Andy Holden, Interviewed by Jarvis Cocker, Observer, May 8 2022

Andy Holden's grandmother never owned a cat, but she did collect ceramic cats – hundreds of them – from charity shops. After she died, Holden, a multimedia artist and musician from Bedfordshire, inherited her collection and turned them into an installation called *Cat-tharsis* (2016). "My gran had been my early champion of my strange desire to be an artist and I realised that looking at her collection as a child had been an influence on my art in many ways," he says. "The cats, when all arranged together, made a terrific sculpture that told you a lot about the person who was responsible for it."

Holden doesn't do much collecting himself these days, but, he says, "I like to be surrounded by things, to live with things, as vehicles for stories". His work, which has exhibited at Tate Britain and Bristol Museum, doesn't shy away from the darker side of collecting and its links with colonialism and environmental destruction. In his 2017 show *Natural Selection*, commissioned by Artangel and made in collaboration with his father Peter, he explored the impulse to collect birds' eggs. "It takes great skill and you can never complete the collection," he says, "however it destroys the very thing you love."

Did your grandma have her collection on display at home?
The cats lined the shelves of her small bungalow, floor to ceiling, staring back at you.

As a child I remember asking my mum: “If grandma likes cats so much, why doesn’t she just get a cat?” But I realise now that I had entirely missed the point. She would collect them from charity shops. They were not souvenirs, often they were other people’s souvenirs, bought secondhand. It was an open-ended collection; at times she had to get rid of some to make room on the shelves to be able to continue to amass them.

Everything that can’t be invested in human relationships can be invested in objects

Why did you hang on to it after she died?
Collections outlive you, and it felt natural that I’d inherit her collection. I had initially assumed the collection was about cats. Cats have always been a symbol; from their God-like status in ancient Egypt to their omnipotence as symbols of unselfconsciousness on the internet. However, I realised that it was more a portrait of my grandma. They were not about saying she went here or there, they did not contain memories, but were a way of exerting control over the present moment, over the unpredictable events of life. Everything that can’t be invested in human relationships can be invested in objects.

Tell me about the art piece you created around your grandma’s collection.
Soon after I inherited them I was asked to do a live performance supporting the comedian Simon Munnery. For the show I decided to “unbox” the cats on stage and tell stories about cats and my grandma, rambling towards a punchline that the process had been “cat-thartic”. I found this really helped me process my gran’s passing. I have since made this into a video, which I’ve been showing as part of the British Art Show, alongside her collection. It is a way of thinking about how the things we collect and surround ourselves with tells us about who we are. The ceramic cats, with their absurd long necks, big eyes and vase-like decoration, at first appear kitsch and trivial, but through talking about them, my grandma reappears.

The first piece I saw by you was your *Natural Selection* exhibition with Artangel, made in collaboration with your dad, in which you explore how birds make their nests. As part of the exhibition you recreated a bowerbird’s bower. Is collecting an instinct?
The bowerbird is a unique collector and arranger of objects. It gathers up shells, feathers and sometimes blue plastic and places them around the bower, demonstrating aesthetic preference. I think it shows the impulse to gather objects around us for display is indeed a natural impulse.

What do you collect?
At the moment I’m only collecting my thoughts. I have started a diary to try to collect them all in one place. If I wasn’t a maker, who makes more than I part with, I think I’d be a collector, because I like to be surrounded by things, to live with things, as vehicles for stories. As a kid I collected all sorts; fossils, shells, bits of toys, stones. My first exhibition at Tate Britain was about the impulse to collect. When I was 10 I “collected” a piece of stone from the side of the Great Pyramid of Giza. But when I got

home I felt terrible about it, as my dad said: “If everyone did that there wouldn’t be any pyramid left.” So this stone in my collection filled me with guilt, and 15 years later I decided to travel to Egypt again and return it to where I’d taken it from. I then made a 100,000 times enlarged knitted replica of the stone called Pyramid Piece, a kind of monument to a piece of a monument. It was a little parable about the desire to want to possess objects that are significant to us, and what can be undone. It was also a comment on colonial guilt, and the objects in some of our beloved museum “collections”.

Guardian Review of ***Beano: Art of Breaking the Rules*** curated by Andy Holden, Somerset House, October 2022-March 2023

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Art

How our art critic ended up in the Beano: The Art of Breaking the Rules – review

Adrian Searle
@SearleAdrian
Wed 20 Oct 2021 16.59 BST
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★★★★★

Adrian Searle's biggest accolade ... being immortalised by the Beano. Photograph: Courtesy of Beano/Somerset House. Words by Nigel Auchterlounie and art by Nigel Parkinson

Somerset House, London

From Viz to the fourth plinth to David Bowie, the perennially upstart comic's influence rampages on – and even our own Adrian Searle can't get off scot-free

What should a critic do? I'm sure there must be rules: don't take backhanders from galleries. Don't get too intimate with artists, especially not dead ones. Declare any conflicts of interest (no conflict, no interest, I always say). Keep up to date and don't be late, and wear black at all times. I could go on. The public expects certain standards, and a degree of aloof hauteur from the arbiter of taste – it adds gravitas and readers like a touch of disdain; it gives one's judgments that extra little bit of critical oomph.

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But what if the critic has somehow found themselves on the streets of Beanotown? The artist I'm up against is Dennis the Menace, straight out of the pages of the comic. Thanks to the Beano, and artist and curator Andy Holden, my carefully constructed critical persona has been for ever ruined. Drawn by the Beano's Nigel Parkinson, my all-too-recognisable cartoon avatar has been inserted into the storyline of a Beano strip, reviewing the very exhibition I now find myself standing in.

"We've already written your review," Holden tells me, pointing at my cartoon self, deliberating on the wall. The situation is worthy of one of those metafictions by Jorge Luis Borges or Paul Auster. I might never escape. It's a nightmare. Or, rather, an *Aaaarrghhh!!* moment, accompanied by a shout - I am in the Beano! This is my biggest accolade, compared to which my various real-life embellishments - the fellowships and honorary doctorates, the critic of the year badge I never got, the Golden Lion at Venice I secretly yearn for - are but the merest gimcrack baubles.

A visitor looks at an artwork by founding member of The Specials Horace Panter - a reworking of David Hockney's 1967 painting A Bigger Splash. Photograph: Yui Mok/PA

The Art of Breaking the Rules, at Somerset House, is a thoroughgoing homage and exploration of the world of the Beano comic (which first appeared in 1938 and is still going strong) its influence on art and popular culture, and its place in the psyche of anyone who has ever picked up a copy over the last 80-odd years.

The comic strips in Beano are all about railing against authority, and Holden, like Picasso, sees anarchic wilfulness and disobedience as the keys to creativity. Holden has encouraged the Beano's artists and story-writers to include various denizens of the art world in the comic's strips, produced specially for this exhibition.

Good lord, there's art dealer Larry Gagosian, Damien Hirst and Gilbert and George. And here comes that famous art critic, yours truly, flouncing in on the back of a swan. Holden also becomes a character. His hand-drawn Toontown double first appeared in his marvellous hour-long 2017 animation Laws of Motion in a Cartoon Landscape. The animated Holden appears and reappears at Somerset House, both as curator of the exhibition and of Beanotown's Museum of Modern Art, where actual Beano-esque art works by real artists are on display, overseen by cut-out museum guards.

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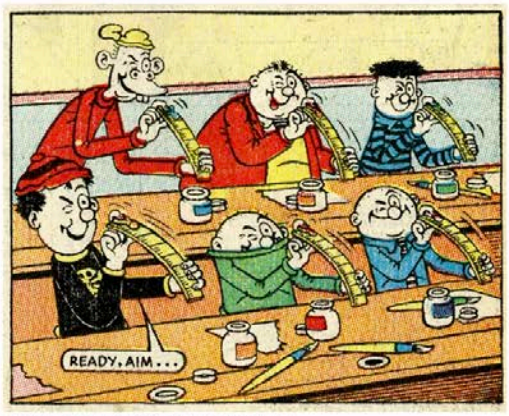
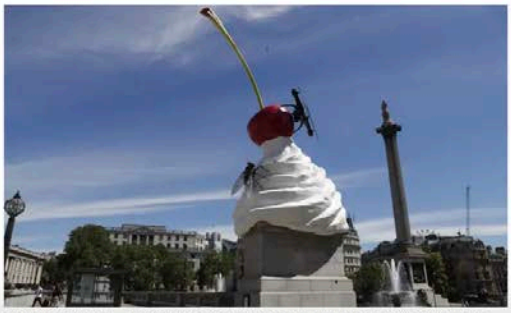


Bash Street Kids, 1982. Photograph: Courtesy of Beano

The Beano's designers have also reconstructed the comic's Dundee HQ and editor's office, opened up their archives, and otherwise abetted the artist-cum-curator. Helpful signs alert the young to boring bits of the show, or advise guardians that Ed Atkins's CGI slurping, squashing, human meat-compressing sandwich-preparation animation might be too disturbing for kids. I think they'll love it.

No Beano, no Viz. No Beano, no Heather Phillipson's The End on the fourth plinth of Trafalgar Square. No Minnie the Minx, no Sarah Lucas's fried-egg tits on her T-shirt. Or, at least, that's what the show suggests. I might also refer readers to the cover of the 1966 album by the Blues Breakers in which Eric Clapton is seen reading the comic, and that David Bowie cited the Beano, along with Madame Bovary, as a major influence. Already inspirational, Beano might also nurture the creative streak and anti-authoritarian leanings of a current generation of young readers whose artistic yearnings are being stifled by current educational policies, just as the strips in the late 1950s punctured my own childhood docility and subservience to authority.

Always a bit edgy, with its Bash Street school slackers, its tomboys and characters like Dennis (just the kind of kids my parents wouldn't let me play with), the Beano was never much encouraged when I was a child. But unlike American superhero comics, and the endless jingoistic war comics which I never enjoyed, Beano was rooted in a familiar world of small living rooms, suburban streets and washing lines, overbearing adults and frightening authoritarian teachers.



Beano-influenced ... Heather Phillipson's The End on the fourth plinth in 2020. Photograph:

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Holden's approach is historical and archival (there are lots of displays of defunct rival comics, and of now-relegated Beano characters, such as Lord Snooty, the top-hatted toff, who has returned here as an art collector); sociological (including a great promotional video of Beanotown, based on a 1960s film extoling the delights of Stevenage new town); and scatological. An entire section is devoted to food and food fights in the Beano, and the culinary preoccupations of postwar, post-rationing austerity Britain. A mountain of mash is pierced, like St Sebastian, not by arrows, but by sausages. Holden even cites Michel Foucault in a section of the show titled Discipline and Punish, after the French philosopher's terrifying 1975 book. Here, the slipper and the cane, the domestic equivalents of the rack and the whip, are used to reinforce order in the home and the classroom. In a scene from the Bash Street Kids, Teacher has all the kids on their knees, bare bums in the air, as he raises his cane. It's like a scene from Pier Paolo Pasolini's gruesome 1975 Sadean allegory Salò.

