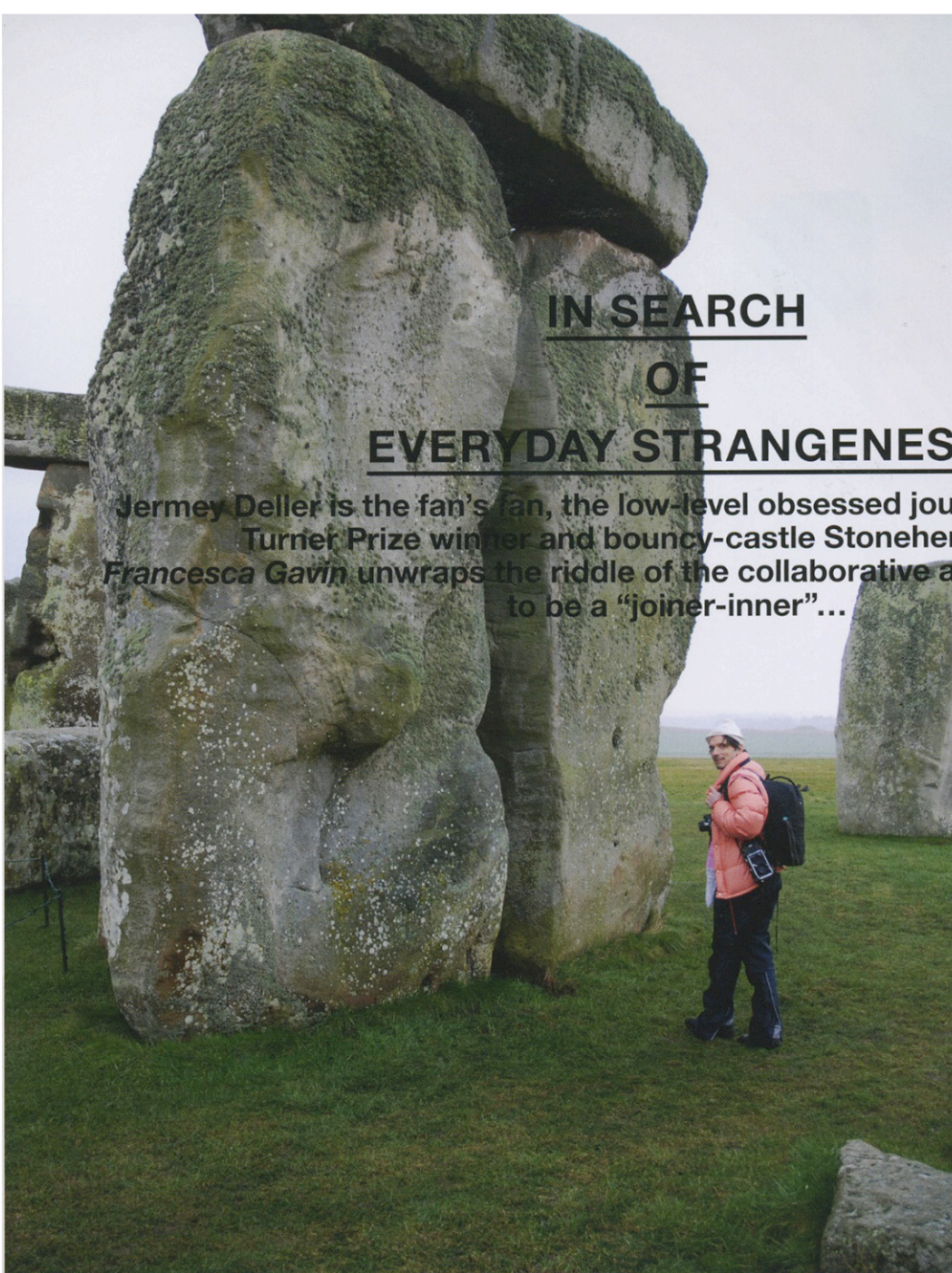


IN SEARCH OF EVERYDAY STRANGENESS

Jeremy Deller is the fan's fan, the low-level obsessed journeyman artist, the Turner Prize winner and bouncy-castle Stonehenge maker. Francesca Gavin unwraps the riddle of the collaborative artist who claims not to be a "joiner-inner"...



