

THE BISCUIT FACTORY

Samson Tudor - Strange Times

29 April - 4 June 2023



Stalemate:



This is a vision of a play out of control, where characters from different narratives have come to confront and to oppose. They find themselves at a stalemate, enveloping a furnace in the centre of the image, as parts of the stage are broken apart. Division and destruction further confines the figures.

Animating a theatre of a chaotic world that epitomises the strange times we live in, where downtrodden or defiant figures play out their daily lives in surreal landscapes and confined interiors.

Sinking:



A figure futilely attempts to remove water from their sinking ship as another character jumps in off-stage and breaks the composition, hoping to hide the chaos from the audience by dragging across another curtain. Perhaps this is an interval.

The stage has collapsed, and the audience can see the illusion has broken - again the interior meets the exterior. The strong surrealist undertones of the piece reflect the surreal nature of these strange times.

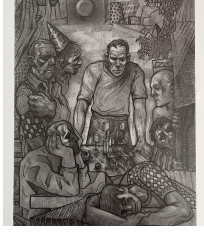
Carnival:

In Carnival we spectate the spectators, as they watch the play. There are hints at both the ship of fools allegory (Plato and Hieronymus Bosch) and the fleeing of a sinking ship.



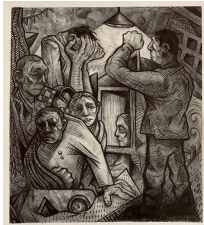
A jumble of seemingly disparate objects that can be found throughout the stage 'scenes' of other artworks featured in the exhibition - the ladder, the broken clock, vase and empty mask. Perhaps this isn't a staging but a genuine collapse of the scenery, as props are greedily hoarded away, as an injured actor looks away in shame whilst another turns his back to us, the other audience.

The audience to the right watches on with amusement, shock and indifference, they cannot look away, they do not move. The central seated figure seems disappointed at the events unfolding around him, sat with carnival hat hoping for celebrations. The scene is set in both an interior and exterior world, yet the stage curtains to the right are subtly positioned behind the 'audience' which hints they too are part of the show.



A Moment in Time and Any Day Now:

Protagonists in a disjointed play waiting for change, frozen as the world changes around them - perhaps we are witnessing a monologue, a revelation or a closing speech. The chaotic stage plays conjure up socio-political issues and notions of community.



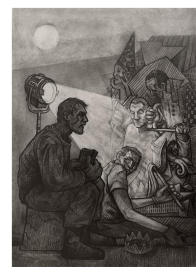
The figures are all displaying a varied range of emotions between forlorn and pensive. Again, the stage is parting and the exterior can be seen, breaking the illusion.



Mask of Porcelain:

This graphite drawing features the seven deadly sins represented as allegory for modern times - in a frozen scene of uncertainty, waiting amidst a carnival.

Instead of violence or confrontation there is an uncertain waiting, where pensive thoughts are gathered, and reflection is held. Prop items blend into real world paraphernalia, and distinctions between the fact and fiction blur.



Eternal Echoes:

Presents a director held in thought as he positions the cast and stage objects. He is lit apart from the rest, shown almost in a darkened silhouette, as if to isolate his position further. He clutches a script, as he looks past the scene, lost in thought. This is a more direct translation of the world as stage allegory. Where the exterior blends into the interior.

An allegory for the weaponising of mass media and the current socio-political climate. It's as if the lights have just been switched on and the play is about to start - in front of us the viewer. Small details such as the fake wooden sword (a warmonger's toy) and flag held like a whip (the violence of nationalism and jingoistic pride) add to the paused tension of the scene. The crown, a symbol of power, laid like a bear trap also hints at corruption out of shot.

Tolerance:



A group of performers that recall circus acrobats, actors and ringmasters, orchestrating a new play, as the set is building around them. They often merge into the stage and offer the appearance of being carved from it, with a strong sculptural presence, born out of such an environment.

This painting ultimately presents people going about their daily lives through the lens of the theatrical, a metaphor for a changing world, a transforming society, shifting around us.

Reunion:



There are further socio-political readings - around the movement of people, displacement and reunion. The suggestion of interlocking narratives presents human activity as a chaotic spectacle, divided and restless. The painting offers a fragmented reality, where perspectives are broken and abstract geometry is woven through the picture, as the act of painting also reveals itself.