Corporal punishment has, of course, disappeared from the latter-day Beano, as it largely has from schools and homes, and Walter the Softy is no longer bullied by Dennis the Menace in the comic's pages, because it might be seen as homophobic - and, in any case, bullying is bad. This is wokeness gone mad. "Comics aren't art! The curator's an imbecile!" sniffs Walter. He reminds me of someone. In 2018, Beano wrote to Jacob Rees-Mogg MP, requesting that he summarily cease and desist from infringing the intellectual property rights of Walter Brown, AKA Walter the Softy, whose dress sense, attitudes, glasses and hair parting have clearly been lifted, wholesale, by the MP.

Adrian Searle's verdict on the Beano exhibition. Photograph: Courtesy of Beano/Somerset House. Words by Nigel Auchterlounie and art by Nigel Parkinson

Cause and effect, the relentless surge of one thing leading to another, exemplified by the great Leo Baxendale's drawings of the Bash Street Kids, is complemented by Swiss duo Fischli and Weiss's 1987 film The Way Things Go, with its studio experiment of burning tyres trundling down ramps, things whacking other things, pendulum swings and constant round of calamitous interactions. The terrifying toy-train ride in Nick Park's 1993 film The Wrong Trousers is part-Beano, part Buster Keaton's The General. Beano has also inspired Steve Bell (who wrote a great obituary of Baxendale in The Guardian), and cartoonist Martin Rowson turns Brexit into Brexo, in homage to the Beano. Everything leads to everything else, which is why, in this exhibition, Billy the Whizz takes us to Philippe Parreno's floating, helium-filled speech bubbles, and Richard Wentworth turns the search for knowledge into a compost heap of old books, studio sweepings and a tin of paint-stripper.

Conceived during lockdown, when we were besieged by ever-changing rules, Holden gives us the full Beano. It is a riot in there. But we must have rules, and artist Peter Liversidge has, with the help of Beano readers, produced a forest of placards to which visitors to the show can also contribute. "Never Go to Bed", they say, "We Want a Future", "Visit Museums" and "No More Rules". Critics are all about having rules, or at least opinions. As my cartoon self says in the comic strip: "It's a MESS-TERPIECE!" How could I possibly disagree?

Financial Times - Review of Beano: Art of Breaking the Rules curated by Andy Holden, Somerset House, October 2022-March 2023

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Beano at Somerset House – heartfelt, meticulous and splendidly irreverent

'The Art of Breaking the Rules' celebrates the subversiveness and creative legacy of the 83-year-old comic

Save

'Splash', painted by The Specials musician-turned-painter Horace Panter in 2018, with Dennis the Menace and Gnasher diving into a David Hockney-like pool © Courtesy of the artist

Arwa Haider NOVEMBER 2 2021 4

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At "Beanotown Museum" the display cases appear to be heavily cracked, sassy captions bubble hover above the historic artefacts ("Boring old stuff"; "Yawn!"). Larger-than-life school kids and multimedia art loom from the walls, and beaming youngsters and oldies let their imaginations run riot. Welcome to *Beano: The Art of Breaking the Rules* — a new Somerset House exhibition dedicated to the world's longest-running weekly print comic (currently in its 83rd year), its creations (including stripy-sweatered scamp Dennis the Menace), and its enduring cultural influence.

This isn't the first time a "serious" institution has dedicated space to comic culture. Tate Britain's 2010 exhibition *Rude Britannia* charted centuries of satire and smut, including Beano-inspired adult comic Viz; the British Museum mounted an extensive display of Japanese manga in 2019. And Somerset House itself devoted a show to Tintin in 2015.

Minnie sees Stacey Denim's bed, 2002, with artwork by Tom Patterson © Beano

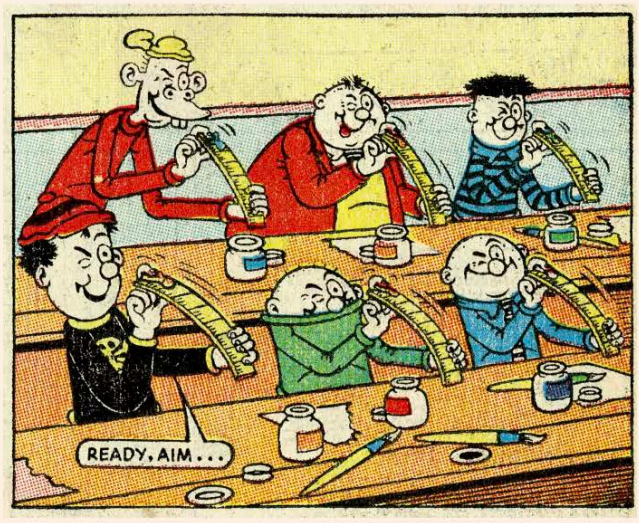
Unusually, *The Art of Breaking the Rules* centres kids as significantly as the grown-ups. Its tone is simultaneously heartfelt, meticulous and splendidly irreverent.

"I kind of started working on this exhibition when I was eight years old," jokes the curator, visual artist, musician and life-long Beano devotee Andy Holden. "For me, the Beano was a gateway into art, creating characters and self-reflexivity.

"The Beano is a formula that's run since 1938; there's something perennially inspiring about the ingenuity, fun and craziness of kids trying to navigate the world of adults' arbitrary rules. I wanted to make a show that you'd absolutely love if you were 10 years old; you'd feel like you're actually in the comic, and come away thinking you could be an artist. The maverick spirit that the Beano characters possess, and their inversions of gender stereotypes, are things to hold on to."

The Beano has never pitched itself as explicitly political, though exceptions were made during the second world war, when strips would feature fascists being outwitted by kid characters including Pansy Potter, the Strongman's Daughter. Pansy, introduced in issue 21, also heralded the Beano's strong and increasingly diverse tradition of female rebels, any of whom are now likely to be its cover stars: Minnie the Minx, created by Leo Baxendale in 1953 and currently drawn by the comic's first regular female artist, Laura Howell; and relative newcomers such as sporty JJ, tech whizz and wheelchair user Rubi, and prank supremo Harsha Chandra.

As the exhibition highlights, the Beano has always made subversive digs at social inequalities. The characters' traditional reward of a "slap-up feed" reflected the postwar scarcity of food (sweets were rationed in Britain until 1953). Nowadays, the Bash Street Kids' rival group is called Posh Street (which includes one snorting, mop-haired character called Boris), and Dennis's longtime adversary, Walter, is no longer a "softie" but the bullish son of Beanotown's rich Mayor. The "good guys" are everyday kids rather than superheroes.



The Bash Street Kids, from 1982 © Courtesy of Beano

While the Beano has a global presence via comic subscriptions and an animated series watched in 100 countries, it's also spiritually rooted in its birthplace of Dundee, base of publishers DC Thomson.

"Dundee is a rebellious city," says the Beano's editorial director Mike Stirling. "It has always poked back against authority, including when Winston Churchill was its MP. It was once known as 'She-Town', because of the female-led jute industry, and it's been the epicentre of factory and school strikes." This rebelliousness is reflected in the comic, as Holden explains: "American comics tend to be about upholding the law; the Beano has always been about not doing what you're told."

The exhibition also brilliantly traces the Beano's creative legacy in modern and contemporary art, finding kindred spirits in Swedish-American sculptor Claes Oldenburg's knobbly "London Knees" (1966) and Heather Phillipson's Trafalgar Square sundae-sculpture "The End" (2020). The Specials musician turned painter Horace Panter depicts Dennis and Gnasher diving into a David Hockney-like pool scene; elsewhere, kids and adults avidly watch Swiss duo Fischli & Weiss's incendiary chain reaction film, *The Way Things Go* (1979), or concoct "protest signs" in Peter Liversidge's pop-up studio. Some rules, sadly, can't be broken; one gallery attendant repeatedly has to ask kids not to touch the brightly hued model of Beanotown.

Minnie goes to contemporary art museum, with artwork by Nigel Parkinson, (2018) © Courtesy of Beano

For visitors who grew up on the Beano, the exhibition is powerfully emotive. It might be the headiness of watching your own youth rewound frame-by-frame — there's even a nod to the fabled Beanos record emporium once located in Croydon where I'd splurge my pocket money as a kid. It might be the joy of watching your kids devouring their own Beanos. Or perhaps it's just the comic's core intent; as Stirling says: "We strive so that everyone can see themselves in Beanotown."

To March 6 2022, somersethouse.org.uk

Review of ***Natural Selection***, by Andy Holden & Peter Holden, Artangel, London October-December 2017 - Observer, 10 September 2017

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Art

Andy Holden & Peter Holden: Natural Selection review – artfulness is egg-shaped

Laura Cumming
@LauraCummingArt
Sun 10 Sep 2017 08.00 BST

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★★★★★

'A show of marvels': Natural Selection at the former Newington Library, Elephant & Castle, London. Photograph: Marcus Leith

Former Newington Library, 155 Walworth Road, London SE17

A father and son ask if birds are born artists in this marvellous Artangel show held together by mud, poetry and natural mystery

The swallow sculpts its nest out of mud. The horned coot works with pebbles in streams, an avian Andy Goldsworthy. The weaver bird is famous for its elaborate globes and sheaths conjured out of grasses; but the bowerbird surely takes the biscuit, decorating its lavish pavilions with flower petals, shells and shards of shining plastic. It has even been known to use masticated berries as paint.

A magnified bower dominates the opening gallery of Natural Selection. An enormous assembly of reeds with a central eye-like hole, it's so suggestive of art as to strike the mind first as some sort of sculpture. Which is both true and exactly the point. For everything in this marvellous Artangel exhibition - a show of marvels in itself - turns upon the astonishing connections between ornithology and art, or more precisely between birds and their visions,

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The argument is played out using eggs and nests from all over the world, as well as paintings, sculptures and films. These are the work of Andy Holden, sometimes in conjunction with his father, Peter. Holden senior is a household name: national organiser of the RSPB's Young Ornithologists' Club and former "bird man" on *Blue Peter*; Andy is an artist, animator and musician with the Grubby Mitts. Posters for Peter Holden's first book featured infant Andy reading bird magazines in his highchair. This show is also about the evolution of their relationship.

