

INTERVIEW

Ben Turnbull



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By joshjones

Ben Turnbull is a London-based artist whose work blends collage, collections, and meticulous craftsmanship. He's got a new show – No Guts No Glory – opening at the Saatchi Prints & Originals Gallery on the 11th April, so it seemed like a good time to sit down and have a chat.

Tell us a bit about this show and how it came about.

I began a particular piece and I didn't really think that much about it, I just thought it was a very strong piece, that's the Uncle Sam piece; what tends to happen is I tend to try and do something very impactful with one particular piece, and then I try to build a series around it. It just seemed to bring up a lot of thoughts and memories of war films – Coming Home, John Voight, Born on the Fourth of July. I really build a real sort of storyline around this actual one piece of propaganda and that's kinda how it began really.

Your work seems quite political, is that fair?

No, I'd say it's historical now more...it was, it used to be, but I think people's perceptions of people's work can be very different to what the actual reality is anyway. This exhibition is more about building from my own sort of credentials, my own background. I've got a real passion for a journalistic-type approach to work anyway because I think it's more interesting. I don't really enjoy just viewing artworks in a sort-of aesthetic sense, I'm not really that keen on that.

There seems to be a bit of a schism between wallpavery art and work that has more of a message or concept behind it at the moment.

Yeah, I literally got duped into going to the opening day of the American thing over at the British Museum. What a pile of shite. Honestly, what a dupe, I was conned. I can't believe the political section had five pieces of work. And they were tiny. I would recommend people to just go to fucking Foyle's and buy a book about American history. It was literally a glorified exhibition for four artists, really.

Your say your work's historic, and we seem to be living in quite historic times. Is that something that you want to engage with, or take inspiration from?

No, no I don't think so, because I used to do that a little bit, and then I realised that you can get bracketed quite easily with a lot of other people. A classic case of this is the Trump thing. People were saying "Ben, this must be fucking gold dust for you, Trump, gold!" and I was just constantly looking at them thinking, no, no it's the opposite of gold, because what will happen is that if he wins, which I knew he would – I told people to go and put money on it when he was rank outsider.

Did you put any money on?

I didn't put money on it because I'm not a gambler, I gamble with my art work, I don't gamble with money. Gambling with art is dangerous enough. So I knew this would happen, all the artists will start bringing out their version of Trump. And I find that just so unappealing as a form of art – it would almost be like everyone would be sort of jockeying for position to try and outdo each other over a specific subject.

Have you thought about what you'll do next yet?

I have, yeah, I'm a bit worried about it because it's very difficult for people to run independent type shows. I know we're working with a very famous gallery name, but I think it's becoming more and more difficult for artists who have quite an independent streak to take on more difficult projects. It comes back to this problem of agents and galleries; they really just want somebody that draws glasses, or cups, and then they want that guy to draw glasses and cups, and can I have some more glasses and cups please? Or pictures of cats. That's what's so irritating about this next project, it is fucking beautiful and perfect: it's like the amalgamation of the first two American History X's, but it's got the storyline from this last project, which I think is easily the best project because you just get better as you get older. I do believe that; I think possibly I wouldn't want to do any work after fifty, I don't trust anyone's artwork after the age of fifty. I think they should just give up. I actually did believe in euthanasia at forty eight. Let other people have a crack. Stop showing all these fucking big hitters from the sixties, and let other people have a chance, because they're more interesting.

Interview and photo: Tom Medwell

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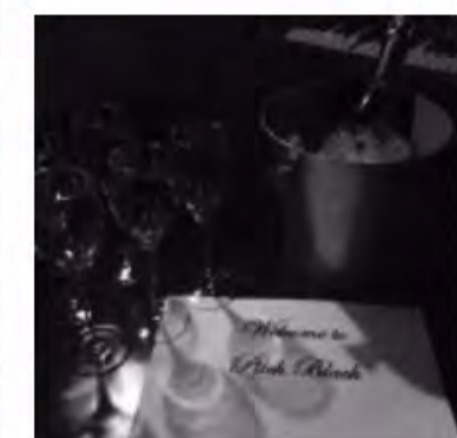
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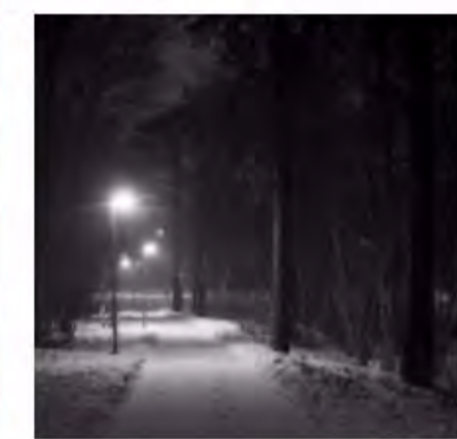


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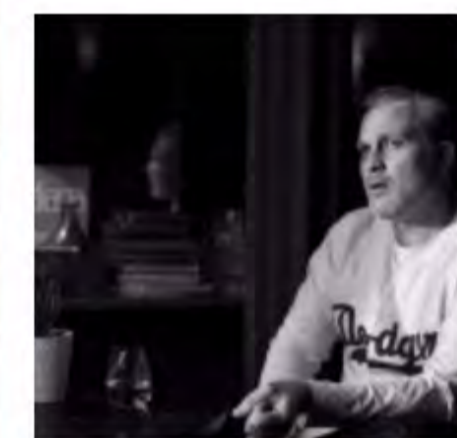


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