

**ArtSeen**

## Jonathan Baldock: *Grave Goods*

By [Helena Haimes](#)



Jonathan Baldock, *Seasons in the Sun*, 2022. Felt, hessian, ceramic, and quartz, 21 x 82 1/2 x 6 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York. Photo: JSP Art Photography.

Any artist worth their salt spends their career striving to achieve a visual language all their own. It is a statement that sounds so obvious as to be meaningless, but is far easier said than achieved; the line between a contemporary artwork that's in productive dialogue with past and present practices and one that's just plain derivative and/or irrelevant is incredibly fine, and tricky to tread. Every artistic practice references, but with varying degrees of subtlety, rigor, and success. Whether through pure imitation, parody, pastiche, or refined homage, all artists engage in a dialogue with art history and with their peers, whether they want to fully acknowledge that or not.

In his current show at Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, British artist Jonathan Baldock offers a masterclass in navigating this difficult creative terrain. The work here quotes liberally from a broad stable of references and influences, from Bauhaus theater and early Renaissance painting to northern European folklore and 70s pop songs. His range of techniques and processes are just as catholic—Baldock turns his hand to appliqué, tapestry, ceramics, and weaving. In the hands of a less capable artist, it could all very easily become a blurry, art historical hodgepodge. However, thanks to the artist's deft sensitivity to vernacular histories of craft, folklore, theater and ritual, his technical prowess, and, crucially, his dark, infectious sense of humor, this heady mix of references becomes engaging rather than overbearing.

Two large, neatly hand-stitched wall hangings greet us first. Made from hessian and cotton candy-toned felt, *Seasons in the Sun* and *In Your Face* (both 2022) unabashedly reference early Renaissance painting with their millefleur-inspired flowers and compositions inspired by a frieze and an altarpiece. In a defiantly contemporary flourish, mouthless heads and ceramic hands seem to be trying to burst forth from their two-dimensional dwellings, hinting at sensuality, even fetishism. Baldock's longstanding interest in the revolutionary aesthetic of Bauhaus theater (think bright, geometric costumes chock-full of colorful symbolism) exerts a loud presence, too. His titles are also mined from his intricate palette of cultural references: *Seasons in the Sun* taken from the 1973 Terry Jacks song about a dying man bidding farewell to his loved ones, written with Jacks's terminally ill best friend in mind. It's a peppy but profound tune, a latent reference to death and grief in pop form that neatly encapsulates Baldock's visceral yet culturally attuned approach to death and the rituals that surround it.



Jonathan Baldock, *In Your Face*, 2022. Felt, hessian, ceramic, and crystal, 78 1/2 x 55 x 6 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York. Photo: JSP Art Photography.

As is to be expected from a show entitled *Grave Goods*, death and dying provide the whole show with its conceptual backbone. Smaller wall pieces—squashed ceramic faces, feet, fingers tied to hessian backdrops, are entitled “Reliquaries,” as in containers for holy relics. His nine stoneware vessels are also fleshy, carnal, with the cast ceramic hands, feet and digits that poke out of them adding yet more corporeality. They’re colorful as hell, from the cobalt blue foot hanging from *Boo-Boo* to the deep crimson red of *Unfurl* (both 2022), which has something of the squashed internal organ about it. It’s all extremely icky but also kind of lickable. Each of these vessels and reliquaries also contains funereal herbs—rosemary, lavender, wormwood, mugwort, lemon balm—bringing an olfactory experience to the work. These had largely faded by the time I visited a couple of weeks after the show opened, though that wasn’t as disappointing as you might imagine. The very act of sticking your freshly unmasked nose into a voluptuous piece of stoneware to try to catch a whiff of yarrow flower forces you to relate to it in a startlingly intimate way.



Jonathan Baldock, *Unfurl*, 2022. Stoneware and glaze filled with wormwood, 17 1/2 x 15 1/2 x 15 1/2 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York. Photo: JSP Art Photography.



Jonathon Baldock, *Mending*, 2022, Stoneware and glaze filled with mugwort, 20 x 14 1/2 x 15 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York. Photo: JSP Art Photography.



Jonathon Baldock, *Boo-Boo*, 2022, Stoneware and glaze filled with sage, 18 x 13 1/2 x 13 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York. Photo: JSP Art Photography.



Traces of the artist's hand and, for that matter his body, are everywhere: one of the sculptures has been brushed with what we assume are three of Baldock's fingers, while many of the cast body parts, from tongues and ears to feet and fingers, are his own. This all lends a genuine intimacy to the work; nothing like a cast form of an artist's own big toe or a squelched, ceramic version of his face to encourage an affinity between artwork and viewer. The sheer range of visual references further builds this sense of familiarity, given that there's something here for so many of us to connect with; Bauhaus aficionados are likely to feel drawn to Baldock's use of bold symbolism, his depictions of some of the ickier parts of the human form will presumably fascinate anyone with an interest in anatomy, and those with a love of craft will assumedly be engaged by the quality and breadth of his craftsmanship.

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## Contributor

**Helena Haimes**

**Helena Haimes** is a contributor to the *Brooklyn Rail*.

30.09.2020 — Review

# Jonathan Baldock: Facecrime

The Bluecoat, Liverpool  
*by Kyle Nathan Brown*



Jonathan Baldock, *Facecrime*, Bluecoat Exhibition Launch, 2020. Photo: Brian Roberts

It seems a strange time to visit an art gallery right now, but the latest exhibition at Bluecoat (Liverpool), Jonathan Baldock's *Facecrime*, was too intriguing to miss. Originally set to open earlier this year, the exhibition was postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic and very recently reopened. In a video interview about the exhibition, Baldock explains how the works came about following his research into an alternative history of ceramics; a history in which clay objects were not only functional, but were used by early human civilisations as a means of communication. His interest in Mesopotamian clay tablets, which bear the markings of the ancient



Corridor8

pictorial cuneiform language, inspired Baldock to adapt this idea for a contemporary audience, using emoji symbols – the fastest growing non-verbal language of our modern age. Non-verbal language can be found throughout the exhibition, where facial expressions adorn ceramic towers and masks. Solidifying this idea of non-verbal communication is the exhibition's title, 'Facecrime', a reference to George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*, in which body language is used as evidence of guilt, and incentive enough for characters to be arrested and questioned by the state.

