

Q&A

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Jonathan Baldock

Using ceramics, textiles and other crafty mediums, the artist explores the complexities of life with theatrical flair. *Natasha Levy* pulls back the curtain

Crafts: Your work is often described as being theatrical. Do you see an exhibition as a performance?

Jonathan Baldock: It really is a performance. I love going to the theatre and escaping into another world, and I definitely play off that in the work I create.

I'm conscious that, in a lot of theatre, there's a separation between the audience and the stage – it's about an illusion being created from a distance – whereas with my work, you're really immersed. So I spend a lot of time on details to pull the viewer in, in the hope that what I create will work on a micro and macro level.

You frequently draw on mythology, folklore and ancient rituals – what sparked your interest in these topics?

I had quite a religious, Christian upbringing and there was never a place for queer people like me. These topics offered alternate ways of living, and so much is open to interpretation – I can impose my own readings onto them. However, there were a lot of things that I enjoyed about going to church and the ritualistic elements of having a faith. My life is framed by a certain amount of ritual, as I think most people's are – so this naturally weaves into my work.

What other elements of your past have influenced your practice and the themes within your work?

My granddad was a hop farmer, and my mum was, too, when she was younger. Everybody in the family would help – there are even pictures of me beside the hops in a pram. As I got older, I started to have more and more admiration for people in my family who worked hard on the land, and the knowledge they had.



ABOVE: Jonathan Baldock with *Kiss from a Rose*, 2023
RIGHT: installation view of *Becoming Plant (A Hop)*, 2023, from *Touch Wood* at Yorkshire Sculpture Park



PHOTOS: MARK REEVES, COURTESY THE ARTIST AND YORKSHIRE SCULPTURE PARK



LEFT: *Moment in the Sun*, 2023
BELOW: *Earthly Coil (Sight)*, 2021



I also used to spend a lot of time with my nan indoors and she would teach me how to knit, sew and crochet – I was a ‘nanny’s boy’, if you will. When I went to Winchester School of Arts, I started incorporating some of those skills into my work. Then later, when my mum had retired, she started to help me work on pieces. It’s been a lovely way for us to bond and have time together.

That is what’s really amazing about a lot of these skills – they’re collective. There’s a reason why so many folk tales involve spinning and weaving, because they probably came from a time when people would have sat around working on huge textile pieces together.

To what extent is your work autobiographical?

We are Flowers of One Garden was essentially an exhibition about my relationship with my mum. Yes, the theme was very personal, but it’s also something that I think a lot of people can connect with. My primary focus is always

the audience. I try to create a space that will engage the viewer, somewhere they can bring their own experiences.

You studied painting throughout university, but now work with a variety of materials – why?

I like to bring in opposing materials because it creates tension within the work. When you make everything the same, your eye gets too used to it. I want the eye to be busy when it’s looking at my work, I almost want there to be more than you can take in, for there to be a visual feast. I think of my pieces as being very painterly – they’re a bit like tableaux vivants.

I also just love materials. I’ve always been one of those people that you could give a couple of toilet rolls and pipe cleaners to and I would enjoy making something out of them. Some of my very first works that got a bit of attention were pieces made out of salt dough. At the time I didn’t have a studio and I couldn’t afford clay, so I ended up creating these



salt dough 'heads' on my kitchen table in a shared house that I lived in just after graduating from the Royal College of Art.

What is your creative process like?

I spend a lot of time researching an exhibition – I very much think of it as a play that sometimes has a cast of characters. Once I'm fixed on an idea, I'll go straight in and start making because I'm incredibly impatient.

Over the course of making, things go wrong and my ideas change, or things don't work out the way that I want them to, but it's a back-and-forth process, the materials are teaching you something. That's what keeps it exciting, and what keeps your mind engaged.

Why do you enjoy time-consuming craft practices like sewing and hand building with clay?

I'm quite an anxious person, and I've always found that process-based mediums are very levelling and calming.

Having said that, it only works when you're not stressed or under pressure from a deadline. But I can't imagine moving away from these techniques because, for me, there's a connection to the body and human experience. Making with machines doesn't allow for imperfections, and I love imperfections – I gravitate towards the lumps and irregularity of ceramic, or a slightly uneven stitch. It's like handwriting: it speaks of the person who's made it.

Your work includes lots of humorous motifs – is this intentional?

To frame very heavy topics in a cold, serious way doesn't really reflect life. To me, life is light and dark. To see joy and happiness can also be empowering, especially with everything that's going on in the world. We need to feel that there is good so that we can see the bad.

*'Jonathan Baldock: Touch Wood' is at Yorkshire Sculpture Park until 7 July 2024; yosp.org.uk
jonathan-baldock.com*

ABOVE: *Mother Flower*, 2022

Jonathan Baldock

by Emily Steer • 04.10.2023

The raucous ceramic and textile installations of Jonathan Baldock (b.1980) [FIG.1](#) are replete with emotion, often drawing on the artist's personal history, as well as mythic and pagan traditions. Since graduating from the Royal College of Art, London, in 2005, his exhibitions have become increasingly ambitious, encompassing sound, scent and towering sculptures. His last solo show, *we are flowers of one garden*, at Stephen Friedman, London (20th January–25th February 2023), evolved out of the artist's close relationship with his mother. Large sculptures resembling flowers [FIG.2](#) reference her passion for gardening, alongside wider themes of nature and life cycles. Such sculptures – some of which include casts of his mother's face [FIG.3](#) – are at once humorous, touching, terrifying, surreal and yet undeniably lifelike.

Baldock's solo exhibition *Touch Wood* at Yorkshire Sculpture Park (YSP; 23rd September 2023–7th July 2024) develops similar themes [FIG.4](#). The double meaning of the title – at once a reference to traditional superstitions and lewd humour – parallels the multi-layered approach of the installation. Here, Baldock's symbolism originates in the fifteenth-century misericords and carved wooden figures in the nearby Wakefield Cathedral. Misericords are small seats on the undersides of stalls or chairs, designed for monks or canons to rest against for support during long periods of prayer. They are often richly carved with vivid subjects, including mythical beasts, or scenes of everyday life. In this new body of work, Baldock has included casts of his face and body, as well as those of his mother – featuring as part of flower heads or appendages to ceramic vessels [FIG.5](#). This intensely personal approach is woven through with folk motifs, sacred geometric forms and hybrid creatures. Emily Steer interviewed the artist about this new project and his interest in elements from the past that have often survived in secrecy.

Emily Steer (ES): *Touch Wood* at Yorkshire Sculpture Park brings together multiple threads – from the personal to historical and local research. What was your starting point?

Jonathan Baldock (JB): I'm a fan of gargoyles and so whenever I go to a new place I check if there are relevant architectural sites worth visiting. Wakefield Cathedral doesn't have gargoyles, but it does have misericords, which are found underneath the seats in the quire – the section where the clergy and choir sit during prayer. They often show weird hybrid beings that are akin to gargoyles. In Wakefield, there's one carved with an image of a man

bending over and baring his bum, which was really funny to me, and became a central part of the exhibition [FIG.6](#). There are a lot of scatological references in misericords; there's also so much joy in them. The imagery isn't what we would typically consider to be religious today – they are not necessarily connected to the scriptures – but rather more to do with mythical, pagan or folk beings. For me, they speak to the time and people who made them, who I would say were working people. They are beacons of self-expression, and this became the springboard to reimagine a sacred space for *Touch Wood*. I wanted to bring these small sculptures that have remained somewhat hidden out into the open and make them monumental.

ES: What sort of imagery do you see recur in the misericords, and how did the makers bring their own creativity to them?



Fig. 1 Jonathan Baldock at Camden Art Centre Residency, London, 2018. (Photograph Damian Griffiths).

JB: You see the Green Man quite a bit, the origins and significance of which in a Christian context are still unclear [FIG.7](#). For me, from a queer perspective, there's something important about the misericords existing on the outside and surviving censorship. They survived the Reformation and the conflicts that followed. A leaf was added during the Victorian era to the misericord of the man exposing himself, so it was censored a little, but he's still there. You can think of it as a silly bit of humour, frivolity and whimsy, but it also speaks to something much more complex. History is not written by working people, so I see these objects as a bridge to the people we don't know much about.

I grew up around people with religious beliefs, and so I'm very interested in faith but from a distanced position. If you're gay, you don't have a place in many religions. But I think about existence and spirituality. Sacred geometry is a recurring motif in this new

body of work, which ties into the idea of the never-ending line and interconnectivity of everything. It also relates to nature, which is another major theme in *Touch Wood*. A lot of these misericords are hybrid versions of animals and nature. There's a brilliant documentary by Louie Schwartzberg about the mycelium network called *Fantastic Fungi* (2019) and a book by Merlin Sheldrake titled *Entangled Life: How fungi make our worlds, change our minds and shape our futures* (2020). These ideas are very ancient, but in a wider, cultural sense, we're now discovering the extent to which we're all entangled beings.

