongside the distractions, embedded in amongst the building and its usual activities. Most people might not even notice the works at all, and that's fine, but some might, and might want to see them all, and that would require a bit of an expedition around the building.

Alan: What I'm really struck by is that the audience is encouraged to go through a similar process to the one you went through when you were creating the pieces. As you say, people have to go on an expedition. They might not go from A to Z in a similar way. Everybody will have their own journey and come to their own conclusions. You're giving each person the ability to make their own choice about how to synthesise this data. There's something significant about how little is prescribed about these pieces.

Adam: I think in some ways I have to be very controlled and specific, and in others, very open. In how I want the work to look, what it is made of, how it is made, where it is shown in the space – all these things I want to be very specific about. That's really what I'm offering by making the work. And then I can allow an openness in experience and interpretation for the viewer. Perhaps it is a bit like an experiment. You need to be in complete control of some variables to do a proper experiment, but then you must be open to the outcomes. And exactly how you are taking control over certain elements is a large part of the work. For example, I need to figure out what hardness of graphite is best to coat the oak frame, which fixative to spray on the graphite coating so it maintains the glossy effect of the graphite I want, what distance to spray it from, and so on. By the end of the project, thousands of those sorts of decisions have been made. To a large degree, I can control those things. And then there are elements that I can't control or really don't want to control. Of course, I've orchestrated it all, and I'm still guiding the viewer. I've made very subjective, personal choices about which texts to include, in an order of my choosing, in locations of my choosing. But I'm not explicitly instructing anyone what to think or feel. I don't really see that as my role. It's more about asking questions rather than providing answers. I just have to ask the questions in a particular way to make them the sort of questions I'm interested in.

Alan: If we bring this back to our experience of moving through a building, it would be like saying you can only walk in one direction, kind of how we had during Covid, just the arrows telling you where to walk. I think there's something quite profound as to what you're suggesting, because the reality is we enter these spaces and we can go anywhere we want, we forget about that freedom all the time. I think having an artwork like this reminds people of the weirdness of what's around them, that the College isn't this pristine corporate thing. It's an aggregate of the people who've existed in it, the different points of view people have had, even the kind of architectural differences people have brought. It's a kind of, well, I was going to say it's a conglomerate, but that sounds quite corporate actually.

Adam: From the outside institutions can seem clean and fixed. But there are variables beneath the surface that are managed to maintain that. Part of what the archives show are what those variables are and how they are managed. It's also why there is a text next to each of my works saying that the language is no longer in keeping with the College's current language and messaging. There's a degree of openness to how the works might be interpreted, which is an uncertainty, which generates an anxiety and a risk that must be addressed.

Alan: So I'm going to be a bit leading here. Do you think some of the stuff we've been talking about, such as allowing people to ask questions, maintaining a sense of uncertainty, fostering an attitude of discovery, are actually important components in being a psychiatrist?

Adam: That's interesting. Well I think the things you've just mentioned are what the arts tend to enable. And in psychiatry we might feel they are important values, but they can be a real challenge to embody in day to day practice. If we just consider uncertainty, it often feels to me like a lot of the things that we're asked to do at work don't facilitate that. For example, today at work a lot of what I was asked to do was to engage with other professionals to provide them with a sense of greater certainty, to contain and address uncertainty and the anxiety that accompanies it, and to take responsibility for those decisions, and then document at length exactly how I did that. It depends what role you're doing and in what environment. When you're on call, it doesn't feel like people are phoning you because they want you to maintain a sense of uncertainty. But maybe part of the role is trying to do just that. Perhaps those examples speak more to what

psychiatrists are expected to do, and the values you're speaking about are better applied to our interactions with patients. It's a balance isn't it. Being asked to provide certainty about things when they are uncertain or you feel uncertain, or when you feel something should remain uncertain, is very difficult. Our focus on assessments of risk in psychiatry feels relevant to all this.

Alan: We've talked about the project in a macro way, but I was really interested in some of the micro stuff you were talking about. I wondered if you could speak about exactly how you made the works.

Adam: Well the frames are made of oak. Half of them are joined with an underpinner at a workshop I was using, which then broke, so the frames for the accompanying documents I had to join with glue and little hammered nails. I've coated all the wooden frames in liming wax, because it brings up these white highlights in the grain of the wood, so you get white on black in the frame which contrasts with the black graphite on white paper of the works. With soft graphite sticks, I've then rubbed the frames around the works, the archival backing board behind the works and documents, and the spacers which separate the works from the glass. For the texts themselves, I began by taking photos on my phone of books in the antiquarian library or pages from the archive, and I'd make a note of where the photographs were from. I didn't really know what was going to materialise from those photos yet, but in the end I cropped the photos to show the paragraph or the sentence that I thought was interesting. Then I printed these fragments out, and then I would place them on top of carbon paper and trace them onto single sheets of A4 drawing paper. They often need a bit of cleaning up and drawing over again as well. But the transferred texts then retain their original font to some degree, which I liked, and the text also warps a bit at times, because the original photo was taken with the page in the book curving out of the spine, or at an angle. It's a very laborious and imperfect way of recreating pieces of text. The carbon transfer paper makes them feel a little like they're printed, but because they're traced they seem looser and more hand-written than that. It's strange, the process of tracing them is so slow that I would lose the meaning of the text, a bit like writing lines at school, or practising joined-up handwriting by copying words written by a teacher, where it is just a formal exercise. And if I made a mistake, or the result wasn't composed in the way that felt right, I'd have to do it again.