In Gallery One, three walls are lined with a row of clay tablets, or 'masks' as Baldock calls them, each unique and bearing a human-like face. There is a sense of walking into a crowded room of private conversations, each stopping dead upon the visitor's entry; some faces appear mouths agape as if interrupted mid-sentence, others with staring eyes demand silence from the rest, which are frozen in comical shock. The room is bright, and the masks are a feverish medley of colour, texture, shape and expression. In some cases, Baldock has used leftover clay, string and beads, giving a sense of urgency, as if these works were conceived during episodes of restless inspiration with the artist hastily grabbing whatever was at hand; others convey a sense of care and patience. The masks range from looking as though they belong in a primary school art class, with their charming naivety and brutish execution, to nightmarish and expertly crafted, and others still feel friendly and wise, as if fallen straight out of folklore and fairy tales.

One mask bears a face of leaves or petals, black with flecks of light brown and glossy with patches of matte paint, arranged around three holes; two eyes and a perfectly spherical, whistling mouth. Contrasting this is a cartoonish pink face, matte and flesh-like, with a crude, trunk-like nose protruding from the middle, bending downwards, then immediately up again before being squashed into where its left eye should be. The solitary right eye resembles a peeling scab, revealing a small orange ball underneath. A second small, this time yellow, ball has been dragged through the wet clay to carve an arched, frowning mouth, and two unnervingly realistic ears jutting out from each side of the tablet complete the piece. The masks are beaming with emotion; warm, friendly, sad, strange and jocular. There's a strangely welcoming energy in Gallery One, after the initial feeling of unease – the artist states that he wants viewers to spend time with the works, and allow their own interpretations to influence how they experience the fascinating characters of the exhibition.



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After the intimate atmosphere of the first room, Gallery Two presents something entirely different: a large space strewn with towers of elaborately decorated vases, one of which almost reaches the gallery's high ceiling, whilst others seem to have fallen, spilling blue sand with small stamped coins or disks in heaped piles on the ground, evoking an immediate sense of wonder. Like in Gallery One, there is an abundance of colour, all soft and playful in pastel. This playfulness is apparent throughout these works. Gloss details draw out puckered lips and toothy smiles from the matte finish of the vases, whilst emoji stamps decorate the clay. Protruding tubes and body parts call the viewer with beckoning fingers, waving hands, and mouths ready to speak. There's even a distractingly realistic male torso appearing from one vase, which the artist has fashioned after his own. There is a sense of humour in these works, along with a feeling of the artist's hands; art made with skill, thought and care, adding the satisfaction found when comparing something handmade to its mass-produced replicant.

Somewhat obscured by the whimsy of the work is a sophistication in Baldock's use of technique and materials. His use of ceramics, blown glass, wicker basket weaving, and even poured melted wax add depth to the texture and surface of each piece, the latter creating a distinctly fleshy and tactile appearance and maintaining an immersive experience throughout the exhibition.

The space is bright and peaceful, which adds to the surprise when, seemingly out of nowhere, a loud, comical sobbing, or mad cackling is blurted out around the space, bouncing throughout the installation. An almost inhuman whistling occasionally sounds from above; according to the artist, these are the sounds of the works speaking to each other non-verbally, adding an extra dimension to the already visceral world he has created. Baldock has succeeded in giving these characterful objects a sense of history. The strange blue sand that appears to have been spilled around the sculptures may represent what has been lost over the many centuries – but what remains, these ceramic vessels, offer glimpses of bygone civilisations; marketplaces and trading docks, the storing and sharing of goods.



Jonathan Baldock, Facecrime, Bluecoat Exhibition Launch, 2020. Photo: Brian Roberts

In the adjoining corridor between the two galleries, the walls are again lined with peering masks, but these feel different to those in Gallery One. Somehow more active, they seek the visitor's attention, like they have something to say. Aesthetically uniform, the artist has utilised a folding technique, with the masks' features only suggested by the lapping of thickly glossed clay. The faces on one side of the corridor appear brutally sad, with their eyes following the visitor around the building, pleadingly. Whereas on the opposite wall the masks are smiling, some of them innocently, and others perhaps not. Though their folds of clay and blank eyes are almost identical to the sad faces, these beings seem to be experiencing something else, perhaps hinting at some absurd truth they learnt from the aeons their kind have seen. This is all conjecture, of course, but it is what this exhibition does so well; awakens the imagination in such a way that the audience can't help but create lives, purposes and histories for these characters and objects.





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*Facecrime* feels as though it is about humanity's enduring talent to communicate through culture: art, language and even facial expressions, highlighting the ability to talk and share, no matter what the circumstances, making this exhibition somewhat comforting in our current time of anxiety and sorrow. The artist wants the viewer to devise their own individual conclusions, but one interpretation is that this exhibition constitutes a place to step back from the current moment, and contemplate something enduring.

