

Andy Holden

Chewy Cosmos Thingly Time

14 May - 10 July 2011

Kettle's Yard Teachers' Support Notes

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"I'm curious how changing the scale or property of an object can reveal something about it's nature, and how the meaning of a object can keep changing but at the same time remain just a thing..."

Andy Holden

To book a visit to Kettle's Yard house or gallery, please call us on 01223 748100 or email education@kettlesyard.cam.ac.uk

About the show

This is the first major exhibition of Andy Holden's work in the UK. Holden is a young British artist based in Bedfordshire, who first gained widespread acclaim for his 'Pyramid Piece' in the Art Now series at Tate Britain in 2010.

Andy Holden's practice is experimental and draws on various cultural references. He works with plaster, bronze, ceramics, found objects and images, household paint and printmaking, sound and performance. He has created monumental outdoor sculptures, affordable multiples and complex, poetic events. He makes the plinths and cases that display his work, and the posters that serve to promote and document his performances, including those that will be part of this exhibition. He composes music and leads the band, 'The Grubby Mitts'. Each activity informs other aspects of his work in a cumulative way. The exhibition brings together all strands of Holden's practice for the first time to explore some recurring themes, such as memory, time, and our attachment to objects.

The exhibition features new works made especially for the exhibition. It includes an outdoor sound installation with recorded sounds from amusement arcades, an animated film, and collages using found imagery, from the painterly smears of make-up in women's magazines to textbook pictures of space. Some new works are part of an ongoing project, such as *Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will* (installations of melted 78 rpm records, decorated with household emulsion and collaged cut-outs from the cartoon Peanuts) and Holden's stalagmite sculptures, made with poured plaster and household emulsion. Holden will also present earlier works such as *Bastion of Empire*, a group of paintings on brown paper, all depicting the same rocky outcrop of Rockall off the coast of Scotland. This was the farthest land mass claimed by Britain during the Cold War. The paintings were made with different colour schemes taken from a range of Homebase paints, reflected in the paintings' contemporary flavoured titles such as Mocha, Summer Fruits, Butter Pecan, Biscuit Crumble and Strawberry Cheesecake Cappuccino under a Mulberry Sky.

Holden also addresses the house at Kettle's Yard in different ways. The house will provide the context for two special evening events during the exhibition, in which Holden will present two key performance works. The first, *Lecture on Birdsong*, is on 18 June at 6pm. Andy Holden and his father, ornithologist Peter Holden, will give an illustrated talk structured around a series of walks taken from their house and the birds they hear on the way, incorporating anecdotes about both the science of birdsong and its impact on culture. Holden will present the second piece, *Six Short Works in Time* on 9 July at 6pm. This is the culmination of a series of pieces investigating the relationship between sculptural objects and duration. It will incorporate projected film, a live camera feed, spoken word, and a string quartet performing music by Johnny Parry and The Grubby Mitts. It will also feature the premiere of *Quartet for Thingly Time*, composed especially for the exhibition. Both events are free but space is limited; the exhibition will also be open late on these evenings.

Key Themes

Multi-sensory Experiences

"I'm interested in notions of play in relation to artistic practice, and ideas of naivety in relation to how we experience objects in the world. The hand-made knitted cherries in my crude wooden factitious Cherry Picker arcade machine series explore this idea, and ideas of desire and longing."¹

Untitled (Cherry Grabber), 2006, was made the year following Holden's graduation from Goldsmiths, University of London. The pear-grabber, entitled *Apologies, (W.S)*, is a new work created specifically for this exhibition, inspired by the William Scott print, *Pears*, on display in the Kettle's Yard house. Holden frequently revisits his previous work as a source of ongoing inspiration and motifs such as cherries and knitted objects also recur.

The sound piece in the courtyard, *Quartet for Thingly Time*, primes viewers for their encounter with the claw-grabbers and is a surprising contrast to the anticipated calm of a gallery. Combined, these three artworks invoke multi-sensory memories – they recall the taste of cherries and pears, the softness of knitted materials, the sound of arcade games and the smell of the seaside. The immediate experience of the works is scrambled with the memories of associated experiences and sensations.