ES: There's been lots of interest in the idea of entanglement recently. In *The Milk of Dreams*, at the 2022 Venice Biennale, for example, many artists returned to the interconnection between humans, nature and animals. The pandemic and the climate crisis have certainly brought these ideas – which, as you say, aren't new – into focus as another way of understanding our place in the world.

JB: I grew up around nature and couldn't wait to get to the big city. I think a lot of queer people have a desire to make that pilgrimage. I'm now in my forties, I don't have children and people who I care about are dying. There's a shift in how I'm thinking about why I'm here – it's a feeling of 'what's next?'. In *we are flowers of one garden* I was aware of my mum not being around for much longer and I wanted to create a show about how important she is to me. But it's not just a love letter to her and her garden, I was also thinking about my existence, our existence and the purpose of it all. *Touch Wood* is a continuation of that. I'm finding comfort in learning about the planet and the idea of my body returning to earth and feeding into something else.

ES: In secular cultures, there seems to be a shift in looking for new meanings – ones that connect with ideas of returning to nature rather than heaven or rebirth. We're also thinking about the future of the planet and the death of the world as we know it.

JB: We're probably heading for mass extinction, but I think life will continue in a different form. Our existence is so small and insignificant and yet in the West we consider everything in an anthropocentric way. I'm interested in looking at things in a collective manner: organisms make us, we are a universe unto ourselves. I wanted to create a space at YSP that is in parts funny, joyous and meditative. Hopefully it will evoke a feeling similar to what you might experience in a place of worship. A lot of people who don't follow a religion say that they are still moved by such spaces. I'm attracted to creating that through colour, the handmade and the body.

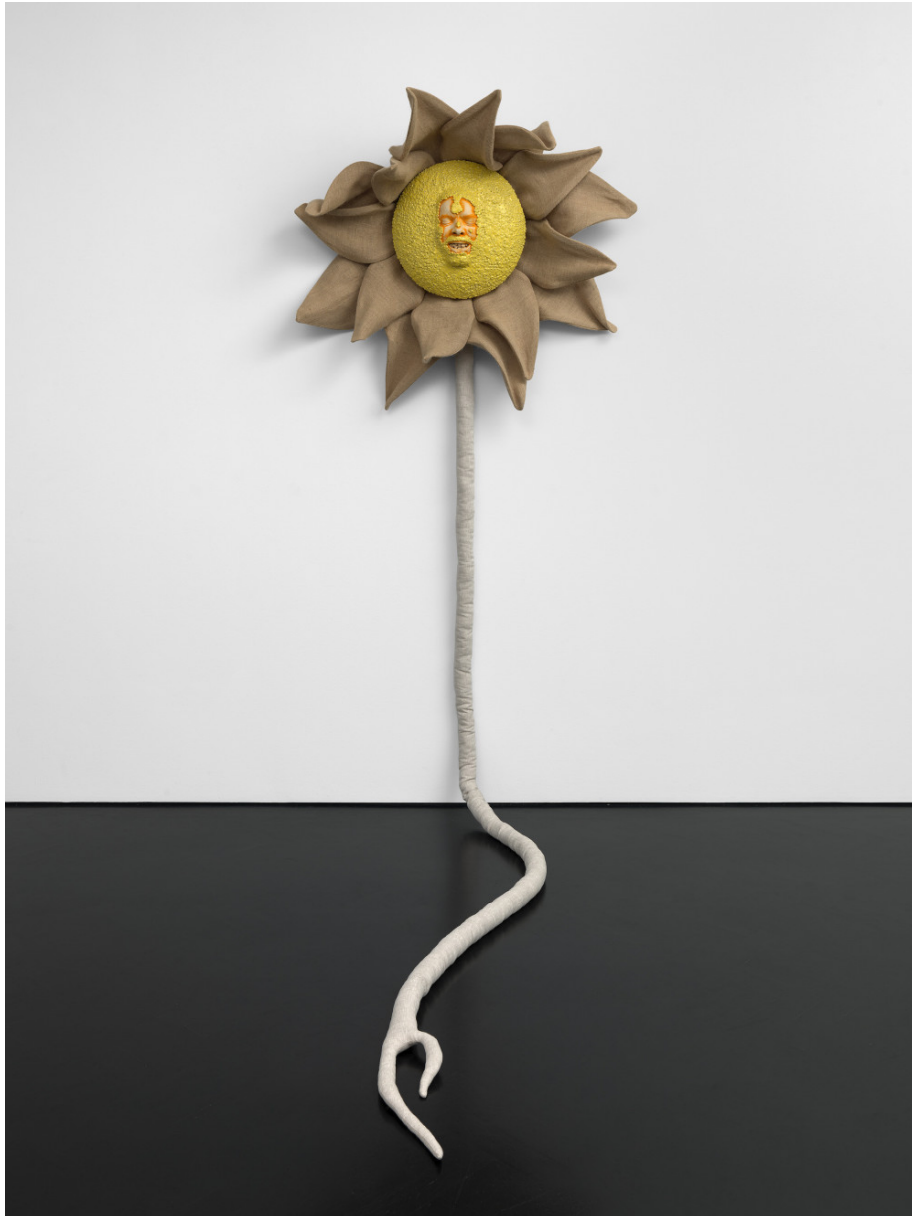


Fig. 2 *Wildflowers don't care where they grow*, by Jonathan Baldock. 2022. Ceramic, hessian, linen, boning and dried chamomile, dimensions variable. (© Jonathan Baldock; courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph Todd-White Art Photography).

ES: You also include sound elements in *Touch Wood*. Your installations have become increasingly sensory – your audiences walk into an environment rather than simply looking at pieces of work.

JB: I love being able to create immersive spaces when I'm given the opportunity. It's very theatrical. I find a lot of pleasure in the potential for worldbuilding and creating a space to step out of the everyday. The sound has been created by a friend of mine, Luke Barton, who is a musician. He's incorporated recordings of plants growing and birds at YSP, as well as Morris dancers and my grandad playing the accordion. These samples feed into a soundscape that takes visitors through all four seasons.

ES: It's interesting that you've mentioned theatricality. Your work in *Touch Wood* inspired by the misericords makes me think of colourful historical storytelling such as Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1387–1400), with its bawdy humour and celebration of working-class narratives.

JB: Exactly. I like imagining what regular people were doing. We're not that far removed from them. Although we learn about ourselves through the past, history is often viewed through a very narrow, formal perspective. If you were working the land, you'd be surrounded by nature, which can be hard. I can see where this view of it as something powerful and monstrous comes from. I think we've lost that.

ES: Can you tell us about the craft processes that you have used in *Touch Wood*? Are there any techniques that you tried for the first time?



Fig. 3 Detail of *Just a wild mountain rose*, by Jonathan Baldock. 2022. Ceramic stoneware, linen, boning, stuffing and dried hibiscus. (© Jonathan Baldock; courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph Mark Blower).

JB: I've made works primarily in textile and ceramic, which are very much the core mediums in my practice. All the works are made by hand and the textile pieces have involved months and months of work [FIG.8](#). I would say they are the most ambitious textile pieces I have made in terms of scale – it was a real learning curve. I always talk about the calming and meditative aspect of hand sewing – the meeting of head and hand – but with these I was close to tears on a few occasions. They just wouldn't play ball. I'm so happy with the outcome of them though. They feel so alive and powerful, which is just what I wanted when I decided to transform the little medieval wooden sculptures into big, imposing, powerful characters. The show also includes basketry [FIG.9](#), metal and glass, although I can't take credit for all of those elements. They add richness and complexity for the eye so that it never gets bored.

ES: There's a strong thread of inherited skills running from *we are flowers of one garden* to *Touch Wood*. In the former, you thought about the skills you learned from your mum, and in the latter you're exploring your family tradition of hop farming. How far does your knowledge of this ancestry go?



Fig. 4 Installation view of *Jonathan Baldock: Touch Wood* at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, 2023. (Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph Mark Reeves).

JB: My mum is very interested in family trees and ancestry. We go to the local churchyards and it's quite amazing to see the places where my family have been buried for over hundreds of years. There's no exciting royalty, just people registered to labour on the land; it goes quite far back. The crafts I employ are functional. I'm interested in the handmade but not high-end embroidery or fine beadwork. For textile works [FIG.10](#) I always use blanket stitch, which

would have been used by people living in poverty who made things from scraps of material. There's also a relationship to the body: it's often the stitch used to sew people up. Even the clay I use, there's a functionality to it – it's earthy – and the hessian I use comes from plants. I'm taking something that might be functional or overlooked – in the same way I'm remaking these small wooden misericords – and elevating them in a space where they can be beautiful or monstrous.