There is an appearance of an industrial setting, of working-class figures, yet it's devoid of specific technology or a sense of time and place. Perhaps the optimistic rebuilding of a new world after the stage collapsed.

Defiance, Portrait Study, Emerge, and Against the Sun:



The smaller canvases offer a deeper research into individual subjects. Emerge, Portrait Study, Defiance and Against the Sun are all actors stepping out into the spotlight, harshly lit faces that return the viewer's gaze back at them, they are determined yet inquisitive. Emerge is a portrait of a figure closing his eyes to the audience, denying their existence, retreating behind the stage curtains, perhaps a frozen moment of stage fright or the gathering of thoughts before emerging in front of the crowd.

They exist in a zone that is both retreating into and emerging from an unknown darkness. These imagined portraits aim to capture the current zeitgeist of uncertainty and underlying tension. They are raw and unflinching, and show life etched into skin; a face scarred by society and time itself.

Guardian II:



A monumental figure seemingly frozen in time. This painting explores the themes of isolation, chaos and uncertainty - the search for a 'new normal' after the Coronavirus pandemic and subsequent lockdowns.

Acting as a study of the human condition in times of uncertainty, the reflective work examines the balance between fear and hope; through an emotive single figure, waiting in an abstracted landscape. The tension between the monochrome palettes heightens the sense of alienation and anticipation within the piece - and infers a 'calm before the storm' narrative.

Beyondness:



Still wearing his carnival hat, he marches forward, clutching to the last of the stage - a torn fragment of curtain, a literal red flag to wave down any passerby for help. His pose and stick resembles the countryside walker or rambler, like a guardian of the paths and trails they repeatedly stroll.

Acting as a study of the human condition in times of uncertainty, the reflective work examines the balance between fear and hope; through an emotive single figure, waiting in an open field, devoid of debris or pollution. There is no indication as to where the figure is heading, only that he has left the theatre, and it's here where the figure is left in the beyond, positioned against the immense open sky which transcends any stage.

Equilibrium:

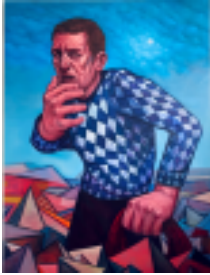


Figures crowded together in a Carnavalesque scene that they have little control over, one viewer looks out towards the spectator, the lone questioning voice that breaks the fourth wall illusion. The title refers to the fine balance of order required to keep society together and the thin line between the 'normal' and the 'surreal'. These characters seem more out of place on stage than the other images, as if the everyman has been dragged onto the stage.

Crowded and confined by the cramped stage, the figures blend in and morph out of their surroundings, as the image fluctuates between the real and the impossible. The stage seems to exist in a twilight zone that hovers between the real and the otherworldly. Eludes to historical plays, retold on stage, as a power struggle plays out.

The Actor:

To purchase works please ask a member of the gallery team. All pieces are eligible for the Own Art scheme - spreading the cost of purchasing art over 10 interest-free instalments

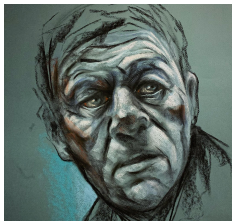


The actor is left to question what's next as he stands defiant as the scenery around him changes and collapses. Serving as a metaphor for uncertainty and change. He cuts an alienated figure, confronting the viewer with a questioning gaze, through exaggerated gesture and distortion. He has possibly stepped out of his role as actor and is now with us as audience - a question of spectatorship.

His characterful face and piercing eyes are that of a world-weary performer - stood monumental in a pose of defiance, gripping the fallen stage curtain in a clenched fist. Trapped by his surroundings, reflecting the uncertainties and philosophies of contemporary life. The scene suggests that the storm has faded - with the warm sun begin to burst through the clouds. The title of this painting references Pablo Picasso's 1904 painting 'Actor' from his Rose period.

'All the world's a stage, / And all the men and women merely players:/ They have their exits and their entrances' - As You Like It (1600)
Shakespeare.

Light Study, Portrait Study and Light:



These reflective portraits are based on working-class figures and former coal-miners. Capturing their character in emotive and powerful tones, bringing forth questions of identity, class undertones and notions of the human condition.