*Jonathan Baldock's Facecrime is on display at Bluecoat until 1 November 2020.*

*Kyle Nathan Brown is a writer and artist based in Northwest England, currently writing his first novel.*

*This review is supported by Bluecoat.*



In the work of London-based artist Jonathan Baldock, sculpture becomes a portal, inviting viewers into imaginative contact with the body, as well as personal and familial histories. Although Baldock's work bespeaks the influence of historical soft-sculpture and its echoing of the body – as in the work of Claes Oldenburg or Louise Bourgeois – it also channels myriad forms of primitive, folk and popular culture. The artist's vibrant, plush constructions thus oscillate between widely available touchstones and intimate disclosures.---'My biggest fear is that someone will crawl into it' (2017) couples deeply personal source material with a widely accessible theatricalization of bodily and domestic anxiety. This work comprises a modular sleeping room, constructed by hanging sewn fabric panels over a wooden frame. The environment's textile exterior is decorated with vibrant bodily and biomorphic motifs into which thin ribbons of colour sometimes disappear, like tapeworms or animated cotton swabs. Literally amplifying the work's domestic theme, Baldock has installed speakers within it, playing excerpts from his mother's autobiography. While this work's title references the possibility that a viewer might enter the sculpture and fall asleep, it also echoes the anxiety over the body being surreptitiously entered – a theme that recalls the artist's 2014 exhibition 'Notes on the Orifice' at London's VITRINE gallery. Here Baldock created an environment of cartoonish fabric sculptures centred around suggestive holes – an oversized pink and purple donut, as well as sewn walls and paintings, riddled with beckoning perforations. In this way, his sculptural environments – which he describes as realities that viewers are asked to step into – enact lively counterpoints between the whimsicality of cartoonish stuffed toys and deeper psycho-bodily interests.---Baldock self-identifies as an artist who 'thinks through making'. This characterization helps to explain why formal rhymes and resonances between pieces, as well as slow and meticulous elaborations of repeated motifs, are equally important to the more easily described bodily, familial and cultural themes that run through his work. In the two-dimensional textile work 'Now We Look To The Future' (2016), for example, the rhythmic repetition of patterned ovoid heads, placed behind a vertical grid of tree branches and a single onlooking bird, is just as significant as the ominous historical viewpoint suggested by the work's title. Likewise, 'Marionettes (Jay and Barb)' (2017), in which pink orbs appear once more as heads on two lifelike dangling puppets. These spindly wooden corpuses lead downwards to old-fashioned embroidered garments and vibrantly painted hands and feet. Both marionettes hold their mouths open like whistles, again invoking the orifice motif. It is through these vibrant echoes and playful associations that Baldock's work achieves its curious tensions.---Mitch Speed

JONATHAN BALDOCK Born 1980, Pembury, UK. Lives and works in London. **SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS:** 2019 – Camden Arts Centre, London; 2018 – Zzo Sara Zanin Gallery, Rome; 2017 – 'There's No Place Like Home', CGP, London; 'My biggest fear is that someone will crawl into it', SPACE, London; 2016 – 'The Skin I Live in', Nicolle Beauchene, New York; 2014 – 'The Soft Machine', Chapter Gallery, Cardiff, UK; 'Hot Spots', The Apartment, Vancouver; 2013 – 'A Strange mix between a Butcher's Shop and a Nightclub', Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge, UK. **SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:** 2018 – 'Objects Like Us', The Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum, Ridgefield, Connecticut; 2017 – 'Idea Home Show', Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, UK; 'Offshore', Perens Art Gallery and Hull Maritime Museum, UK; 2016 – 'Conversation Piece | Part 3', Fondazione Memmo, Rome; 'Seepferdchen und Flugfische', Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck, Remagen, Germany; 2015 – 'Archetypes, Power, and Puppets', College of Wooster Art Museum, Ohio; 'Only the Lonely – Seuls les solitaires', La Galerie centre d'art contemporain, Paris; 'The Varieties – Dance First, Think Later', Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston, UK.



Now We Look To The Future---2016---Felt, silk thread and hessian---  
225 x 200 cm---88 1/2 x 78 3/4 in---Installation view at Fondazione Memmo, Rome



My biggest fear is that someone will crawl into it---2017---Hessian, felt, silk thread, wood, mattress, cushions and cotton (with audio recording of artist's mother whispering inside)---210 x 160 x 250 cm---83 x 63 x 98 in---Installation view at SPACE, London

Jonathan Baldock



Marionettes (Jay and Barb)---2017---Felt, silk thread, cotton, jesmonite, wood, polystyrene and rose quartz---45 x 197 cm each---18 x 77 3/4 in each





# CREATIVE **BOOM**

## **Witty ceramic masks by Jonathan Baldock that convey a world of emotion**

Katy Cowan | 20 Sept. 2019

Do you know those people who find the face of Jesus in a pack of Monster Munch? It's called pareidolia, a psychological phenomenon that causes people to see faces in inanimate objects. And it's a cognitive process that British artist Jonathan Baldock is exploring in his latest series of ceramic masks.



Jonathan Baldock, *Maske III*, 2019, ceramic, 31 x 35 cm. Copyright Jonathan Baldock. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London.



# CREATIVE BOOM

Called Personae, the collection teems with bright colours and outlandish expressions. Ripples of clay allude to folds of skin whilst incisions and abstract protuberances reveal physiognomic features such as eyes, ears and nostrils. Here, you can see Baldock is toying with the theme of pareidolia. Whilst some masks mediate universal emotions such as happiness or sadness, others merely hint at figuration.

Baldock achieves the variations in mood and personality by experimenting with different ceramic techniques, using coloured clays, applying glazes, and firing the hanging tablets at varying temperatures. "Lustrous, painterly finishes emphasise the playfulness of certain expressions whilst earthen, pumice-like surfaces manifest feelings of melancholia," says the Gallery. "The artist employs seriality to emphasise these differences by hanging the works side-by-side and using an identical rectangular format."

You can see this new series at an upcoming exhibition at the Stephen Friedman Gallery in London, launching on 27 September and running until 9 November 2019.