ES: Thinking about that relationship with the body, many of the sculptures in *we are flowers of one garden* and *Touch Wood* feature the human form trapped in or emerging from another object **FIG.11**.



Fig. 5 Detail of *They tried to bury me, they didn't realise I was a seed* by Jonathan Baldock. 2023. Ceramic. (Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph Mark Reeves).

JB: Yes, there's a blur of the body. You could look at them as being trapped or fused. There's an obvious parallel with our interconnectedness with the earth and nature, but I'm also interested in the connection we have with human-made structures. Throughout history, nature and the body have inspired building design – columns in Classical architecture often have foliate motifs and Greek temples were modelled on the proportions of the human body, for example. Many of the body parts are my own but I don't want the work to be necessarily 'about' me. I'm making votive objects for existence. Part of this is about claiming a space or giving purpose to my existence. It's also about the ancient idea of metamorphosis – in the human consciousness, we often see ourselves in animals or objects.



Fig. 6 *Kiss from a Rose*, by Jonathan Baldock. 2023. Ceramic, 77 by 29 by 36 cm. (Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph Mark Blower).

ES: *we are flowers of one garden* was the first time that your mum's face was cast in the work and she returns in *Touch Wood*. Why do you directly incorporate her body in your practice?

JB: A lot of my work is a love letter to my mum and nan. When I was growing up, my mum would drop me at my nan's when she went to work, and my nan would teach me to knit and sew. She wouldn't do fine needle work; it was very functional. We'd sit in front of the television and chat and I loved it. When I was at art school, the sculpture department always seemed to be a very

masculine environment, I was in painting but I still wanted to make three-dimensional, sculptural objects so I relied on the knowledge I already had: the textile skills that I was taught as a child. Later, when I decided to create bigger things, I got my mum involved. She helped me quite a lot with my early shows.



Fig. 7 *A foliate offering*, by Jonathan Baldock. 2023. Ceramic, 57 by 33 cm. (Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph Mark Reeves).

In *we are flowers of one garden* I wanted to make an ode to her, not only as my mum, but also as a big influence on my work. Her garden is beautiful. She loves flowers and she works hard at it. I thought that was a great springboard for the exhibition. I wanted to capture some permanence, so I cast her body in it. The show was beautiful to create and it was magical to share with her. Making work can allow me to feel more powerful and motivated to make change outside the art world. It can be disempowering to

focus on the negatives, which is difficult at the moment as there are so many awful things to be concerned about. How do you fight that?

ES: Growing up in the United Kingdom, I definitely had the impression that we were in a constant state of sociocultural progress, which, in retrospect, is far from the truth. In making *Touch Wood* I wonder if you have noticed any parallels between contemporary and medieval values towards sexuality, gender and class?



Fig. 8 *Be fruitful and multiply*, by Jonathan Baldock. 2023. Polystyrene and fabric, 220 by 220 by 150 cm. (Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph Mark Reeves).

JB: I've been thinking about this. It's hard to project. Many of those perspectives were never documented. A lot of our understanding around sexuality has been moulded over the last two hundred years. Prior to that, on the occasions when homosexuality was

evoked in art, it was sometimes linked to humour. But I like to imagine that people are people and it's always going to have been there. Similarly, before the Reformation there would have been women considered to be healers, who held prominent roles in their community. But this was extinguished with the intensive period of witch-hunting in Europe from the fifteenth century onwards. Previously thought of as intelligent and talented women, they were suddenly rebranded as dangerous witches.

We're now making a huge amount of progress socially, but there's always backlash and people resisting. I hone in on bits from the past that have the potential for magic, things that have the potential to empower, that have survived in secrecy.



Fig. 9 Installation view of *Jonathan Baldock: Touch Wood* at Yorkshire Sculpture Park, Wakefield, 2023. (Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph Mark Reeves).

ES: Your reworking of the misericords would seem to capture that. It's exciting to think that the person who carved the nude man bending over would have a significant exhibition dedicated to their moment of expression over five hundred years later.

JB: What's amazing about the misericords is that they are nameless. This is just freedom of expression and pure joy. Using it as an emblem is incredibly powerful. Within this church – which is full of emblems of authority, both religious and political, as we can't forget the role of patronage in these spaces – there's this little man baring his bum. We have our systems of value and status, but I want to show humans and even their bodily functions alongside other more 'serious' subjects, just like they did in the Middle Ages. We all have the desire to laugh and love; we question our existence in the same way now as we did then.



Fig. 10 *No one had paid them any particular attention*, by Jonathan Baldock. 2023. Polystyrene and fabric, 108 by 58 by 190 cm. (Courtesy the artist and

Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph Mark Reeves).

ES: Although the distinction between secular and religious life exists today in a way that can't be applied to the time when the misericords were created, they nonetheless seem to manifest as punctures in official narratives. They offer a more human perspective of this period in history. There's also a strong history of pagan imagery, mythical creatures and goddesses from our land that many don't connect with growing up. All of this leads the body to be cut off from pleasure and the natural world.



Fig. 11 Detail of *Becoming Plant (A hop)*, by Jonathan Baldock. 2023. Ceramic. (Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph Mark Blower).

JB: I think many people are seeking that connection again and to challenge historical biases. Victorian attitudes towards sexuality, for example, were a matter of ownership. For me, what's really fascinating about churches is that they've been better preserved than other types of buildings. They are rich material for tracing our histories. In many other areas, such as houses or farms, the past has been erased. The fact that these images have endured in churches of all places blows my mind – it's a story of survival.

FRIEZE



Jonathan Baldock Cultivates an Unearthly Garden of Delights

The artist's oversized flowers at Stephen Friedman Gallery, London, address ideas of inheritance and nurture

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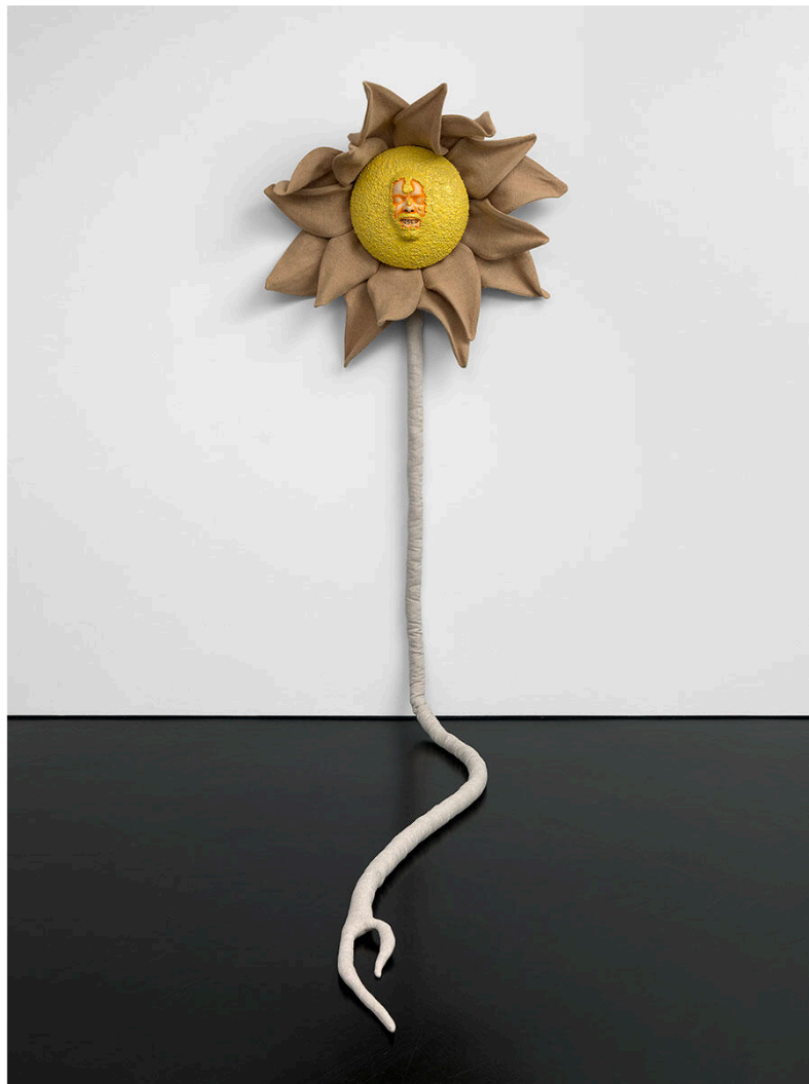
BY TOM MORTON IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS, UK REVIEWS | 30 JAN 23

Spring has come early in Jonathan Baldock's solo show, 'we are flowers of one garden', at Stephen Friedman. On the walls of the exhibition space, outsized blooms flourish, their sackcloth petals spoking from brightly glazed ceramic discs, their stuffed-linen root systems trailing across the black floor, as though they've been pulled up by some huge, unseen hand. These plants belong to no species known to botany. Indeed, their generative pistils and stamen have been replaced by, or perhaps mutated into, human countenances, cast from the faces of the British artist and his septuagenarian mother – a woman who taught him many of the craft techniques he employs in his work, and who has long cultivated her own modest garden in the village where Baldock spent his formative years.