Here, for instance, is the blackbird's nest Andy once found in the tree outside his childhood home. A perfect circle, it turns on a revolving disc, emphasising the lovely roundness of the bird's creation; whereas for Peter the design is about cupping the eggs as safely as possible. Swallows are equally security-minded to the father, nesting in high eaves. But a greater wonder for the son is their ability to sculpt in a medium as quick-drying as renaissance terracotta using only beaks and claws. Andy shows photographs of the bird that even built its home on an emblematic trowel.

'Knowledge from the father, poetry from the son': Andy Holden, left, and Peter Holden, right, and the nest of a long-tailed tit. Photograph: Andy Holden & Peter Holden

Bark, nests and branches are all used in quasi-scientific displays, as well as installations and depictions (a vast collection of stolen eggs, subject of a famous crime, is recreated in spectacular facsimile). But the dialogue between father and son has its principal focus in a split-screen film where they give a brilliant two-headed lecture on nests, taking in, inter alia, the homicidal cuckoo; the tailorbird, stitching leaves together with spider's silk; the massive airborne apartment blocks of the sociable weaver bird; and the mute swans that work together in pairs.

> **What is an egg but a perfect creation, a triumph of form and beauty, removed from the flow of time**

For Andy, the swans' nest measures the strength of their marriage. Knowledge from the father, poetry from the son: that seems to be the pattern. Except that Peter Holden opens your eyes to beauty too - to nests as exposed pockets, fragile cradles or invisible cities, as he refers to rookeries. He may be sceptical of Andy's chicken and egg claims - did mankind really make mud huts in imitation of the swallows, as Pliny says - but he points out just how astonishing it is that young long-tailed tits can make their bottle-shaped nests without ever having seen another bird do it.

Downstairs in the disused Victorian library (formerly the Cuming Museum, a father-son ethnographic collection) is Andy Holden's latest film installation. Ostensibly narrated by a cartoon crow that once starred in his father's RSPB magazines, now grown into a wise old animatronic bird, this is an enthralling history of egg collecting from eccentric pastime, when aristocrats swam Scottish lochs with eggs in their hands, to childhood hobby, competitive pursuit and eventually - after the 1954 Protection of Birds Act - organised crime.

Watch a clip from Andy Holden's film installation.

The crow flies through landscapes by Turner, Ravilious and Hockney (this is a concise history of English art en route), hops in and out of a mist-rolling Paul Nash, enters into documentary footage of egg robbers discussing their crimes. Most unforgettable are the stories of Colin Watson, who cut down the tree in which endangered ospreys were nesting, in protest against the 1954 Act, then died while clambering up for an egg. And Matthew Gonshaw, jailed in 2011 for egging, who speaks on camera of his addiction, and the romance of it, betraying a forlorn desire to return to the innocence of childhood.

Andy Holden twines the strands together like a weaver bird himself, subtly suggesting all sorts of parallels - between the cuckoo forging other birds' eggs and his own artfully faked collection; between the tailorbird's lacing and the shoe tying learned from his father (what's learned, what's instinctive?); between egging and art collecting. Egg thefts might almost be construed as a kind of art crime, except that to steal an egg is to steal a bird's life.

Collections of eggs on display in Natural Selection. Photograph: Marcus Leith

And what is an egg but a perfect creation, a masterpiece of form and beauty, removed from the flow of time. Look at the owl's moonlight egg, known as an immaculate. Or the guillemot's eggs, laid directly on the rocky ledge, and apparently painted to resemble it. Each is different in its graphic abstraction; this one like a Henri Michaux ink work, this one like a Jackson Pollock. How are they even made?

The show circles back in the end to the bowerbird, making its nest for fun, or love, a free invention in which no eggs will ever be laid. This bird, the Holdens agree, has a singular sensibility. For the father, this is a triumph of natural selection; for the son, it's the essence of creativity. The bird has a concept of beauty that precedes and governs his creation. It is by definition an artist.

Review of ***Natural Selection***, by Andy Holden & Peter Holden, Artangel, London October-December 2017 - Guardian, 11 September 2017

Art and design

Natural Selection review – a risky celebration of the dastardly life of birds

★★★★☆

Former Newington Library, London

Police chases, undercover detectives, secret societies: this bird-themed installation, by artist Andy Holden and his ornithologist father Peter, is full of rough-edged surprises

Skye Sherwin

Mon 11 Sep 2017 16.59 BST

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Soaring storyteller... a CGI-animated blackbird with Andy Holden's voice relates the history of egg-collecting in Natural Selection. Photograph: Marcus Leith

It sounds just charming: a long look at all the feathered friends flitting around our back gardens. Yet the cosy material in Natural Selection, an exhibition by father and son duo Andy and Peter Holden, turns out to have more drama than Hitchcock's The Birds, rife with dastardly tales of a criminal underworld, obsession and class conflict.

The project, commissioned by public art powerhouse Artangel and sited within London's former Newington Library, takes as its jumping-off point A Natural History of Nest Building, a three-screen film essay presented by artist Andy and his ornithologist father Peter.

Sporting a cravat, Peter has the measured tones of a man comfortable on camera: as "the bird man" on Blue Peter and co-presenter with Bill Oddie on Bird in the Nest, he introduced generations of children, including his son, to the wonders of birds. In a faded brown tie and jacket and nerd glasses that look back to his dad's heyday, Andy on the other hand is nervy, his delivery fast-paced and unpolished.

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What of the birds? The pair relate fascinating stories, from the cuckoo's parasitic tactics to birds that lay eggs straight on to cliff edges. Holden junior is particularly interested in how nest-building relates to art-making. Do birds create their intricate constructions because instinct tells them to drop moss on twigs, or do they have a vision of their home in mind, suggesting a higher consciousness? Consider the Australian bowerbird, unique in fashioning an inverted arch of sticks purely for displaying the objects it collects, like "a set for a performance". Andy has constructed a massive version of one in the gallery.

Display nest ... Andy Holden's version of an Australian bowerbird's nest. Photograph: Marcus Leith

Meanwhile, bird behaviours become pronounced metaphors for the creative process, like the osprey, whose nests resemble vast balls of tangled wool, sites they return to again and again and build up over the years. Andy's breakout 2010 work comes to mind, a knitted boulder that upscaled a chip of a pyramid he had "stolen" as a child, into an ingenious analogy for the comic distortions of memory and guilt.

This is Andy's typical modus operandi: starting small with something from his own life, then exploding it outward into a twisty nest of ideas. Sophistication is balanced by self-exposure, embarrassment even. Natural Selection's inspiration he tells us, was a blackbird nest discovered when he moved back to live with his parents.

The artist first started collaborating with his dad on bird-themed art performances in 2011. But, as diverting as these nest-building accounts are, it's in the library's low-lit basement - where another father and son, Richard and Henry Cuming, once stored their natural history collection - that the plot thickens. Here an eerie CGI-animated blackbird with Andy's voice relates the history of egg-collecting. Beginning with Victorian aristocrats hell-bent on cataloguing nature, through to the 21st century's outlaw nest robbers, it's a narrative peppered with police chases, undercover detectives and secret societies.

Egg collectors aren't presented as monsters immune to the threat of avian extinction though. Rather they are self-styled experts, often clinging to the values of a past era. A backdrop of paintings romanticising the English landscape, from Eric Ravilious' chalk horse on a West Country hill to David Hockney's Technicolor take on Yorkshire, underlines how artists also impose their very human vision on to the natural world.

Where things get really interesting - and risky - is in Andy's focus on a particularly thorny subject right now: class, specifically the white working class, apparently left behind by the globalised world and demonised as stuck on a vision of a Britain that never was. Today's criminal egg collectors are welders and decorators, living isolated existences with pictures of those original "gentlemen scientists pinned to their walls".

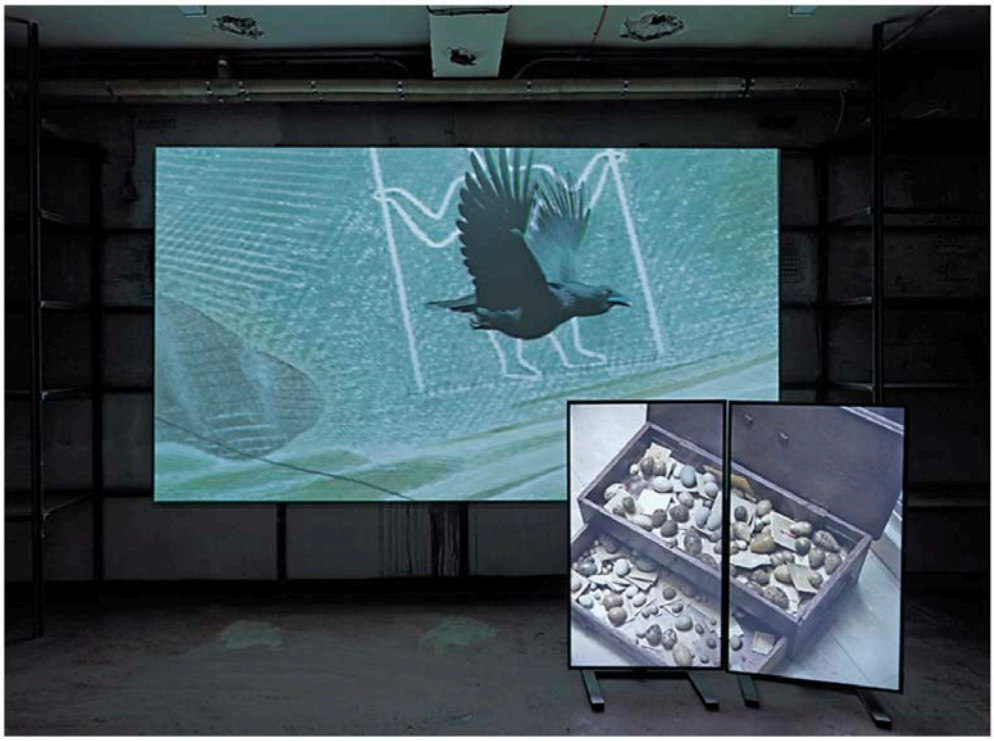
Speckled treasures ... Andy Holden has recreated a 2006 hoard of 7,130 eggs, found in Cleethorpes. Photograph: Marcus Leith

Victorian hero Lord Rothschild - who founded the Natural History Museum, gifting it his egg collection - is represented in the two-screen video by a photo of his zebras pulling a carriage. On the other hand, the East Ender Matthew Gonshaw, whose collection landed him in prison in 2011, comes across as a tragic, sympathetic figure. "I'd like to find a female," he says, baring his lonely heart to a gang of news reporters. In an adjoining room, Andy has recreated a 2006 hoard of 7,130 eggs, found in Cleethorpes. The tiny speckled treasures are housed as they were discovered, not in display cases but old margarine tubs and chocolate boxes.