Baldock trained as a painter but now works primarily in low-fi ceramics and textiles – hand-making vast 3-D objects, sculptural pieces and colourful immersive installations. His work is often crazily humorous but also has an uncanny, macabre quality. He has exhibited internationally and his work has explored everything from emojis to orifices. His studio is in East London but he exhibits internationally. Find out more at [jonathan-baldock.com](http://jonathan-baldock.com).



Jonathan Baldock, *Maske I*, 2019, ceramic, 31 x 25 cm. Copyright Jonathan Baldock. Courtesy of the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London.



# THE ART NEWSPAPER

## Frieze London diary: enforced leisure, free whiskey and a four-poster bed

### Plus, Theaster Gates' culture club

3rd October 2019 18:03 BST

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#### In bed with Baldock's mum

The artist Jonathan Baldock wants to get you into his bed. This is no saucy invite but an interactive artistic intervention called *My biggest fear is that someone will crawl into it*, showing in the sumptuous surroundings of Fitzrovia Chapel (until 5 October). The artist describes the four-poster work, which comes complete with exquisitely crocheted blankets and pillows, as a “secure centre in a chaotic world”. Visitors can snuggle up and listen to a narrative recorded by Baldock's mother, who told us at the private view how “extremely proud” of her offspring she was. Bless.



Sweet dreams: Baldock's bed in Fitzrovia Chapel may prove enticing during Frieze Week © Stephen Friedman Gallery



# Jonathan Baldock, MULTIFACETTE

*Sculpteur londonien, il navigue librement à travers les savoir-faire, gardant toujours la figuration en ligne de mire. Jonathan Baldock trouve dans la diversité des médiums la satisfaction de tout fabriquer lui-même. Sa résidence de six mois au Camden Arts Centre lui donne actuellement l'occasion de développer un travail d'argile, matrice offrant une plasticité propice à la grimace.*

© Courtesy de l'artiste, Damian Griffiths



Série « Mask », 2018, grès, engobe, 38 x 28 x 5 cm

Le corps fascinait Jonathan Baldock bien avant qu'il n'intègre une école d'art, lieu où l'anatomie relève de l'exercice le plus académique. Aujourd'hui, il aborde le sujet avec indiscipline, et ne peut envisager un jour de s'en lasser. Le fait-main doit autant permettre le grotesque que la délicatesse. Il a élaboré ses propres canons et son idéal s'éloigne des critères de beauté pour privilégier l'irrégulier, le suant, le nerveux. Il manifeste un rapport empathique à l'extravagance, cette rugosité qui contredit l'imagerie lisse, quitte à s'approcher de la caricature.

## Un visage a minima

Nous pouvons nous interroger sur la façon de représenter un visage. Jonathan Baldock indique ne pas avoir de formule magique, si ce n'est d'éviter l'évidence d'associer systématiquement bouche, narines et yeux. Ses masques relèvent plutôt de la juste combinaison, parfois aussi simple que deux trous avec un troisième ailleurs, ou bien une oreille assortie à une tranche de pamplemousse en guise de sourire. En fait, n'importe quelle forme ou objet en lieu et place des dif-

férents organes sensoriels. Bien qu'il vît des têtes partout, il commença par triturer la sienne. Ainsi, il appliqua de la pâte à sel sur les reliefs de sa figure, obtenant ainsi une base qu'il transforma en différents personnages issus de l'histoire ou de la culture pop. Des façonnages qui restent de l'ordre de l'imagination car le céramiste confie qu'il n'a finalement jamais réalisé de portrait à proprement parler. Il cherche à capturer des émotions ou des humeurs, autant de caractéristiques qui ne reflètent pas le physique d'une personne en particulier.

## Casting cosmopolite

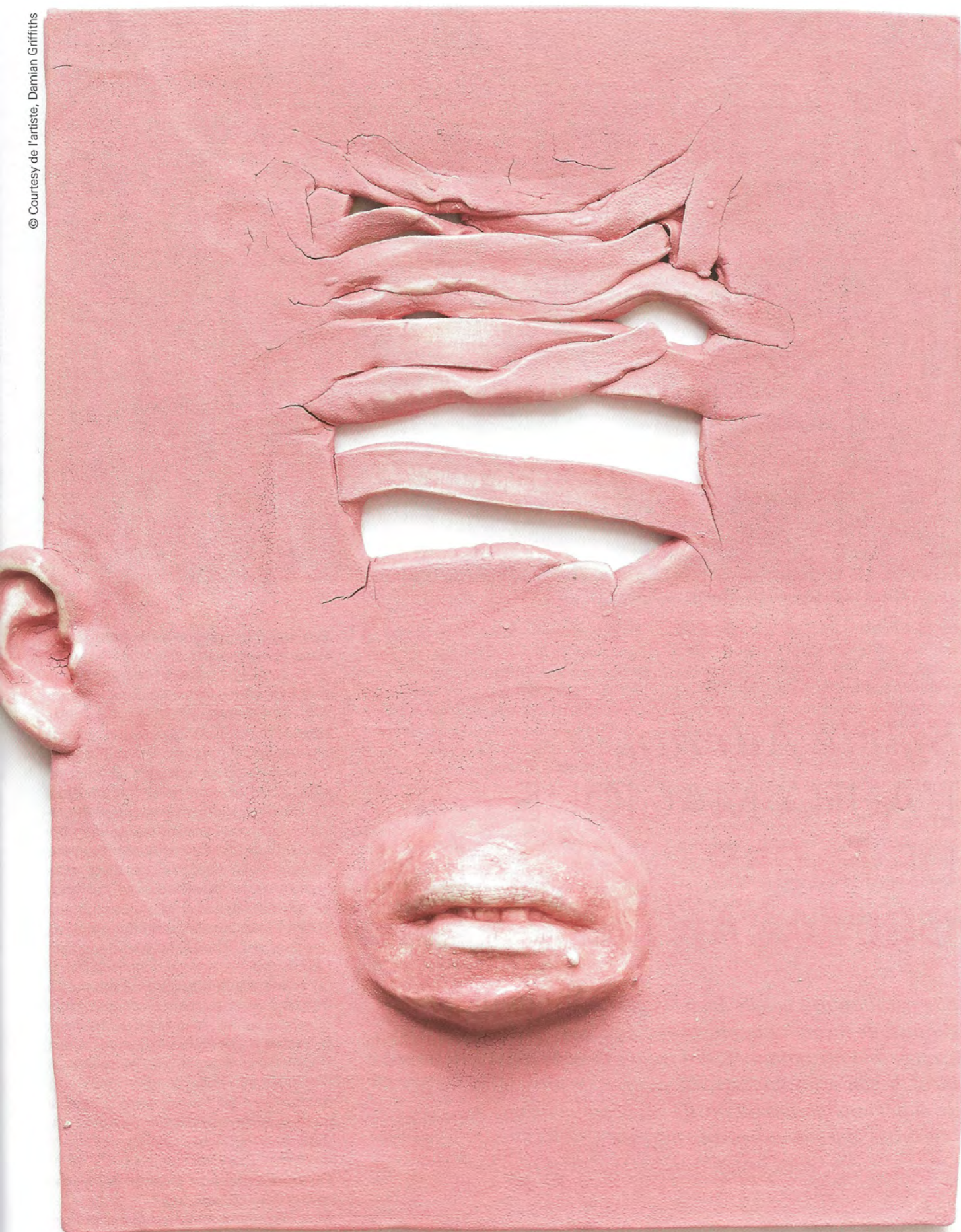
Jonathan Baldock s'est formé à la peinture qu'il considère comme un artisanat parmi d'autres. Tout matériau l'intrigue par sa capacité à être transformé, selon les compétences. S'il brode, crochète, tricote, tisse, coule le bronze, moule la cire, souffle le verre, grave le bois ou tresse l'osier, c'est au départ dans un souci d'économie doublé d'un contexte familial opportun, sa mère lui ayant transmis un panel de techniques. Cette situation lui donna une autonomie inédite,