Jonathan Baldock, Mother Flower, 2022, hessian, felt, ceramic stoneware, wadding, hollow fibre, wood, boning, dried roses, dimensions variable. Courtesy: © Jonathan Baldock and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph: Todd-White Art Photography

This, then, is an exhibition about roots, nurturing and budding into (creative) flower, in which sculptures formed from clay and textiles emphasize their origins as earth and vegetable matter. Nevertheless, it is neither a wholly bucolic vision nor a straightforwardly autobiographical exercise. In the exhibition text, the artist says that he'd like his anthropomorphized flora 'to look like they could perhaps eat you', and in *Wildflowers don't care where they grow* (all works 2022), there's a whiff of both the cursed mandrake root and the walking carnivorous plants from John Wyndham's post-apocalyptic novel *The Day of the Triffids* (1951). Here, Baldock's features emerge grimacing from the centre of a yolky yellow bloom, his mouth stuffed with dried chamomile, as though to calm him from some terrible, hungry rage. On a different, albeit no less disquieting note, in *And I refused to just wither in place*, a long pink ceramic tongue spools from his mother's mouth, while her face is framed by what look less like petals than glossy scarlet labia. Growth may be one phase of organic existence, but it is bracketed by sex and death – two things which Baldock's flowers, with their unsettlingly mobile root systems, appear all-too ready to provide.



Jonathan Baldock, *Wildflowers don't care where they grow*, 2022, ceramic, hessian, linen, boning, dried chamomile, dimensions variable. Courtesy: © Jonathan Baldock and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph: Todd-White Art Photography

The cycle of life is as close to an eternal theme as it gets, and to make it feel fresh is no small challenge. The artist's witty formal invention certainly helps. Consider *They were common and close, I had no room for growth*, a white stoneware vessel with a pregnant belly that sprouts a pair of cast hands and feet expressing contrary, if connected, emotional states: the former an exuberant 'jazz hands' gesture, the latter toe-curling embarrassment (which extremities belong to son, and which to mother, is left deliciously unclear). Another factor is how Baldock's identity as a gay man scrambles any dully heteronormative readings of these works' dynamics, familial or otherwise. Much as this exhibition is preoccupied with what we inherit, and bequeath, through nature and nurture, it also has more universal concerns. While the show's titular 'garden' is, in one sense, the self, in another, it's our wide, shared world.



Jonathan Baldock, *They were common and close, I had no room for growth* (detail), 2022. Ceramic stoneware, hessian, wood, dried lavender, 142 × 34 × 30cm. Courtesy: © Jonathan Baldock and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph: Todd-White Art Photography

If this world has a deity, then perhaps it's *Mother Flower*: a totemic, stuffed-fabric bloom whose pink face is tattooed with green floral motifs borrowed from European folk art. In the gallery where she hangs, the sound work *Just a wild rambling rose seeking mysteries untold* (a collaboration with Luke Barton) swells from a set of speakers. Amid amniotic throbs, mother and son sing Dolly Parton's track 'Wildflowers' (1987), and Baldock's late grandfather plays the accordion. Looking closer at *Mother Flower*, we might notice she's chewing on a mouthful of dried roses, consuming dusty, bitter petals as she breathes out sweet perfume. Maybe her divine wisdom is that we should focus on cultivating our garden and leave the imponderable questions of life and death, the 'mysteries untold', to her.

Jonathan Baldock's 'we are flowers of one garden' is at [Stephen Friedman Gallery, London](#), until 25 February

*Main image: Jonathan Baldock, *And I refused to just wither in place* (detail), 2022. Ceramic stoneware, hessian, boning, stuffing, natural amethyst, dimensions variable. Courtesy: © Jonathan Baldock and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London; photograph: Todd-White Art Photography*

Jonathan Baldock: 'We Are Flowers of One Garden'

Art

Stephen Friedman, Mayfair

Until 25 Feb 2023



Mark Blower

Time Out says



You should always talk to flowers. Not to help them grow or anything, but because they might just talk back.

The flowers in Jonathan Baldock's new exhibition are more likely to do that than most, because they're not just plants, they're almost human. His installation is filled with ceramic sunflowers and pots and petals. Mouths and eyes and hands appear out of the pistils and stems, grasping fingers, wagging tongues, flapping lips. They're sunny, obscene, funny, weird things.

But they're not surreal for surrealism's sake. Baldock's hybrid human/flower garden is a tribute to his mother, who didn't just raise him, but taught him many of the crafts he uses in his art now. Across all the technicolour vegetation of the exhibition, you get to follow the ups and downs, annoyances and loves of a mother-son relationship, the closeness, the tenderness, the tension. In the back gallery, a giant sunflower – the mother to all the smaller ones in the show, maybe – peers out of the wall, its roots flopping all over the floor, its eyes bulging and intense, always there, always watching, like a mother is supposed to do.

With his work's folk-y, handmade quality mixing with contemporary aesthetics and his tenderly personal approach, Baldock proves that art doesn't always have to be about big concepts of beauty or grief, or about subverting the gaze or questioning the nature of looking or any of that bollocks. Sometimes it can just be about how much you love your mum.

I've never been massively taken with Baldock's work, but this is the best I've ever seen him. The work is clean, beautifully made, clever, attractive. It's a genuinely moving, deeply lovely and hugely affecting exhibition. It's the garden as a parable for familial love, for kinship, for letting relationships bud and bloom, even when they're covered in manure. And more than anything, it made me really miss my mum.

Written by [Eddy Franke](#) Monday 23 January 2023

London art exhibitions: a guide for early 2023

Your guide to the best London art exhibitions, and those around the UK this winter, as chosen by the Wallpaper* arts desk



Jonathan Baldock, *And I refused to just wither in place*, 2022. Ceramic stoneware, hessian, boning, stuffing, natural amethyst

(Image credit: Copyright Jonathan Baldock. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London. Photo by Mark Blower)

Jonathan Baldock
Stephen Friedman

20 January - 25 February

Jonathan Baldock's work employs ceramic art, installation and performance to explore our relationship with the human body, and the spaces it inhabits. Baldock's show at Stephen Friedman, inspired by his mother, will transform the gallery into a vibrant garden, filled with monstrous flowers and sculptures infused with motifs of plants and leaves. Embedded with playful humour, his work questions function, and asks the viewer to reflect on the trauma and spirituality that surrounds our relationship with the body.

Writer: Saskia Koopman



Art

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Future

SPECIAL FEATURE

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 Zhao Zhao

Blossoms

홀리 헨드리 Not Working(왼쪽), Body Language(오른쪽),
You Are What You Eat(아래)

석고, 스틸, 제스모나이트 14.7×43.5×59cm 2021(왼쪽),
제스모나이트, 안료, 돌, 스틸, 물감 17.5×77×103.5cm
2022(오른쪽), 혼합재료 70×195×101cm 2020(아래) / 만화적
표현과 유머를 곁들여 하이브리드 신체를 형상화했다.



조나단 발록 Eating Feelings (A Conversation)

나무, 스티로폼, 펠트, 청동, 유리, 장미석영, 도자 각
30×50×185cm 2020 / 유럽의 민속 퀼트아트와 동시대조각을
결합했다. 민중의 삶이 녹아있는 전통 마리오네트, 가면, 의상 등을
모티프로 사회를 향해 유머 넘치는 풍자를 펼친다.