The subject matter is quaint, but Andy uses rough edges - his awkward delivery, the iffy animation - to avoid what might be a rose-tinted Wes Anderson-ish dive into yesteryear's pursuits. What emerges, finally, is a reflection on the dangerous allure of nostalgia itself. There are a lot of layers to unpick. But, like the osprey's nest, it is a project that deserves repeat visits.

● Andy Holden and Peter Holden: Natural Selection is at the former Newington Library, London, until 5 November.

Natural Selection, Andy Holden & Peter Holden, review, Artforum, February 2018



Andy Holden, *The Opposite of Time*, 2017, three-channel digital video, color, sound, 30 minutes. Installation view.

Andy Holden and Peter Holden

ARTANGEL

The father-son birders Andy and Peter Holden are obviously of the same phenotype. "Natural Selection," their most recent show, was set in the former Newington Library in south London, where their interest in ornithology informed works whose central concern was precisely the frayed edge between art and nature. The male bowerbird, for instance, creates a nest not for habitation, but purely for aesthetic display. These structures are a kind of folly, decorative at most (and an annoyance to Darwinians at the least). Andy Holden's *Untitled (Bower)* (all works 2017) is a re-creation of one of these nests, larger than life. Looking through its womb-like tunnel out the other end of the space, the viewer could see a video. As one walked around the nest, marveling at its mathematical precision, its balance, its credible artifice, it became clear that the video was flanked by two more. The Holdens' three-channel work *A Natural History of Nest Building* contains chapters titled "Nest Types," "Nest Sites," and "Nest Materials." The central video is composed of both found and newly filmed footage of nests from around the world, while in each of the other two, the Holdens deliver a half-scientific, half-speculative lecture and performance. Though father and son are separated by the central screen, they appear to be standing in the same space—as evidenced by the John Constable paintings in the background—often passing props across screens. Their own relationship, in which each is fiercely independent and reluctantly reliant on the other, mimics their telling of the stories of birds and their young ones. The effect is one of unexpected emotion. The three videos are interwoven just as the twigs in a nest are: with enough distance and equal tension.

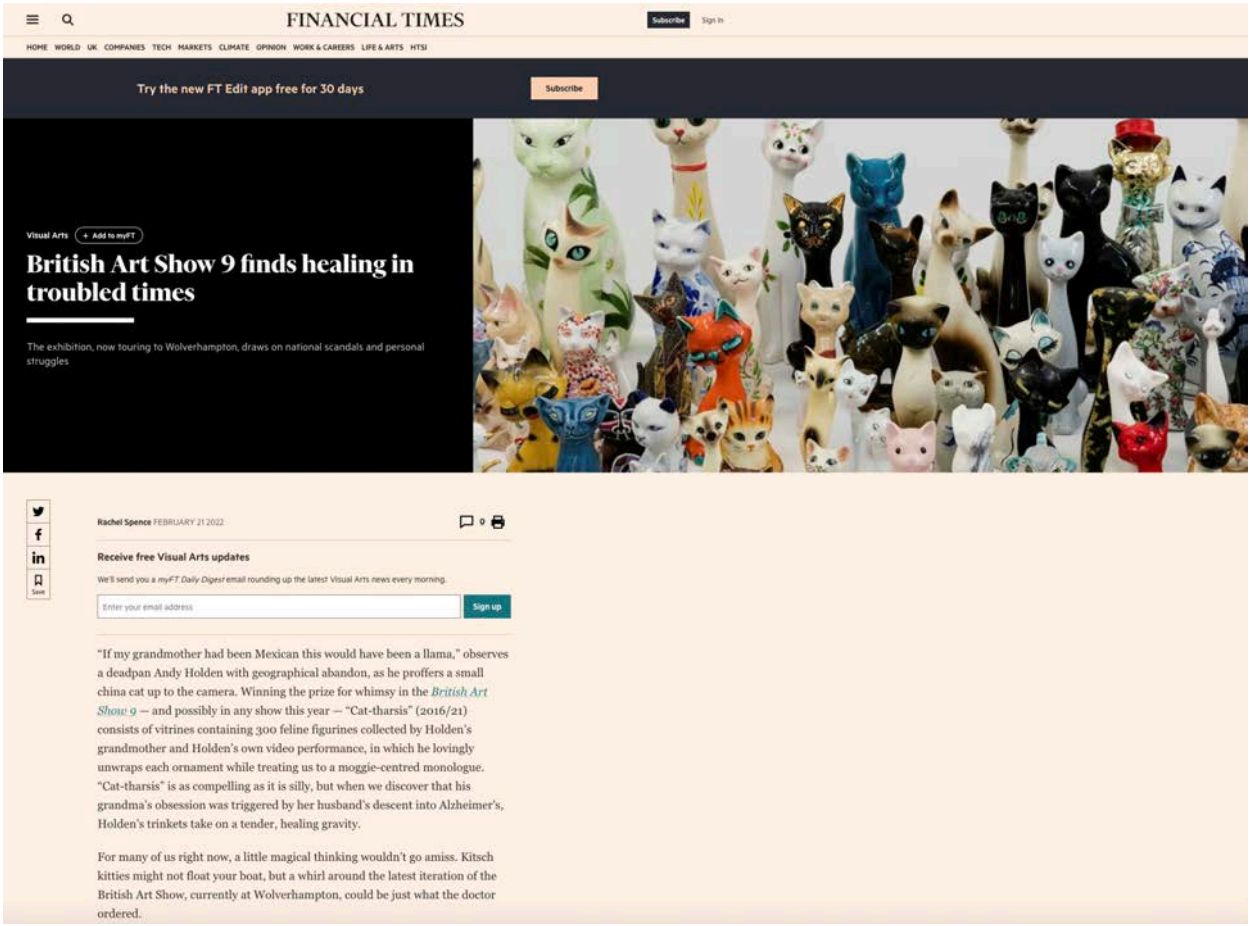
One of the duo's central questions is whether the nest transcends its inherent functionality and is an intentional work of art. Andy Holden describes the blackbird's nest—a spiral of mud, straw, and grass held together by a centrifugal force—as "an image of cosmic confidence in an arboreal world." Every species makes a different nest, and each nest contains its own twigged idiosyncrasies. What can we decipher about the nature of art from the ability of a bird to make choices? Peter Holden argues that if a bird can repair a nest, it must have had an idea of the nest's overarching design to begin with. Art is not simply the prerogative of the human.

The boundary between nature and artifice was blurred even further in the basement of the former library, which once housed the Cuming Museum, an institution devoted to local history that started as a father and son's collection of natural and ethnographic materials. In *The Opposite of Time*, a diptych of monitors sits in front of a projection of an animated crow flying across paintings by J. M. W. Turner, David Hockney, and others. The work uses archival footage to tell the story of the underground British Oological Society, an association of bird's-egg collectors. In the neighboring room was *How the Artist Was Led to the Study of Nature*: plastic boxes and tin containers of birds' eggs. Only upon close inspection did it become clear that these eggs are porcelain replicas (fabricated by Peter Holden and Eileen Rowland). But until coming to that conclusion, one might have experienced an ethical dilemma—between the beauty of the egg and the threat to avian species caused by collection, which has been illegal in Britain since 1954.

It is only through an exhibit such as this—through a convincing imitation—that wild birds' eggs can really be seen, admired, and protected. Just as the nest, with its wires and scraps from every age, becomes an archive of a material history of an area at a particular time, the artists have become conservationists, preserving both endangered eggs and nests as well as the obsolete discipline of oology itself. "Natural Selection" reminded us that nature and art are not, in fact, opposing forces, just as a nest's strength and fragility are extensions of each other.

—*Himali Singh Soin*

Review of ***British Art Show 9:*** Financial Times, February 21 2022



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British Art Show 9 finds healing in troubled times

The exhibition, now touring to Wolverhampton, draws on national scandals and personal struggles

Rachel Spence FEBRUARY 21 2022

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"If my grandmother had been Mexican this would have been a llama," observes a deadpan Andy Holden with geographical abandon, as he proffers a small china cat up to the camera. Winning the prize for whimsy in the *British Art Show 9* — and possibly in any show this year — "Cat-tharsis" (2016/21) consists of vitrines containing 300 feline figurines collected by Holden's grandmother and Holden's own video performance, in which he lovingly unwraps each ornament while treating us to a moggie-centred monologue. "Cat-tharsis" is as compelling as it is silly, but when we discover that his grandma's obsession was triggered by her husband's descent into Alzheimer's, Holden's trinkets take on a tender, healing gravity.

For many of us right now, a little magical thinking wouldn't go amiss. Kitsch kitties might not float your boat, but a whirl around the latest iteration of the British Art Show, currently at Wolverhampton, could be just what the doctor ordered.

Andy Holden's cartoon avatar narrates Laws of Motion in a Cartoon Landscape. Photograph: Courtesy of the artist

Over at Wasps studios, we get a lecture by a cartoon version of artist Andy Holden. His on-screen avatar is part hipster, part 1970s Open University don. Holden takes us through the history of animations and how the physical laws of the cartoon world ("Any body suspended in space will remain in space until made aware of its situation"; "Any violent rearrangement of feline matter is impermanent"; "Everything falls faster than an anvil") deviate from the everyday Newtonian universe. It's a hugely entertaining melange of redundant erudition, linking the sublime violence of Disney and Looney Tunes to quantum physics and Stephen Hawking.

Laws of Motion in a Cartoon Landscape is worth an hour of anybody's time. The real point is that the precariousness of the cartoon predicament mirrors modern life, with gravity against us as we try our best not to fall. Don't look down.

Adrian Searle, Guardian, 2016

ARTFORUM

Andy Holden

ZABLUDOWICZ COLLECTION | LONDON
176 Prince of Wales Road
September 26–December 15

View of "Andy Holden: Maximum Irony, Maximum Sincerity 1999-2003: Towards a Unified Theory of MI!MS," 2013.

Conceived as a single installation that resembles a theatrical set of a town, this exhibition has been designed to illustrate the manifesto Andy Holden drew up as a teenager along with four friends while living in Bedford, England. Apprehended over four years beginning in 1999, the work was motivated by a desire to overcome the cynicism he and his peers perceived in the world—they titled the work *Maximum Irony! Maximum Sincerity! (MI!MS)*.

