

TAILBONE

AT THE ARTESIAN WELL

26/27 JAN 2019 11 AM - 6 PM
PV SAT 6 - 10 PM

Setting the Scene:

The mythic and the mundane coalesce at The Artesian Well. Serpents entwined with a woman's hand, carved fauns lurking in dark corners and horned deities emerge from the former nightclubs' walls. In the 1990's artists Rudy and Tony Weller transformed the Victorian Public House into a club with a collage of classical mythical references. Amongst other themes, the decor is a rich living tapestry of our ever-evolving relationship with animals. The venue is now a domestic space protected by residents who cook, sleep and live amongst the creatures and figures of the bacchanalian backdrop.

The artworks exhibited in *Tailbone* act as characters for the staged intersection between human and animal tales within the readymade theatrical set. The works pivot between sense and non-sense, power and abasement, past and present.

The curators have brought together sculpture and video to awaken the sense of stifling bodies that once danced alongside the storytelling frescoes. Emphasising the Saturday night Private View event, *Tailbone* reflects an urge to escape current reality, just as the nightclub created a place to break away from the monotony of the working week.

Staged by:

Neena Percy and Lizzy Drury

1.

Originally performance props exploring the mysticism of storytelling, the artist bends the lion's traditional symbol of courage. Here they are found dead or asleep, awaiting animation, becoming ghostly caricatures of themselves.

In contrast, caught frozen in action, the statue of a powerful ram-horned deity imposes from the ceiling in the first room of The Artesian Well. His muscular arm holding an orb and a chicken, he observes the dance-floor. Below, diminished in scale but equally shrouded in oddity, a life-sized cast of a squirrel nibbles on a flaccid penis. Joel Chan's sculpture in bronze is reminiscent of a statue or even a sordid taxidermic trophy. The imbalance between animals and humans is reversed as the common squirrel gnaws away at the phallic symbol of power in a tragi-comic moment.

Animals inhabiting the venue as mythic tokens also include the half-human half-goat faun, who follows Bacchus 'God of Wine' through painted scenes of hedonism. In a futuristic tale of environmental adaptation, Milo Creese's *Kekuit* foresees cutting-edge gene technology where humans are transformed into frog-like beings. Creese weaves the character *Kekuit* (a part-human, part-frog Egyptian deity) into a sensory tale of contemporary culture, resembling the experience of surfing the web. With an uncertain looming future of rising sea-levels, perhaps we may return to the water with webbed hands and feet.

3.

OLLIE BRADLEY-BAKER
JOEL CHAN
MILO CREESE
JAMIE FITZPATRICK
EGLE JAUNCEMS
CANDIDA POWELL-WILLIAMS
ELLY THOMAS
WILL THOMPSON

TALE I: The Origin of Hands

The tailbone is a hidden remnant of human evolution, tying us to our nude animalistic past. We have always lived alongside and depended upon animals, ascribing them meaning and attempting to capture something of them. The first figurative painting made was of a bull in oxblood, bold lines elegantly conjuring an instantly-recognisable form.

Freed from crawling on all fours, our elongated fingers became tools, bending to pick up objects, while our brains developed a consciousness to interpret the world through symbolic thought and art. Yet, artists often attempt to free their hands from cognitive reason during the making process.

In the search for uninhibited free play, Elly Thomas explores the tactile process of making in the studio through final yet temporary artworks. Thinking through her hands to toy with unforeseen outcomes, the distinction between sense and non-sense collapses. Consisting of basic materials, *Apparatus* is an ever-evolving sculpture that takes on provisional configurations as a 'toolkit' for different settings.

THE CURTAIN CALL

The animal is a reminder of our own evolution, and with this, the constant progression of time. The timelessness of storytelling and desire to escape the present manifests in *Tailbone*. In the amalgamation of fiction and fact, the artists address humanity's current concerns.

Rendering himself a cartoon in *What a Time To Live In (or 2016)*, Andy Holden proposes that our bizarre hyper-fast world is becoming a cartoon landscape. In cartoon logical-illogic, anything becomes possible. Mumbling that 'truth no longer bears any weight', Holden's alter-ego wanders through natural and man-made landscapes, including Trump's Disney-esque golden tower, where rapper Kanye West greets the President. The invasion of celebrity into politics and power is a laughable yet an all too serious reality which has, in some respects, superseded the absurdity of the cartoon.

The timelessness of Ollie Bradley-Baker's *Travailler* encapsulates the growing romanticisation of past and (rare) present utopian ways of living. Activated by the viewer, a hand-wound 16mm adapted film projector shows a couple who live in the Dolomites with three donkeys and dogs. Reminiscent of a Darwinist study, it could present a speculative future or a revisiting of a past way of life - but here exists suspended in time.

3.

Deme Georghiou engages in the age-old tradition of hand carving to create convex and concave surfaces that are cast in plaster. Georghiou builds up forms to create imagined objects or totems of an unspecified society. Akin to the fake fossils embedded in the former club's walls, the layers of labour within Georghiou's process are subtly revealed. A man-made process of fossilisation, the relief creates relics of organic forms, leaving it to the viewer to place their origins.

TALE II: Mastered Reality

Figures of Godly power portrayed in classical paintings at The Artesian Well lost their original symbolic meaning with the disintegration of the beliefs they represented. Copies of paintings, they became backdrops for the nightclub-goer, and now for the presented artworks in *Tailbone*. Art has always played its hand in representing power and wealth, first glorifying and immortalising the sitter, and today demonstrating the taste and status of the art collector. Art equally has the ability to critique power and its' attached potent symbols.

Egle Jauncems' fragmentary painting composition sabotages images of power. From objects, such as the once-luxurious lemon, to immortalised figures from history, they are transformed into beings of pathos and irony. Similar to the taxonomy of animals, the studio becomes an index of thoughts and questions made visual through the artist's own ideas and desires.

2.

Also poking fun at systems of fear and authority, Jamie Fitzpatrick's *until you see the whites of their eyes*, is a theatrical three-headed wax colonel. Historical figures of power are subverted; the character is seen failing miserably in his prescribed role, crumbling into a laughable mess under the weight of his symbolic military garments. Fitzpatrick enacts the jester at a royal court, wittily using historical references to highlight the current socio-political climate.

Two life-sized pale calves and feet stand in old black leather shoes, their laces still tied. Will Thompson plays the fictional creator, piecing together a character's cast legs and another's carved face to play with the allegory of detached body parts. Referencing slapstick humour and evoking puppetry and nonsense, the work invites a suspension of disbelief. The artwork's punchline is highlighted within the context of a club's intoxicated revelry, within which ones' legs or mind can get left behind.

Tale III: The Distanced Animal

Since the early ox cave painting, we have continually observed the essence of the animal, so alike yet unlike us. The gap in communication between species has rendered them into fascination and metaphor. This distance in comprehension creates an unenterable space of human spectatorship. Mortal or immortal, animals appear in fables, myths, the Zodiac, religious iconography, humanised-animal cartoons and stuffed toys.

Two disembodied lion heads amongst scattered motif tiles form Candida Powell-Williams' *Cache Reconfigured*.

"Goodnight then, dear reader. Go home, lock your cage well, sleep tight and have pleasant dreams. Until tomorrow."

Grandville, 19th century artist

We are extremely grateful to the residents of The Artesian Well: Charlie, Wes, Julie, and Marianne for letting us use their home as a temporary exhibition space. This project would not have been possible without their kindness and generosity.

Thank you to Brew By Numbers for providing delicious beers.

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