

Press Release

Cornelia Parker

28 April – 21 June 2017

Frith Street Gallery, Golden Square & Soho Square

Cornelia Parker is one of Britain's most acclaimed contemporary artists. Her work transforms the ordinary into the extraordinary by combining visual and verbal allusions that trigger cultural metaphors and personal associations. This exhibition is taking place at both gallery spaces. Golden Square showcases a new series of videos filmed in New York City late last year, while Soho Square shows a number of other films and recent work.

In 2016 Parker was commissioned by the Metropolitan Museum of Art to create a site-specific installation for the museum's roof garden. The resulting work, *Transitional Object (PsychoBarn)* was made during the rancorous US presidential election. It was inspired by the paintings of Edward Hopper and by two emblems of American architecture—the classic red barn and the Bates family's sinister mansion from Alfred Hitchcock's 1960 film *Psycho*. *PsychoBarn* loomed on the city's skyline as a harbinger of things to come - signaling that all was not so well in the American psyche.

Parker visited New York at the end of October 2016 to give lectures about the *PsychoBarn* prior to its de-installation. Fittingly its closing date was Halloween, the old festival of All Saint's Eve, which has been famously elevated in the USA to a theatrical celebration far removed from its folkloric and religious origins. It was a just a few days until the election itself and she and her husband used their iPhones to film people dressed up on the streets. On show at Golden Square, the resulting video *American Gothic 2017* captures ghoulish revelers having their last hurrah, mingling with the crowds of the un-dead. On All Hallows night in Greenwich Village every American archetype, good and bad, seemed to be out promenading the sidewalks, from superheroes, vampires, clowns, ghouls, trolls, Freddie Krueger and Hannibal Lecter, Uncle Sam, Dorothy and the characters from *The Wizard of Oz*. In the East Village they came across a lone 'Donald Trump', the only reference to the never-ending twenty-four hour election news cycle. The scenes are captured in the revolving lights of police cars, and accompanied by a slowed-down location soundtrack.

Alongside the video installation are two blackboard drawings from a series entitled *News at Five, News at Ten 2017*. These were made with the collaboration of 5-10 year-old schoolchildren from Torriano School, London. They were asked to copy out news headlines collected from various UK and US newspapers. At that age, children have a barely formed view of the news and world affairs – they don't yet have a vote, but the political turmoil unfolding in their young lives will have a profound effect on their futures.

The space at Soho Square exhibits several small works including *Bullet Drawings (Crosshairs) 2017*. These are made from bullets melted down, drawn into lead wire and then sewn through paper creating modernist grids. Implicit in the bullet is a death, however when it is shot from a gun it usually goes in a straight line; here it can go around corners.

Juxtaposed with these pieces are two works made from confiscated firearms. *Sawn Up, Sawn Off Shotgun* 2015 is the result of an unlikely act of collaboration. The gun has been chopped into pieces, its barrel sawn off by the original criminal owners and sawn up by the police decommissioning it. *Precipitated Gun* 2015 is the powdered remains of another confiscated gun, this time rusted with acid leaving only a line of red dust.

Also on display is an embroidery sewn by prisoners. Two opposing dictionary definitions (Poison and Antidote) have been sewn as mirror writing on both sides of a piece of linen. The definitions are face-to-face within the fabric scrambling their meanings into a single image that is a little less easy to define.

Two videos are shown in the basement gallery. *Made in Bethlehem* 2012 is the result of an invitation to exhibit in the annual Palestinian *Jerusalem Show*. Parker's first visit to the city was just before Easter, when the shops were full of hand-made crowns of thorns ready for the imminent crowds of pilgrims. The artist (a lapsed catholic) tracked down the crown makers to a family-run workshop in Bethlehem. This video records a simple process that hasn't changed over the centuries, a perpetual chorography enacted since the Crucifixion. Muhammad Hussein Ba-our and his son meditate on life and politics while weaving thousands of barbed crowns, eerily reminiscent of the razor-wire coils that adorn every corner of the Promised Land.

War Machine 2015 charts the progress of two narrow coils of paper, one red and another green, through a highly mechanised process which transforms them into the millions of poppies worn to commemorate Armistice Day. The rhythmic soundtrack of pounding machinery accompanies their relentless motion. The traction unfolds the process, gradually revealing the stages of the poppies being made. There is no human presence; it feels like this is a machine you can't get off. The apparatus seemingly grinds to a halt for a two-minute silence recorded live at the Cenotaph, then starts up again to continue the seemingly never-ending task, fifteen hours a day, fifty weeks a year.

Cornelia Parker (b. 1956, Cheshire) has had numerous solo exhibitions including The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Whitworth, Manchester, The British Library, London, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, and Baltic, Gateshead. Parker's work is represented in many international collections including Tate, London, The Caixa Foundation, Barcelona/Madrid, The Museum of Modern Art, and The Met, New York. She was nominated for the Turner Prize in 1997, elected to the Royal Academy in 2009, awarded an OBE in 2010, and won Apollo Magazine Artist of the Year Award in 2016.

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