Throughout the rooms of the installation are seven videos, one that attempts at producing the "ultimate love song" while depicting young lovers kissing amid sculptures in a park and another that restages songs from MI!MS history with a children's choir and a school orchestra. The latter has been edited with scenes from a reunion concert Holden held with his teenage MI!MS band, Brave Soldier. On one wall, shiny stickers on desks are posited as artworks and, nearby, T-shirts are wrapped around canvases. There is also a "utility room" filled with memorabilia from the artist's youth, including an image of a walkabout in Bedford that Holden organized for which he shook people's hands on the street and then photographed each encounter. Holden has since recreated this project, documenting a young actor who retraced his steps in a series of photographs, which are presented on another wall.

The exhibition recalls the feverish idealism that often accompanies adolescence, a time when falling in love can take on titanic proportions and rejecting social hierarchies is *de rigueur*. By reflecting the context within which the manifesto was produced, Holden privileges intention over statement. In one video, projected on the second level of the installation, Holden depicts five young actors he has cast as his younger self and friends sitting around a café table fervently formulating the manifesto. Their discussions are measured and raw, teeming with youthful abandon. Such romanticism (indeed, sincerity) can easily be shrugged off as indulgent, naive, or, in the case of Holden's resurrection of his youth for this exhibition, even calculating—but this is where Holden's maximum irony comes in. It is precisely to those who have, due to experience, become suspicious of good intentions that MI!MS is directed at most.

— *Stephanie Bailey*

ANDY HOLDEN

Artist Andy Holden makes a marvellous mountain out of a misdemeanour

His new installation at Tate Britain sees him guiltily return a stolen stone to the Pyramid of Giza. It's a gripping work of art

Rock of remorse ... Andy Holden's Pyramid Piece 2008 at Tate Britain. Photograph: Courtesy the artist/Projects and Hidde van Seggelen/Tate

It's unusual to see a new work of art about conscience. I mean individual conscience, not some generalised idea of political guilt. There are plenty of contemporary artworks that might play on our collective guilt about the environment or global relations. But for a young artist to meditate on the power of personal guilt, in a private and introspective way? That's quite striking.

Andy Holden
Art Now
Tate Britain, London

Andy Holden's band, the Grubby Mitts, are giving a live free performance at Tate Britain on 20 March
More details

Andy Holden's Art Now installation at Tate Britain tells the story of a childhood crime and an adult's attempt to make amends. On holiday in Egypt, the young Holden plucked a loose piece of stone from one of the pyramids of Giza. In his imagination, this archaeological theft assumed massive proportions. The tiny fragment became a gigantic boulder – almost a mountain. That is the scale it assumes in his sculpture, Pyramid Piece, a towering fragment

ANDY HOLDEN

of rock, like a fallen meteorite, that dominates the gallery, covered in knitted wool like a Joseph Beuys piano covered in felt, and revealed by that incongruously soft surface to be a dream, a phantom stone, that exists only in his guilty mind.

A film playing on a TV monitor, which Holden made by giving a camera to someone he met at the pyramids, records his attempt to return the stolen fragment. On shaky handheld video, the artist clambers up the vast stepped sides of the Great Pyramid, looking for the right place to put his shard; vainly, madly trying to identify its original location in the immensity of stone.

The film has a wonderfully sad soundtrack, recorded by Holden's band the Grubby Mitts, that you can listen to on headphones. It adds hugely to the conviction and emotion of the work.

Replicas of the pyramids sit on a table, a final comment on memory – how fragile it is, how reducible to cheap souvenirs. But Holden's attempt to return the stone is a poetic and haunting parable of remorse. Inward-looking and subtly monumental, Holden's work confirms the seriousness and intelligence of young art at the moment.

Jonathan Jones, The Guardian, March 2010

10 ... Sunday January 10th 2010. Sunday Telegraph.

NEWS

ROCK OF AGES ARTIST'S PENANCE FOR BOYHOOD THEFT AT PYRAMID

ROYA NIKKHAH
Arts Correspondent

IT ALL began with an innocent trip to Egypt with his father, who was there on business. It ended in guilt and a very public act of penance.

Andy Holden, then 12, was taken to the 4,500-year-old Great Pyramid of Giza, and could not resist breaking off a rock as a souvenir.

For the next 15 years, Mr Holden – who has grown up to become a leading British artist – was consumed by a guilt that has spurred him into making amends in public.

He has gone back to the pyramid to replace the stolen rock – and taken a year to create a 10ft-high knitted replica of the fragment, which features in a new exhibition at Tate Britain, in central London.

"When we arrived at the pyramids, unthinkingly I broke off a lump of stone from the side of the Great Pyramid in Giza," said Mr Holden. "I got home and put it on a shelf in my room alongside a collection of other souvenirs I had as a kid, but when my parents found out, they were furious and it ended up becoming this terrible guilt object."

His work, *Pyramid Piece 2009*, is displayed alongside a film, *Return of the Pyramid Piece 2008*, in which he can be seen climbing the pyramid and returning the stone to its original spot.

Under Egyptian law, it is illegal to remove any item from a cultural heritage site without the government's permission.

Sally MacDonald, the director of the Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology in London, said: "If you remove an artefact without permission, you are not only stealing from that country, but robbing humanity of knowledge because once you take it away from that site you lose all manner of contextual information that can never be replaced. I am glad that this issue is being aired in an exhibition and I hope it will make people think twice about taking home illicit souvenirs from their holidays."

Art now: Andy Holden runs at Tate Britain until April 10.

IN SEVEN: ARTS 2010 CULTURAL PLANNER

PAUL GROVER

From left: Andy Holden in Egypt aged 12, replacing the stolen rock, and his 10ft knitted replica

Sunday Telegraph, January 2010

ANDY HOLDEN

frieze

Andy Holden *The Cookham Erratics*, 2012,

With hands clutching pebbles, a young boy and his friends crouch behind the wall of Cookham churchyard in Berkshire, occasionally taking pot shots at a painter as he works. The artist, as it happens, is Stanley Spencer, who is working on *The Resurrection, Cookham* (1924–7); the boy is Andy Holden's Uncle John. Or at least that's how the story goes, as told by Holden's disembodied voice, which emanates from the depths of the six large sculptures that comprise *The Cookham Erratics* (2011). For despite functioning as the work's catalyst, the veracity of this slice of familial folklore is called into question by the revelation that neither Holden's mother nor grandmother can recall any account of pebbles being thrown at Spencer. In fact, this detail may be little more than an innocent embellishment on the part of Holden. Thus his entire project is founded on a myth, a fiction, a yarn.

The latter word is apposite, for each of the speaking sculptures – enlarged replicas of pebbles collected from the churchyard at Cookham – is knitted, imbuing the work with an unusual, homey quality. This play on words is surely not coincidental, for etymology is evidently important to Holden. The word 'erratic', for instance, can refer either to something without a definite course or, in geological terms, to a rock deposited in a landscape via glacial ice. Marrying these two definitions, Holden's installation of oversized pebbles (which appear more like boulders) are heard playing portions of a narrative that meanders through subjects as diverse as geology, art history, theology and metaphysical poetry. The result is a dense babble of voices that weave a web of tangential musings across the gallery. Walking between the knitted rocks, it's difficult to discern much of what is discussed; only when you hunker down close does the story become palpable.

Listening to one sculpture, childhood recollections of John Donne Primary School in South London – which Holden attended in the 1980s – swiftly turn to discussions of the eponymous poet's work and his appearance in Spencer's paintings. 'No man is an island entire of itself,' wrote Donne in the most famous stanza of his 'Devotions upon Emergent Occasions' (1624); elsewhere we learn that these words were once printed on a mug owned by Holden that have long since been washed away, much like the clod in Donne's celebrated poem. This observation inspires a delicious and idiosyncratic chain of thought, via which Holden transports us to the Acropolis, the Elgin Marbles and on to a discussion regarding the formation of pebbles. Turning our ear to another sculpture we hear ruminations on Judgement Day and the theological distinctions between particular and general resurrection that somehow transition to an analysis of the moral dimension of *Spider Man* and back again to autobiographical memories.
Questions and conundrums, both explicit and implicit, permeate Holden's narrative. We are asked, for instance, to consider when a rock becomes a pebble, or how many fragments of stone can be removed from Giza until the pyramids are no more. These are variants of the classic Sorites Paradox, which ponders the number of grains required to form a heap, and recalls Holden's earlier work *Pyramid Piece* (2009), shown in his 2010 'Art Now' exhibition at Tate Britain. An antecedent to *The Cookham Erratics*, *Pyramid Piece* also employed knitting to create an enormous replica of a small stone fragment pilfered from the Great Pyramid of Cheops during a childhood holiday. Addressing the Sorites Paradox through the lens of guilt, *Pyramid Piece* represented an act of reparation for an adolescent misdemeanour, culminating in the physical return of the stone. While the notion of returning ancient artefacts to their place of origin is alluded to by *The Cookham Erratics* (a facet perhaps more keenly felt in the Benaki Museum in Athens, where the work was originally installed amid a splendid antiquities collection), this intriguing installation is best understood as an extended meditation on transmutation and displacement. As with glacial erratics that appear incongruous in the landscape, we may not be entirely sure how Holden reaches some of his destinations, though we come away feeling strangely glad that he does.

David Trigg

Frieze - Issue 146 April 2012

problems arise: too much attention is paid to the story's exterior characteristics. The facts of Welles's endeavour can be learned from the A4 interpretation sheet stuck to the gallery's shell. These few paragraphs of historical exposition act as an anchor, mooring potentially radical artistic departures to its concrete base while obviating any need for a straight retelling of the way things were. Instead of diving into the narrative's depths, the artists hover around its periphery, presenting subtle conceptual puzzles that, when deciphered, lead back to coldly phenomenal details. It is a kind of journalistic approach to the making of art, in which the artists visit a curatorially defined narrative locus and, upon their return, produce works that refer to specific points of interest. There is nothing wrong with reportage, but its stylistic pitfalls (factual presentation and a reliance on the accounting of physical as opposed to psychological events) inhibit the deep interiorities that the production of art gains easy access to. Welles's story is an enticingly dramatic and multilayered source from which Cooper and Yedgar's curatorial premise feeds. But, in being dazzled by the brilliance of its surface, the chance to pull the viewer down through Welles and Melville, into the stomach of the great white whale (and whatever metaphorical possibilities that particular image may contain) has been missed.

