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## JAKE & DINOS CHAPMAN ON THE SUBJECT OF “HELL” AND THE INFLUENCE OF GOYA

**NICK HACKWORTH** Do you regard “Hell” as your most misread work?

**DINOS CHAPMAN** It's all misinterpreted.

**NH** I mean in that many people saw the work as a morally sharp artistic comment on war and genocide, just as some have of your various re-workings of the “Disasters of War”. What's your reaction to that interpretation?

**JAKE CHAPMAN** Culturally I think it's true to say that our work operates in that way...in a worse case scenario it confirms a sense of moral conscience. It's a very unfortunate default in a way. What one can say about the more romantic interpretations of the work is that they indicate how the work wasn't, on a really fundamentally simple level, looked at. If you want to know whether this work has anything to do with the past then look at the three headed mutants and ask yourself how many how many three headed mutants were there running around in 1945.

**DC** Yes, seeing “Hell” as a representation of the horrors of the Second World War is actually quite an impressively wilful misreading to make because there are so many parts of it you have to ignore. The interesting thing about making hell was making a sculpture that wouldn't allow you to ignore certain parts of it. It's too big. It's too involving...

**NH** So if people seriously looked at the work they...

**JC** ...wouldn't be able to make those interpretive judgements, because they're simply factually incorrect. There are Nazis being spat out of a volcano, an Adolph Hitler factory, mutants beyond description... That work was aimed at trying to gather up or present this notion of pathos via bad assumptions of historical interpretation and so the work collapsed under the weight of its own ridiculous audacity. I mean that the work is about audacity. It's about absolute, utter impoverishment.

**NH** How is it impoverished?

**JC** We used an inherently inert form of infantile representation, toy soldiers, to infect the grown-up subliminal self. We were interested in seeing the whole synthesis collapse into a black hole or volcano. I mean the materials are so fundamentally flawed. They're so pathetic that they can't amount to the sum total of the pathos that piece began to attract, which is really funny. But then it's the same with all of our work.



Jake and Dinos Chapman  
Hell  
1999-2000  
Glass-fibre, plastic and mixed media (Nine parts)  
Dimensions variable  
© the artist  
Photo: Stephen White  
Courtesy White Cube



**NH** You are amused when it attracts 'bad thinking'?

**DC** It's something, which seems... inevitable.

**JC** If you make a sculpture of 'evil', it has to have swastika on it. As much as if you make a painting of something happy, it has to have a smiley face on it. The representational semiotics in the work are so banal, they're so obvious.

**NH** But however tactical and deliberately warped your deployment of those signifiers might be, the fact is that they still, however opaquely, reference the Holocaust and thus it seems reasonable to read "Hell" as, at least partially a response to other cultural and social responses to horror and atrocity?

**JC** Well I'm not sure reasonable is an appropriate word to use in this context. I mean the work is excessive and we used overloaded detail to vulgarize metaphysical essence, to overshoot the threshold of poetics.

**NH** Presumably the scale, as with "Disasters of War", was quite specific in its intent?

**JC** We took a perverse pleasure in shrinking the scene and thereby denying death its proper proportion... When you scale things down it disinvests them of their presumed existential weight, it compresses their singularity into a mass. This rupture in scale is sadistic.

**DC** Yes, it took us two years to make several thousand figures, but in one concentration camp it took them three hours to kill 18,000 prisoners who were forced to run into a pit before being shot... Our work is 1/32 scale pathos.

**NH** So the work does have something do to with genocide and the Holocaust?

**JC** The logic and efficiency needed to indulge in racial genocide at the level of the concentration camp is indicative of an industrial process. Everyone who figures in the web of industrial relations is implicated that form of industrial murder implicates. It's part of our flow, our teleology.

**NH** What was your favourite part of "Hell"?

**DC** Well in one of the tunnels there's this one man all on his own who looks like he's going to escape, but the tunnel continues into another section and you look at the other half of the tunnel and there's a tank coming that's about to run him over. I like that bit.

**NH** Let's move away now from the immense three dimensional tableau of "Hell" to discuss the related content of your graphic works such as the etchings and drawings that make up "Los Caprichos" and "Disasters of War". Do you ever get bored of using Goya as source for your work?

**J/DC** No.

**NH** Do you think repetition intensifies the power your work draws from its use of Goya?

**DC** Yes, it intensifies all the related work that precedes it as well. But, I mean, ideally I'd like to do without subject matter all together.

**NH** That might be a bit difficult.

**DC** True. Perhaps the best we could do is to limit our subjects to two or three things that we constantly return to.

**NH** Your constant repetition of Goya's imagery serves several different purposes. In "Insult to Injury" one of those ends is an attack on authenticity and originality, his, yours' and everyone else's...

**JC** Yes, the first thing I think about when you say Goya is that within our own work there are so many Goya's. There's Robert Hughes' Goya, modernity's Goya, our own various and different interpretations ideas of Goya. So even our identity, which is dealt with in terms of history, and sort of venerates him as a very particular thing. We've pursued a Goya, which is an entity in difference articulated through repetition. With Goya the entity changes with every repetitious move.

**NH** So the repetition is an exemplification of the Deleuzian idea of difference?

**JC** Deleuze is really anti-identitarian, where all terms are infinitely changeable, and are always in flux as opposed to the model of classical philosophy that is based on the idea of keeping all terms that have a transcendent definition unchangeable. On a systemic level we form a crude macro-system by doubling the number of people making the work – but every time we try to discuss the art in non-identitarian terms and rather in terms of historical continuum and historical materialism, yet this falls on absolutely deaf ears in the art world, in which people aren't prepared to think in those terms. They're not prepared to think of art in any terms other than those that orbit the idea of genius.

**NH** But equally to say that it's meaningless to talk about human agency seems as crude as to see creativity as a gift from God...

**JC** Of course. In fact we try to allow the active forces in our ideas help generate the work, because it's as if they are metaphysically determined by things of a higher order to anything else. Which is to say that you recognize your relationship...that when something occurs to you, do you realise it's the occurring that's happening to you, or to put it another way, there's that great phrase 'language speaks man'. It's to do with a continuum of ideas are apparent, that are a part of your proximity to history, part of your proximity to material conditions.

**NH** And why did you want to do 'improve' Goya's other famous series of etchings, "Los Caprichos"?

**DC** Well, "Los Caprichos" are different to the "Disasters of War. They're very odd. The "Disasters of War" are quite humane by comparison, with an overt moral justification. These pictures are much more, or rather even more misanthropic. The titles say things like 'humanity, the fault is yours' and 'man lives to have the life sucked from him'. They articulate the dark side of modernity. They're dark and unredeemable and really, really offensive.

JC An absolute elaboration of evil.

DC And violence.

Jake Chapman was born in 1966 in Cheltenham, Olinos Chapman in 1962 in London. They live and work in London. They have exhibited extensively, including solo shows at Tate Britain (2007) Tate Liverpool (2006) Kunsthauus Bregenz (2005) and P51 Contemporary Art Center, New York (2000).

Nick Hackworth is a gallerist and writer. He founded Paradise Row, a London based contemporary art gallery in 2006. Previously he was an art critic writing for the Evening Standard in London. He is currently working on a monograph on Jake & Olinos Chapman.



Jake & Olinos Chapman  
*Insult to Injury*  
2003

Francisco de Goya 'Disasters of War'  
Portfolio of eighty etchings reworked and improved  
14 9/16 x 18 1/2 in. | 37 x 47 cm | [incl. frame]

© the artist  
Photo: Stephen White  
Courtesy White Cube



even  
my mum  
can  
make  
a book

