

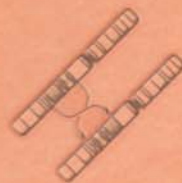


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THIS SUMMER ¥



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Jack Lavender

IN CONVERSATION WITH
MATTHEW DE PULFORD



Matthew de Pulford Your titles often refer to time, eternity and dreams, and your show at The Approach was called *Dreams Chunky*. Was ‘chunky’ a reference to something like a KitKat Chunky – a monumental version of something familiar?

Jack Lavender I’m reading Kurt Vonnegut’s *Timequake*, in which the universe has shrunk back to 1991. Consequently the characters in the book have to re-live the previous ten years of their lives, but without the ability to change anything – they’re on autopilot. I’m at the point in the book where the ten years is coming to an end and Vonnegut compares it to exiting from an escalator.

I relate this to something that happens when I’m driving: I have moments where I suddenly realise that I’ve been on autopilot and I have no memory of the previous ten minutes of the journey. I like that moment of sudden awakening. Where did that time go?

Dreams Chunky is actually the name of a knitting pattern. But it made me think of ambition or hope – dreaming big. That’s what it felt like for me when I’d just left college: I’d been in education for a long time, dreaming. I didn’t feel that I lacked direction but I felt really lethargic, stoned, like I had been on autopilot and had just awoken.

(M.d.P.) In the show there was a tension between an apparent lightness of touch and the positioning of weighty construction materials, such as re-bars and metal chain.

(J.L.) There are set norms to do with our physical expectations of objects, which are for me about the ‘end’ of an artwork. But in dreams things get reanimated. I can fly in my dreams. I never go high, but I’ll be walking, push up and then I’ll be in a tree. Art needs to push like that, needs to do a little more. There needs to be a tension between dreams and reality.

(M.d.P.) Do you think of the re-bar works in terms of painting?

(J.L.) When they’re finished, I do read them that way, but as I’m working on them I’m thinking sculpturally. I like the awkwardness of them projecting so far from the wall, and being a bit disjointed.

When they are photographed they get flattened and can be read like a painting but ‘in the flesh’ I want them to reach out – for you to feel like they are sharing your space. The Internet changes the way we look at art, it provides points of entry to sculptural work. You won’t see any scuffs on the wall in the background and the works become like graphic elements on paper (or like paintings).

I can sit with the re-bar works for months, moving things around on the grids. The objects I am moving might have been used for their colour but will later resonate with a certain idea.

(M.d.P.) You’re always finding ways of framing empty space. Your old work used glass a lot and the most recent work you’ve shown in LA uses double glazing units.

(J.L.) I’m making more of the units at the moment, but there’s less and less going into them. It connects to potion-making, I think, in some way, but also it’s playing with the idea of a picture as ‘a window to another world’ where you have to construct your own view and it reflects certain aspects of your own world back like a monolith to project your own beliefs upon.

Dreams Chunky 3, 2013, 221 x 138 x 30 cm previous page: Hannah, 2012, 130 x 80 x 24 cm Courtesy The Approach, London



(M.d.P.) When I first met you, you had a kind-of studio in your parents' cellar, which was rammed with different objects you had collected. These objects would often end up in your work. I wondered if the collections were a means to making art or an independent activity?

(J.L.) I've always collected things, stuff from the beach. My first collection started with family trips to castles around the UK, and I'd collect miniature military iron figures. I specifically remember thinking of that as a collection. As I got older, I collected Drum & Bass tape packs, alcopop bottles, posters from my local video shop. The posters were 10p each, and there came a time when every square inch of my wall and ceiling had a poster covering it, forming a grid. I stuck with the same format, and I'd get every poster, even for the films I didn't like. I think that there are certain things that I collect now where that's part of it, the extent to which you can disregard what something represents when you pick it up, thinking, "Ah, that's just a really nice colour," but without seeing what it's about. For me collecting was a visual way of recording ideas. But I didn't start for art-making reasons. I was just doing it because it was interesting – a way of exploring or gaining knowledge of something.

(M.d.P.) I find it curious that you use representations of fast food a lot – kebab shops, sausage on a string – but you are vegan.