Milani's mixed-media assemblages reference the Native American ethnicities associated with Melville's character of Queequeg, the 'friendly cannibal'. In *Queequeg*, 2011, a black and white photograph of a Caucasian, female mannequin's head, overlaid with clear glass, is nailed to a scarf-size line of red fabric. A feathered headdress circles her neatly cut bob. This combination of western coiffure and indigenous ornament recalls the odd incongruities found in Hollywood's early practice of placing western actors in ethnic roles. In Milani's *Characters*, 2011, three found photographs (production stills from unknown plays) show western actors in exotic costume and full Sioux chief regalia. In Hamilton's *Untitled (rope divider)*, 2009/11, a large metal ring is attached to a dyed bamboo stick from which hang strips of thick, knitted rope. Hamilton was compelled to construct the piece following repeated viewings of the 1956 film version of *Moby Dick* (where the character of Queequeg was played by a European) in which Captain Ahab's crew were seen tying knots.

Cleobhe's *New Wing: A Rehearsal For a Faulty Projector*, 2011, is a six-minute video in which the rehearsal of a theatre group is offset against the bar code stripes of a malfunctioning projector. His *Props, For memorizing the Gravity of mime objects*, 2011, an array of rocks displayed on four shelves that have been labelled as other objects, is a witty riff on liminality: using, as its subject, objects whose true use value is present once they are absent. Despite these clever manifestations of curious and personally interesting (for the artists) elements of Welles's, and Melville via Welles's, narrative, the artworks listed above exist only as incomplete, partially obfuscated referents to minor facts (faux Native Americans, nautical rope tying, theatre companies, non-existent props) in the curatorial thematic.

Of the four participating artists, Cinnett's contribution is the most considered and, as a result, affecting. *In Floors of the Exhibition*, 2011, lines of magnetic tape run along the gallery walls creating three distinct elevated architectural drawings of the three theatre spaces used by Welles. This matryoshka-like project nests the gallery visitor within a dizzying array of localities; standing in the centre of Cattel she or he actually stands within three theatre spaces, which are within a shipping container, which is itself within an old police station, within New Cross, within the borough of Lewisham – onwards and upwards, expanding ad infinitum. The work prompts an almost transcendental sense of relief that some metaphorical engagement with the idea of entombment has taken place. It is a shame that Olivier Cattel, the artist behind this clever, witty and ultimately numinous work, chooses to remain partially obscured by the Cinnett pseudonym.

Despite the rather ancillary engagement of some artists, 'In the Belly of the Whale' is almost alchemically well put together. Cooper and Yedgar have transformed Cattel's cramped interior into a plausible and misleadingly spacious venue for a group exhibition. In the accompanying text the curators describe the exhibition as a 'rehearsal for a larger show'. Let's hope this appealing, if slightly remiss read-through develops into a full stage production: a Stanislavskian journey to the heart of the narrative, or at least its abdomen. ■

MORGAN QUAINTANCE is a writer, musician and curator.

Andy Holden: Chewy Cosmos Thingly Time

Kettle's Yard Cambridge 14 May to 10 July

It is appropriate that Andy Holden's exhibition at Kettle's Yard is centred around a conversation: one that provides a map or even a multitude of perspectival threads connecting the objects and installations that are featured in the exhibition. The venue itself is also pertinent, as Holden's formative years were spent perusing Jim Ede's house at Kettle's Yard and thus experiencing early British modernism in an individual domestic setting. These two aspects remain extremely important in addressing the way Holden has articulated the space here: subtly echoing the adjacent house, and creating – from his conversations with his curator friend, the late Dan Cox – a kind of territorialised cosmology of things, objects and relationships. In the accompanying catalogue Holden provides a transcript of their taped conversations in the studio, as a document of the evolution of thinking around, and referencing, fugitive cultural references: from Gilles Deleuze to Monster Munch corn-based snacks. In effect, this is Cox's curatorial blueprint, laid down before his tragic death in a cycling accident. The potentional framework is constantly rethought through his probing and pushing of Holden's intentions.

The result of this dialogue is a notion of 'Thingly Time' and at the heart of the exhibition is an installation housing Cox's personal library, which provides pointers as to what this home-made theory might be. This, like the conversation, is a glimpse into what might be considered a contemporary artist/thinker's theoretical workshop, with its traversal, as in Holden's practice, of art books, natural science, philosophy, theory, fiction and science fiction. Holden has specifically constructed the bookshelves as well as carpets with screen-printed extracts from Flaubert's unfinished novel *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, a book that both Cox and the artist strongly identified with. With its eponymous archetypal cataloguers and copy clerks, Flaubert's comedy recounts the protagonists' excursion away from their offices to carry out a flawed investigation into 'reality' through the facts and phenomena associated with, and gleaned from, the disciplines of astronomy, agriculture, philosophy, politics: everything, in fact,

that has been denied these pen pushers in their day jobs. When this research fails miserably they return – as in Flaubert's sketch for the end of the novel – to their copying but with a specially designed double desk, specifically realised in this context by Holden with a small sculpture of an extinct Dodo sitting on top (*Double Desk for Dan*, 2011).

Flaubert's novel, with failure at its centre, and its search for total knowledge, has been seen by many as a parable for the failure of the museum and the incessant cataloguing and presentation of culture that, in turn, can never be a substantial representation of the world. And while the fictional project of Bouvard and Pecuchet broke down because of the innate contradictions of the received ideas of institutionalised knowledge, Holden thrives on the mountains of outmoded 'facts' and wrong-headed ideas. Cox talks about the importance of the library as a catalyst for 'creating one's self through textual objects, 'the history that is part of the object becomes part of your own'. This, of course, can be transposed to Holden's practice as a whole, whether it is the performance/lectures with his ornithologist father, playing with his band *The Grubby Mitts*, constructing wooden boulders or making coloured emulsion plaster stalagmites. Each has a performative aspect, a sense of its own positioning in time with its identity as a constituent part of a bigger whole. His practice, in this way, tends to refract theory and the object – the one leads to the other by inference: 'There is a continuous oscillation between the thing and the thing that causes the thing.' Likewise, the cartoon blobbiness of the stalagmites exists simultaneously as physical matter, document and image. These sculptures are seen by Holden as a manifestation of studio time, with one layer of coloured plaster equalling one hour's labour. These are positioned at the back of the gallery and share the space with a series of gramophone records transformed into hanging baskets, hung from wooden structures created to intercept and interrupt the slightly brutalist dimensions of Kettle's Yard gallery space.

This concern with labour time might connect, albeit tentatively, to some of the classical modernist positions on process and temporality, but is also evidenced, I feel, through Holden's engagement with a kind of generic cultural labour that might go unseen. Especially in respect to what was deemed unpalatable, provincial or bourgeois by high modernism: in this instance, a British lower-middle-class sensibility that informs his activities – DIY, knitting, woodworking, ornithology, the domestic library, collecting, hanging baskets etc – each culturally marginalised but perhaps approaching a personalised 'unalienated' labour in their own right. What binds these activities after all is the enthusiasm and enjoyment of the hobbyist, the amateur, each generally conducted within or around a domestic setting. Certainly this is not a strategic posturing on Holden's part – these practices, no doubt, are part of a personal memory bank. And this points to the richness of his contribution to current practice: a strange fusion between private and the public, cartoon logic and science, and the absurd marriage between the parochial and the cosmic.

'Chewy Cosmos Thingly Time' at Kettle's Yard installation view

In Holden's work, wit, humour and preposterous act as a democratic mediation between the 'unconscious' of the artist's studio and the world at large; the objects operate as a mirror to ways of acting, being and doing in that world. It's a chewy logic, thingly time thing. ■

DAVID RYAN is an artist and musician and currently reader in fine art at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge.

Still Life

Lismore Castle Arts Co Waterford 9 April to 30 September

Lismore Castle Arts presents an uncommon and, perhaps, beckoning challenge to guest curators. On the one hand, the gallery – opened by the Devonshire family in 2005 in a renovated wing of their eye-smashingly beautiful castle home an hour or so from Cork – attracts an art-savvy audience for its annual exhibitions by artists ranging from Richard Long to Ai Weiwei to Gerard Byrne. On the other, whatever is on show ought to avoid alienating the castle's primary clientele: tourists who don't typically wander the precincts of contemporary art. Polly Staple, who helms Chisenhale Gallery in London, has responded with a conceit that is, on the face of it, obvious: a show about still life, the genteel artistic genre you'd be most likely to find in a castle outside of formal portraiture. (To the next curatorial incumbent here: that one's on me, and good luck.) But how to also make still life smart?

Staple's response veers off in several directions. Her six (very much art world-approved) artists – Gillian Carnegie, Anne Collier, Mark Leckey, Sherrie Levine, Seth Price, Richard Wright – are unified, according to the accompanying literature, by their explorations of 'the status of images as objects'. This proves to be a fairly broad liminal

'OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE: ARTISTS REMAKE THE TAROT'
4 July to 27 August 2011
A Hayward Touring / Focal Point Gallery exhibition curated by Andrew Hunt. This project, together with an edition of cards released in September 2011, will form the latest issue of Showstone Poster Publication (2008–2011).

Morag Keil 'PUBLIC HANGING' (offsite)
4 July to 27 August 2011

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SOUTHBANK CENTRE
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND
southend on sea

ANDY HOLDEN

frieze

Andy Holden's world is inhabited by large, knitted boulders muttering to themselves, and overflowing multi-coloured mounds of hardened goo. His series of oversized outdoor wooden boulder sculptures, what he describes as "follies, flat-backed pure facade, temporary events, ply-clad Sisyphean voids," have at points popped up on the beach at Jaywick on England's coast, in the Dutch countryside, or acted as a stage for the artists' music festival *Be Glad For the Song Has No End* at the Wysing Arts Centre in 2010. The English artist's sculptures, installations and performances have the sense of being made by an existential rhetorician excavating the glow of adolescence; taking inspiration from Wile E. Coyote's incessant chase for the roadrunner, and endless cells of Charlie Brown, who Holden has described as "the perfect split between pessimism and optimism, embodying both simultaneously." The ranging products of his research evince a homely folk art feel, though one shaken up via the figurative raucousness of late Philip Guston paintings.

Chris Fite-Wassilak: The *Be Glad…* festival you arranged saw you build several stages for yourself and other artists to present musical performances. Similarly, your recent at exhibition at Cubitt functioned as a platform. Would you consider your practice as dialogical?

