

Steven Claydon

*Rat. Pearl. London. Onion:*

29 November 2012 – 26 January 2013

4 New Burlington Place, London W1

Steven Claydon's first exhibition with Sadie Coles HQ revolves around the transmission of matter and information, and the mediating effect of hindsight. Harnessing sculpture, painting and video, Claydon reinterprets the vehicles – objects, images, texts – via which cultural baggage has been communicated. He explores how an object's social status or agency is offset by its essential materiality or "thingly" agency.

The genesis of the show was a small book on Breughel published by Dolphin, a branch of Thames & Hudson, in the 1970s. Its dual status as a social object (with distinctive sans serif font and compressed layout) and a repository of relayed information mirrors the exhibition's wider preoccupation with artefacts and their shifting meanings and statuses. Replicas of antique musical instruments – the precursors to more familiar instruments played today – are a recurring point of reference.



Several sculptures draw together eclectic aesthetics and materials as well as combining traditional and high-tech modes of facture, in order to articulate the ways in which information is compartmentalised and metered. A Formica-coated cube bears a decorative panel (quoting Tudor décor yet cast deceptively in polyurethane foam). A marbled circular relief refers elliptically to the boiling sentient sea in Stanislaw Lem's book *Solaris*, whose "sticky, colloidal mass" could be a metaphor for the metamorphosing associations which populate Claydon's work. The plinth of one assemblage incorporates a structure resembling carved limewood, while its overall form references a design by the feted architect Ettore Sottsass. This modernist paradigm clothed in Gothic ornament problematises familiar methods of layout and compilation, compounding them to create a 'beacon' of accreted information. On top is a duo of fetish-like figures, each modelled on a carving of an Augustinian abbot. Truncated and doubled, they begin to resemble 'primitive' ethnic carvings – a slippage in signification which mirrors the infidelity of the materials themselves. A plaster bucket stuffed with incongruous utilitarian items refers to a wicker basket in Breughel's painting *Children's Games* (1560) similarly packed with motley objects.

A video installation titled *A Broken Consort* juxtaposes footage based on an animated screensaver with excerpts from a 1976 Granada television documentary written and presented by musician and musical historian David Munrow. The documentary aimed to introduce Medieval and early Renaissance instruments to a popular audience. Much of it speculated on the composition and construction of early music and instruments on the basis of extant examples and fragments of ancient scores. Installed nearby, *Orion Prepared Spinnet* is a *bricolage* compilation of objects whose structure is based on a hollow English Bentside Spinnet (a type of harpsichord). Another sculpture incorporates replicas of the reed instruments discussed in the documentary – all the while expressing the impossibility of faithful 'recreation' or 'reconstruction' (Claydon's instruments are deliberately functionless) and the lack of veracity which memory entails. These instruments were predominantly monophonic devices (sounding a single note), and Claydon has incorporated an electronic soundtrack into the film composed on a monophonic analogue synthesizer.

Mirroring the virtual collations of search engines, Claydon's works compress a mass of allusions. They intimate canons and taxonomies while ultimately deconstructing such systems. Claydon thereby activates the contingent nature of reference itself and accentuates the mutating "voicefulness" of objects. He has commented that objects are "performative and active post authorship ... these things should operate without any knowledge of my motives or research: objects conceal and reveal constantly." His work ultimately questions whether the concept of reconstructing objects from the past might be inverted, so that the artefacts of the future – or of alternative realities – can be 'pre-constructed'.

Steven Claydon (b. 1969) studied at Chelsea School of Art & Design and Central Saint Martins, London. He has exhibited internationally, with major solo exhibitions including *Culpable Earth* at firstsite, Colchester (2012); *Mon Plaisir... Votre Travail...*, La Salle de Bains, Lyon, France (2011); *Goldene Zeiten / Golden Times*, Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany (2010); *The Ancient Set and The Fictional Pixel*, Serpentine Pavilion, London, and *The Ancient Set*, International Project Space, Bournville, Birmingham (2008); and *Courtesy Of The Neighbourhood Watch*, White Columns, New York (2006). Performances include *An Equivalence Propelled*, Royal William Dockyard, Plymouth, 17 September 2011, and *Forward-facing lemon yellow eyes*, Hayward Gallery, London, 31 March 2011 (both in conjunction with *British Art Show 7*); *Bestiary*, Cavallerizza Reale, Turin, July 2009; and Serpentine Pavilion, London, 08 August 2008. His work has been included in numerous group exhibitions including *SOUNDWORKS*, Institute of Contemporary Art, London (2012); *Various Stages – Bedingte Bühnen*, Kunsthaus Dresden, Germany (2012); *We Will Live, We Will See*, The Zabudowicz Collection, London (2011); and *British Art Show 7: In the Days of the Comet*, Nottingham, London, Glasgow and Plymouth (2010-11). In 2007 he curated the exhibition *Strange Events Permit Themselves The Luxury of Occurring* at Camden Arts Centre. A major publication, *Culpable Earth*, was produced to coincide with firstsite's show in 2012.

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Opening hours Tuesday – Saturday 11 – 6pm

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