In Kettle's Yard House, Jim Ede also combined different elements to achieve a unified experience. Artwork and furniture are displayed with natural objects, pebbles, shells, driftwood, and the light from the purpose built windows highlights the textures of the walls, rugs and floorboards. Holden's exhibition has a similarly cumulative effect – whilst viewing one piece may be exciting or humorous, the full experience of **history practice**, artwork, music, performances, gift shop, is much richer.

Discussion Activity:

How do we experience art? Think about your first reactions to the word, what do you associate with it? What do you think are suitable subjects for art? What do you feel Andy Holden thinks are suitable subjects for art? What senses can you use to engage with art?

Rich Description Activity:

Working in pairs, choose one person to talk and one to write. Swap afterwards.

Person one: Close your eyes and imagine taking a walk through a place you know well – your town, a city you've visited, the countryside around your house. As you imagine your walk, describe all the different senses you can remember. What you can see, smell, hear, feel, taste? Try to picture and describe every aspect of the scene.

¹ <http://www.dontpaniconline.com/magazine/arts/andy-holden-art-now>

Person two: Listen closely to the description. Under headings for each of the senses, make a note of how they are described. By the end you should have collected many words.

Together, examine the words and have a go at pairing them together to get new descriptive words or word pair that seem to capture the experience that have been described.

Activity for younger audiences: Feely Fuzzy Fruit

Andy Holden fruit are knitted out of wool, making them soft and inviting. What other fruit can you name and what do they feel like?

Spiky pineapple? Fuzzy peach? Smooth plum?

Collect up a variety of different textured paper – you could try bubble-wrap, sand paper, coiled string, cotton wool, tinfoil or corrugated card. Make cut-outs of all the different fruit, picking different textures for each one.

Stick them down onto a large sheet of paper. Can you name all the different textures?

Object and Authenticity

“... for an object to work it has to have more than one set of reasons for coming into being... let's take the stalagmite... On the one hand it's a thing from the trapdoor, or a dripping down, on the other... a sense of duration, geological time, an honesty, a weight and bulk, corporeality, something that requires you to pull a muscle when you try to move it... It has to be all these things at once to make the thing itself appear.”²



Stalagmites (A Series of Small Encounters)

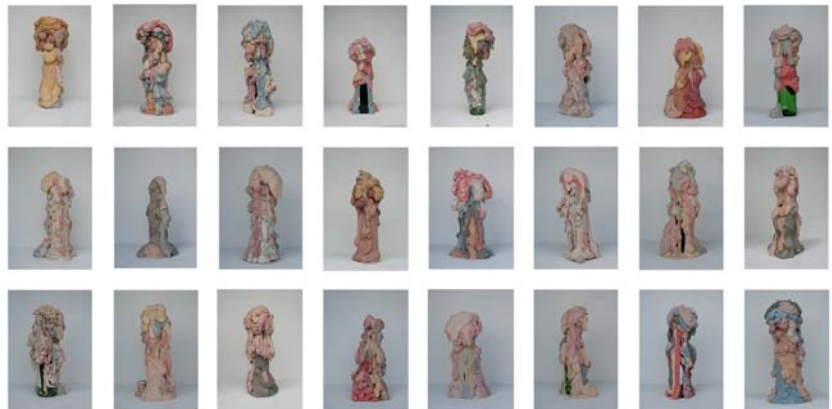
Holden's work frequently draws out the relationship between artifact and artifice, between the authentic and the fake. His stalagmites are totemic, organic structures. Created through the laborious process of dripping coloured plaster, each layer takes one hour to form and set before the next can be applied. For Holden, these sculptures are the manifestations of studio time – the slow building up of an idea, the thought processes which happen in the studio. Here the forms reveal the time of their own construction. They are authentic and honest; the nature of the material dictates the time it takes to construct.

At times these constructions are cut into slices with a saw, excavated, and presented like geological artifacts on plinths or in cases, revealing the strata inside. As the quote above

² Exhibition catalogue

demonstrates, Holden's interest in the stalagmites goes well beyond the time invested in their manufacture. His interest also extends to an exploration of the change of meaning that occurs when a stalagmite is cut down to a cross-section, becoming an 'artifact'.

