



Jonathan Baldock

(British, b. 1980)

Syncing disparate binaries such as sculpture/costume, art/craft, and ancient/contemporary is at the heart of British artist Jonathan Baldock's work. From sourdough busts to soft-sculpture Stonehenges, Baldock uses craft processes and materials to blur the boundaries between absurdity and reality.

Rife in Baldock's work are subtle—and sometimes not so subtle—allusions to literature, film, pagan rituals, archaeological materials, carnivals, theater, and puppets. In his installation *PA UBU*, he references Alfred Jarry's scandalous play *Ubu Roi*, (1896). The PA (*père* or father) of Baldock's title is the protagonist in Jarry's satire on power, greed, and the complacent French bourgeoisie.

Much translated, revived, and revised, *Ubu Roi* is a searing social critique about unbridled self-gratification portrayed through puppets. In short, Jarry drew from marionettes and puppet theater to portray Père Ubu as an archetypal megalomaniac glutton who leads a revolution then kills the royal family of Poland, taxes the population before killing them, fights off invading Russians, is attacked by a bear, and reunites with his scheming wife before fleeing to France.

In Baldock's version, *PA UBU* becomes an outsized, giant emoji face with arms akimbo on the supporting structure—or prop bin—and eyes and tongue separated from the overwhelmingly large face that does not have ears with which to hear. Given the size of the face, PA UBU would stand over 70 feet tall. Such an outsized puppet could be seen as a twenty-first century analogy to the nineteenth-century French bourgeoisie because economic and power imbalances have—once again—moved to the forefront of social ills.

About the Artist

Jonathan Baldock was born in 1980 in Pembury, and graduated from the Royal College of Art in 2005. Select solo exhibitions include: *Notes from the Orifice*, VITRINE London (2014); *Hot Spots*, The Apartment, Vancouver (2014); *The Soft Machine*, Chapter, Cardiff (2014); *A Strange Mix between a Butcher's Shop and a Nightclub*, Wysing Arts Centre, Cambridge (2013); *The Blue Epoch*, Colloredo-Mansfeldsk Palác, AMoYA, Prague (2012); *Musica*, Annarumma Gallery, Naples (2011); *Pierrot*, Peregrine Program, Chicago (2011). Select group exhibitions include: *Only the Lonely*, La Galerie, Noisy-le-Sec, Paris (2015); *SUNSCREEN*, commissioned by EM15 for the *56th Venice Biennale*, Venice (2015); *Dance First, Think Later*, Harris Museum & Art Gallery, Preston (2015); *Two Figures in a Landscape* (choreographed by Rubato Dance Group), Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai (2013); *The Gathering*, Mytoro Gallery, Hamburg (2013); *ARE YOU ALRIGHT? New Art From Britain*, Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art (MOCCA), Toronto (2013); *NEWSPEAK: British Art Now*, Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (2009); and Saatchi Gallery London (2008).

Baldock's recent awards include a 2015 fellowship by Künstlerhaus Schloss Balmoral in Bad Ems, Germany, the

Anne Chu

(American, b. 1959)

In a 2004 interview with art critic Linda Yablonsky, Anne Chu stated, "I generally pick archetypes that have been used so much they've been emptied of meaning, so I can invest my own." At the time of the interview, Chu was investigating the idea of puppets as sculpture. Ten years later, the "archetypes" in *Eques* suggest further abstraction as the artist explores a kind of recombinant iconography that references the metaphorical realm of puppets.

In this piece, the minimally detailed suede and copper horse head is tempted, pursued, and chasing carrot-printed hide shapes. Interspersed are an inverted *putto* (or cherub) head with Tang dynasty-like glaze marks, a black pelt, and a large fish weight.

Although mobiles can invoke whimsy as they eschew the pedestal and ground to take to the air, Chu's focus on neutralizing the familiar also means that this work carefully avoids a direct narrative. Instead, she leaves that to us.

