

Into Focus: Chewday's

Why Tobias Czudej is juxtaposing prehistoric artefacts and emerging art

Tell us about where you're based - the area and your premises.

The gallery space was previously a Polish grocers; it's located in a housing estate on Lambeth Walk, a couple of streets from the Thames. During WW2 the street was made famous with the song 'The Lambeth Walk', and in the 1980's and '90's there was an influential artist-run space, City Racing, down the road, near Oval cricket ground. I also recently discovered that William Blake lived round the corner; in Milton: A Poem in Two Books, Milton descends from the heavens in the form of a comet and lands in Lambeth inside Blake's foot. There are only a handful of galleries in the neighbourhood, but they're good ones: greengrassi, Corvi-Mora, Cabinet, and institutions like Gasworks, Tate Britain and the Imperial War Museum.

How would you describe the gallery's philosophy?

Kippenberger talked about wanting to be seen as a "good mood" artist and I want to be a "good mood" kind of gallery. The programme has no strict parameters: the exhibitions generally stem from ongoing research and conversations. I want to test the conventions of what a gallery is and explore how it can operate in a critically engaged way, true to current conditions as well as being historically aware. The next year includes exhibitions by both emerging and established artists as well as exhibitions of antiquities and other historical objects, collaboration with researchers in their respective fields.

What are you presenting at Focus?

For Focus I'm collaborating with two Antiquities specialists – Georgiana Aitken and Martin Snowdon – to present new works by London based artist Gabriele Beveridge alongside Neolithic Idols from 10,000 – 2,000 BCE. Five idols will be displayed on a large glowing plinth: reminiscent equally of museum display, science fiction film sets and high-end retail design. On the walls there will be three new large-scale works by Gabriele Beveridge - assemblages constructed of found advertisements, artist-made frames, hand-blown glass and ephemera.

What drew you to the Neolithic idols?

I've been studying the Paleolithic and Neolithic periods for the past couple of years. It was in the Upper Paleolithic period we evolved into modern humans, from which we trace back the first evidence of image-making, and in the Neolithic period there are the beginnings of agriculture, social hierarchy and capital. These small sculptures - testimony to the popular beliefs of mankind at the birth of human civilization - resonate with Gabriele Beveridge's mysterious portraits of females, which explore experience in our contemporary commodity-world.

The exact purpose of Neolithic Idols is not really known, there's evidence pointing towards them being used as fertility votives, funerary statuettes, idols for worship or basically as dolls – they are, most commonly, highly stylized anthropomorphic representations of the female form.

continued

What else are you looking forward to seeing at the Frieze fairs?

Frieze Masters! And Nicolas Tremblay's curated section of the fair about the 1990s.

You've curated shows for PACE gallery in London, among others. How did that experience lead you towards your own gallery?

I decided to open a fixed gallery space as it allows me to curate a long-term program, and to work with artists on solo exhibitions and publications, which is a much slower, focused process than curating one-off group shows. I got married this year to Catharine Czudej (previously Ahearn), the first artist to show at the gallery; she's based in New York so I'm half there and half here, and will continue to organize shows independently at galleries in the US and elsewhere.

What are your typical Frieze Week haunts? Any traditions?

Trisha's basement, on Greek Street.

What are you currently showing at the gallery?

We have a solo exhibition with Bryan Dooley from 24 September until 05 November titled Public Death: it explores fear, future disaster and circulation