



THE JACKDAW

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A Newsletter for the Visual Arts

Future History is the title given to this exhibition of selected maquettes that have been produced during the first year of my fellowship in London at the former studio of the sculptor Kenneth Armitage. The term future history describes the creative visualisation of future events, a philosophy famously practised by the former heavyweight boxing legend Mohammad Ali. The title is an appropriate one to describe this body of work. The maquette is a powerful tool that sculptors use to anticipate the shape of things to come. The work also draws upon timeless concerns that have and will always preoccupy mankind.

'Fertility Figures' are a group of modelled figures that have evolved from a large foam sculpture entitled 'Silenus', which was first shown at Goldfish in 2006. They are rotund and earthy in appearance, and stare as if through old eyes. Like Padstow's Obby Oss, their sexuality is neither conventionally pretty nor beautiful, but oddly dark, unsettling and humorous.

'Ancestral Funerary Figures' are inspired by the powerful impressions left on my mind by three wooden carved ancestral figures that I first saw at the Royal Academy's Africa exhibition in 1995. The carvings struck me in a way that few sculpted forms have in the past. The experience was a uniquely apparitional one, like witnessing spirits emerge from gouged pieces of wood that knocked upon the window of present day reality – spirits of a different time and place.

'Man on Fire' and 'Tank on Fire' are inspired by photo-journalistic images of world conflict. Three versions of 'Man on Fire' have been created in the past year, the first version was shown at the Sherborne Open Exhibition several days after the terrorist fire bomb attack on Glasgow Airport on June 30th, 2007. The third version is a hypothetical proposal for The Fourth Plinth at London's Trafalgar Square. The title 'What God of Love Inspires Such Hatred in the Hearts of Men' is inscribed on the side of the plinth; sump oil spills down over the edge of the box. The work depicts the figure of a man lunging uncontrollably forward consumed by flames. The subject could be a self-igniting suicide bomber or the victim of a petrol bombing.

'Tank on Fire' depicts a soldier diving from a tank that is engulfed by flames. The work refers to the series of photographs taken in Basra in 2004 showing a soldier leaping to the ground from a burning Warrior vehicle. These shocking images have a macabre appeal; they are deeply compelling also because the scene is medieval in character. During the making of this piece, I met some of the soldiers from a tank battalion that had fought in Iraq. Listening to their experiences, one becomes acutely aware of the plight of each individual within the frame of that newspaper photograph – the anger and resentment felt by a disempow-

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Above
Tank on Fire



Right
Man on Fire

ered population towards a foreign occupying force and that of the soldiers whose job it is to stay alive in such situations.

Making both these works, I tried to imagine the dreaded thoughts and feelings that would inevitably race through the mind of someone who is being consumed by fire, of someone who is caught between two worlds, that of life and death – the panic associated with the instinct to stay alive and the dreaded terror of losing one's life.

Compiling the work together for the show, I had initial concerns about how the nature of 'The Fertility Figures' or 'The Funerary Figures' would fit together with that of the war pieces. At first glance, the work pursues two distinctly different paths, one deals with current affairs the other has its roots in something much older and unseen. The work makes reference to lineage, procreation, violence and death. Perhaps the one thing that binds it together is to do with that most primal of all concerns which is the will to exist, life force itself. It is here within this body of work where seed and survival amalgamate.

Tim Shaw: Future History is at Goldfish, 56 Chapel Street, Penzance, Cornwall until July 7th only.