About the Artist

Anne Chu received her BFA from the Philadelphia College of Art, and her MFA from Columbia University. Select solo exhibitions include: *Rubric for the Eye*, Tracy Williams Ltd., New York (2014); *Animula, vagula, blandula*, Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld (2012–13); *A Resting Place for William Tell*, Art Parcours, Basel (2010); and the Miami Museum of Contemporary Art, Florida (2005). Select group exhibitions include those at: the Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn (2011); the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2008 and 2010); Gladstone Gallery, New York, and the Aspen Art Museum, Aspen (both in 2007); Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago (2006); Victoria Miro Gallery, London, and the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley (both in 2003); and the Henry Art Gallery, Seattle (1998). Select awards and grants include: the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (2010); the Penny McCO(the)JtLO(t P) Mn Ltd., New Y

My Barbarian

An artist collective/theater troupe, My Barbarian was founded in Los Angeles in 2000. Comprised of Malik Gaines, Jade Gordon, and Alexandro Segade, this notorious group has produced works for the Whitney Museum of American Art, LACMA, and the Hammer Museum, among others.

My Barbarian describes themselves as artists who “make site-responsive performances and video installations that use theatrical play to draw allegorical narratives out of historical dilemmas, mythical conflicts, and current political crises.” More to the point, Gaines has said about the group, “we are black-box theatricalists who snuck into the white cube . . . we revel in the baroque trappings of genre.” And revel they do. Puns, jokes, and theoretical over-complication combine to divert sustained attention from the social inequalities and global politics at the heart of the work.

Object Opera was part of the troupe’s multi-faceted *Broke People’s Baroque Peoples’ Theater*, first performed in 2012. It features visible puppeteers moving objects around a stage. Two Baroque operas, two Maoist model dramas, and a Brechtian Lehrstück (or experimental play) make up the piece, with each tackling social issues such as class warfare, wastefulness, and injustice.

Trying to keep track of the literary, historical, and political references in *Object Opera* is almost impossible. Conclusions are drawn, only to slide away moments later. Quotes from “The Promise of Politics,” by Hannah Arendt, “Art for Art’s Sake,” by Emory Douglas, and “Aesthetics of the Oppressed,” by Augusto Boal come and go, and memorable phrases such as “aTpl) 20(the Ogpmehy) 20 Tf TD(po?“uglas,se of P) lwe are ard global

Tom Thayer

(American, b. 1970)

A polymath and collaboratively oriented artist, Tom Thayer bridges a wide spectrum of mediums and disciplines. His work combines elements of painting, sculpture, animation, technology, music, video, theater, and performance art. Thayer's naive painting and collage style and use of elementary-level art

Kara Walker

(American, b. 1969)

Kara Walker is best known for her hard-hitting, mural-sized silhouettes depicting the brutality, absurdity, and deep racism of America's antebellum South. Discussing her re-adaptation of the oh-so-proper Victorian silhouette, the artist states, "The silhouette says a lot with very little information, but that's also what the stereotype does."

Walker's shadow-puppet video, *Fall From Grace, Miss Pipi's Blue Tale*, 2011, uses motion and sound to bring hateful racial fantasies and realities to life by exploring the relatively unstudied history of sexual relations between white, elite, Southern women and black males. The narrative arc of the work revolves around a Southern belle, Miss Pipi, having sex with a male slave. In the end, Miss Pipi is disgraced, and the slave is mutilated, beaten, and consumed by flames. Filmed in the artist's studio, Walker is visible as she manipulates the puppets, and her laughter can be heard throughout.

During the sometimes excruciatingly uncomfortable seventeen minutes of this piece, the viewer becomes a complicit voyeur of unexpected eroticism, brutality, and graphic sex. As the artist stated when *Fall From Grace* was shown at the Camden Arts Centre, London, in 2013, "I want the viewer to feel a giddy discomfort—that same sort that happens when I'm making the work."

Sex in puppetry has historical precedents, and is jarring because of the cognitive dissonance created between the medium and the subject. Yet, these are just manipulated pieces of paper. The characters are not real or even dimensional. Even so, we do not want to watch these stereotypes of hyper-sexualized black males, cosseted and repressed white women, and the intolerance of biracial sex in the antebellum South. Why? Perhaps because *Fall From Grace* is a potent reminder not only of a shared history, but also of our country's still-simmering racial issues, which is something we most

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TED Talk by Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones, 2011
DVD video, color, sound; 18 minutes
Courtesy of TED Talks and Adrian Kohler and Basil Jones