qu'il mit au service de projets ambitieux. La pratique de la terre s'inscrit dans ce même appétit depuis une bonne décennie, et prend ces derniers temps une ampleur nouvelle. Lauréat du Freeland Lomax Ceramics Fellowship (fondation qui propose une bourse de recherche en céramique, une résidence au Camden Arts Center de Londres suivie d'une exposition), Jonathan Baldock peut s'immerger totalement dans la matière grâce à la mise à disposition d'un grand four et la bienveillance d'un céramiste. C'est là qu'il décline des fratries de masques et de totems. Sur la surface de plaques ou de grands cylindres, des entités prennent forme et dessinent leur personnalité. La gueule s'étire dans la tendresse de la glaise, le nez pointe, le regard perce. Progressivement, de la comédie à la tragédie, Jonathan Baldock dépeint tout l'éventail des rôles. ■

JOËL RIFF

[www.camdenartscentre.org](http://www.camdenartscentre.org)





Mask V, 2018, grès, engobe, 38 x 28 x 5 cm



## Jonathan Baldock and Emma Hart

De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea, UK

BY [CHRIS SHARRATT](#) IN [REVIEWS](#) | 20 NOV 17



Jonathan Baldock and Emma Hart have been on tour, or at least their three-act ‘Love Life’ exhibition has. Starting as a small but busy show at PEER in London at the end of last year, an expanded ‘Act II’ was at Blackpool’s Grundy Art Gallery over the summer, and the final leg finds them on the UK’s South East coast. The locations are significant: ‘Love Life’ takes its cue from the puppet show, Punch and Judy, which can trace its roots in the UK to 17th-century London. In the 20th century, the show’s red-and-white-striped booths became a seaside holiday staple, Punch’s frequently violent relationship with Judy becoming a benchmark of summertime family entertainment. But while ‘Love Life’ references the tropes of the show – De La Warr Pavilion’s back wall is painted in vertical red and white stripes, the artists wear Punch-style large noses in a short film – it is contemporary domestic tensions that are being explored here rather than the puppet show itself.

The scene is set with a decorative hessian hanging depicting a twee-looking house with crosshatched windows (Baldock, *Wait Until I Get You Home*, all works 2016 unless otherwise stated). At PEER, this faced the gallery’s floor-to-ceiling front window; in Bexhill-on-Sea, where the first-floor exhibition space is open on one side, it faces onto the interior landing of this seafront pavilion. Peeking out from under the hanging is a garish pink carpet; to the left there’s one of four booth-like interiors that resemble sparsely furnished stage sets. Dyed-red clothes tumble out of a washing machine made from pink metal tubing (Baldock, *Out Damn’d Spot!*) and works in ceramic and fabric are positioned on the floor, the walls, a dining table. A giant figure in a baby walker – Baldock’s *A Guiding Hand* – acts as a slightly sinister overseer, its large pink fabric head featuring a film of a single blinking eye. Behind it on the wall, Hart’s ceramic *Boohoo Boob Tube* features two squeezed paint tubes morphing into red-raw breasts. Spelt out in alphabet spaghetti in a ceramic saucepan are the words: ‘I feel like I’m drowning’ (Baldock, *It’s Not Burnt It’s Caramelised*). This is no ‘Home Sweet Home’, then; cartoonish and tense, it’s a place to escape from, rather than to.

