



# Poor Things

Linda Aloysius, Eric Bainbridge, Jonathan Baldock, Simeon Barclay, Beagles & Ramsay, Joseph Buckley, Chila Burman, Andrew Cooper, Jamie Cooper, Penny Goring, Brian Griffiths, Emma Hart, Lee Holden, Dean Kenning, Josie KO, Rosie McGinn, Rebecca Moss, Janette Parris, Anne Ryan, Aled Simons, Laura Yuile

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This exhibition brings together sculptures made by artists from across the UK. The selection has been made by artists Emma Hart and Dean Kenning in the hope that together the sculptures might reveal the multiplicity of experiences of artists whose work speaks to working and lower-middle class backgrounds, whilst identifying points of commonality. The title refers to Emma and Dean's love of the everyday thingness of sculpture, the way it exists in the same space as we do, and can be made of ordinary materials. In order to explore the connection between art and social class, they have brought together what they consider to be some of the best 'poor things' made by contemporary UK-based artists that they have come across.

Preferring to ask questions than assume answers, and wary of speaking on behalf of the other artists in the exhibition, Emma and Dean have had conversations with all the artists while preparing and installing the exhibition. As well as specific questions about individual artworks, the artists considered art and its relation to wider issues of social and cultural division, identity, what gets valued, and these wider questions:

- How does class operate in the art world today?
- How do class factors intersect with questions of ethnicity, gender and sexuality which might be expressed in artists' works?
- What could be done to enable more people from working class backgrounds to be artists?
- In what ways is the art/sculpture made by those from working class backgrounds different from art/sculpture made by those from middle and upper class backgrounds? (In terms of issues, subjects, passions, feelings, politics, ways of working, etc.)
- Why is it important that there are voices from working class backgrounds in contemporary art?

The conversations between the artists form the basis of the book that will be published to celebrate the exhibition. You can also listen to some of the artists talking about their work by scanning the QR codes on the labels next to their work. These are the questions Emma and Dean asked of each artwork:

### **Linda Aloysius**

*Teen*, 2019; *Fresh*, 2017; *Perforated*, 2015

Your figures are constructed using materials that may have been salvaged from the street. They have an endearing, dishevelled character. Do you think of them as having personalities?

### **Eric Bainbridge**

*African Violet – Decadence in the Dinosaur World*, 1985

Is the fake fur animal print a marker of class? Dinosaurs seem goofy and popular. What is and isn't taken seriously as art?

### **Jonathan Baldock**

*Warm Inside (v)*, 2021

Is the basket a comfort zone or a place of transformation?  
How do the hand-made craft processes relate to class?

### **Simeon Barclay**

*What you Make of it (Trace)*, 2022

You've told us of the journey undertaken by your father who arrived in the UK in the 1950s from the Caribbean, making a home in Yorkshire. How does your suspended bath present a narrative which addresses the dynamics of identity?

## **Beagles & Ramsay**

*A NEW HEADS ON THE BLOCK & ROPE A DOPE KIDNEY  
PUNCH UPDATE MEAL DEAL AKA THE WORLD BELONGS  
TO THOSE WITH GOOD TEETH AKA SELL A LUNG TO FEED  
THE KIDS AKA TYPE IV FUN AKA DAMN YOUR SPAM WE WANT  
BEEF AND WELCOME TO THE NEGATIVE AFFECTIVITY DOMAIN  
2.0 OR SHOULD THAT BE A MOMENTARY LAPSE OF EQUALITY  
CONTROL IN A CIRCULAR HOLDING PATTERN OR HEAD LUNG  
DEAD AND OLD NED MOB, 2023*

The figures are made from recycled, flat-packed office furniture, as if some self-assembly has gone on. How does this work address the politics of contemporary labour?

## **Joseph Buckley**

*Crystal Landlord, 2023*

*Crystal Landlord* has a political dimension that draws on sci-fi and fantasy imagery. How do the themes of power and control in the work relate to both class and racial inequality?

## **Chila Kumari Singh Burman**

*Eat Me Now, 2015*

Your father sold ice-creams in Liverpool in the 1960s when he first arrived from Punjab, India. Is your sculpture a monument to everyday pleasure?

## **Andrew Cooper**

*Those Whose Souls Resist Repossession, 2016*

*Millie, Reg, The Hammer, 2012; Tea Horse, 2010*

Your sculptures are carved from ordinary domestic objects – banisters and the like. Who are these characters and what is being brought back to life?

## **Jamie Cooper**

*Nomnom*, 2021

Your work looks like it has been born in a shopping centre but it might not die there. Does your work transform the seduction of retail aesthetics into a liberating force?

## **Penny Goring**

*Wrong Doll*, 2022; *Pour Doll*, 2021

What does it mean when the artist's feelings are publicly exhibited, their emotions there for everyone to read?

## **Brian Griffiths**

*The Body and Ground (Or Your Brittle Smile)*, 2010

Your sculpture is a large brown tent in the shape of a bear's head. Does the absurd and magical character of the work transport us elsewhere?

## **Emma Hart**

*Spoilers*, 2021

Your *Spoilers* confront you as you enter each gallery space. They shout right into the viewer's face. The colours that come out seem a bit twisted and messed up. Is this working class exuberance or have you said the wrong thing again?

## **Lee Holden**

*Pervading Animal (Variant 23)*, 2023

Your work is overflowing, it uses redundant and cheap stuff and seems to create a fictional machine. Does your mode of working relate to class?

## **Dean Kenning**

*Renaissance Man*, 2017

*Renaissance Man* is an agitated figure, undertaking repetitive movements that get him nowhere. What's on his mind and what's on yours?

## **Josie KO**

*Let's Get Lost Tonight, You Can Be My Black Kate*

*Moss Tonight*, 2023

This sculpture seems to address the representation (or lack of) black women. The sculpture includes signifiers of value – it's painted gold and placed high up on a plinth. How do issues of race intersect with issues of class?

## **Rosie McGinn**

*Oblivion*, 2021

There's a sense of ecstasy and exhilaration in your work, being with others – friends and family. Do you think of your subject matter as different from the tastes encountered in high culture?

## **Rebecca Moss**

*Thick-Skinned*, 2019; *Home Improvement*, 2021

Through sculptural contraptions and costumes you turn yourself into something comically monstrous. But the weird scenarios that ensue take place in the very ordinary settings of your back garden and nearby Essex landscape. What does it mean when you are transformed into a thing in the place you grew up?

## **Janette Parris**

*Catching Up*, 2020; *Skint*, 1996

What does your work say about being a working class artist, having no wealth to fall back on and caught in the indignity of being constantly dependent on patronage and other sources of income to continue as an artist?

## **Anne Ryan**

*Friday on my mind*, 2022–23

There's bodily pleasure in your sculpture and also a sense of joy in how the works are made. How does joy and pleasure relate to class?

## **Aled Simons**

*Sulkamania*, 2019/2023

You have presented us with a homemade Hulk Hogan that we can imagine playing crazy golf with. We've been given a cheap fake instead of the real deal? How does this unreliability relate to class?

## **Laura Yuile**

*Heavy View*, 2022

You've rendered old TVs in pebble dash. What are the class connotations of pebbledash and how does this sculptural work relate to your political work around housing?

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