Gabriel Chaile

b.1985 아르헨티나



기념비적 점토 조각, 이웃과 만나다



가브리엘 사일은 아르헨티나 토착 문화를 모티프로 기념비적 조각을 제작한다. 어도비, 진흙, 금속, 벽돌 등 자연물을 주된 재료로 삼아 선조와 공동체를 이야기한다. 사일은 자신을 ‘시각적 인류학자’라 정의한다. 콜럼버스 이전 시대의 문화와 20세기 개념미술을 결합한다. 이를 위해 인류학, 정치 사회학, 후기식민주의를 연구하고, ‘형식의 계보’라는 이론을 내세워 문화적 유전 인자를 추적한다. 여성과 의식에도 관심을 둔 작가는 식민지 이후의 역사를 유머러스하게 비튼다. 그 결과 냄비와 점토 오븐 같은 사물이 의인화된 형태로 구현된다. 2018년 부에노스아이레스에서 열린 아트바젤 시티워크에 대형 점토 조각 〈Diego (Portrait of Diego Núñez)〉(2018)를 공개해 화제를 모았다. 아르헨티나 북부 지역 광산에서 강제 노동을 당한 수백 명의 원주민을 기리는 투쿠만 조각에서 영감을 얻었다. 공공 장소에 설치된 이 작품은 오븐이자 벽난로로 사용되면서 음식을 나눠 먹는 ‘만남의 장소’ 역할을 맡았다. 2022년 베니스비엔날레 본전시에는 초대형 조각 군단 〈Rosario Liendro〉(2022)를 출품했다. 작품명 ‘로사리오 리엔드로’는 작가의 외할머니 이름. 부모와 조부모의 특징을 떠올리며 만든 이 작품에 공동체주의, 보살핌, 헌신의 의미를 담았다. “나는 사물의 모양을 유심히 관찰하면서 그것들을 이해하려 노력한다.” 투쿠만국립대학교 졸업. 쿤스트할레리스본(2022), 뉴욕 배로(2021) 등에서 개인전 개최. 아르헨티나 코빅스예술상(2022) 수상. 부에노스아이레스와 리스본에서 거주 및 활동 중.



Hannah Levy

b.1991 미국



에로틱 하이브리드 신체



한나 레비는 조각과 디자인의 경계를 넘나든다. 특정한 용도를 지닌 사물의 외형을 참조하지만, 관능적이고 유기적인 구조로 재해석한다. 실용성을 거부하고 인체 공학적 상태에 접근하려는 의도다. 작가가 변형하는 대상은 의료 장비, 운동 기구, 샵들리에부터 패스트리, 아스파라거스, 진주까지 다양하다. 이들의 형태를 왜곡, 과장하면서 독특한 조형미를 산출해 낸다. 가령 〈Retainer〉(2021)는 대리석과 스테인리스 스틸로 만든 초대형 치아 교정 장치다. 고가의 교정 비용과 가지런한 치아로 대변되는 사회적 위계를 드러낸다. 레비가 자주 사용하는 재료는 강철과 실리콘. 단단한 은빛 강철은 작품의 뼈대, 샵색 실리콘은 피부를 암시한다. 극적으로 구부러지는 강철이 공격성을 드러낸다면, 부드러운 실리콘은 손으로 만져보고 싶은 욕망을 일킨다. 시각과 촉각을 동시에 자극하는 에로틱 하이브리드 신체다. 레비의 예술에는 에바 헤세, 루이즈 부르주아, 메레 오펜하임의 미술사적 유산이 녹아있다. 2022년 베니스비엔날레 본전시에는 3점의 신작 조각을 출품했다. 절지동물과 박쥐의 날개를 연상시키는 금속 구조물, 그리고 대리석으로 만든 대형 복숭아씨다. 동글동글 모양의 복숭아씨는 귀여워 보이지만, 강력한 독성 물질을 함유한 물질이다. 작가는 기능성 가구와 미적 조각품 사이를 가로지르며 평범한 사물을 낯설게 만든다. “나는 내 조각이 ‘디자인 연옥’에 존재한다고 본다. 혐오와 매력은 나란히 공존한다. 내 작품에는 신체적 불안감이 감돈다. 몸을 가진다는 건 꽤나 그로테스크한 일이다.” 뉴욕 코넬대학교 졸업 및 프랑크푸르트 슈테델슐레 마이스터슐러 취득. 캘리포니아대학교 버클리아드무지엄앤퍼시픽필름아카이브(2022), 더아츠클럽오브시카고(2021), 뉴욕 하이라인커미션(2021), 뉴욕 케이스카플란(2020) 등에서 개인전 개최. 뉴욕에서 거주 및 활동 중.

Hao Liang

b.1983 중국



전통을 동시대의 운치로



희뿌연 초록빛 거비산수, 날카롭게 뾰은 해조묘, 깊은 산세로 안내하는 굽이굽이 심원법… 중국의 전통 관념산수를 닮았지만, 제작 연대를 짐작할 수 없는 화면이 펼쳐져 있다. 하오량은 비단에 정교하게 그린 풍경화, 초상화로 중국 전통수묵화를 동시대 감각으로 재구성한다. “나는 중국의 전통을 가지고 논다. 거기에 동시대의 영화, 문학, 철학을 접목해 전통의 경계를 부수어 내려 한다. 가령 나는 전통수묵화의 시공간을 흔들어 ‘점프’하고 싶을 때가 있다. 명나라 학자이자 화가인 동기창의 예술론 읽다가도 바실리 칸딘스키를 떠올리고, 자연을 여행하다가도 영화의 몽타주처럼 전통회화의 세부들이 번뜩 생각한다.” 청두에서 태어난 하오량은 어린 시절 중국의 ‘큰손’ 컬렉터이자 20세기 중국 미술을 대표하는 장대천의 제자였던 대모의 아버지를 통해 예술을 접했다. 하오량이 국제적으로 큰 주목을 받은 시점은 2016년 베이징 울런즈현대미술센터에서 〈소상팔경〉(2014~16)을 선보인 이후. 〈소상팔경〉은 중국 후난성의 소수와 상수가 합류하는 지점의 빼어난 경치를 여덟 폭으로 그린 산수화다. 북송대 시인 송적이 처음 그려 동아시아 문화권에서 ‘관념산수’의 전형으로 자리 잡았다. 작가는 오랜 중국회화의 전통을 차용하되, 회화의 구성, 색상, 원근법을 비틀고 동시대의 흔적을 집어넣어 불안정한 시공간을 만들어냈다. 이 작품으로 하오량은 2017년 베니스비엔날레에 최연소 작가로 참여했다. 2018년 가고시안 뉴욕 개인전에서는 10m 길이의 두루마리 작품에 동기창 회화론, 피카소 큐비즘, 칸딘스키 추상을 녹여내며 글로벌 아트씬에 당당히 자리 잡았다. 쓰촨미술학교 학사 및 석사 졸업. 광저우 미러드가든(2021), 상하이 오로라미술관(2019), 가고시안 뉴욕(2018) 등에서 개인전 개최. 베이징에서 거주 및 활동 중.

Harm Gerdes

b.1994 독일



디지털 세계로의 여행



함 게르데스는 디지털 세계의 우발성과 증혹성을 모티프로 추상화를 그린다. 뒤죽박죽 섞인 형상, 평면과 입체를 넘나드는 구성으로 가상 현실이 지닌 리얼리티를 표현한다. 게르데스는 ‘0과 1로 구성된 디지털 세계가 실제로 존재한다면 어떤 모습일까?’라는 질문에서 작업을 시작한다. 웹 페이지가 도시라면 각 사이트를 연결하는 하이퍼링크는 기차, 프로그램 소스는 건축 자재, 유튜브는 극장 등으로 나타나리라 상상한다. 작가는 이러한 가정에 착안해 ‘디지털 하이퍼리얼리즘’을 구현한다. 스스로 디지털 세계를 오가는 여행자가 되어 가상 현실을 극사실적으로 재현했다. 실제 건축 모델을 반영해 공간감을 부여하고, 강렬한 컬러와 복잡한 구조, 그곳을 누비는 움직임을 묘사해 생동감을 불어넣어 ‘리얼 월드’를 창조한다. 〈Rollercoaster〉(2022)는 사용자를 태우고 웹 주소를 빠르게 이동하는 링크를 롤러코스터에 비유했다. 액체 상태의 데이터가 사이트에서 생성되며, 열차를 타고 이동하는 모습을 생생하게 그렸다. 〈Falling Stars〉(2022)는 열화된 데이터를 별뿔별에 빗냈다. 밤하늘을 빛내다 결국 생명을 다하고 땅으로 떨어지는 유성처럼, 더 이상 사용될 수 없는 자료는 이곳저곳을 떠돌다 더미 데이터가 된다. 뒤셀도르프예술대 졸업. 페레스프로젝트 베를린(2022, 2021)에서 개인전 개최. 〈There Is No Sea But the Sea〉(카를스루에 마이어러거 2022), 〈Werden: From Michelangelo to〉(인스브루크 티롤러란데스무젠 2021), 〈Utopia〉(페레스프로젝트 베를린 2021) 등의 단체전 참여. 뒤셀도르프와 다름슈타트에서 거주 및 활동 중.



아트인컬처 × 2023.01

Heather Phillipson

b.1978 영국



아포칼립스, 희망은 있다!



