

Thames-Side Studios Gallery

Chris Thompson – *Instrument*
5-20 September 2020



Exhibition open Thursday – Sunday, 12-5pm, and by appointment.
Please note that face masks are mandatory in the gallery space.

The British Museum is a storehouse. Full of questionably acquired objects, its contents offer a window into the wider systems of ownership, wealth, transportation and consumptive structures embedded within their original eras and places. As an institution, its behaviour is also produced by those same structures. This is perhaps most evident in the gift shop, where one can buy plastic fridge magnet facsimiles of a Lewis Chessman knight for £3.50 (£3.15 for members).

In Season 9, episode 22 of *The Simpsons*, Homer Simpson becomes the Commissioner of Sanitation for the city of Springfield by making a lot of crazy promises, and with a little help from Bono. Homer devises an idealistic system that promises to fix and deal with every single spill, nasty banana peel and fashion disaster the townspeople can produce. Predictably Homer's *Odyssey* blows up in his face - literally. After spending all of the department's money, the trash refuses to be so easily managed and starts to spew out of every hole it can find.

These two institutions may be bound by a sense of custodial responsibility towards our produce (waste or artefacts) but there is a crucial difference to be observed in the outcomes. Homer's willfully absurdist system seems almost designed to expose the relationship between processing and the agency our crap has, but my knight is a far subtler, very unintentional cypher for its own environment.

Instrument is a show focused on the moments where systems of processing unwittingly generate their own criticisms. The latent irony of my magnet gives light to the cultural, economic and industrial paradigm of the moment, and its obsession with processing and reconstituting my heritage into plastic for tourist change, just as tyre bales are a capitalist market's solution to rubber waste, one unwittingly taking on a guise of a baroque monument to its excess.

In a cultural and materialist paradigm where everything past is fodder for irony and dress-up, and everything present is waiting its turn to be shredded, discarded or repurposed, a position to occupy seems to be to willfully occupy Homers framework- to generate conditions in which the agency of our collections, archives and clutter gain the capacity to unpick our deconstructive pathologies.

Crucially, our capacity to recognise our cyphers at all gives rise to how those pathologies inhabit us, and are perpetuated by us, as well.

D'oh!

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For more information visit www.christthompson.eu @christthomp1991