Andy Holden: Some works are, yes, whereas others are more hermetic. The *Dan Cox Library For the Unfinished Concept of Thingly Time* (2012) was the product of tragic circumstances, through which I found myself in the role of caretaker or custodian of an idea. Dan was a close friend that I invited to curate my exhibition Kettle's Yard last year. He died in an accident part way though our collaboration. On the morning of his death he told me about his idea for 'Thingly Time', as a potential concept we could develop together. The Library at Cubitt contained all of Dan's books, housed on bookcases I designed, combined with fragments of my previous pieces and placed upon carpets with screen-printed extracts from Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881). The Library also contained an exhibition within an exhibition, a display of works dedicated to exploring what Thingly Time might be, as well as hosting a weekly reading group dedicated to unravelling Dan's embryonic concept through dialogue. However other works like the *Cookham Erratics* (2011) are more introspective monologues, questioning my own impulses and why I come to see the world as I do.

Beyond Logic: Andy Holden's "Laws of Motion in a Cartoon Landscape"

BY MARGARET CARRIGAN, MODERN PAINTERS | FEBRUARY 10, 2017

Andy Holden performs "Laws of Motion" live in 2016.
(Andy Holden)

Andy Holden's body of work is one of informed naiveté; the artist often presents the comical as serious (and vice versa), and he's as likely to draw inspiration from Kant as he is Kanye. The 34-year-old artist's practice traverses sculpture, installation, collage, performance, and video, and his projects often

iteratively build off of previous works. Consider the giant knitted rock known as “Pyramid Piece,” 2009, a scaled-up rendering in yarn of an Egyptian pyramid fragment Holden “stole” when he was 12 while on vacation with his father. In 2010, he showed the yarn rock at London’s Tate Britain alongside “In Place of an Ending (Pyramid Souvenirs, Second Visit),” 2008, an installation of small pyramid souvenir figurines, and “Return of the Pyramid Piece,” 2008, a video work that shows him going back to Egypt — the scene of his youthful crime — to restore the stone fragment to the site.

“Laws of Motion in a Cartoon Landscape,” 2011–16 — an hour-long, dual-channel video installation detailing the nonsensical physics that undergird cartooned worlds — is another project that Holden has been developing for years. Clips from beloved shows like Looney Toons, Peanuts, and The Simpsons illustrate the interruption of Newtonian law on the right-hand screen while, on the left, an animated Andy guides the viewer through not only all the anvil crashes, but also the history of the cartoons and their implications in the real world.

In his exhibition “As speed increases a body can be in several places at once,” on view through March 17 at Lancaster Arts, Holden debuts an updated version of the film that takes into account recent news, like Donald Trump’s upset victory in the US Presidential election. On March 16, Holden also stages a live performance of the 10,000-word “Laws of Motion” transcript at the Tate (he had originally conceived the project as a lecture-style performance, with his friend Tyler Woolcott, back in 2011). It’s part of a one-night, Holden-curated event, “World as Cartoon,” which includes video works by other artist-peers who are intrigued by the idea of animating the inorganic, like Jordan Wolfson, Mark Leckey, and Ed Atkins.

“Laws of Motion” grew out of a conceptual framework that Holden started building nearly two decades ago. As a teen, growing up in Bedfordshire in the early aughts, he and four friends penned “Maximum Irony! Maximum Sincerity (MI!MS),” a nascent metamodernist manifesto that offered the young collaborators a way to make and understand art. “We live in an age of irony in mourning for sincerity!” the document earnestly and playfully proclaims. “MI!MS” advocates for the embrace of oppositional modes of being: to be both cynical and sincere, worldly and naïve, romantic and realistic all at once. It suggests harboring a “willingness to be lied to and the will to believe.” “Laws of Motion” takes up the “MI!MS” cause, seeking an interpretive structure to understand not only art, but the increasingly disjunctive aspects of our shared reality, from ongoing Brexit fallout to Trump’s ascension to the Oval Office.

As fake news and sensational rhetoric continue to shift the landscape of rational discourse, the artist’s cartoon-land conjectures and observations take on an added sense of gravity. Modern Painters associate editor Margaret Carrigan spoke with Holden about making “Laws of Motion,” and the sincere desire for truth in a post-truth world.

What prompted you to start using cartoon imagery?

A few years ago, I was developing a way of talking about a number of the sculptural pieces I was making, and cartoon-like was an adjective I’d been using, along with mute, dumb, and thingly. Most of the time, when we interact with an object, it’s in a realm of simultaneity; but every now and again an object, often an art object, ruptures that, and it reveals something durational. That’s how the sculptures I was making at the time were functioning: They’d look out of place and out of time. For me, cartoon-like had become a way to describe this incongruity.

I started making these giant sculptures that looked a little bit like the boulders from Wile E. Coyote’s landscape. They were built in the realm of architectural folly, so I would only build the fronts of them; they were almost like stage sets. I wanted them to oscillate between seeming very soft and cake-like and then also very hard like stone, so the multimorphic forms of cartoon landscapes were a visual point of reference for me. Some of these big works would only exist for a day or two, so they only really existed

through the documentation — there was an absurdist, excess effort to make these five-by-five meter sculptures in often inaccessible, often remote places. I think the way they look in the photos is quite right: They have a look not dissimilar to the way the cartoon version of me looks in "Laws of Motion" — both at home and out of place in the landscape.

And, you know, I've always been interested in cartoons; they were a huge influence on me growing up, as I think they were for a lot of people. I learned to draw by copying cartoons and there are so many quotations of cartoons in art. Obviously Pop art, that was very intentional, but I was coming across so many artists — Cosima von Bonin, Peter Wächtler, Dan Colen — working with this imagery or language, and it seemed like the right time for it, like maybe this just wasn't about me and my work.

"Laws of Motion" runs over an hour; the transcript is around 10,000 words. It's essayistic, in a way that reminds me of David Foster Wallace, blending historical background, personal anecdotes, topical tangents, and philosophical musings. What interested you in this particular style of narration?

The video started as a way of explaining my work, like an artist's talk where I showed cartoon clips and explained the physics at play in them as a way of clarifying how I wanted my work to operate. I'd been thinking of my work for a long time as this kind of metonymic movement, in that one form or a part of a form might stand in for something else, and that was something I found a lot in cartoons. As I was putting the "Laws of Motion" talk together, it became more interesting if I made it not just about my work but about art in general. Then I wanted to push it even further than that, and it became about the world in general.

Of course, the world was starting to become more absurd at the same time. This was after events like the Charlie Hebdo shooting, when cartoon-like imagery seemed to have a physical power again. Plus Trump's campaign was picking up steam and the Brexit argument was underway. It made me think that the Golden Age of cartoons was maybe a premonition of the world we now live in. Not that I think we actually live in a cartoon. It's an as-if proposition in the Kantian sense — treating the world as if it's a cartoon in order to explain something that is otherwise quite difficult to explain. Like why we're seeing a change in the shape of logic and that rational arguments no longer take hold, or why certain modes of exaggeration have become incredibly powerful.

Do you feel that there's a tension between the visual and the linguistic in your work, or do they mutually support each other?

For every dense monological piece that I make, I'd like to think that I could make one thing that doesn't require any language. I am really invested in the power of the sculptural, visual object, but these objects do seem to appear more and more within networked discourses. I think that has a lot to do with the accessibility of information now: One minute I'm reading the New Scientist and the next I'm looking at a cartoon and then I'm reading a thinkpiece on contemporary politics. These all become tangled.

That's very Bruno Latour-ian of you. Does that kind of network theory inform your practice heavily?

Oh yeah, Latour's 1991 book "We Have Never Been Modern" was a huge influence on me for "Laws of Motion." The idea of the vastness — what Timothy Morton would call "hyperobjects" — at the moment, I feel that on a very molecular level. The interconnectivity of things, and bringing art into context with other disciplines, just in general the blurring of categories — it's about moving one form into another. Things have become so bendy and multimorphic now, you know. Someone can be the savior of the common man and also a rich member of the elite — they can perform both roles at once. Listen to a Trump speech or a Kanye rant: It's just a concrete-poetry experiment with constant repetition and

strange adjectives. It's hyperbolic; there are loose connections between many things and huge leaps in logic.

I wanted to put together my argument in "Laws of Motion" like that: One idea moves so quickly into the next that you don't have time to debunk it or even question it. So when I was editing, that was something I was very conscious of, and I watched a lot of conspiracy-theory videos to see how those were put together. They had the right talking heads at the right times, they had dramatic music, they had 3-D models, and it all moved along so quickly that I found myself having to believe in the conspiracy to understand the show. I started to realize that any narrative can be told like this and you can shift reality in that way, particularly when you incorporate images. It doesn't need to have a factual basis, or be accountable for anything — we're seeing that play out in the real world now with the fake news problem.

Is it weird to have this project you started years ago as a thought experiment become increasingly relevant?

I like the idea that "Laws" is premonitory. In it, I talk about the Golden Age of cartoons in the 1920s and how it foretold our current state, as if there was a release from the constraints of space and time by the collective imagination of a group of people based mainly in LA. Cartoons were (and perhaps still are) a way of processing the speed of modernization and change. So many theorists wrote about that, like Sergei Eisenstein on Disney. These comical, impractical, visual representations of universal truths like gravity helped people process a huge change in the fabric of society. But cartoons become less successful the more they try to be like the real world — it's the real world that tends to trend toward cartoons. There were important sociological, political reasons for their emergence; those same reasons are perhaps why cartoons should be reexamined now.

You've added some new footage to "Laws of Motion" lately to do just that — to reexamine the social and political relevance of cartoons — correct?

I promised myself I wouldn't touch the film before I showed it again, but I really just had to in light of recent events, as it just seems like our world is getting more and more like a cartoon. I've added the recent viral Simpsons clip — the bit where Trump and Homer are descending the escalator in Trump Tower — and the real-life footage of Trump descending an escalator before he announced his presidential campaign. And then, at one point, I've also inserted cartoon-me in the back of Trump's speech, to mirror the part of The Simpsons when Homer stands in the background while Trump gives a speech. It's a dramatic moment, revealing the permeability between one world and another.