헤더 필립슨은 설치, 회화, 문학 등 다양한 장르를 넘나드는 멀티 플레이어다. 황금만능주의, 거대 기업의 착취, 인간의 상품화가 심화한 디스토피아를 모티프로 작품 세계를 펼쳐왔다. 필립슨은 사회복지사였던 어머니와 페미니즘 활동가이자 작가였던 아버지의 영향으로 어려서부터 비판적 시각을 키웠다. 그의 부모는 의회나 외교 같은 국가 정치 외에도 타자와의 관계, 함께 식사하는 매너, 의견을 나누고 듣는 방법 등 일상에 녹아있는 정치를 함께 가르쳐주었다. 이러한 감각은 사회 부조리에 예민하게 반응하고, 거대 담론에 가려진 작은 이슈에도 소홀히 하지 않는 작가관에 큰 자산이 됐다. 〈The End〉(2020)는 런던 트라팔가광장에 설치된 대형 조각이다. 트라팔가 해전의 영웅을 기리는 넬슨기념탑을 휘핑크림으로 덮고, 그 위에 체리와 파리, 드론을 붙였다. 드론에 장착된 카메라는 광장을 실시간으로 촬영한다. 자본이 국가를 집어삼키고 감시가 일상화된 종말을 상상했다. 최근 발표한 〈Rapture〉(2022) 시리즈는 영국 터너미술상 파이널리스트에 올랐다. 무분별한 과학 기술 사용으로 인간이 불러온 아포칼립스적 상황을 묘사했다. 암울한 시대상을 다루지만, 필립슨은 동시에 이곳에 희망이 있다고 믿는다. “모든 것이 끝났다고 여길 때, 근본적인 변화를 위한 기회가 생긴다. 블랙라이브스매터 운동이 그랬듯 희망은 항상 비극에서 시작한다.” 켐브르크셔대학 예술 및 디자인 전공, 카디프웨일즈대학 예술 및 철학 석사, 런던 미들섹스대학교 미술 박사 졸업. 블랙풀 그린디아트갤러리(2022), 런던 테이트브리튼(2021), 게이즈헤드 발틱현대미술관(2018), 플리머스아트센터(2016), 런던 화이트채플갤러리(2016) 등에서 개인전 개최. 런던에서 거주 및 활동 중.

Holly Hendry

b.1990 영국



고고학적 발상, 기괴 혹은 유머



홀리 헨드리는 고고학자의 태도로 조각을 만든다. 그의 관심사는 건축물 내부, 지하 공간, 신체의 장기 등 표면 아래 숨은 것들이다. 눈에 보이지 않지만 세계를 움직이는 ‘보물’을 발굴해 거대하고 기이한 조형물로 구축한다. 이를 위해 작가는 해부학, 생물학, 지구 과학 분야의 전문가와 협업한다. 강철 대리석 알루미늄 제스모나이트 실리콘 슛 립스틱 비누 모래 등 다양한 재료를 과감히 접목하기도 한다. 헨드리는 ‘몸’이라는 ‘컨테이너’에 담긴 내용물을 꺼내는 목적으로 내장을 형상화하지만, 만화적 표현과 유머를 곁들인다. “웃겨 죽는다는 말에는 가장 유머러스한 행동이 가장 끔찍한 결과를 초래한다는 뜻이 담겨있다. 만화는 기본적으로 유머러스하지만, 여기에는 현실을 초월한 몸이 등장한다. 사회의 규칙에서 해방된 몸, 죽음에서 되살아나는 몸이다. 나는 유머러스한 조각으로 신체를 새로운 시각에서 바라보고자 한다.” 괴상한 형태의 조각을 작품명과 연결하면 그 의도가 더욱 명확히 드러난다. 팔이 어지럽게 꼬인 작품은 〈Body Language〉(2022), 혀가 잠들어 있는 작품은 〈Not Working〉(2021)이다. 소형 도축장처럼 생긴 작품 〈You Are What You Eat〉(2020)에는 ‘당신이 먹는 것이 바로 당신이다’라는 진지한 잠언이 녹아있다. 한편 헨드리는 작품이 설치되는 장소와 상호 작용하는 대형 조각을 제작하기도 한다. 2022년 가을 버밍엄시태대학교 정원에 첫 번째 영구 공공작품을 선보였다. 캔터베리 크리에이티브아트대학교, 런던 슬레이드미술대학 및 영국왕립예술대학 졸업. 런던 스티븐프리트만갤러리(2022, 2020), 백스힐 드라워파빌리온(2021), 요크셔주 요크셔조각공원 웨스톤갤러리(2019) 등에서 개인전 개최. 런던에서 거주 및 활동 중.

Ian Cheng

b.1984 미국

라이브 시물레이션의 신세계



이안 쉥은 컴퓨터 프로그래밍으로 가상 세계를 창조하는 미디어아티스트다. 게임 엔진과 AI 기술을 이용해 인간 의식의 알고리즘에 접근하고, 주제와 환경의 상호 작용을 탐구한다. 쉥은 ‘라이브 시물레이션’으로 작가 자신도 예측할 수 없는 이야기를 펼쳐나간다. 이 기술은 사용자가 초기 설정 값을 입력하면, 이후 컴퓨터 프로그램이 자체적으로 변화를 일으키면서 진화하는 시스템이다. 논리적으로 이해할 수 없는 태도를 뜻하는 ‘인지 부조화’와 학창 시절 심취했던 시물레이션 게임 〈심즈〉를 모티프 삼았다. 전자는 프로그래머가 통제할 수 없는 컴퓨팅에 아이디어를 주었고, 후자는 작품 캐릭터의 생로병사를 다루는 데 영향을 미쳤다. 대표작 〈사절〉 트릴로지는 쉥이 활동 초기부터 현재까지 꾸준히 집중해 온 시리즈물이다. 메인 코드에 휘둘리던 주인공이 점차 명령어를 거부하고 자유를 구사한다는 성장 서사를 담았다. 한편 〈BOB(Bag Of Beliefs)〉은 스마트폰 애플리케이션과 연계형 컴퓨터아트다. 작품 캐릭터는 앱 이용자의 조작에 영향을 받으며 신체와 가치관을 형성한다. 쉥의 작업은 모두 디지털 언어로 구축된 프로그램이지만, 두뇌 알고리즘과 환경의 상호 작용이 이루어진다는 점에서 리얼리티를 지닌다. 따라서 그의 작품은 가상 세계인 동시에 현실의 축소판이다. 쉥은 시물레이션으로 사회 관계를 실험하고 새로운 가능성을 모색할 수 있다고 믿는다. 캘리포니아대 버클리 인지 과학 및 미술 전공, 뉴욕 컬럼비아대학교 비주얼아트 석사 졸업. 리움미술관(2022), 아를 루마재단(2021), 베를린 울리아슈토셰크컬렉션(2018), 런던 서펜타인갤러리(2018), 피츠버그 카네기미술관(2017) 등에서 개인전 개최. 루이비통재단미술관 올해의 영상 작품상(2017) 수상. 뉴욕에서 거주 및 활동 중.

Jenna Gribbon

b.1978 미국

여성이 그리는 누드

제나 그리본은 여성의 ‘누드’를 그린다. 그 주인공은 여자친구이자 인디 록 뮤지션 토레스로 활동하는 매켄지 스콧이다. 작가의 그림은 관객을 매혹적인 유대감과 불편한 관음증 사이에서 길 잃게 만든다. 그리본은 실 한 오라기 걸치지 않은 자유로운 사생활의 순간을 포착하고, 예술이 오랫동안 여성을 타자화해 온 역사를 비튼다. “내 자신을 이해하기까지 오랜 시간이 걸렸다. 여성들의 ‘관계’를 그리는 이미지가 부족했기 때문일 수도 있다. 낭만적인 상황으로 묘사되는 게이 남성들의 역사는 조금 더 긴 편이다. 여성의 퀴어 정체성을 다루는 그림은 훨씬 적게 본 것 같다. 그 어느 때보다 많은 이미지 속에 살고 있는 시대에 나는 ‘보는 것’과 ‘보이는 것’이 무엇을 의미하는지 관심을 둔다.” 작가는 2001년 조지아대학교를 졸업하고 제프 쿤스 스튜디오에서 1년간 일했다. 그리고 소피아 코폴라의 영화 〈마리 앙투아네트〉(2006)에서 사용될 로코코 양식의 세 작품을 의뢰받았다. 이때 작가는 로코코 양식이 여성의 ‘욕망’을 숨기지 않고 화려하게 꽃피워 낸 최초의 사조라는 사실을 인식했다. 이후 로코코의 풍만한 분위기, 네덜란드 황금시대의 포즈, 인상주의의 부드러운 배경 처리 등 미술사의 다양한 조형 언어를 끌어들이며 관객의 ‘관음’을 유도한다. 하지만 그 목적은 여성 ‘주체성’의 회복. 특정 신체 부위를 강조하는 컬러, 시선을 과감하게 혹 끌어들이는 구도, 색유일하게 일히길 거부하는 표정 등으로 서양 미술사에 확립된 ‘에로틱한 누드’에 맞선다. 보는 이의 시선을 작가 스스로 결정하고, 여성 초상화의 무례한 역사에 대항한다. 조지아대학교 학사 및 현대컬리지 석사 졸업. 마시모데카를로 런던(2022), 뉴욕 프레데릭스&프레이저(2021), 베를린 GNYPGallery(2020) 등에서 개인전 개최. 뉴욕에서 거주 및 활동 중.