Alan: I was thinking about the other meanings behind the word 'practice' as well. There's the professional sense of having a 'practice', but also something about practising, a repetition of going over things again and again in how you made the works.

Adam: Yes. It's a very repetitive but also quite relaxing process. And it reminded me of how I had studied medicine. I used to get reams of paper and document facts from memory again and again. I spent a lot of time reiterating written information as a way of remembering it. But a lot of this project is about exploring how knowledge is not the only thing that identifies a profession. It's also about its values, what its practitioners are willing to take responsibility for, how they should operate. Maybe the repetitive process is more about writing lines in the hope that those ideas really sink in, like how Bart Simpson writes lines in detention on a big chalkboard in the opening credits to each episode of *The Simpsons.*

Alan: I think we're getting again at the meaning of the word 'practice', that a practice can be an approach, a way of doing things, and despite there being multiple different approaches over the decades or centuries that you've collated, there does seem to be some kind of central approach or practice. I don't think we've really defined that – maybe it's for other people to define. Maybe

it's a medical approach, or it's an iterative approach. It's something about discovery or curiosity, an innovating sense of practice that seems to drive some of these pieces.

Adam: In art people talk about their 'practice'. Arts Council England gives funding for 'Developing your Creative Practice', which can involve networking, travel, training, sustainability, or making work, among other things. Or I've heard someone be criticised for not really having 'a practice'. I'm not entirely sure what that means, but it feels like an accusation that they have no unifying approach to the world through their art, or maybe that they don't contribute to it regularly or actively enough. Of course in medicine we have 'best practice', and when we work as doctors as many people as possible should follow 'best practice'. Art is of course different, by and large it likes to think it celebrates a range of practices, all of which can be individual and different. There is no 'best practice', and in fact having the same practice as someone else might cause problems. But that's a clear difference in how we understand many jobs as opposed to creative disciplines. I chose the title 'In Practice' for the project partly because I think it raises questions about what is embedded in our 'practice', including values that are internalised, where you might represent and embody them in whatever you do, without necessarily knowing where you learnt them or how you know it is the optimal way to function. The phrase 'In Practice' suggests the phrase 'in theory' too, without explicitly stating it. I think it opens up a difference between words and actions somehow, and the difference between what we think we do, or think we should do, and what we actually do.

Alan: To me it seems like you're emphasising the importance of an individual sitting at the centre of this, synthesising all this data and coming to their own conclusions, and in that there is some idea of a 'practice'. It's an important part of being a person I think but definitely of being a psychiatrist too, and developing your approach. I used to supervise quite a few psychotherapy cases and inevitably people would ask you, 'If a patient says this what should I say to them', and then we could do a bit of role play and maybe I'd say 'You could say this', and then next week that little thing that I suggested would be parachuted into the middle of their session where it just didn't belong in that moment, and treatments would end and dissolve because these things were being inauthentically inserted where they didn't belong. It's sort of the equivalent of taking an extract of one of these fragments of text and just putting it in my own work. With a practice, there needs to be something authentic about it, where you can take ownership of it for yourself, I think.

Adam: Well I feel that way when I encounter doctors as a patient, that the encounter needs to feel alive in some sense. I need to feel that the situation varies depending on what I am saying and what they are saying. That's how conversations work. In this conversation we're having now, if we already knew exactly what we would say, there wouldn't be much point in having it. I think it's about being alive and responsive moment to moment. I suppose that training, learning and supervision is more about developing a practice or an approach that you embody. You absorb some of this material information but it's not about regurgitation. I've done some projects before which have been closer to performances, or live actions or events. For example, I asked someone to improvise a narrative to a live audience in response to pictures and objects I had planted around a space. I guess it's not dissimilar to what I'm trying to do in the College, by guiding to certain material where people can then make their own conclusions. I've been quite interested in this idea of 'liveness' for a while. Many events exist on a spectrum of liveness, and in some of the projects I've done I've been interested in making them feel more 'live', more alive perhaps, or at least a little more unstable, unpredictable, at risk or open to the interpretations or actions of others. I suppose experiments can work in similar ways, as we discussed earlier. None of these

things are uncontrolled. They need certain parts to be tightly controlled so that other parts can really feel alive. Sports, which have strict rules which enable the unpredictable live event, work in that way too. And, to circle back to the original point, a lot of medical activities can, and maybe should, feel like that. When I was first thinking about this I had been working in A&E, which really does feel like a live, unpredictable event, but so much of our work, especially in psychiatry, is down to the conversations we have with others, and how they can and should feel alive and potentially transformative as a result. As you were describing with your supervisions, if a comment from someone else, elsewhere, at another time, is parachuted into a conversation, it destroys any sense that the conversation is alive, that you're with another engaged person, and that words and actions are being understood and appreciated.