LIFE ON THE OUTSIDE: ANDY HOLDEN

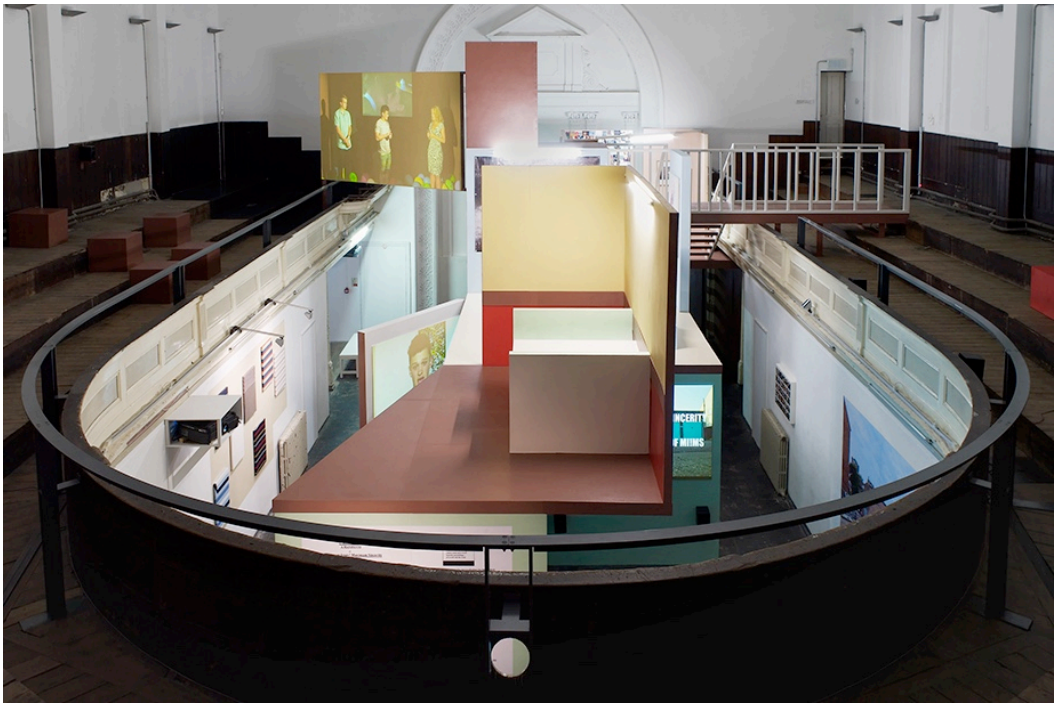
Feature: Crack Magazine UK, February 2014

Arlesley Station in the rain is no fun. Seemingly in the middle of nowhere, 35 minutes out of Kings Cross, it's grey and without shelter. Deeply unwelcoming, we wait here on the platform for Andy Holden.

Working primarily in sculpture, Holden has been gaining momentum over the past years, with a piece in TATE Britain and solo shows across the UK. He's in a band, he's curated a festival, he's staged plays and he's lectured on ornithology. He lives in Bedford, and works in a cold but cosy three room studio seven minutes drive from the station Crack arrives to, in the rain.

We're picked up, taken to HQ, tea is offered and conversation segues into interview so seamlessly that we almost forget to turn the Dictaphone on. The scope of Holden's practice is as broad as he is talkative. Sculpture is ostensibly his thing: large scale works with a recognisable shabby aesthetic; giant boulders (referred to, by the artist, as 'Dumb Motifs') made from bent MDF boards perched in various landscapes; knitted sculptures, monumental in scale (some murmuring), inhabit galleries. He works in plaster, too. Large stalagmites are built up in coloured layers.

His studio is crammed with things. A table is covered in bird's nests, materials from his work with his father on an Ornithology lecture he's staged; an ashtray, cautiously used (it might be a sculpture, you see. Probably is, doesn't seem to matter); boards covered in stickers, familiar from his latest show Maximum Irony! Maximum Sincerity 1999-2003: Toward a unified theory of MI!MS (hereafter obbreviated to M!MS) at the Zabludowicz collection, are packaged in bubble-wrap and leaning against the walls.



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The multicoloured plaster stalagmites are there, as are beer bottles, covered with the same plaster. He sold these as merch, or £20, outside the gallery where the big plaster works were exhibited. He makes us another tea and bums a cigarette.

There appears to be an interesting disparity to Andy Holden. Though his practice is diverse, it is always united by a distinct aesthetic contiguity; a kind of clean shabbiness. His sculptures have something of the crafty about them. They seem wholesome, and homemade. His plaster stalagmites look quite delicious, something out of Willy Wonka's chocolate factory. As mentioned, a table in his studio is covered in bird's nests. His works are friendly and welcoming. His discussion of them, though, can be impenetrable. There's something jarring in the disjunction between output and self. "There's this strange idea that complex ideas have to be inaccessible," he tells us when we mention it. "It shouldn't be that for something to be clever or complicated, it also has to be visually austere." His sculptural practice, through its approachable aesthetics, disguises the weight of the intellectual rigour behind it. "Often big questions are incredibly accessible, you just have to trust that people want to engage with those things. If the material brings you in and allows you space to be comfortable, hopefully the minute you start to engage with it, it has a way of unfolding."

One of Holden's biggest projects to date has been the staging of Brief Interviews With Hideous Men, David Foster-Wallace's seminal collection of short stories. Holden was drawn to it, in part, he says, because "someone had made something that was right on that point of high-postmodernism tipping over into something else, something new. A different position to referentiality, to reflexiveness, that brings together a kind of new emotional space that comes through the reflexivity that we've been brought up on." Foster-Wallace's writing offers a way, as Holden puts it, of, "knowing a thing outside of our knowing the thing." The decontextualisation of an emotion, feeling or thought from the

tools we have at our disposal to process it. “David Foster-Wallace finds access to things that seem to be an emotional space outside of language. He gets there through his brilliant excess of taking almost every position and moving it around; his materiality of language is something that really resonates with me.”

"There's the strange idea that complex ideas have to be inaccesible. It shouldn't be that for something to be clever it also has to be visibly austere"

Holden seems to do the same, but with his own, self described, “language of materials.” Where Foster-Wallace fills in space, relentlessly, with words, describing every possible outcome and feeling a situation could engender in photorealistic detail until a picture becomes clear, he highlights the negative space outside that picture, the “emotional space outside of language.” Holden attempts the same with materiality M!MS is a sprawling show. It recreates the movement for which Holden and chums wrote a manifesto. A response to the angsty reflexive trap of adolescence, “being very self-conscious, but wanting the sincerity of direct experience,” M!MS argues for a paradoxical state, a kind of doublethink, the kind that simultaneously allows one to be scornful of a minor chord change and find it stirring. Images, film, music and sculpture are packed into the exhibition. From YouTube videos to carefully performed scenes taken from the artist’s and his M!MS colleagues’ memories, he bombards the audience with reflexive information, until the strangely tautological M!MS dichotomy filters through. The volume of information to process renders the concept more and more intellectually opaque, but it sharpens and focuses the emotional clarity, until what is left is a distinct but almost impossible to articulate sense of M!MS. “The idea of maximum irony, maximum sincerity was that both these things drop away and you have a whole new way of thinking about something, which is to embrace these things ‘bothly’, simultaneously. It’s not ironic or sincere, it’s this other thing that’s both these things at the same time.”

In Laws of Motion in the Cartoon Landscape, Holden and co-lecturer Tyler Woolcott deliver a seminar on the proposed rules governing physics in the universe of cartoon slapstick, to explore how “cartoon physics will predict how the landscape after art history might happen.” In the lecture he talks constantly, “I want to get a massive amount of information into things, to make something that might require a couple of viewings.” Laws of Motion was, for Holden, an early exercise in accessing the same conceptual zone as David Foster-Wallace does through his “materiality of language.” “You can navigate that emotional space through the construction of objects but only in relation to setting up these interpretive frameworks around them, then looking at the tension between the object and the framework you put the object within. Laws of Motion was the first experiment of that. The theory is a work within the show, so you have to treat the words of the idea as equally as the materials.”

Holden's conceptual concerns make up an expansive network, but there are reference points to which he always returns; most especially the material. "Narrative is one way of giving a sense of time, but when an object gives a sense of time something else happens to me. Something which I've always described as this 'thingly time'. A sense of materiality, of duration."

The power of materials, both as a context and as objects, is always at play. "I started thinking about the construction of thought from a material point of view, outside of language. The imagery that you keep around dictates the way you conceptualise your own past, and therefore your position within the present. What informs your memories structures the way you interpret the present; the conservative politics of the small town is informed by the constant belief that the past was somehow better than the present."

The point is that for Holden, materiality does function as a language, capable of informing thought like language, capable of marking time like narrative. Towards the end of our interview, Holden alludes to "metonymic movement". This is the easiest way of parsing the materially disparate aspects of his practice; if the projects he works on seem disconnected, these movements are the points of overlap on the Venn diagram of, say, sculpture and music. "It's about running several discursive groups together," he says of his different projects, "and seeing what they do when they come into contact." These points of contact are identifiable as a kind of metonymical contiguity. Aesthetically, Holden's works containing recurring motifs; "Charlie Brown's head is kind of the boulder, that's the Dumb Motif, made into his head. This idea that you take a form or a shape, it's part of something else that becomes part of it or stands in for it". Conceptually, too, though, this metonymic

movement allows a sense of contiguity to blossom between totally disparate projects. The point is that for Holden, materiality does function as a language, capable of informing thought like language, capable of marking time like narrative.

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- Totem for Thingly Time (plaster, household paint, 2011)

So on to his band, The Grubby Mitts. It's kind of trendy for artists to have musical side-projects at the moment. "I think art in its closed off state is finishing," Holden speculates. "How it incorporates itself and reacts with different disciplines now is an interesting position." This kind of answers Crack's next question; whether his music is to be taken as external to his practice, or as part of it? "It's both, it really is. It destabilises my practice and brings in collaborative elements that aren't there. Music is a very articulate way of describing a temporal shift. It can take a duration and transform those minutes, expand

them and contract them through playing with how something unfolds. Organising musical practices forces me out of studio routine and gallery routine and moves me into scenarios and dialogues with brains I wouldn't necessarily encounter." This last point is important; for Holden, an essential facet of the band is the negotiation that comes from working with people from another discipline.

"With me coming from an art background, and them being primarily interested in the craft of music, them forcing my hand and me forcing theirs, we make these things that meet in the middle as both sculptural art pieces and musical works. That feeds then back into the practice. I start to think of objects as songs, and songs as objects." And so we're back into the "language of materiality," the metonymical nexus that lies at the core of Holden's practice.

Our interview is scheduled to last an hour, but the dictaphone is turned off after exactly two. The wide breadth and high output of Holden's practice is reflected in his discussion of it, which is at times extremely hard to follow. Like David Foster-Wallace, though, the volume of information he presents eventually gives way to clarity. And if we find it hard to follow at times, so does he: "Sometimes I feel like I have no strategy in the world. When you're trying to make some kind of a larger system, sometimes you just get lost within it."