This is partly inspired by the artist's own family background and the forgotten, ex-mining village in the Midlands where he grew up. The charcoal and pastel on toned paper allows for a sculptural quality that effectively parallels the notion of life etched into the face, whilst conjuring up further layers of character and life experience.

Searching for the Ticket:



This pastel drawing features an ambiguous narrative that invites the reader's interpretation. Centering around a male figure wearing a heavy crown made from stone, as he searches for the ticket inside his jacket pocket. The case he grips indicates the journey is long, whilst the slight lean to drop the case down suggests he has arrived at a pick-up point. The emotive states of both figures looks uncertain and deep in pensive thought. Perhaps he is venturing out to play a new role and join the others on a new stage.

The broken wall / stone alter is based on the ruins from the lost village of Derwent under Ladybower Reservoir (local to the artist's studio in the Peak District), and appears as a barrier or checkpoint. The landscape looks desolate and barren but for a long standing elm tree, which carries various symbolism from strength to melancholy.

Cabinet of Curiosities:



This drawing centres around a disparate array of props and antiquities, that seem charged with mysticism and intrigue. A mask is positioned between two crystal balls, in a concrete cabinet closely guarded by a frenzied crowd of figures, who have come to believe the myths they were retelling.

They appear to be dragged into the stage and held a prisoner of it. A dejected king bows his head under the weight of a heavy crown and looks away from the crowd. Identities are concealed by masks which appear permanently attached, and impossible to remove, as actors who play the part too long see their realities become blurred.



The Gathering I and II:

The carnivalesque narratives are open for varied interpretations, but are imbued with a reflective atmosphere and a sense of foreboding. The characters are in some form of struggle; internal woes and angst manifests as mistrust and chaos as they struggle to set the scene, and move the props into place.



Stylistically sharing the qualities of an etching, the drawing confines the characters and traps them in a tight composition. The heavily layered graphite is worked and reworked until it is built into the paper, then an eraser is used to 'carve the light' offering a sculptural way of dealing with light and shade.

Paragraph:



This piece features a stage on the move, a travelling circus that moves in one nomadic mass of figures and cubist geometry. There are actors, puppeteers, stage hands and directors all in search of a place to set the stage. The allegory of the stage as we charge from one untold act and chapter to the next.

This artwork was drawn straight from the artist's imagination with pastel, Conte, and charcoal, on heavily textured pastel card.

Mythologies:



A melee of actors in the final act of the play, holding their positions as the curtains begin to close. Competing protagonists of their own stories, masters of unknown fables, where the viewer is encouraged to bring their own narratives to the play. There are few hints to existing Greek mythologies; the terror of Medusa is implied in the lower right of the picture, with a golden fleece tightly gripped opposite, whilst the composition itself unfolds dramatically as if the stage opened as Pandora's box.

This painting acts as a metaphor for the chaos of contemporary life and the theatre of human existence, a visual realisation of *Theatrum Mundi*. A sense of apprehension hangs in the air as isolated figures, conversely interlocked together, avoid any form of emotive contact, entangled in a mess of rich, vibrant colours and props. The stage construction is evident and frames the figures, confining them all together, but the exterior is still partially visible. The two masked figures 'guarding' the play at either corner give the impression of a metamorphosis

Rehearsal:



A rehearsal frozen mid-scene, of an unidentifiable and unwritten play, destined to never be seen. Wrapped in theatre costume and armed with theatrical props, the scene appears almost tragicomic, and yet the characters appear almost without expression. It is as if this routine has been rehearsed too often, and these indifferent figures are now resigned or disillusioned - world weary in the play of life.

A stagehand atop a ladder, fixing props and maintaining the appearance of the scenery, works to retain some of the illusion whilst the stage begins to crumble around him. The characters appear distanced from one another whilst almost interlocked within the confines of the cramped composition - confined within the stage in front of us the viewers. A clock without time and a light without its power offer further symbolism within the work.

Collage works:



The collage and mixed media studies present male working-class portraits that explore ideas around identity and the human condition. The portraits are uncompromising and appear to simultaneously show multiple emotive states and identities, as we as people are ever changing. Life and character are etched into the faces and force the viewers to elicit their own stories and personalities from these characters that only exist before them.

An amalgamation of a spectrum of emotions, faces and masks - condensed into an unknown identity in a 'post-truth' era.

The collages contain photography of paintings and drawings that I have reworked and transformed, before destroying to only exist in collage.