In addition to these authentic structures, Holden makes multiples, or 'souvenirs'. These are made from the plaster left at the bottom of the bucket when mixing up the material for the larger forms. The left over plaster is pumped quickly over an empty green beer bottle, without attention to how the plaster falls or if the bottle is covered or not. In his writings,



Beerbottle Stalagmites (Original Multiples)

Holden describes the relationship between these souvenirs and their original, "*the souvenir itself is something, but it's also a nothing, an empty vessel that points elsewhere, signifying a larger event that can't be consumed in an object*"

Activity: Swap Shop

During your visit to Kettle's Yard house and gallery, choose one object that you enjoy, that inspires you or that you feel familiar with. Take drawings of it; annotate them to help you remember aspects of the object – colour, texture, size, materials etc.

After your visit, explore the object further – what do you remember about it, can you research it? Think of way to replicate your object as a multiple. Will you try to make a faithful copy or focus on one aspect in order to give a feel of it? Think about how you can reproduce multiple times – can you photocopy it? Potato-print it? Make a template like a cookie cutter? Aim to make 5 copies.

When everyone has made their objects you can arrange them as a shop. Think about how you'll display them together. Will your stall be like an art gallery or a jumble sale? How do the replicas compare to the real objects? Do they give you a sense of what Kettle's Yard is? What's different?

Finally you can swap your replicas with others in the class so you all have 5 different objects.

Activity for younger audiences: Time Markers

Andy Holden uses plaster as a marker for the time spent on an activity, but you can see the evidence of time spent in many ways. For example, your drawings change the more time you spend on them.

During the visit, choose an object or exhibit to draw.

Give yourself 30 seconds to draw it.

On a separate piece of paper, spend 3 minutes drawing the object.

See the difference?

Did you notice more about the object when you drew for longer?

Personal Experience, Memory and Narrative



Pessimism of the Intellect, Optimism of the Will

“In general I employ a highly subjective approach as a methodology, using personal starting points to attempt to open up much more general questions, using myself and my subjectivity as a microcosm to attempt to approach something much bigger than myself.”³

It is not uncommon for creative individuals to draw on personal experience in order to inspire their work (be it a novel, a painting or a song). This doesn't mean that the work is only autobiographical however. Holden takes fragments of memories as a starting point but then this initial idea will develop and be added to with other influences and connections. Holden investigated one aspect of his personal history in *Pyramid Piece*, 2009, where he examined his motivations for stealing a rock fragment from the Giza pyramids as a child. He recreated the fragment in the form of a gigantic knitted sculpture and made a short film, showing him returning the fragment to the pyramid as an adult, displayed next to a collection of pyramid-shaped souvenirs purchased during his return trip.

Like a dream, disparate ideas are combined in unexpected ways, leading to the creation of new, sometimes funny, objects. Moving from the specific and the personal to the universal and the collective, Holden transforms his experiences into something that a broad audience can appreciate and enjoy.

Another particular trait of Holden's work is the way he combines high brow and popular culture. For example, he has taken inspiration from authors Gustave Flaubert and Virginia Woolf as well as referencing Peanuts cartoons and seaside amusement arcades. This even-handed approach to source material and the unexpected juxtapositions it creates adds greatly to the charm of the work. The resulting sculptures and paintings encourage the viewer to create narratives that will join these disparate ideas together.

³ <http://www.dontpaniconline.com/magazine/arts/andy-holden-art-now>

Collection Activity:

There are many ways in which your personal history can come through in your artwork. Taking a medium to large box (perhaps from your last pair of shoes), fill it full of items that reflect you as an individual. Add any objects, knick-knacks, photos or trinkets that describe something about you. Will there be music in there, or perhaps your favourite book or lines from a song or poem?

Wait a few days before you look at the box again. When you do, try and analyse the content with fresh eyes. What would someone else be able to tell about you from your selection? What elements would suggest the community you live in or the people you know?

