Artist Statement

Jessica Thomas is a Birmingham born (1994) artist who is currently based in Bournemouth. Whose work is concerned with our personal and cultural identities, and how these are shaped by, and interact with western societal values. Thomas particularly focuses on notions of class struggle and income inequality by highlighting contradictions in our cultural ideology. For example, take the concept of freedom, which in western culture is held up as worth both dying to defend and waging war to deliver. While we all notionally enjoy freedom, the level to which this is actually so is determined by economics. If someone has enough accumulated wealth to not work and still enjoy the benefits of civilization then we as a culture value them highly, if someone has no wealth and does not work we make them homeless. Whilst working class people are in reality conscientious towards their roles in society many of their roles are looked down upon and poorly compensated because they are viewed as unskilled and undesirable despite being socially necessary.

Thomas gains inspiration from a combination of historical & political research on diverse themes from land ownership and working class literature to modern pop culture. She is particularly interested in the visual aspect and lifestyle depicted in 90’s reality television programs such as *The Simple Life,* that showcase the life of the rich and famous. In the show Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie act up to their ignorance of working class culture, and in some ways can be seen as setting the stage for an explosion of people seeking fame for fame’s sake. One family who have embodied this desire is the renowned Kardashian family, who’s sybaritic lifestyle flagrantly displayed on their TV show *Keeping up with the Kardashians* is fascinating to those who aspire to celebrity while living without many of the same luxuries. This is a direct reversal from working class Victorian England, where the wealthy would pay slum landlords to tour the homes of the working class, fascinated by the lifestyles of the poor, wondering why anyone would ‘choose’ to live in the conditions they witnessed.

Thomas creates video installations that deal with these issues in hope to reach the working class audience by using a cinematic value in which her fictional world of brightly coloured, kitschy aesthetics meet exaggerated characters that play out scenarios of our world in an uncanny format.