

¹ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans Leon S Roudiez, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

² "Abject Art", Tate. Accessed 24 October 2014, <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/a/abject-art>.

³ Nathan Gorelick, "Life in Excess: Insurrection and Expenditure in Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty", *Discourse* 33 (2), 263.

⁴ "Abject Art", Tate. Accessed 24 October 2014, <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/a/abject-art>.

⁵ Whitney Museum of American Art, *Abject Art: Repulsion and Desire in American Art. Selections from the Permanent Collection*, exhibition catalogue, 23 June – 29 August 1993, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City.

⁶ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Santa Monica: The Lapis Press, 1976), 15.

A KNEE-JERKING RE-EDUCATION WITH JAKE & DINOS CHAPMAN

interview by Natalie Baerselman le Gros

Many people are quick to describe your work as shocking or horrific, however I am yet to meet anyone who has been physically or emotionally shocked by your work. What do you think causes these reactions and why?

WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE WHO ARE QUICK TO DESCRIBE OUR WORK AS SHOCKING OR HORRIFIC – IF YOU CAN'T ACTUALLY FIND THEM DO THEY EXIST? I'VE NEVER MET ONE. BUT IF YOU MANAGE TO FIND ONE, KEEP HOLD OF THEM AND GIVE US A CALL. I WOULD LIKE TO MEET THEM AND SHAKE HANDS WITH THEM, IF INDEED THEY HAVE HANDS. I IMAGINE THEM AS STRANGE CREATURES THAT LIVE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA, FLOATING IN THE DARK, SIGNALLING WITH FILAMENTS OF WEIRD LONELY NEON, ALL STRANGE AND TRANSPARENT, LIKE ANGRY BLOGGERS THAT MASTURBATE AND MOAN IN THE DARK.

What provokes you to continue to create such art that will inevitably be deemed "shocking" and "horrific"? Are you hoping to re-educate people or do you revel in people's knee-jerk abhorrence?

I LIKE THE IMAGE OF KNEE-JERKING RE-EDUCATION. IT SOUNDS LIKE SOME KIND OF YEAR-ZERO CULTURAL REVOLUTION. IF IT WORKS I'M ALL FOR IT.



© Jake & Dinos Chapman
Mannequin (1998), Mixed Media
Wigs and Trainers, 152 x 47 x 57cm
MAXXI Gallery, Rome, Italy

The Tate describes your work as “abject”, something they define as:

“Artworks which explore themes that transgress and threaten our sense of cleanliness and propriety, particularly referencing the body and bodily functions [...] In practice the abject covers all the bodily functions, or aspects of the body, that are deemed impure or inappropriate for public display or discussion.”

Despite the apparent inappropriateness of “abject” art it has been embraced by the art world, evinced by its sheer presence in the Tate collections (and many others). Similarly, White Cube represents three artists deemed abject by Tate. Do you think then there is a place for the term “abject” in art or indeed any form of culture today?

I LIKE IT THAT WHITE CUBE HAS THREE ABJECT ARTISTS AND THAT THE TATE HAS MANY. IF ABJECTION EXPRESSES A TENDENCY TOWARDS THE UNSAVOURY, IT SEEMS A NICE COUNTERBALANCE TO THE TATE'S SUGARY PAST. IF BEAUTY IN ART REPRESENTS THE APOGEE OF ENLIGHTENED TRAJECTORY, THE TENDENCY TOWARDS ABJECTION SEEKS TO DRAG THE SUBLIME BODY BACK INTO THE MIRE. THIS IS A POLITICAL PROJECT.

Is the presence of the “abject” rooted in the reaction of the viewer rather than inherent in the artwork or the intentions of the artist?

BOTH/NONE?

Is shock before the “abject” a moral obligation?

IT'S PROBABLY MORE A SOCIAL OBLIGATION, A PERFORMATIVE RESPONSE.

Do contemporary media and current affairs have any effect on the dulling or exaggerating of people's expectations and experiences with art?

THE INSUFFICIENCY OF ART'S ABILITY TO DO MUCH-AT-ALL IS THE REASON IT'S WORTH DOING. KILLING THE DEAD BODY OVER AND OVER WITHOUT EVER LETTING IT FINISH WITH BEING DEAD.

If the “abject” has become mainstream, where does art go now in order to provoke thought and emotion from the viewer? How do you see your artistic practice evolving in the future?

IT'S A TENDENCY TO EXTINCTION, NOT A HANDBAG.

In light of the “spectacularisation” of the gallery and the art space, do you think “the spectacular” has become or could become a legitimate genre within the art world, to become recognised as a chapter of the art historical canon in the future?

COULD BECOME? IT'S ALWAYS BEEN – THE MYSTICAL SIGNIFIER FOR ABSTRACTED CAPITAL – THE AESTHETIC SUBLIME.

... like angry bloggers that masturbate and moan in the dark

In August your sculpture *Piggyback* was removed from MAXXI in Rome by the Italian Observatory of the Rights of the Child to “avoid promoting depictions with a clear paedo-pornographic context behind the art [...] this is not about an attack on the freedom of artistic expression.” To me it seems more of an appeasement of the public’s inability to deal with imagery responsibly and a refusal to address the social reasons behind such associations. Do you think censorship has a detrimental effect on the art world and the wider social world? Is it demotivating as an artist to see censorship as a reaction to these associations, rather than discussion or engagement?

IT'S UNLIKELY THAT ANY SELF-RESPECTING PAEDOPHILE WOULD GET HIS ROCKS OFF LOOKING AT ANYTHING WE'VE EVER MADE. MORE SO THE PAMPERS ADVERT AND ALL THE OTHER CUTE-CHILD ADVERTS THAT FLIRT WITH SUBCONSCIOUS CHILD SEXUALITY IN ORDER TO SEDUCE BUYERS INTO THE SAFE COMMODIFICATION OF THEIR PRODUCTS. IF THE VALENCE OF THE NEGATIVE REACTION TO OUR SCULPTURE IS TELLING, IT INDICATES THAT IT SIMPLY TRANSGRESSED THE COMMON CODE OF CONDUCT UNDER WHICH SEXUAL OBJECTIFICATION REMAINS DISCREET.