Unpacking the box, make a pile of things that could *only* be in your box, and a pile of items that could also be in someone else's selection.

Activity for younger audiences:

Sometimes art is made out of very precious materials; gold, marble, richly coloured paints. These artworks often describe things that are very important to many people, like beauty, war and love.

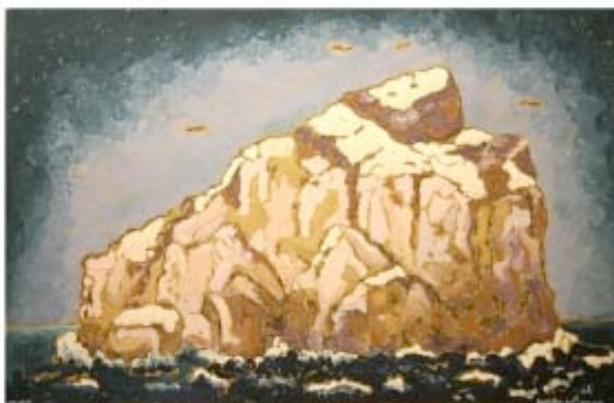
Andy Holden takes some everyday objects that are important to him and by remaking them, or displaying them in a gallery, he makes them very special objects.

Collect some of the objects you use everyday, like a plastic plate, comb, a drinks bottle, or a box of cereal. Play around with making these everyday objects look special. Maybe you could paint your object gold, cover it in glitter, make a big high box to put it on?

Display all the objects together on a shelf for special things.

Love of ideas

Andy Holden's world is encyclopedic and thoroughly referenced, drawing on sources from all facets of the world around him. Placing the same weighting on ancient philosophical texts as he does on song lyrics and cartoons, Holden combines art-forms, using whatever he needs to make sense of things and communicate.



Bastion of Empire (Caramel Coffee Creme), 2009

Bastion of Empire (Strawberry Cheesecake Cappuccino under a Mulberry Sky), 2009

In this series of paintings, *Bastion of Empire*, Holden paints the same image of the tiny island of Rockall, familiar to those who follow the shipping forecast. Located to the west of Scotland, this was the farthest land mass claimed by Britain during the Cold War and is quite literally the 'last bastion of the British Empire'. Repeating a scene over and over again using different colours brings to mind Claude Monet's study of haystacks in different lights and Paul Cézanne's series of paintings of Mont Sainte-Victoire. The gravity of Monet's and Cézanne's reputations contrasts with the edible descriptions of the colours, which take their names from Homebase paint charts and Starbucks products.

These paintings have previously been presented as part of a performance, where a group of individuals simultaneously read out different text about Rockall, considered from social, economic, and environmental perspectives. All of the references combine to make a potential stand-in for the island itself, as Holden discusses:

*"What I wanted was that if someone was telling you the Irish mythology explanation for the island – a Giant Throwing Stones into the sea – whilst someone else was explaining the biodiversity or the fishing rights of the island then perhaps the island will appear just as a thing...on the one hand you have the thing, and on the other hand all the possible ways of thinking about the thing"*⁴

Activity: 7 Degrees of Andy Holden

This activity requires an internet connection and plenty of curiosity.

Go to Andy Holden's website <http://www.andyholdenartist.com/>

Searching around find a reference that intrigues you, be that a venue, a person, a date or a title. Try googleing it to see what comes up. On that website, find another reference that intrigues you. Google that and so on.

After 7 different websites, see how far you've come from the original idea.

Compare with what others have found.

What did you discover along the way? Did you want to stop and follow another line of thought?

Plan an artwork that incorporates the original idea and the theme of the final webpage. How will you mesh the two together?

Activity for younger audiences: Chinese whispers

Sitting in a circle, one player is chosen to start the chain. They think of thing they liked about the Andy Holden exhibition - an object, a colour, a feeling etc. The first person then whispers it as quietly as possible to his or her neighbour. The neighbour then passes on the message to the next player to the best of his or her ability. The passing continues in this fashion until it reaches the player at the end of the line, who calls out the message he or she received.

See what comes out!