Jon Rafman

b.1981 캐나다

디스토피아 오디세이



존 라프만은 상상과 현실, 테크놀로지와 인간의 상호 작용을 주제로 영상을 제작한다. 비디오 게임, 밈, 중세 문화, 오타쿠 문화, 신화, 영화, 미술사 등 상상력을 자극하는 것이라면 무엇이든 레퍼런스 삼아 동시대의 다면을 포착해 왔다. 라프만을 주목받게 만든 작업은 〈9-Eyes〉(2009). 구글 스트리트뷰가 촬영한 사진 중, 비현실적으로 보이거나 비극적 상황을 떠올리는 장면을 모아 엮었다. 아름답고 평화로운 풍경과 폭력, 절도, 가난 등이 존재하는 어두운 사회의 이면을 대비해 세계의 부조리를 드러냈다. 2016년 베를린비엔날레에는 VR작업 〈View of Pariser Platz〉(2016)를 공개했다. 관광객으로 붐비는 베를린 파리지광장에 좀비가 나타나 사람들을 잡아먹는 지옥도를 펼쳤다. 가상의 디스토피아 풍경으로 현대인의 무의식적 불안과 윤리를 상실한 시대상을 비틀었다. 최근 라프만은 비디오 게임과 현실을 오버랩한 작품에 열중하고 있다. ‘성형 수술’을 디지털 세계에 접속하기 전 캐릭터를 커스터마이징하는 과정으로, 사회 곳곳의 뿌리박힌 폭력을 ‘게임의 몬스터’로 은유했다. 무섭고 기괴한 상황이지만, 라프만은 이곳에 ‘낭만’이 있다고 믿는다. “현실을 솔직하게 마주하지 않는다면 평생 공포에 시달려야 한다. 어둠의 심장부를 탐험해야만 빛에 닿을 수 있다.” 몬트리올 맥길대학교 철학 및 문학 전공, 시카고예술대 영화과 석사 졸업. 향저우 B1ock갤러리(2022), 스프루스마거스 베를린(2022), 베를린 싱켈파필리온(2022), 밀라노 오르멧(2022), 마드리드 라카사엔센디다(2021), 보훬 오팔오피체(2021), 모데나 팔라치나데이자르디니(2018), 칼코스티알 스톡홀름(2016), 암스테르담시립미술관(2016) 등에서 개인전 개최. 몬트리올에서 거주 및 활동 중.

Jonathan Baldock

b.1980 영국

퀼트아트, 유럽판 민중미술



조나단 발독은 유럽의 민속 퀼트아트와 동시대조각을 결합한다. 민중의 삶이 녹아있는 전통 마리오네트, 가면, 의상 등을 모티프로 사회를 향해 유머 넘치는 풍자를 펼쳐왔다. 작가가 어렸을 적 어머니는 직장에 출근할 때마다 그를 할머니에게 맡겼다. 할머니의 취미는 공예였고 발독은 날마다 바느질, 자수, 뜨개질 등을 어껴내며로 배웠다. 발독은 이때의 경험을 자산 삼아 자신의 작업 언어를 개발했다고 밝힌다. “부유층이 대다수인 영국 미술계에서 수공예는 고급예술은 지닐 수 없는 매력을 지닌다. 퀼트아트는 노동자 계급의 예술이고, 자본에 의존하지 않고 자유롭게 작품을 펼치는 나의 무기다.” 〈Everything Starts with a Dream〉(2020)은 펠트와 나무를 재료로 만든 마리오네트 조각이다. 끊어진 조종 실, 발버둥 치는 팔과 다리로 지배층에 저항하는 민중을 표현했다. 관객은 작품 앞에서 꼭두각시와 함께 무대에 올라간 배우가 된다. 조종 실을 들어 권력자에 협력할지, 인형의 편에 설지, 과거와 현재를 관통하는 민중의 고민을 제시했다. 〈Earthy Coil〉(2021) 연작에서는 고대 종교가 창조의 원리로 제시했던 4원소 불, 물, 흙, 공기를 익살스러운 모습으로 시각화했다. 오늘날 서구 문화를 지배하는 기독교적 세계관에서 벗어나 자연과 교감을 중시했던 과거의 관점을 재현했다. 윈체스터예술학교 순수예술 전공 및 런던 영국왕립예술대학 회화과 석사 졸업. 런던 헤이워드갤러리(2022), 뉴욕 니켈보슈네(2022), 스톡홀름 액셀레이터(2021), 마드리드 라카사엔센디다(2021), 스타방에르미술관(2020), 스티븐프리트먼갤러리(런던 2020, 2019, 블루코트 2020, 리버풀 2020) 등에서 개인전 개최. 런던에서 거주 및 활동 중.

JR

b.1983 프랑스

세계의 균열을 찍는 사진



스트리트 아티스트 JR. 그는 사진과 영상으로 국경, 정치, 문화, 정체성을 초월한 연대를 실천해 왔다. 중절모와 선글라스는 JR의 트레이드 마크. 13살 이후로 선글라스를 쓰지 않고 찍은 사진이 없을 정도다. 작가는 신분을 가리는 장치가 그에게 자유를 준다고 믿는다. 독학파인 JR은 18세에 처음 카메라를 들고 유럽 전역을 발로 뛰며 우연히 만난 사람들을 촬영했다. 이를 건물 높이에 맞춰볼 정도로 크게 인쇄해 도시의 길거리, 담벼락, 지하철 등 공공장소에 붙였다. 슬럼가, 폐허, 분쟁 지역, 국경 지대의 거주민처럼 예술이 흔히 다루지 않는 인물을 주인공 삼고, 문화의 사각지대에 있는 이들 앞에 작품을 내보였다. 2010년을 전후로 유럽에서 미국, 아프리카, 아시아까지 활동 영역을 확장한 그는 각지의 길거리뿐 아니라 정통 미술기관과 갤러리에서도 전시를 열었다. ‘글로벌 프로젝트’의 대표 연작 〈The Wrinkles of the City〉는 사회 소외 계층의 초상과 낙후 지역 풍경을 찍고 이를 건물 외벽에 설치한 작품이다. 이스탄불, 카르타헤나, 상하이의 척박한 현실을 알리고, 그러한 현실에서도 용기를 잃지 않는 시민의 의지를 표현했다. JR은 전시장을 수백 장의 사진으로 가득 메우거나, 일반 건물 크기를 훌쩍 뛰어넘는 초대형 사진을 야외에 설치하기도 한다. 2022년 4월에는 우크라이나에서 45m에 달하는 사진 설치물을 공개했다. 5살 우크라이나 난민 아이의 초상으로 러시아 전쟁을 비판하고 평화와 회복을 기원했다. “이 소녀는 우리의 미래다. 아이는 지금 우크라이나 국민이 무엇을 위해 싸우고 있는지 우리에게 말해준다.” 쿤스트할레뮌헨(2022), 그로닝겐 그로닝거미술관(2021), 페로탕 도쿄(2021), 런던 사치갤러리(2021), 페이스갤러리 런던(2021) 등에서 개인전 개최.

Kara Joslyn

b.1983 미국

트롱프뢰유, 눈속임의 진실

카라 조슬린은 홀로그램처럼 은은하게 반짝이는 모노크롬회화를 그린다. 주된 재료는 아크릴과 스프레이 페인트. 신화 속 인물, 1950년대 공예 장식 등을 모티프로 환상 세계를 펼쳐왔다. 조슬린의 그림에서 반복되는 주제는 ‘모순’이다. 흑백 컬러, 고전적 이미지는 컬러 모니터나 디지털 편집이 존재하지 않았던 과거를 연상시킨다. 반대로 눈속임 화법 ‘트롱프뢰유(trompe-l’oeil)’로 만든 홀로그램 효과와 매끈한 입체 표현은 오늘날 3D 그래픽과 비슷하다. 달빛을 스포트라이트 삼아 무대로 등장한 기이한 대상은 꿈과 현실을 교차한다. 과거와 현재, 의식과 무의식의 대치를 넘나들며 작가가 던지는 메시지는 ‘진실’이다. “사진은 진실의 상징이지만, 연출이 숨어있다는 점에서 거짓과 가깝다. 반대로 그림은 거짓을 통해 진실을 표출한다. 즉 그림은 진실을 말하는 거짓이다.” 무의식과 꿈은 환상에 불과하지만, 환상은 억압돼 있던 실제의 욕망을 비춘다. 착시를 일으키는 그림으로 관객 저마다의 잠재된 진실과 마주하길 의도했다. 최근 작가는 르네상스회화에 등장하는 음악의 여신 ‘뮤즈’를 다루고 있다. 인류의 역사가 객관적 진실이 아니라 허구의 이야기로 전승된다는 점에서 신화가 자신의 작업과 닿아있다고 느꼈다. 온몸을 자극하는 음악의 파장을 어슴푸레한 달빛과 초현실적인 형상으로 재해석했다. 올해 작가는 신화를 변주한 연작에 주력할 예정이다. 캘리포니아예술대 회화 전공 및 캘리포니아대 샌디에고 시각예술 석사 졸업. 페로탕 뉴욕(2022), 로스앤젤레스 M+B(2021, 2019), 로스앤젤레스 보조맥(2018), 시카고 LVL3(2017), 오클랜드 랜드앤시(2015) 등에서 개인전 개최. 로스앤젤레스에서 거주 및 활동 중.



