

Gilbert Bayes

AWARD

For early career sculptors

2020 WINNERS' EXHIBITION

NOTE FROM THE EXHIBITION CURATOR

thin king from a distance

(a mistake)

or

What is there to know?

All this is what it is

You and me alone

Sheer simplicity

('know-How' by Kings of Convenience)

What is there to know?

I was a guest judge for Gilbert Bayes Award, and am now the curator for the award exhibition, which came with an invitation to write a short text, in one form or another, about the exhibition.

2020: new forms, entirely lonely, not close. Please. Alone and loitering.

I have not seen a sculpture (not one), not seen the sculpture show (not yet), or met the sculptors. (Well, I met Air Commodore Mitch Vowles briefly on a cold Essex day.)

Things are missing, replaced so efficiently by a something that I nearly—
No. This is not a voice-over. No, nope, no sireeeee. This is not a voice over, a series of reluctant text panels, all explicit, fixed and total. This is not to be added on like a title or caption or as a frothy / tedious / average / informative (delete as appropriate) descriptor of a thing. NO. Not at all. Not happening. Not on my watch.

So: sculptors; titles; jpegs. This is what it is.

I haven't met the artists. They haven't had the chance to charm me or casually – hey, hey – ignore me, or do something off (my) script. I haven't had the opportunity to admire their youthful exuberance, intelligence or footwear. I just got some google-searched, artist-unapproved snapshots from their art college days, or from overcrowded private views somewhere. Never any feet.

Look. Titles are important:

Elector Sarah Howe

Captain Katharina Fitz

Viscountess Emily Motto

Attaché Vanessa da Silva

Cygnus Olor Sally Hackett

Prof Jessica Wetherly

Supervisor Chen Winner

Laird Sasha Bowles

Air Commodore Mitch Vowles

King Eugene Macki

We are told that titles are important, that words matter. We are told that to name a thing is to acknowledge that it's there – hello there! – a way to give it a dignity of autonomy and to welcome it to the world of nameable things. To name something makes it real. We can, apparently, then write about it. Naming is a constructive achievement, often with the relief of completion. So, yet to be titled, untitled, TBC is keeping it loose, just too soon, speculative, or some glorious unconstructive lack of achievement?

We are told to keep titles snappy, easy to remember, like:

The Physical Impossibility of...

We are told that the curator's favourite artwork title from the exhibition, as of 29/11/2020, is *Garlic Swans*. Sounds like a 1980s post punk band from Hull, *and* a dish that must be pre-ordered at a river-banked restaurant with two Michelin stars, *and* it still manages to be artlessly literal.

REMEMBER: show don't tell; things not ideas, or no ideas about things just the things.

We are told we name to identify, symbolise, refer, describe, simplify, organise and, most importantly, to bring close. We need to make ties and emotional bonds with people and things.

We are told that everybody seems to name. It's our right as reproducers, owners, family members to assign names. Also, we like it:

Genuine Risk (a racehorse)

Bail Out (a boat)

The Dandy Cock (a pub)

Xerox (a parrot)

Shore Thing (a beach hut)

Codrophenia (a fish & chip shop)

Karl Barx (a dog)

Dakota has recently proclaimed that she is a reincarnated 15th-century serial killer, so I'm cancelling all scheduled playdates until further notice (a cute bird painting by Matt Adrian)

To name is to pay attention. To name is to love. I have heard a rumour that the original brand name for KFC was Hot Dead Chicken.

The trap of language leads us to confuse words with things. As Virginia Woolf observed: 'Words belong to each other'.

The trap of digitality leads us to confuse the images with things. As Larry Page observed: 'Images belong to each other'.

I am not going to write from a jpeg. No, no, not me, nope. Describing a description. No can do.

My friend – let's call her Sarah Jones – told me about a show at the Henry Moore Institute called 'Photographing Sculpture: How the Image Moves the Object'. I never did catch the show. I wasn't in Leeds then, or now, but I've leered over the meagre and ungiving online selection of images. It made the show seem really special, like a well wrapped present. No. More like something sketchy, just out of focus, that's ready to be filled and reshaped by eye and mind. As the text says, the show looks at the ways in which 'photographs *move* objects, whether activating them visually, transporting them by proxy or documenting their travels across space and time'. These Henry Moore show images, I imagine, are full of character and characters, adventures of place and time, signalling worldly lives lived for, and by, sculpture. These images offer riotous alternatives to the fridge effect of most photographic documents of contemporary art: lost and frozen, all clean and perfect.

That sculpture and this jpeg: sculptural matter and pixilated thin, endless, can't-hold-it stuff; 3-D and flatness; there then and here now; room and rectangle; ground and image surface; the two-person uncomfortable lift and a nonchalant finger key press; complications of shipping logistics and the USB stick. Somewhere in all this there's an invitation to dream. Great gaps and holes for projection, for super-duper invention and some improvised desktop travel. Image as a vehicle that can really move across grounds, categories, temporalities and smudged realities. This is a vehicle for imagination, for delusion, for the unreliability, for multiplicities, for versions, for head-out-of-the-window, eye-watering, tongue-flapping possibilities. This travel is both clumsy and vivid. It's not correct, but compelling and oh-so-human. (Come on you Kings, Viscountesses and Lairds!)

I imagine you in this amazing exhibition, holding this text, forgetting THESE WORDS.

As you are here now – you and it alone – sheer simplicity.

Brian Griffiths is an artist (and doesn't have a title)

“
**I THINK
ART IS
A WAY
NOT A
THING.**
”

Brian Griffiths is an artist who lives and works in London and Colchester. Since graduating from Goldsmiths College in the late 1990s, he has been making sculptures and object installations full of overblown theatricality and pathos. Brian is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Sculptors.



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