Nostalgia:



This portrait looks straight back at the viewer with a questioning glance, an actor breaking the fourth wall, thereby challenging the spectatorship. He wears the clothes of the harlequin, so the play is again at once tragicomic, but the glance suggests an awareness

This portrait was an original 1/1 etching that was then reworked as an oil painting utilising the etched texture.

Broken:



A dreamscape in exile. The figures are positioned back-to-back and belong in different settings whilst also being juxtaposed next to each other. There is an implied narrative where the figure has hurriedly crammed a precious vase full of plants - taking something from the standing vase outside (exterior) and bringing it across into a domestic setting (interior).

The figure at the left of the picture is looking across at something we cannot see, so the landscape holds more than we witness. The piece investigates the interior vs exterior (lockdown) and connection vs isolation (social distancing) - which were key dualities of the pandemic. The surrealist tones fit the uneasy and surreal nature of lockdown and the cubist elements and devices bring a matching division and jarring quality. The broken vase is loaded with symbolism, such as trauma and imperfection.



Last Light:

Shares a very similar composition to Compère but as if the figure has remained rooted to his spot until night begins to fall, frozen in the last light of day.

At the end of the carnival, wearing a cone that sits between a party hat and a dunce hat, whilst also hinting at a Foolscap with the positioning of the fading sun. The atmosphere is pensive and reflective.



Autumn Paradox:

Only the folded curtain at the corner of the scene hints at the stage - the narrative is ambiguous. The figures are frozen in different poses as if waiting for the play to start. This play is perhaps in rehearsal as we can see two orchestrating figures positioning the others.

This piece imbues a sense of change, changing scenery, changing acts and of course the seasonal change of Autumn - in the fall when days become shorter and bring a new sense of melancholy as change beckons. The debris of the stage and broken props have fallen in the autumn and the everyman stands atop a rock braced for a new act to begin.

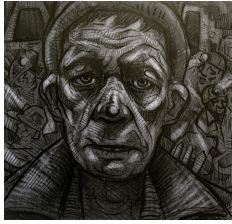


Memoir:

This painting depicts a magic show unfolding onstage, with figures waiting in anticipation as dice are about to be rolled. A man dressed as a theatrical king puts on his robe as the show starts, perhaps this is the magician, centre stage, and the others are onlookers and volunteers. Ordinary, working class figures merely observing, yet somehow invested, all betraying a sense of isolation.

A sense of the magic and the surreal permeate the picture and the multiple figures around the table recall both The Last Supper (Da Vinci) and The Card Players (Cézanne). The scene is carnivalesque, yet melancholic, with an elusive narrative that encourages different interpretations. The broken perspectives create different points of view, and the warmer yellow stage lights break through the set, as the scenery is being peeled back and the exterior revealed. An illusion is being built and simultaneously undone, which is of course the act of painting itself.

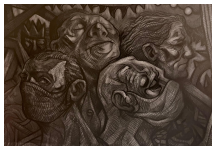
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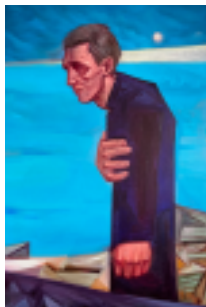
Nocturnal Wisdom:



Four actors uniting at the end of the play, before the final curtain bow, standing definitely as the stage has collapsed around them, possibly trapping them in.

These are working class figures with character etched into their faces, obscured by almost chiaroscuro lighting.

Compère:



The painting features a melancholic figure wandering through the same broken landscape that the Actor has also found himself in. But he has wandered out of the debris of the fallen stage and is forced to meet a new way of thinking and search for new beginnings. He is lost in introspection.

The Compère is left to wander an ambiguous landscape or zone reminiscent of Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979).

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The Show Must Go On:



Multiple figures gather around a large target board where circus tricks and knife throwing is performed, in front of us, the audience. Again this appears mid rehearsal as the performers are gathered round in a carnivalesque assembly where a play is amalgamated with carnival and circus.

A script is angrily slammed down on a table next to a practicing puppeteer, who is embraced by an actor wearing a literal mask. A contortionist is cramped into the lower corner of the composition as a jester above pokes at the actor playing king. We see the varied roles we play in life's act. Other allegories are hinted at such as *The World Upside Down* and *The Emperor's New Clothes*.