

Interview for the exhibition

I AM EMPTY LIKE A VEGETABLE

GRAHAM HUDSON MONITOR 2017

Graham Hudson with Gourmand Shah:

Gourmand Shah:

So I read the press release and had a look at the works in progress, dominated by these paintings(!) The text begins in 16th century Genoa and maps this to the revolutionary spirit of 1968 (with its imminent 50 year anniversary) using Jane Fonda as a kind of irreverent motif? First question has to be what is with the paintings?

Graham Hudson:

The Vietnam era political actions of Jane Fonda, her work with the Black Panthers and the Viet Cong, has a direct and open correlation to her 1982 aerobics 'Workout' project. I'd played with this before, but this time - with 2018 approaching and the political climate in Europe right now, I was thinking about her path to political radicalisation in 1968. This meant dealing with the images of her early Hollywood career, some kind of mediation of those images became unavoidable for me. Jane Fonda had wanted to be a painter, like her father, who is famous for his acting, but he spent as much time painting. This is what initially led her to Paris and her subsequent encounters with the left bank politics of the day; Satre, De Beauvoir, Camus.

Each painting presented here is a different chameleonic incarnation of her early Hollywood studio career, with a gradually increasing French influence, as we move from 'Tall Story' and 'Walk on the Wild Side' to 'Circle of Love' and 'Spirits of the Dead' this was the era, when New Hollywood was in awe of Goddard and the revolutionary techniques of the Nouvelle vague.

The varying painterly technique aims to dovetail with fonda's chameleonic roles in that Hollywood period, as well as her life before and after that; actor, activist, workout guru, tycoon wife, Christian, now back to Hollywood star. I used each painting as a chance to adopt a style, these include; something like (not precisely, but more evidently at some times) Marlene Dumas, Francis Bacon, Christopher Wool, Jenny Saville, Richard Prince, Alex Katz and Wilhelm Sasnal

Gourmand Shah:

We have a few other works in this show, a red wine fountain in a bathtub, complete with body building nutrients powder containers makes up the contents of one sculpture?

Graham Hudson:

Maybe the best way into a conversation about this work is to talk about psychology, my thing with Jane Fonda has always been to use her a motif into discussing the psychology of the individual behaving in the world around them, thus political.

The fountain is a suicide. Some kind of mental illness will affect 1 in 4 people in their lives, and it is still a hugely under recognised part of how we think about disability, even though the landscape has changed greatly in the last few years.

It's kind of a sign of progress that society is now able to confront and deal with the complex realities of the self. Only a hundred years ago mental institutions were common across Europe, with people locked up and labeled crazy. Post traumatic shock disorder was unrecognized at the end of the 2 world wars and you only have to watch 'One flew over the cuckoo's nest', based on Ken Kesey's 1962 novel, and 'The Exorcist', 1971, to get an impression of the recent history of how we considered mental illness. Jane Fonda turned down both leading female roles for those two films.

Fonda's mother committed suicide in a sanitarium when Jane was 12, slitting her throat from ear to ear after years of battling depression and schizophrenia.

Suicide is also the weapon of choice for the Islamic fundamentalists who torture the West with it the prospect of self-bombs at German Christmas markets and Riviera beaches. In the exhibition, with the 1968 anniversary coming up, I wanted to think about revolution and becoming a radical, talking about the past, alluding to the present. What is the process of establishing identity, thought patterns and behaviour, something we call brainwashing when it suits us?

Another work is a kind of NFL (American Football) helmet styled into a Gorgon's head - with lights instead of snakes?

The Gorgon as an image got into my head reading RD Laing's 'The Divided Self' as he refers to the process of Freud in the underworld of the subconscious. Holding the severed Medusa's head a-la Perseus. The Gorgons are famed in Greek mythology for three reasons: The snakes for hair, a multi-phallus symbol as Freud asserted. The castration process of decapitation, also an Isis process and the intriguing psychological component that you can't look at them without turning to stone, which also has such formal potential for thinking about the traditions of materiality in sculpture. In a formal sense, creating an artwork that you can't look at is something interesting to play with. This NFL helmet I had seemed a fitting carrier, American football is a hero worship sport learnt at High Schools. So an emblem of the Western 'brainwashing' that is also represented here in these Jane Fonda Films circa 1960 - 1967.

It's also a riff on Neurology, as the NFL is currently embroiled in it's billion pound lawsuit with ex-players over brain damage. The end result may see the helmet and serious contact banned from the sport, another castration. The issue of concussion goes to the heart of defining consciousness and the notion of self.

The film has four clear components; a monotone slow voiceover, footage in a blue skied canyon, footage at a Modernist building, and a goldfish.

The film has been a long-time in the making. The location footage is in two very specific places. The Bronson Canyon in Hollywood, Los Angeles and The Salk Institute for biological studies in La Jolla, San Diego, filmed in early 2015. The Bronson Canyon is a part of Griffiths park in Los Angeles, very close to the Hollywood studios. It's always been a natural resource for film-makers, particularly used for Westerns and Science-fiction, perhaps most notably the climatic John Wayne scene in 'The Searchers' is shot there, John Ford had ran out of budget to return to Monument Valley in Arizona, so Bronson Canyon it was. It's the Batcave entrance from the 60's TV series, it can also be clearly seen in Elliot Silverstein's 'Cat Ballou' 1965 starring Jane Fonda.

The Salk Institute for Biological Studies in La Jolla is one of the world's leading scientific research institutions. Its research centers include neuroscience molecular biology, genetics, cancer, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's. The building is by Louis Khan and the day I filmed there is was raining, which is rare for Southern California.

The voiceover is a hybrid from a Joan Didion essay in her 'The White Album' a series of essays on late 60's America, as well as her personal depersonalization at the events occurring, including the notable attack of nausea and vertigo. This Didion text is montaged with facts and specifics from the life of Jane Fonda, the hereditary depression and schizophrenia in her family, the Hollywood objectification she experienced. The fish bridges the two locations, in the cave, the goldfish is famous for its myth of a three second memory, this is a play on how self is constructed, memory is all we have to rely on for our projection of self, to remain acting who we think we are. 'To hide was to survive' said R.D Laing.