(J.L.) I don't know if being a vegan figures when I'm looking at a sausage on a string, and it's not what's important when looking at my work. For me it's more about the way meaning is projected onto these objects. One of the hotdogs I've used recently, in a work called *Welcome into the Light*, personifies happiness. I look at it and I'm almost as happy as the hot dog, it's just so relaxing. On a bad day it can change my mood, I'm quite touched by it in some way. The fact that it's a plastic sausage is secondary, the humour drops away quite quickly. I have another hot dog with a face, which is a blissed-out face. I have a couple of sketchbooks full of pencil drawings of just the face. I wanted to take away the body so you don't know it's a hotdog anymore, its pure post-orgasm face, a lying on a beach face. It's not a sausage any more.

(M.d.P.) But I do think there seem to be a whole range of motifs which shout proudly about being trashy – hotdogs, donuts. And then you have the flipside – healthy stuff like fruit, which appears both in its 'real' form and in plastic. There are also plastic plants.

(J.L.) You can know something's bad but you still seek it out. Then you want to counterbalance it with something really good or healthy. It's hard to balance these fundamental things, fast food, and healthy food, getting drunk. There are things you strive for, things you want, and things you need. Above all, for me, I feel a need to be in nature. At the moment it seems I can't escape images of nature, especially in advertising. How does surrounding yourself with images of nature affect your mood? In my studio there are cheese plants, money plants, ivy and, in the middle of it all, a fake ivy. But when I'm working, it's hard to distinguish between the fake and the real even though I know one's fake. It's funny how the fake ivy is so convincing and such a mood-changer. I'm not sure if convincing is the right word though; the fake ivy can just put me at ease.



Dreams Chunky, installation view at The Approach, 2013 Courtesy The Approach, London





Walking Home 13, 2014 mixed media 180 x 90 cm *previous page*: Glistening Echoes of a Slow Walk Home, installation view at Mihai Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles Courtesy Mihai Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles



Walking Home 8, 2014 Glass, mixed media 180 x 90 cm *next page*: Glistening Echoes of a Slow Walk Home (detail) Courtesy Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles

(M.d.P.) In your work do these plants connect to ideas of eternity, living forever? They're totally disposable and obviously contain no nutrition, but paradoxically won't perish or change either. So it represents permanence and life without having life of its own, or physical life-giving properties.

(J.L.) With these plants there is no need to water or look after them. I know they're going to erode eventually but not in my lifetime – they're almost everlasting. And the thing is that the visual similarity can be enough for you to convince yourself that they are real. In the studio I convince myself on a daily basis that the fake ivy that I look up at is real. I like the idea of living forever! I would rather think about that than death but at the same time I know I'm going to die.

(M.d.P.) There seem to be a lot of these contradictions built into each piece. The juxtaposing of different elements calls to mind recipes or spells.

(J.L.) When I was younger I would make up potions but as I grew older I started thinking that it was stupid. But art does cast a spell on you, it is something that you have to believe in. I wonder how the idea of potion mixing applies to art making. If I mix fake ivy with real oranges, how does that work? Does that do anything? It helps the process. It's really pleasing to go along with an action, to let myself go, shake things-up; so it's an open-ended game that takes me somewhere else, somewhere unexpected, somewhere that I can't plan for.

(M.d.P.) You use a lot of low grade consumer items in your work, which seems to be about your personal relationship with a set of objects rather than an outright critique of consumerism.

(J.L.) All of the components in my work start-off as ideas and symbols for me before they become physical material, then they revert to being symbols when the work is finalised. Using them doesn't seem any more problematic than using paint. I don't want to critique the consumption of goods by using them, it's more about the effect they have on me. I use these objects because they are around me.

Wherever you are, you ingest your environment. I'm on my way home and what I find on the way, be it in a shop or on the street, strongly informs how I construct a work, what I will be thinking about and how I go about my day.

Hindsight is essential. There's an expectation for artists to know what they're doing and to be able to explain it all before they've even started. For me it takes time to be able to look back and understand my intention and, for now, I want to explore. I want to see where the things I find will lead me.

