

Tanya Leighton

FRIEZE

Stories We Missed: Celebrating the BBC at 1

Monty Python's Flying Circus (1969–74)



Monty Python's Flying Circus, 'Whicker Island', 1972. Courtesy: Getty Images

I was 17 in 1969, the year when I first started to experiment with mind-altering drugs and *Monty Python's Flying Circus* first aired on BBC television. The series commenced a few months before I left home, and I still clearly remember having to sit with my parents in order to watch the show. There were only three television channels at the time, so whatever was showing on BBC2 and ITV must have been even more unpalatable to my parents than *Monty Python*, which they hated, but watched anyway. They hated it almost as much as I loved it, which made me love it even more. Through my newly opened and somewhat arrogant doors of perception, I could see things that their generation and all the other 'straight' people out there would never understand. The playfulness of the Pythons' formal trickery, the unpredictability, the deliberate disorientation of the viewer and the 'logic of the illogic' that bothered my parents so much was precisely what I found so attractive and engaging. Most memorable for me are the numerous false endings to the programme, when, on more than one occasion, I found myself momentarily uncertain as to whether I was still watching *Monty Python* or the BBC news. When I take drugs now, it's usually for medicinal purposes, but the fortuitous collision of Monty Python and Mary Jane in my formative years played a big part in my realization that there are many ways of perceiving the world around us – a premise that I've continued to explore in my life and art ever since. – *John Smith*

Frieze, December 2022

Kurfürstenstraße 156, 10785 Berlin
+49 (0)30 21 972 220, info@tanyaleighton.com, www.tanyaleighton.com