⁴ Exhibition catalogue

Andy Holden Glossary

This glossary of terms may help you navigate some of the artist's references.



Trapdoor

Trapdoor was a claymation-style animated kids TV series which ran during the 1980s. The plot centered around the daily lives of a group of monsters who lived in a castle.

Samuel Beckett

Samuel Beckett (1906 - 1989) was an Irish avant-garde writer, playwright, theatre director, and poet. His work offers a bleak, tragicomic outlook on human culture, and he is widely regarded as among the most influential writers of the 20th century.

Ursula Le Guin

Ursula Le Guin (born 1929) is an American author. She has written novels, poetry, children's books, essays, and short stories, notably in fantasy and science fiction. First published in the 1960s, her works explore Taoist, anarchist, ethnographic, feminist, psychological and sociological themes. Her short story, "The Author of the Arcacia Seeds" And Other Extracts from the Journal of the Association of Therolinguistics, is included in the exhibition catalogue.

Charlie Brown

Charlie Brown is the main character in the comic strip Peanuts by Charles M. Schulz which ran 1950 to 2000. Known as a lovable loser, he is a child possessed of endless determination and hope, but who is ultimately dominated by his insecurities.



Chewy Cosmos

There are two poles. Chewiness = 1 being solidity, Chewiness = 0 being liquidity. Both lead to the impossibility of chewing, although they seem to open onto possible universes of biting, sucking, drinking and licking – and the apocalyptic events of spitting and swallowing.

Ornithology

Ornithology is the branch of zoology that concerns the study of birds.

Gustave Flaubert

Gustave Flaubert (1821 – 1880) was a French writer who is counted among the greatest Western novelists. He is known especially for his first published novel, Madame Bovary (1857), and for his scrupulous devotion to his art and style.

Quotes

Holden has a long-standing relationship with Kettle's Yard, having visited regularly since he was a teenager. This exhibition allows him to reflect on his attachments to the place and particular works in the collection. As Holden discusses:

*"...my artistic development, in formative years, is tied to Kettle's Yard and the House, seeing shows that had a big impact. It's not just the place as a space, or the proximity of the gallery to the house, but triangulation of my relationship to both those things. The mixture of objects in the house, pebbles, paintings, furniture, sculpture in a domestic space clearly already had a connection to the way I put things together..."*⁵

Music is an important part of Holden's creative practice. He curated a festival of artists' music at Wysing Art Centre in 2010. A newspaper article about artists who are also musicians includes the following:

'When asked about where music ends and art begins, [Martin] Creed says "The word 'art' is a very difficult word to use. If I was going to use it, I'd use it for everyone who made things on their own, whether musicians or people working with visuals or writers or scientists. People trying to make things up, I suppose."

*But Holden believes there are differences between the two. "Art, I think, is more reflexive. I think it's more cognitive in a way. And I think music relies more on effect, it relies more on simultaneous feeling. The two operate in quite different modes but you can borrow, in the way art can borrow the mode of the written word, it can assimilate almost anything now. It can use the mode of music but still retain the fact that it is art."*⁶

Weblinks

<http://www.andyholdenartist.com/>

The artist's website, including film and sound clips.

<http://www.losttoysrecords.com>

Holden's record label and home to his band, The Grubby Mitts.

<http://channel.tate.org.uk/media/76364862001>

Brief film of Holden talking about Pyramid Piece at Tate Britain, 2010. Part of Tate Shot film series.

<http://www.dontpaniconline.com/magazine/arts/andy-holden-art-now>

Holden discussing his Art Now installation at Tate Britain.

<http://stitchandbitchlondon.wordpress.com/2010/02/26/pyramid-piece-at-tate-britain/>

Holden interviewed for a 'stitch and bitch' blog about Pyramid Piece. Offers some interesting insights into the process of creating the work.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/where-sound-meets-vision-2111165.html>

Artists who are also musicians. The article discusses Holden's festival at Wysing Art Centre in 2010, Be Glad For The Song Has No End.

⁵ exhibition catalogue

⁶ <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/where-sound-meets-vision-2111165.html>