Left: Jeremy Deller at Stonehenge, Wiltshire, United Kingdom

ONLY THE MOST stony-faced observer could resist smiling at the work created by British artist Jeremy Deller. He has carved his own niche in the art world, outside of the gallery system, winning the 2004 Turner Prize in the process, and will next year represent Britain at the Venice Biennale. A hugely successful retrospective at the Hayward Gallery – which attracted over 80,000 viewers – proves how much he is loved by the British public for making innately accessible artwork that connects to audiences far beyond the art world.

Strands of Deller's work have included exploring left-field characters like artist Bruce Lacey, who is the subject of Deller's latest film, made in collaboration with Nick Abrahams

(like a psychedelic Larry David, Lacey is a personification of the naivety and sheer creative freedom Deller is drawn to), while other projects have included "Our Hobby Is Depeche Mode", a rarely shown film about the influence of the band and the fan ephemera and culture that emerged around them.

At other times Deller's work can be deeply political – his painstakingly researched 2001 Artangel project "The Battle of Orgreave" is one of the most direct and affecting pieces, examining the social fallout of Thatcher's Britain. Other political pieces include "Memory Bucket" (2003), a film about Texas that drew connections between the home of George W. Bush and the scene of the Waco siege. For the

2009 project "It Is What It Is", Deller toured America with the remnants of a car bomb attack from Iraq, along with an American soldier and an Iraqi civilian. Here the political was taken into people's hometowns – a daring attempt to insert politics into the personal realm.

Across Deller's work there's a real sense of freedom. He's a fan of fans, and of fandom itself – of the DIY passion and cultural history of outsiders, of contemporary folk artists. He seems simply to want to share his love and enthusiasm for his often-strange subjects.

As an individual he comes across as surprisingly friendly, and dryly funny, with none of the wrought clichés of the tortured artist, and instead is a smart man with a genuine interest

in the quirks of British life – such as builder's tea and toast with thickly-spread Marmite, which is what he ordered when he met Sleek at an old-fashioned cafe in north London, to talk over his career to date.

Sleek: You originally studied art history. What drove you to make the crossover into making art?

Jeremy Deller: I did art history at the Courtauld Institute and was taking photographs at the time, but I didn't know what to do with them. I realised I wasn't really cut out to be an art historian or work in a gallery. I'd balls it up somehow. I realised maybe I could be more creative. It took seven, maybe eight years to come to fruition, taking photos and hanging around the art world. Just a slow assimilation. I didn't do art at school – I had no opportunity to make art but I liked being around art. I didn't know in what capacity, so in the end it was clear I could do art historical things – which I still do.

Is there an art historical approach in pieces like "Our Hobby Is Depeche Mode" or "The Bruce Lacey Experience"?

Cultural historical, rather than art historical. I like doing things about other creative people. I like museums. With "The Folk Archive" we were making an archive like a

museum collection. With Bruce Lacey I felt he deserved to be looked at or reassessed. I liked the idea of another artist doing that.

How do you think that redefines what an artist is? It almost makes you invisible and instead you're pointing a big finger at others.

Artists can point at things can't they, show their interests? I show my interests. I'm in a position of power within the art world – I have power to do things like that. It's a position not many artists have in their lives.

A lot of the materials you've worked with are ephemeral – bumper stickers, posters, T-shirts. What do you like about working with materials that people have usually ignored? That really happened because when I first started making things I didn't have very much money. So you start making things on paper. I like the throwaway nature of it. I like that you could buy something for £2 and put it on a computer or on a car. I like the idea that it takes on its own life and it's cheap and disposable. All those pop art things, I suppose. It's not for galleries, that kind of thing – it would look weird in a gallery.

You're not really a gallery artist...

Including the show I did at Cabinet in 1996

I've done four commercial shows in galleries. Solo shows. In 16 years. Having said that, in October and November this year I'm doing a solo show at Art:Concept in Paris and Gavin Brown's Enterprise in New York. I don't really like doing shows in galleries. I'm not at my best. I do sell work but I don't enjoy the formality. At Gavin Brown's I'm showing a re-edit of the Bruce Lacey film.

That is one of the pieces you've made with filmmaker Nick Abrahams. What do you like about working with other people?

On one level it's just company. You usually get better results. I think it's why Gilbert & George produce so much work. With someone else it's just more productive, fruitful, fun. It sounds like a cliché, but you have someone to kick you up the arse. Someone else to do the driving if you're driving around Britain. It's another pair of hands. Most work is collaborative – apart from writing, which is one of the few non-collaborative art forms. Think about it. Making a film, theatre, anything, there's huge collaboration involved. It's not unusual to work with people. It's just unusual to credit them and the degree of engagement they have. I like working with people because I don't have talents that they have. We complement each other.

