

# TJ·BOULTING

28th November - 24th January 2014

Private View Thursday 27th November, 6-8pm

## HENRY HUDSON PELEGRINO

Henry Hudson's third solo show with TJ Boulting, *Pellegrino*, presents plasticine works, wallpaper murals and a sculpture all conceived during a seven week residency at Villa Elia in the south of Italy, Puglia. *Pellegrino*, which translates as 'pilgrim' in Italian, is titled as such as a result of Hudson's journey from London to the villa. It was an excursion in the same vein as the painting retreats of early 20th Century artists who sought out the brighter, southern sunlight. The exhibition, however, takes the concept of pilgrimage to the modern day, exploring our almost religious attraction to contemporary icons and idols.

On his way down to Puglia, Hudson and his assistant stopped in Rome. They walked amongst the ruins of the Roman Forum and, perhaps more predominantly, amongst the mass of tourists that had flocked there. Whether as part of a swarm charmed by an umbrella-brandishing guide or wondering solo, absorbed and controlled by the calm omniscient voice of a head-set, the tourists all moved about in a state of hypnagogia – that porous moment between sleep and wake, dream and reality. The spectacle seemed to be a modern day pilgrimage, an almost religious rite of passage for the tourists to pay their respects to a fallen civilisation, the remaining ruins now commodified into an 'experience', available, of course, at a price. Throughout the ritual, each tourist was seen to carry around their own sacred belongings: Nikon cameras and iPhones to verify their presence, branded clothes, hats and trainers as mass-produced statements of their individuality and affirmations of their freedom, even if the majority seemed to be replicas purchased from the street sellers gathered around the edge of the enclosure. The symbol was apparently more important than the reality.

Most common, however, was the portable suitcase, popular for its capacity to carry around numerous possessions with minimal effort. *Lost Property*, depicts one of these designer suitcases, in this case Louis Vuitton, cast in bronze and covered in a green patina, like an ancient statue mottled with time. The form is warped and distorted having originally been made in plasticine by Hudson. On its front there is a patch where the green has been rubbed away to reveal the buffed gold shine of the bronze underneath, as though thousands had touched that spot as part of a ritualistic superstition. The suitcase is placed on a plinth made entirely of digital screens, like those of the large advertising displays in Piccadilly Circus or Times Square. Playing on all sides of the plinth are animations of Hudson's sketches created in the Roman Forum. They depict the surrounding ruins overlaid with designer possessions, gadgets and discarded rubbish – a slick shop-window aesthetic fused with the debris of consumer excess, crude and briskly hand-fashioned. The sketches were created and then the drawing process recorded on an iPad, allowing the viewer to experience the artist's mark-making as the forms emerge, as well as strengthening ties between the handmade and digital interfaces.

*Coniglio Scuoiato Supermac* depicts a skinned rabbit similar to the carcasses of Soutine. Hudson's rabbit, however, sits compact in a polystyrene tray and glazed with a veneer of protective plastic. This is not a rabbit that has been skinned with pride by its hunter, but one of thousands off the abattoir production line: the ultimate mechanisation that feeds our growing hunger, churning out identical carcasses to be hungrily consumed. *The Pasta Eaters* is a homage to Van Gogh's *The Potato Eaters*. A group gathers around the dinner table in dimmed light, but again unlike the peasants whose meal ritual is sacred and savoured, this scene depicts the aftermath of indulgence. The faces of the diners are distorted and twisted as though suffering with convulsions and completely inebriated. There is an overflowing ashtray, bottles of wine that have been emptied and a baby plugged into an iPhone that serves as a contemporary passifier. In the back righthand corner of the painting sits a fly trap, perhaps as a reminder of our inevitable attraction to the lures of today's society and the dream-like state which we are magnetically drawn into.

The fly trap makes a more prominent appearance in *Life Trap* which plays on Hirst's *1000 Years* as well as Van Gogh's famous 'chair' self-portrait. In Van Gogh's version, the seat of the artist as well as his pipe and tobacco compile the persona, but Hudson's composition is mirror reflected and dark, suggesting a negative copy of times gone by. The chair also has been removed and the tobacco substituted with the food waste of the trip strewn across the floor and left to rot. Solidity of self has become ephemeral and transient – we are now represented by only the remains of our consumption. There is mosquito repellent on the floor, adding a toxicity into the mix. The fly-trap sits and bathes the scene in its cool and deathly light. Like skulls present in Renaissance painting, it signifies the perpetual cycle of death, decay and birth.

Lastly, *Tarda Estate Paesaggio* and *Swimming Pool* are more formal studies inspired by the simpler times for life and art. Hockney is referenced in *Swimming Pool* but it is mainly a study of light on water. *Tarda Estate Paesaggio*, which translates as 'late summer landscape', shows Villa Elia where Hudson stayed and pays tribute to Van Gogh's *The Yellow House*. However, in contrast to Van Gogh's home which witnessed the life of a struggling artist, the walls of Villa Elia experience only wealth and luxury. On the wall behind every painting Hudson has placed a sketch from the trip, enlarged to fill the entire wall and printed on paper to give the sense of interior decor. The images all reference the various aspects of visual aesthetic experienced there by Hudson: from the daily surroundings of the house to the local supermarket packaging and branded painkillers to numb the hangovers.

*Pellegrino* is a show that covers much ground. Hudson's layers of referencing, appropriation and reproduction highlight issues of meaning in the age of simulacra, and, like flies to the attractive blue light of the trap, we are lured into that cloudy dream state and enchanted.

*Notes to editors: The exhibition Pellegrino is the result of an innovative collaboration between the artist, the owner of Villa Elia, Gaetano Castellini Curiel, Think Puglia and TJ Boulting. Villa Elia is available for weekly rent exclusively through Think Puglia, from The Thinking Traveller, www.thinkingtraveller.com*

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