

Rich Tea

by Jim Brook

Village

Brook explores relationships between the readymade, still life, sculpture and the photograph within his home shared with his Gran in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire. Brook reflects on the cultural history of his northern home town that has strong ties to textile industry, coal mining and trade unions.

The 1977 firemen's strike in Dewsbury (Don't cross the picket), orange, milk, orange. The same toilet since 1983, them Ladders have seen some graft. Sodden towel and budget cooking served on gingham once again. "The legs are about to go on that chair!" I shout to my gran. Three carpet grips, waterproof jacket and my gran's gardening shoes (can't wear them for best) I've had an obsession with this vac since about 2013. A brick from the old wall, a brick from the new wall, a brick from the house and some broken one from the garden. Al av just a splash in mi tea! Leave tea bag in. Dire Straits, Brothers in Arms is on; Gran asks, "do you want a rich tea".



Jimbrook.co.uk

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A face full of a rich tea

by Aaron Guy

Let's not roll turds in glitter,

Growing up can be violent,

And you can be from any background for this to be the case.

But living in close proximity to the poverty line isn't just hard, it can be mentally incapacitating. Not everyone that has grown up in a working-class environment is hard done by, and not all "Working Class" people are, working class.

And the crucial part is just because you are northern doesn't make you working class by default.

And nostalgia is not our culture tip despite the great efforts of the upper and middle classes,

Despite being some of the biggest contributors to GDP, traditionally left leaning working-class areas across the United Kingdom have benefitted less from the successive governments spanning back to the mid 70s. Instead, an image of the dark satanic mills is portrayed to continue the historical narrative that working class areas are empty financially, culturally and morally. Dare not live up to the three bastions of middle-class life and they will distance themselves from you, just ask the Chartists. This narrative has fuelled the idea that those from a lower socio-economic environment live elsewhere and act like beasts. Sadly, this attitude has a broader and more sinister reach, maintains class divides and makes right-wing ideology easier to root.

The disparity in access to the economy grows bigger not because of the decline in industrial work, the changing landscape of manufacturing or the digitisation of the working environment. It grows because its root is the application of trickle-down economic theory (which is actually trickle up and state supported) and bad policy driven by 'those' with a vested personal interest to see a situation benefit themselves rather than society as a whole.

And 'those' come from all backgrounds. The upwardly mobile, socially climbing, dialect changing, culturally commodifying hierarchical supporting 'those'.

To understand this leaves the viewer no excuses. There are no excuses for not taking the time to understand a short part of now/history, and not burden the images with the responsibility of providing explanation leaving the details and nuances of having fuck all come through as a dry wit within each image.

In this landscape you develop that harsh and cutting humour, it becomes a means of dealing with a reality that brings trauma. It allows the masses to build a common language and empathy to understanding. There's no need for RP to navigate and re-articulate the mix of dry and severe, and no need to fall back on a trope that has morphed into a pastiche for cultural capitol.

The language of his image is not decorative or an inflated parody of a northern chav, it's powerful and violent like Cantona's left foot flying into the crowd at Selhurst Park. But it backed with the majestic grace and intelligence of Yeboah's right at Elland Road. These images are not the finished article, yet they take me to memories that have an impact, a cricket bat to the back of the legs, the distinctive whiff of a tea being knocked up, that smell you only get when certain ingredients are available. The draft of my nanna's kitchen, none of these things are nostalgic and at the same time none of it is grim. This is what work made repeatedly on the same subject does. It allows you to bring something to the party. It is made with an astute education in a political situation, using the situation of a kitchen sink drama, by someone with something interesting to say.

By not idly aping the middle-class academic approach or lad art 2.0, Jim has found an ability to surpass the trope, take the in joke, once the weird snobby niche and make it his own, subverting it, and taking the viewer to a place beyond the mid-century, Magnolia or Heritage hues. His references are Soviet, French and Hungarian, not tired American and English schools, because it's the idea behind each detail, rather than the look that is important. And it has to be, for someone who shoots the same subject over and over with the routine of a shift worker, not as a class voyeur, seeking to commodify their place.

For anyone who has grown in this environment they will understand how you can develop a strong self-reliance, this reliance is created by a trust in your own culture and how that culture has knowledge, understanding and empathy in its own voice. Jim is a staunch believer in his culture and his working-class roots. So, when developing his work and he finds Grayson Perry projecting this...

"I think there's a sort of unconscious voice that often a lot of working-class people have and it comes from their community and their parents there was kind of sniping little voices that said, that's not for us dear that's for posh people (in a more working-class accent than normal) or who do you think you are liking a painting in a gallery"

This is not a dig at Perry, this joins a long list of this kind of tripe, and he needs to give his arse a biscuit. And join the cue, Perry, Deller, Parr, The Mass Observation movement, Bill Brandt and Orwell, they have all used the working-class subjects, working class culture or production methods in their work for their own gain.

If there are internal voices of fear and doubt they come from a place so far removed from what is suggested. The entrenched fear of, no money, no scran. There is also a history of those from modest means being made to feel like a fart in an astronaut suit in cultural environments, classic double standard of the liberal facade and conservative values.

The long and distinguished history of supposed class betters, playing the bouncer to their culture club, this brings Jim and many other Artists think he and many others are full of shit, the statement implies anyone from a different background to that suggested are unsure of themselves in a cultural environment or have a history of lack of exposure to culture, more attached to their work than making work. This couldn't be further from the truth.

The work Jim has produced is lyrical, it is not a shit look at me pop song taking from something he doesn't know. He knows it well, well enough to understand its importance even if it's not 'commercially viable'. He knows the kids round his way were using empty council houses to rip off Great Universal and Littlewoods to make money before art. He knows there needs to be more unity before you can make More.

But like the pleasing pebble on a shore, it is never alone. It comes from a large group of very different individuals unified. All formed and compressed in unequal measurement of the mundane and violent, dragged and pushed by currents out of their control long before they end up on that shore looking as good as they do, before someone with the grace of free time is able to pluck it and stick it in their pocket, based on nowt but the way it looks and without a thought to its background.

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SHOUT TO MY GRAN. THREE CARPET GRIPS,
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