

LOVE LIFE: ACT II at Grundy Art Gallery

Sara Jaspan, Exhibitions Editor
Posted 22 Jun 2017



Emma Hart and Jonathan Baldock, LOVE LIFE ACT II, image courtesy of Ian Brown

LOVE LIFE: ACT II at [Grundy Art Gallery](#), 17 June–12 August 2017, free entry - [Visit now](#)

Though its donkeys are now fitted with [contactless payment saddles](#) and the Amusements Arcades resonate with electronic flashing lights and sounds, Blackpool remains forever connected with the iconic Victorian seaside resort it once was. Making the northern town a particularly apt setting for *LOVE LIFE: ACT II* – the second stage of Jonathan Baldock and Emma Hart’s

evolving exhibition that radically re-imagines the traditional beachside attraction, *Punch and Judy*, in three 'acts'.

Following *ACT I* at PEER gallery in London, *LOVE LIFE*'s latest manifestation at the Grundy continues to focus upon the dark humour and violence at the heart of the popular children's show. Transforming the gallery's Edwardian rooms into a network of 'interiors', the artists explore the psychological landscape of the puppet booth in life-size form. Based upon the 'room sets' of Ideal Home exhibitions, each interior offers a wry inversion of the conventional signifiers of domestic bliss. A washing machine spews its blood-red contents onto the floor; a stove heats dishes containing human faces; a string of sausages spell out the threatening words 'YOUR BACK'; and a pair of tired, aching breasts sag against the makeshift wall. Are these the traces of the abusive love life shared between Punch and his wife, often taken out upon Baby?

Drawing upon Blackpool's history, the exhibition also features a special display of vintage *Punch and Judy* puppets on loan from the town's extensive collections, and a giant illuminated thumb which the artists commissioned Blackpool Council's Illuminations Department to create. The sculpture is based on the phrase 'under the thumb' which refers to the old Common Law granting a husband the 'right' to beat his disobedient wife with a stick no wider than his thumb. In the background plays the melodramatic strains of Baldock and Hart's adaptation of *John and Marsha* (1951); the comedian and puppeteer Stan Freberg's cult parody of soap opera dialogue. While a repeated eye motif introduces a 21st century twist upon the exhibition's themes, perhaps referencing the growing infringement of 'Big Brother' style government surveillance upon the privacy of the home.

As the Blackpool rendition of *LOVE LIFE* pushes the show's original concerns to an even darker place, it will be interesting to see how its final act plays out at De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-sea, where the exhibition travels to in October.

LOVE LIFE: ACT II at Grundy Art Gallery

17 June–12 August 2017

Free entry