# frieze

The tension is ramped up further in the film, *Love Life* (2017), one of two pieces in the exhibition produced collaboratively, the other being *Jon and Emma*, a sound installation based on a 1951 Stan Freberg comedy skit. Viewed from a red velvet sofa and presented on a large wall-mounted television, *Love Life*'s portrayal of domestic drudgery and disquiet provides a narrative that links the exhibition's disparate elements. In a series of simmering conflicts that border on the slapstick, the domestic life of a couple with a young baby plays out, at turns funny, farcical, and displaying a pettiness that anyone who has ever had an argument with their partner will surely recognize. Feet are intentionally trodden on as they pass on the stairs; doors rhythmically slam; a crammed washing machine whirrs naggingly. The pair don't talk and barely look at each other, their only communication being via occasional messages written on cardboard: 'You \*\*\*\*ing loser' says one; 'A\*?\*hole' another.



Jonathan Baldock and Emma Hart, 'LOVE LIFE ACT III', installation view, De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea, 2017. Courtesy: De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-on-Sea; photograph: Rob Harris

'Love Life' offers an uncompromising portrayal of a couple living together, exploring both the internal pressures exerted on a relationship and the external expectations that come with family life. Yet while it captures the monotony and frustration of the everyday, it is sustained by both its humour and an almost self-deprecating shrugging of the shoulders. As it examines the stresses and problems of the domestic sphere, it also acts as a reminder that, despite all it can throw at us, equipped with an 'if you don't laugh you'll cry' stoicism, it is still possible to – yes – 'love life'.

June 30, 2017 by Marcelle Joseph

## **Marcelle Joseph Interviews Artist Jonathan Baldock**



“There’s no place like home, there’s no place like home, there’s no place like home...”

Suddenly, images flash through your mind of a baby blue gingham-bedecked Dorothy clicking the heels of her red sequined shoes. The artwork of British artist Jonathan Baldock is equally transportative.

Baldock blurs the line between art and theatre with his cast of enigmatic characters – typically meticulously crafted, soft, pastel pink sculptural assemblages that focus on the human form with an unsettling sense of humour. Employing crafts traditionally associated with the domestic sphere, such as home felting, basket weaving, candle making, appliqué, ceramics and stitching, Baldock’s multidisciplinary practice incorporates painting, sculpture, performance and playful installations, finding inspiration



in the enchanted realms of mythology, masks, tribal rituals and folkloristic traditions. Like Dorothy's ruby slippers, Baldock's work has a performative element that encourages its audience to engage with it. For *There's No Place Like Home* at CGP London (on until 30 July 2017), Baldock's largest and first solo exhibition in a public institution in London, the artist, referencing the 1939 musical *The Wizard of Oz*, creates a symphony of surreal sculptures that play with scale, horror and marvel bordering on the grotesque. Baldock's work can also be seen in Hull (at the Hull Maritime Museum until 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2017 as part of its UK City of Culture programme throughout 2017) and in Blackpool (at the Grundy Art Gallery as part of a collaborative touring exhibition in three parts with fellow artist Emma Hart until 12<sup>th</sup> July).

On the occasion of Baldock's solo show spread over the two spaces of CGP London in Southwark Park, including Dilston Grove, the cavernous historic church that was one of the first concrete buildings of its size in Britain, Marcelle Joseph talks to Baldock about his theatrical sculptural practice and the new cast of characters he was commissioned to make for *There's No Place Like Home*.





**Congratulations on your latest solo exhibition at CGP! Working in such an iconic and monumental building as Dilston Grove and covering two separate locales, how did you approach this show? What came first? The form or scale of the sculptures? The materials? The reference to *The Wizard of Oz*?**

CGP commissioned me to make new works for their Dilston Grove (church) space. As you say, it is such an iconic space and could be viewed as an artwork in its own right! It is long, narrow and very high and so not an easy space to show in. I felt the work had to be made in response to these factors so I always knew that I wanted the work to utilise the height. From here, the idea of hanging works from the beams above evolved. This adds to the already very theatrical nature of the space – not just a church but a stage.

For me, showing in a church made it impossible not to think of mortality. The exhibition came about during a time when I was thinking a lot about the vulnerability and weakness of the human body. Of the shortness of life... I felt the need to oppose this and to make monuments to celebrate its strength and wonder. I started thinking about the church as a body and the sculptures within as fragmented body parts – kind of votives made monstrous. The Wizard of Oz connection quickly succeeded these ideas, and – firstly the idea of the homemade within the works, the significance of home to people today, but also that Oz is the home of all the unusual characters. Ozma is more interested in the unusual ones than the ordinary ones.



**Your work is fascinated with the human body and its many orifices. For this show, the viewer encounters a human-scale votive candle adorned with waxen ears, a wicker chain that morphs into a human spine, chandeliers shaped like breasts hung from the ceiling and a sandy table in the form of an eye. Is your use of the body and its many parts a way of demanding that your sculptures perform for their audience?**

Absolutely – I see these sculptures as very performative. Not just in their references to the body and their energy but also in the fact that they are often activated in performance by live performers. These interactions often leave the performer heavily costumed and seem less alive than the sculptures, and I love that!



**Carrying on with the corporeal theme, do the bodily orifices depicted in your work have a sinister, sexual or violent side to them as well?**

I enjoy the fact that orifices (particularly the word) often have sexual connotations, which in turn could be sexual or violent. For me, however, the orifice becomes a metaphorical portal to pass from one space to another. The doorway from the outer world to the internal world, the physical to spiritual. Orifices on the body are mouths, ears, noses and eyes and not just the anus, urinary meatus, vagina and nipples – which I guess carry more sexual connotations. I think these two aspects can easily run parallel as they do in life. It is the dark and light aspect of the world we live in... or does that make it sound too much like some life coach/guru??



