

S MARK GUBB

HISTORY IS WRITTEN BY THE WINNERS

28 MARCH – 10 MAY 2014

Exeter Phoenix is pleased to present a solo exhibition of new work by Cardiff based artist S Mark Gubb (b.1974).

Gubb works across a range of media incorporating sculpture, video, sound, installation and performance. The subjects for his work are drawn from the social and political culture he grew up in; an equal fascination with things he finds so great and so terrible about the world in which we live. This often takes the form of a re-evaluation and re-interpretation of contemporary culture and history, provoking us to consider our contribution to the world we live in.

The show takes its title from a phrase often attributed to Churchill, but for which there is little actual evidence that he coined. It captures something of the duality that runs through much of Gubb's work; the underlying truth of the statement, held in tension with the inherent loss of the losers' perspective and thus, the whole story. This kind of slippage – word of mouth, Chinese whispers, use of misinformation, control, repositioning and reinvention, is played out through a series of references to historic episodes of political and cultural turmoil. Allusions to nuclear paranoia, assassination, revolution and propaganda lend a distinct thread of implied violence that runs throughout. Gubb highlights their shifting meanings through the lens of contemporary cultural hindsight – balancing out the dystopian mood with a wry sense of dark humour with references to classic tv comedy, literature and rock music.

On entering the building, visitors must walk across a large rug titled ***It's a Wonder That We Still Know How to Breathe*** (all works 2014), which is woven with the image of Edward Bernays, nephew of Sigmund Freud and 'father' of Public Relations. Their feet are wiped clean on the visage of the man who famously conceived Lucky Strike's successful "*Torches of Freedom*" campaign (to persuade more women to smoke in public) and who's 1923 book *Crystallizing Public Opinion* was said to have influenced Josef Goebbels' chilling publicity campaign against the Jews of Germany.

The title work, ***History is Written by the Winners***, is a video work that pairs the audio track from the UK's 'funniest ever TV moment', where Del-boy falls through the bar at his local boozery, with the toppling of Saddam Hussein's statue during the last war with Iraq. Quickly adopted as shorthand for the 'liberation' of Baghdad, the iconic footage now indicative of a more complicated revision of recent history.

In ***We Earn Bread Or Oblivion***, an extended three-meter conjurer's wand zigzags across the gallery. It traces the seemingly impossible - yet officially sanctioned, path of the, single 'magic bullet' responsible for both killing President Kennedy and maiming Texas Governor John Connally in the infamous 1963 assassination. The subsequent cultural status accrued by the countless conspiracy theories having been grafted on to the political consequences and human tragedy of the original event.

Further references to the cultural significance the Cold War (at its height during Gubb's youth) come in the shape of ***Go Fuck Yourself With Your Atom Bomb***, a billboard sized image of fireworks exploding inside a greenhouse, taking its name from Allen Ginsberg's radical poem *America*. Meanwhile, ***A New Physics Based on Nightmares*** (after a line from Kurt Vonnegut's *Cats Cradle*) invites the viewer to make and eat their own Pot Noodle in a video installation that pairs the four-minute preparation instructions with the four-minute launch protocols for a nuclear attack.

In ***I Know My Place*** three platforms for public oratory – a soapbox, lectern and pulpit, each constructed in rough chipboard hoarding, are presented as a space for potential use. Alluding to the classic Two Ronnies sketch poking fun at the British class system, Gubb also sets up one of a series of gaps in the exhibition in which to, literally, position yourself and partake in a lived experience. Rather than just a set of objects to be observed and considered, he creates a place of potential in which the viewer may wipe their feet, eat a pot noodle, flick a light switch or make a speech – and to consider their place in relation to the artworks on display.

A signed, limited edition letterpress print has been specially commissioned to accompany the exhibition from Nashville based Hatch Show Print, available for £35 (+p&p). An accompanying publication containing background and supporting materials, designed and printed by artist Nicholas Davies, is also available for £3.50.

Artist's Talk: Wed 23 April, 6.30pm, FREE

The artist will discuss the exhibition and his wider practice.

About the artist

This is the first of three major projects for S mark Gubb in 2014, the others being a project/exhibition with Berwick Visual Arts bringing together traditional bagpipers and the original drummer from extreme metal band Cradle of Filth, and also a major permanent public work to be sited in Cardiff city centre.

S Mark Gubb's work has been widely exhibited in solo and group exhibitions including; Turner Contemporary, Margate; Chapter, Cardiff; Dublin Contemporary; Aspex, Portsmouth; Postmasters Gallery, NYC; Matthew Bown Gallery, Berlin; Mostyn, Llandudno; Ceri Hand Gallery, Liverpool/London; Castlefield Gallery, Manchester; ICA, London and PS1 MoMA, NYC.

Residencies/fellowships include;

ACW Creative Wales Award (2012); URRRA International Residency, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2011); Standpoint Futures, Standpoint Gallery, London (2010); Cove Park, Scotland (2008); Arts Council of England's International Fellowship at Bunkier Sztuki, Krakow, Poland (2005); The Wheatley Fellowship at Birmingham Institute of Art and Design (2005).

Permanent public works include commissions for Cardiff Airport; Grizedale Arts; Nottingham Contemporary and Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth.