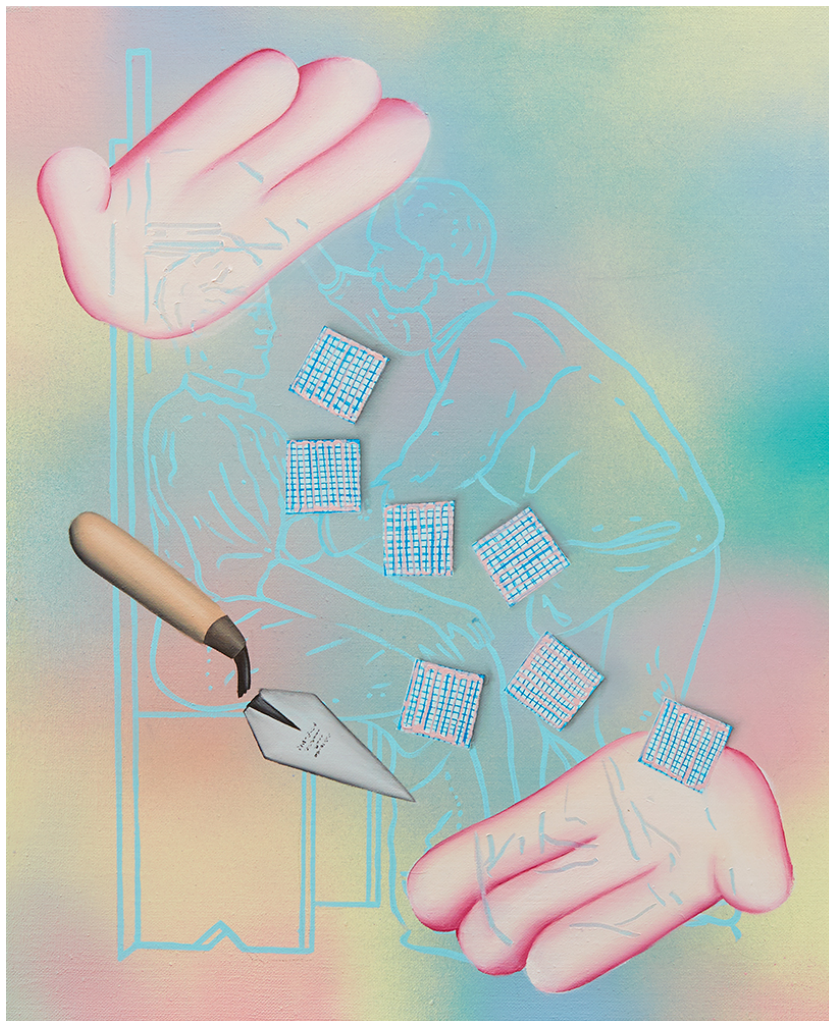


I wanted to talk to you about your recent work. We've spoken a little in the past about the gap between our intentions for our own artwork as its creator, and how it might be perceived by others. It goes without saying that you make work for yourself but you also make a choice to present it to the world. Starting with the most recent work, could you say something about what you hope people will get from it?

We could get into a whole discussion about 'Death of the Author' here but in terms of what I want people to get out of the work it might be more useful to discuss some of my recent work. Broadly, I am interested in what could be described as the 'allure of objects'. I am interested in why people create things, what we collect and what these impulses reveal.

My most recent body of work continues to explore ideas to do with object histories. Over the last year I have been researching objects that have been around for a long time that have been uncovered in archaeological excavations. Things that were created by people, used, lost, buried and then rediscovered. Some of the artefacts I look at seem to reveal and bare witness to human nature, the horrors of the world, moments of pleasure, rationality, absurdity, and diversity. I'm interested in the power objects have. Ideas to do with enchantment, animism and magical thinking have come up a lot in my research.



An Unambiguous Comparison 2015. Acrylic on canvas 45 x 55 cm.

For my recent series I have also been looking at objects from the recent past. In these works, a digitally modelled chicken has an equal currency with a Roman votive offering. An important part of my research has been the history of measurement systems, which is fascinating but also very chequered. Of course one needs to be able to measure in order to understand what surrounds us. Very importantly (particularly for a capitalist society) measurement allows certain things to be controlled and for values to be set. Systems of measurement are in their nature very rigid and when used 'properly' can be extremely useful. Eugenics is an example of what happens when systems of measurement and value can end up distorted and used to disastrous ends.

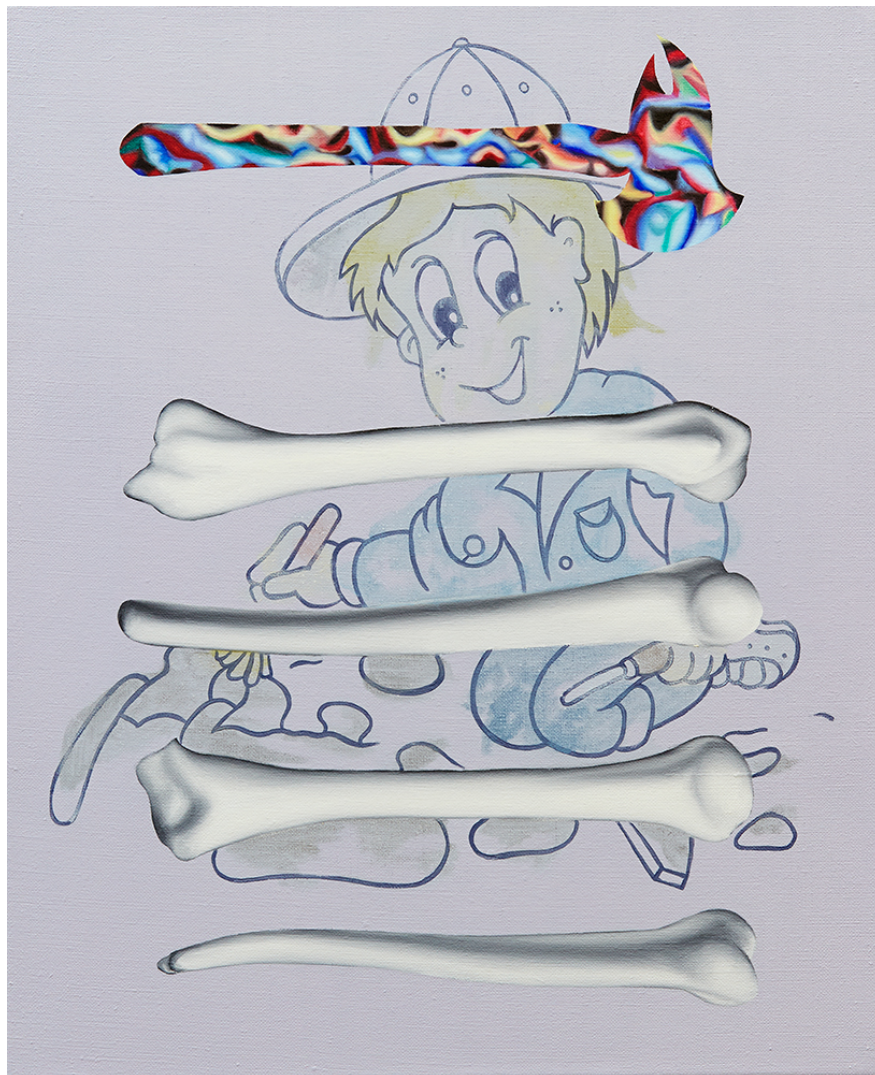
I suppose I am interested in the slippage between what can and cannot be quantified, and the points at which the systems that we have constructed and impose weights, measures, quantities, value etc. break down. How can we accurately measure a historic artefact for example? We can investigate its chemical constituent parts and determine the historical period in which it was made which might allow us to speculate on certain contextual details of the object's production, i.e. the environment from which it may have come from, what materials were available at the time of its making, even its function. However, this is rather a dry way of understanding something and does not add up to its "way of meaning". In the instance of a Roman votive offering for example, we might be able to say that it was made from terracotta in the 4th century but we cannot measure the desperation that was felt by the person leaving this offering as a gesture to the Gods when they were in need of a cure. And we can't quantify the feeling of relief a person must have felt if the offering was left as a token of their gratitude for recent healing. These feelings cannot be counted but I see these sort of narratives around objects as part of their history that are as important and as interesting as the hard facts that can be obtained.



Leftovers, 2015 Acrylic on canvas 45 x 55 cm.

I'm thinking through a similar historical lens with the works that take imagery of contemporary objects that have been digitally modelled. These things that have a very recent history and interest me in that

their referent is in the real world but their physicality and materiality are very different. In my painting *The Archaeologist* the bones in the painting don't refer to actual bones but are a symbol of the thing. Rather than creating works that can be broken down and understood in a fixed way, I hope to make works that destabilise the viewer's perspective and encourage them to re-evaluate their established points of reference.



The Archaeologist, 2015. Acrylic on canvas 45 x 55 cm

In some way all objects are a mystery, even to their creators. It has struck me that the more you explicitly depict your interest with measurement in your work, by way of the measuring instruments used in archaeology, the more ambiguous and perhaps strange your paintings become. They certainly begin to reference the process of excavation more thoroughly but retain an anthropomorphic charm that recurs throughout your work. I know that archiving is something you are interested in but I find it intriguing how you manage to merge the world of fact and matter into these hallucinogenic forms.

Yes I agree that objects and artworks always seem to be in excess of our understanding of them. This is certainly true of the things we make as artists. Philip Guston talked about knowing when a work was done when he left the studio and knew that he had left "throbbing living beings" there. This quote is from a book of his collected writings:

"There is done a work which is recognised by yourself at some point as a separate organism...The strongest feeling I have, and it's confirmed the next day or the following week, is that when I leave the studio I have left there a "person", or something that is a thing, an organic thing that can lead it's own life, that doesn't need me anymore, doesn't even need my thoughts about it."

This sounds quite psychotic really but most artists will understand this (despite it being a rather odd thing.) When you make something and it is working, it can get to the point when it feels to have an agency that is distinct from you - the thing takes on a life and authority of its own and seems to no longer need or belong to you. I re-read *Frankenstein* last year and was struck by the affinity between Dr. Frankenstein's experience of making his monster and the artist making his or her work. When making is intense and one is working to bring something into being, what is revealed can sometimes be shocking, exciting, disturbing and or wonderful - you then have this thing that you have to deal with. It does stuff and demands a response.



Standard Setting, 2015. Acrylic on canvas 45 x 55 cm

Having known you for a while I also have the personal insight that some objects that have interested you have a particular connection to your life or those close to you. Do you think that perhaps you create as a way to process these experiences?

Well my mum was a real hoarder and I grew up in a house that was very full of 'stuff'. This certainly shaped my interest in objects and collection. People describe themselves as hoarders but usually they're not! But most people understand the impulse to obtain a thing and the difficulty in getting rid of it when it feels to have particular value. Desire, attachment and value are really interesting and complex things that continue to have a place in the ideas I explore.



Home c. 1998

Could you talk about the materiality of your paintings, sculptures and installations? What processes and materials do you use?

In a recent body of work *Beyond Measure*, pictured below my wall-hung works on canvas as well as two floor-based sculptural pieces were all constructed with an attitude that originates from traditions in painting.

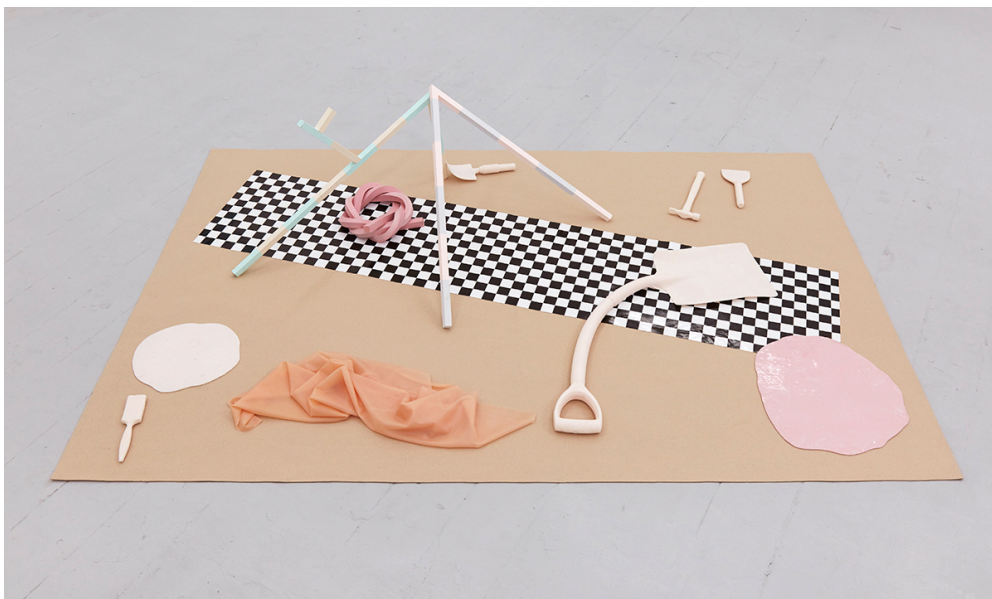


Beyond Measure, September 2015. MA exhibition. City & Guilds of London Art School



Beyond Measure, 2015 Acrylic and oil on canvas, 150 x 180 cm

In the painting *Beyond Measure* (pictured) a double, wide-eyed object sits on a kidney shaped form in a constellation of enigmatic and codified elements and is held between a pair of gloved cartoon-like hands. Gesturing towards an enchanted world, I wanted to create a space where systems of measurement and quantification collapse - where an archaeological measure offers no promise of accuracy and any stability or logic offered by a mathematical system breaks down, becoming dumb pattern.



Unofficial Versions, 2015. Wool, vinyl, silicone rubber, wood, 160 x 200cm

Unofficial Versions is a floor-based work which I wanted to be in dialogue with the wall-based paintings. It is composed of a group of objects that are arranged on a tan coloured fabric surface. The assemblage resembles something that is part picnic, part sand pit, and part archaeological site. Tools that are used for archaeological excavation such as a spade, trowel, hammer, chisel, brush and measuring stick, retain their original form but are materially altered. Cast in pale pink rubber, the tools become uncannily bodily, tactile and comically absurd and their functionality is rendered impotent and unfit for purpose.

Freud famously used archaeology as a 'Master Metaphor' likening the work of the psychoanalyst to that of the archaeologist. He suggested that the analyst must "clear away the pathogenic psychological material layer by layer" and put forward that the analytic technique could be compared with the excavation of "a buried city". *Unofficial Versions* toys with this metaphor and questions the idea of an immutable truth.

You are not only an artist but also co-founder and executive director of Block 336 Gallery, an artist-run project space and studio provider in Brixton, South London; you're a part time Tutor at City & Guilds of London Art School and have just completed your Masters at the same place part time. It would be great if you could talk a bit about Block336, how it came together and how you keep it going? What are your long-term goals and desires for Block336?

I founded Block with Xabier Basterra, an artist I met whilst doing my BA. We had been part of a show that was organised by a student group and we felt that the space we had come across in this process had lots of potential. Somewhat underused, we decided to approach the building's landlord about setting up a project space and studios. He was very pleased with how the student show had gone (despite having been rather nervous at one point when he saw the excessive amounts of alcohol going into the basement for the private view but everyone was very well behaved!)

We took on the space for a year with the idea of hosting exhibitions and events in which we could work with emerging and established artists we were interested in and create something that operated separately from the commercial art world.

Because Block is quite a large space we quickly realised we were going to need a bigger team so we approached some others that we had studied with. Rob Bell and Alex Gough are part of the original team and my fiancé Tom Groves joined us shortly after we opened. Aside from being artists everyone works part time and has other professional skills. Despite the projects we have done operating on very small budgets, there has always been a shared desire to present interesting and well produced shows. The space opened officially in March 2012 so we've been open nearly four years now and have presented fifteen exhibitions and about twenty five events.

We became a UK registered charity twelve months after we began and alongside the exhibition programme we have worked with and hosted art workshops for groups of people with ill mental health. Held within a professional gallery space, where there are working artist's studios, these workshops take on an added dimension that is very positive.

It must also be interesting for you to experience the 'art world' from the angle of the curator and gallery manager as well as an artist. What have you learned from either side that you could offer as advice to those in similar positions?

Managing a space means you have an opportunity to meet people that you want to work with. Being able to exchange ideas and work creatively in collaboration with artists and curators is a real privilege. At Block we offer artists an extended amount of time to develop work in the gallery. The space we have is situated in the concrete basement of a seventies Brutalist building and has quite a lot of character so it takes time to understand how it can be worked with. Because we are not operating on a commercial basis, we are able to give artists the time and space needed to develop new ideas. As an artist myself I am very aware of how crucial this is in developing interesting work that is not necessarily commercial. I think it is very important for there to be space where artists can create work that is not driven by sales.



AXON, Robert Bell. Block 336. 2014. Installation view