**Your work, idolising design, pattern and decoration and often imbued with a hint of the ‘dressing up box’, is laboriously made by the human body, using craft techniques associated with feminised labour. How did your interest in these domestic skills initially come about and how much of it is bound up in your own autobiography?**

I learnt to sew from my nan. She sometimes looked after me when my mum was at work and being an older nan meant that she took care of me in front of the TV and showed me how to knit and sew – I loved it! Later it was my mum who passed on her sewing skills – the basic blanket stitch which is a bit of a staple within my work was taught by her. I’ve always said my childhood role models were three women: my nan, my mum and my sister. And I see them entwined in the work that I make. I believe these mediums have an honesty and integrity to them and are incredibly empowering. Being able to make work and construct work by hand – especially in the early days was incredibly important to me. Today, I am lucky enough to incorporate elements that I do make myself and I think the work is all the stronger for it.



**Let's talk about your palette. Is it pastel pink, sickly pink, candy-coloured pink or flesh pink? Is colour integral to your work and on the flip side, is colour an important tool for the viewer to translate or decode your work?**

Firstly, it is flesh pink but I like that it is also all of those other pinks. I love that it is one colour that has so many associations. Pink also has associations with childlike innocence so it becomes another tool with which I bring together opposing forces and I subvert and distort its reading with uncanny or darker elements





**For this show, you will animate your new work with performances by Vancouver’s Kokoro Dance Company who will interact with your new commissions in Dilston Grove in bespoke, sculptural costumes. This is not the first time you have worked with performance artists and have made costumes for them. How did this collaboration come about with this Japanese *butoh* dance company and why the fascination with adorning the live human body in relation to your sculptural installations?**

I was first introduced to Jay Hirabayashi and Barbara Bourget of Kokoro Dance through the curator of a show I had in Vancouver – Tobin Gibson in 2014. Tobin had organised for them to perform within my show, wear some sculptural costumes I had on display and activate some of the objects. We hit it off immediately and both expressed a keen interest in working together in the future. In 2015, they invited me to design the set and costumes for their piece ‘The Book of Love’. Inviting them to come to the UK has long been a dream of mine and I’m very happy they have agreed to it. I had no prior experience of Butoh dance before working with them but I think what they do is incredibly powerful and a wonderful antidote to a lot of performance at the moment in contemporary art which seems to be focused on the young, bodies, complacency and posing.

### **Credits**

*Images 1-3 and 6: Jonathan Baldock, installation shot of “There’s No Place Like Home” at CGP London (Dilston Grove), 2017, Photo: Damian Griffiths*

*Images 4-5: Jonathan Baldock, installation shot of “There’s No Place Like Home” at CGP London (The Gallery), 2017, Photo: Damian Griffiths.*

*Image 7: Jonathan Baldock, installation shot of “Love Life: Act II” at The Grundy, Blackpool (collaborative exhibition by Jonathan Baldock and Emma Hart), 2017, Photo: Ian Brown.*

*Image 8: Jonathan Baldock, installation shot of “Toilers of the Sea” at Hull Maritime Museum, Hull (collaborative exhibition by Jonathan Baldock and Ian J Brown), 2017, Photo: Ian Brown.*



## Links

*Jonathan Baldock: There's No Place Like Home, CGP London (15 June – 30 July 2017):*  
<http://cgplondon.org/jonathan-baldock/>

*Artist's website:* <http://jonathan-baldock.com>

*Offshore: artists explore the sea, Hull Maritime Museum, Hull (1 April – 2 July 2017):*  
<http://invisibledust.com/project/offshore-artists-explore-the-sea/>

*Love Life: Act 2 (two person touring show with Emma Hart), The Grundy Art Gallery, Blackpool (17 June – 12 August 2017):*  
<https://www.grundyartgallery.com/programme/forthcoming/>

*Belmacz Gallery, London:* [http://www.belmacz.com/artists/baldock\\_jonathan](http://www.belmacz.com/artists/baldock_jonathan)

*Nicelle Beauchene, New York:* <http://nicellebeauchene.com/artists/jonathan-baldock/>

## About the Artist

**Jonathan Baldock** (b. 1980, Pembury, UK) graduated from The Royal College of Art in 2005. He has exhibited internationally, recent shows include: *Offshore: Artists Explore the Sea*, Hull Maritime Museum; SPACE Gallery, London; *Love Life: Acts 1,2 & 3* (touring show with Emma Hart), Peer Gallery, London, The Grundy, Blackpool and De La Warr Pavilion (forthcoming); *Conversation Piece/ Part 3*, Fondazione Memmo, Rome; *Baldock, Pope, Zahle*, Northern Gallery of Contemporary Arts (NGCA), Sunderland; *Notes from the Orifice*, VITRINE Gallery, London (UK); *The Soft Machine*, Chapter Gallery, Cardiff; *Hot Spots*, The Apartment, Vancouver; *A Strange Mix Between a Butcher's Shop and a Nightclub*, Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge. He has received international awards and residencies, including: Künstlerhaus Schloss Balmoral Residency (2015), Abbey Fellowship, British School in Rome, Italy (2013); Residency – The Forest, Wysing Art Centre Cambridge, UK (2012); and Skowhegan, School of Painting and Sculpture Residency, Maine, USA (2007). Jonathan Baldock is represented by Belmacz, London and Nicelle Beauchene, New York.

## Jonathan Baldock and Emma Hart

PEER

97 & 99 Hoxton Street

November 9–January 28

“Love Life: Act 1,” Jonathan Baldock and Emma Hart’s new commission for PEER in conjunction with Grundy Art Gallery and the De La Warr Pavilion, will play out in three parts, the first beginning here. For this exhibition, the artists have refashioned the gallery as a surreal Punch-and-Judy set littered with bizarre handcrafted objects. The two conjoined rooms of the candy-striped space become a gigantic theater for Mr. Punch’s family to perform their cheerfully violent hijinks. Everything is suffused with an air of menace, as though Punch could pop out at any time and brutally beat you with his stick.