STYLE & CULTURE

The best exhibitions in London in 2023

For a bit of culture, head to these fabulous exhibitions across the capital

BY CONNOR STURGES

10 January 2023



Todd White Art Photography, Pete Braithwaite

Jonathan Baldock: We Are Flowers of One Garden, Stephen Friedman Gallery

Inspired by nature, the cycle of life and his mother's relationship with her garden, Jonathan Baldock's latest exhibition at the Stephen Friedman Gallery is a colourful collection of ceramics and wall-based sculptures designed to uplift and encourage reflection. What does it mean to be alive? How do we understand our place in the world? These are some of the questions proposed among Jonathan's sculptures which, although greatly autobiographical, can be appreciated for their universality. Spot faces in flowers, body parts on vases, and other theatrical styles across the showroom.

Address: Stephen Friedman Gallery, 25 - 28 Old Burlington Street, London W1S 3AN

Website: stephenfriedman.com

Dates: Friday 20 January – Saturday 25 February

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.

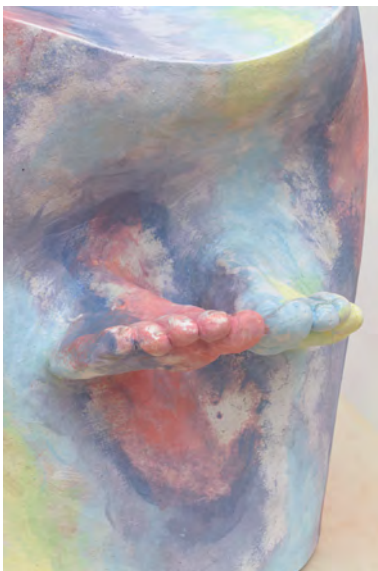


Jonathan Baldock, *In Your Face*, 2022. Felt, hessian, ceramic, and crystal, 78 1/2 x 55 x 6 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York. Photo: JSP Art Photography.

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.

Contributor

Helena Haines

Helena Haines 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.



Corridor8

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.



Corridor8



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.



Corridor8

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', Nielle Beauchens, 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

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.



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

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.

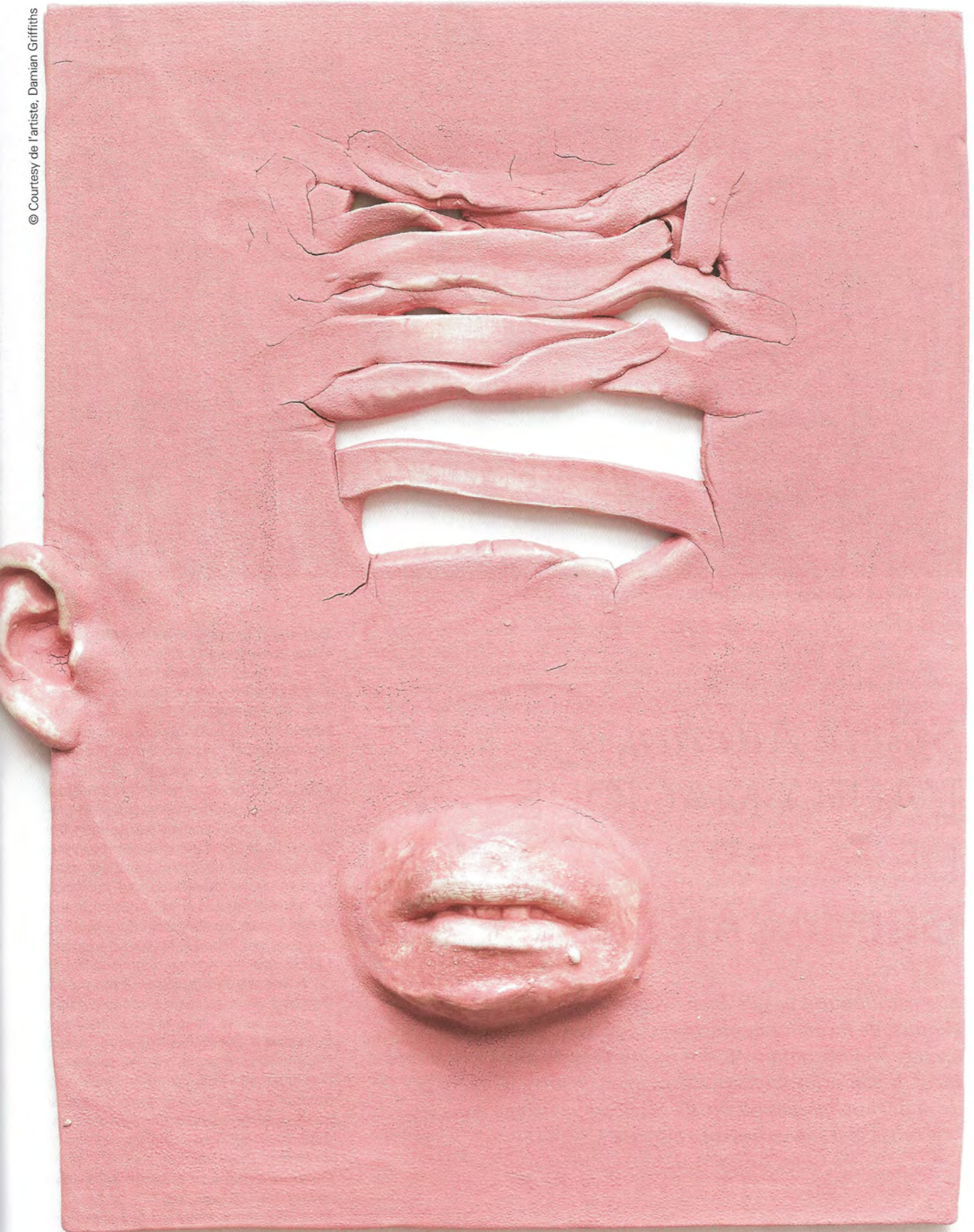
Casting cosmopolite

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 fratrises 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



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'.



BETA
Cool Art & Stuff

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 2nd 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 12th 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://invisible dust.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

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.

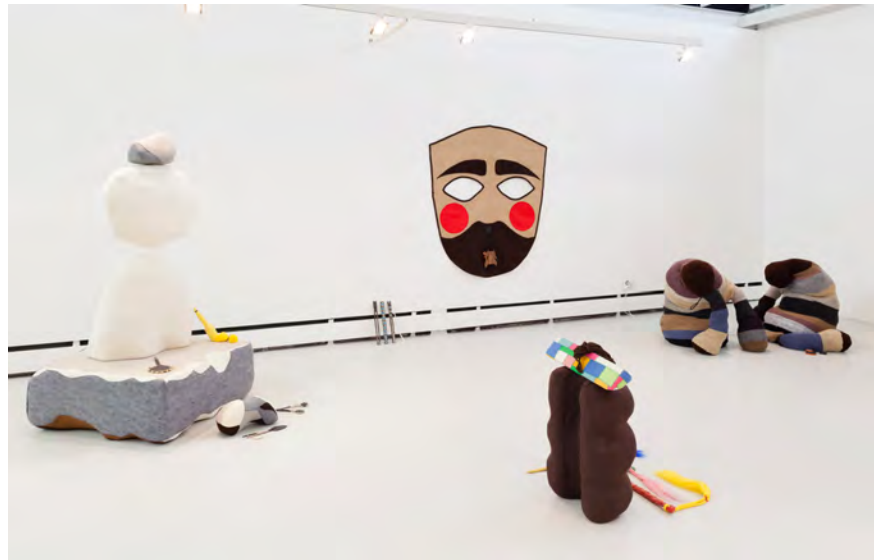
— Grace Beaumont

← 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