Alan: It also strikes me that an important element of practice is that it takes time, and that's very embedded in this project. You've done an archival search over the decades, so you've gone back through time, but actually the method of practice itself takes time, and time is really a operative factor in all of our treatments too, whether they're psychopharmacological, psychotherapeutic or social.

Adam: Well yes, you're right, this project has taken a long time. I've been doing it for over a year, gradually working through the material and making all the components, and with other obligations in my life at the moment I haven't had the chance to work for many hours day after day on the project. I've done projects very quickly in the past, but this hasn't been like that. It has been much more of a gradual accrual of material and thinking, and I think that can be part of having a practice. There's something about ideas festering to become all they can be that's important, you're often having some kind of long conversation with the material you're working with. Often you don't know how you feel about the options until you've tried them out, or until you can look back at them. And all that time goes into the final result, but it might not be obvious in the final result how much time or how many decisions went into that outcome. We tend to take the outcome for granted when we see it, it appears to us as a given. But as a viewer, I think on some level you often can detect that something took time and is considered. In the same way, the position of the College and the profession now took decades and decades of work and collective and individual decisions even if they are no longer obvious to us, and the project exposes some of those moments in its history. So it's an evolution. For example, in this project, for many months I was going to use these mass-produced aluminium clip frames that you often see around institutions that have health and safety documents, or certificates in them, things like that. But that evolved, and I thought it was important to reframe the texts myself and in my own way, and to do that I had to figure out how to make a frame, so I tried to do that, and then it's thinking about what kind of frame, and how it looks and feels. Most projects seem to involve me having to learn how to do something new. It relates a bit to this idea of being professional, or being a professional, when often I'm an amateur. I'm not a framer, for example.

Alan: There's also this drawing from the nineteenth century in the project, I wonder if you could speak about that because it relates to this idea of the amateur and the professional.

Adam: Yes, it's a theorem watercolour, which is a type of art once popular in the nineteenth century, where 'amateurs' or children could make artwork by painting over stencils. However, people still retained a degree of individuality and creativity within the constraints of the process, by choosing the arrangements of their stencils, choosing their colours and applying gradients of tone. To me, the work suggests this idea of individuality and creativity within certain boundaries,

which relates to how we might operate professionally. We have guidelines, protocols, and many shared values, but how we work within them or how we enact them may vary. That's part of being an individual at work. There must still be personal and individual elements to professional life. When you act or speak, you're both a mouthpiece for the profession and yourself. But if your individual opinions or actions stray too far from guidelines or boundaries, that can become a problem for you and the profession.

Alan: One last thing I wanted to ask is what does this work mean to you personally? So much of the work is about, well, it's de-centred in space and time, or it's what other people are going to make of it, but this is also about you trying to make your own sense of what it means to be a psychiatrist isn't it?

Adam: Yes, as much as the project includes text that is already in the College, it's still very personal. It's not a scientific study. It's a subjective extraction of very specific material. And it asks questions I have thought about for a while, about myself and my roles. I've done some art and some medicine. They're very different disciplines. This is a gross oversimplification, but in art, in theory the idea of individuality and having personal ideas is often celebrated. The ways that you and your work is individual to you is significant. In medicine, you represent a body of opinion. It can feel that your value is not always as an individual, but more as someone or something that can enact the teachings and values of the profession. For example, when they're creating a rota, it doesn't matter if it's Dr Alan or Dr Adam doing the Friday night shift if we're both qualified to do it. There's a standardisation of what is expected, and certain skills and values that should be enacted. And I understand why that is. That's part of what building a profession involves. It involves a degree of standardisation, and it means that if you're encountering a professional you can be assured that a service of a certain quality will be provided. It's the same for many professions and jobs more broadly. It might provide the practitioner with reassurance and meaning in their working life. However, it might also mean that it feels you can be plugged in and out to serve the needs of a system, or that your individual values or needs suffer if they don't coincide exactly with the values or needs of that system. So I think about how these things might feel as a practitioner, the feeling that you stand in for something broader than yourself. It makes me wonder who you act or speak for – yourself, or the discipline? Probably both. I suppose all this is partly relevant because it makes me wonder how professions and institutions adapt and change. That's one of the things we see in the project, if and how things have changed over time. The works themselves are evidence of that, and the documents to the right of each work stating that the texts are historical and not in keeping with the College's current language or messaging are evidence of that too. Those documents wouldn't be necessary if things hadn't changed – they weren't how I originally considered the project, but they're now an important part of it, and I've acknowledged that by framing them and giving them the same dimensions as the works themselves. Now one way of considering change is how it might occur – possibly through guidance from above, from institutions such as the College, and another is that change might occur from below, through a profession's practitioners. The answer is probably both, and in fact, the profession's practitioners constitute much of the College. But one thing I hope the project does is connect some of the history of that institutional guidance to practitioners, by making it marginally more public on the walls of the institution, rather that it being in its antiquarian library or archives. So, to answer your question, I think all this relates to my own life, and my working life in art and medicine and how, and if, they can work together. I suppose the residency at the College is a way for me to work through that. And that happens privately but also sometimes more publicly, as with this exhibition.