In the first room, Baldock has constructed a baby’s high chair out of sickly pink felt and thin metal rods (*A Guiding Hand*, all works 2016). In the chair sits a grotesque stuffed head, perhaps a child’s, carrying a digital screen that displays a single eye. The eye just stares, occasionally blinking and tearing up, as though it’s witnessed something terrible. On a nearby wall is Hart’s ceramic breasts with bright-red nipples, which seem to have been squeezed to resemble used-up tubes of toothpaste (*BooHoo Boob Tube*). *Jon and Emma* is a collaborative recording of the artists shrieking out each other’s names hysterically, orgasmically—a sound track for their sexually aggressive tableau. In the adjoining room, Hart’s trio of ceramic comic-book speech bubbles protrudes from a wall, their silhouettes imitating the aquiline profile of Punch (*“You two-faced lying motherfucker”*). Their texts yell out phrases such as “the way you use a knife” and “cross your legs”—evoking a feeling not too unlike like that of being trapped in the crossfire of a lovers’ quarrel. Through black humor and innuendo, Hart and Baldock create an engrossingly sad tale where the viewer can decide the finale.



View of “Jonathan Baldock and Emma Hart:  
Love Life: Act 1,” 2016–17.

— Grace Beaumont



Twin

## Seductive Spaces

**Four new art talents expand expectations of installation.**

WORDS KATE NEAVE



### Jonathan Baldock

Jonathan Baldock creates installations with the mindset of a painter. Designing tableau-style compositions, he wants us to feel like we can step inside the picture frame. Having entered into his surreal landscape, he draws our eye to clusters of small sculptural constellations that are not quite what they seem. Objects that resemble archeological tools are in fact impractical and absurd. Strange handmade objects are everywhere, made from felt, sourdough and polystyrene. Filtering an interest in ancient artifacts, ritualism and tribal costumes, Baldock knits, sews, kneads and glues an imagined contemporary primitivism.

“I think the concept of craftsmanship and the ‘handmade’ has never been more relevant than it is today,” he says. “For too long, ideas associated with craft have been dismissed as sentimental and nostalgic. I believe in the power of making things, and the bringing together of head and hand.” Baldock quotes Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s treatise

on education, Émile, by way of explanation: “If, instead of making a child stick to his books, I employ him in a workshop, his hands work to the advantage of his intellect, he becomes a philosopher while he thinks he is simply becoming an artisan.”

It is Baldock’s talent for engaging the mind that makes his work so compelling. Handmade objects litter the ground like the cultural artifacts of a fantastical lost population. They invite us to imagine our own narrative. His sculptures become characters in stories drawn from our own thoughts.



*A strange cross between a butchers shop, and a nightclub, 2013.*  
Installation shots, Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge. Photos: Plastique Photography

# ArtReview

## Jonathan Baldock: The Soft Machine

*The British artist blurs the boundary between sculpture and costume, at Chapter, Cardiff*



For his first solo exhibition in Wales, Jonathan Baldock will present a series of sculptures, installations and performances drawing from a variety of sources including theatre, pagan ritual, and contemporary popular culture. Baldock's work often takes the form of hybrid sculptures that act both as objects and costumes – turning modest materials into monumental monoliths, or knitted shapes into spaces for performers to inhabit and activate – which explore the relationship between the body and sculpture.

Titled *The Soft Machine*, the show makes reference to the 1961 novel by William S. Burroughs, in which he described the 'soft machine' as 'the human body under constant siege from a vast hungry host of parasites'. By designing a world where humans inhabit the objects, Baldock raises questions of dependence and control, questioning the hierarchy between visitor and sculpture, maker and material.

to 29 June, [Chapter](#), Cardiff



# ARTFORUM

## Jonathan Baldock

PEREGRINEPROGRAM

October 9 – November 6

The clown—a source of laughter for some and of unease or even terror for others—is the central motif in Jonathan Baldock’s sculptural installation *Pierrot*, 2011, which takes its title and inspiration from Jean-Antoine Watteau’s 1718–19 painting of a commedia dell’arte fool. Standing alone above his fellow actors, Watteau’s Pierrot appears lost in thought, the expression on his unpainted face remote. In this moment, he seems unable to fully inhabit his persona—perhaps he is a man forced to play a part that stopped making sense long ago. Baldock’s version of the Pierrot figure evokes a similar sense of displacement, albeit in a comically literal fashion: The clown’s costumed body has been abstracted into a series of modular geometric forms that the artist can (and does) reconfigure at will. Baldock sculpts the individual components out of polystyrene foam, then blanket-stitches sections of cream-colored felt directly onto the forms, forming a taut sheath over the entirety of each. On top of this are sewn additional fabric cutouts in the shape of tears, body parts, polka dots, and stripes.

When viewed as an installation, the sculptures yield a single, exquisitely balanced visual tableau. Seen as individual works, however, their affects career wildly from humorous to bawdy to downright creepy. A head placed atop a stack of cylindrical and rectangular forms evokes a clown in jauntily striped pantaloons, yet the bullet-size hole where one of his eyes should be, and the scarlike strip of black fabric running down the jawline, conjure far less comforting imagery. Comparisons to Frankenstein’s monster and his slasher-film offspring are inevitable, but equally resonant is David Wojnarowicz’s 1990 *Silence = Death* and its iconic image of a man with his mouth sewn shut, blood running from the sutures like tears. For the most part, Baldock avoids pinning any one cultural or art-historical reference to his sculptures, preferring instead to allow for a potentially infinite number of them. A torso with outstretched arms, for example, suggests the graceful leaps of a dancer *en pointe*, while the crudely suggestive smiley face appliquéd to its chest reminds us that “low” forms of culture offer modes of levity that are just as powerful as “high” culture. What is a clown, after all, if not a man who can show us the potential for transcendence that lies in both?

--Claudine Ise