Your work also illustrates a real fascination with the process of research.

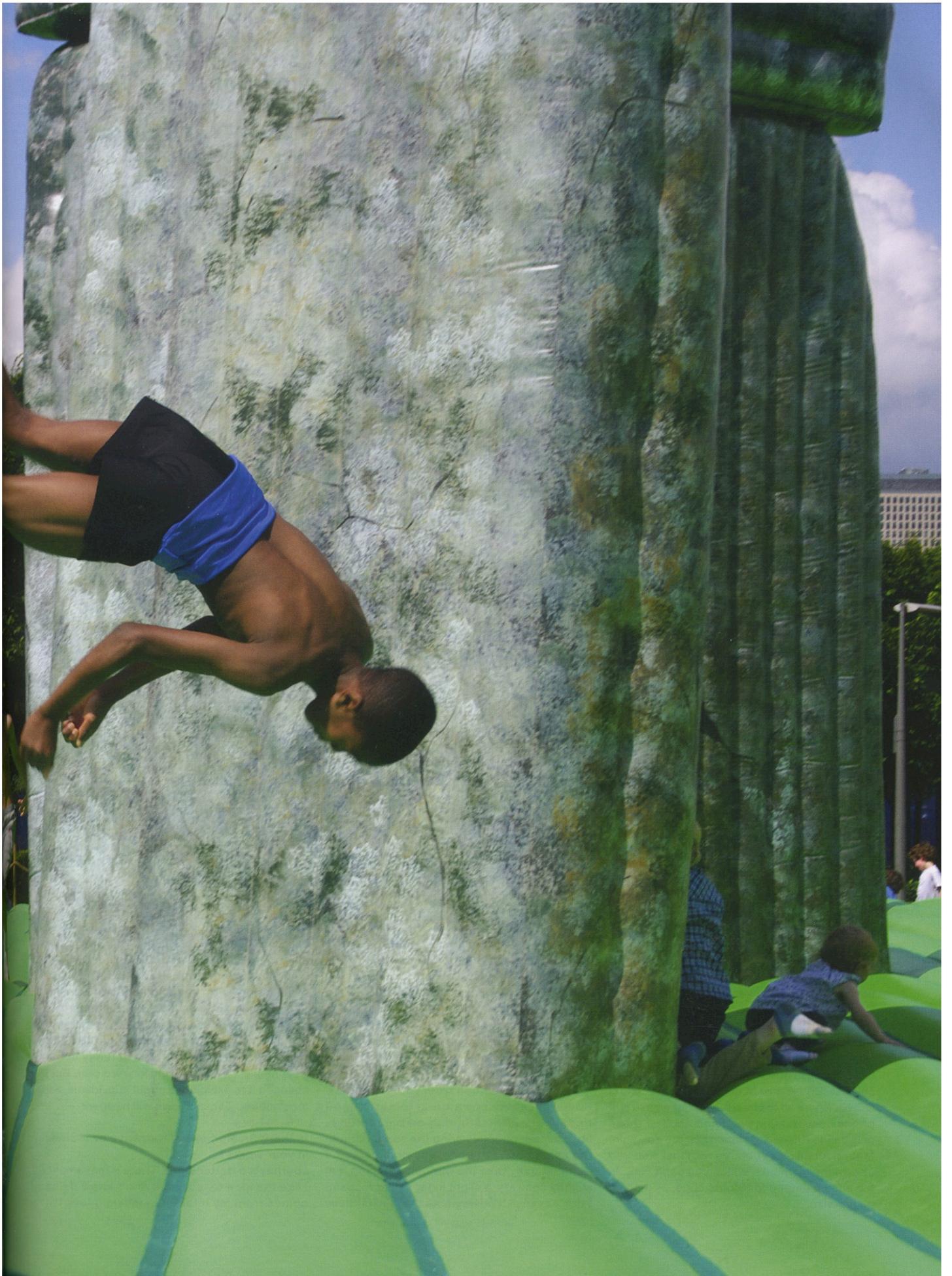
For "Orgreave", there were years of work before it happened and that was almost the best bit. You're discovering things every day. The process of discovery is exciting. Or work itself as a piece of ongoing research – I like that. Maybe it's because I squandered my school years. I worked hard but I didn't really work well and I should have been more ambitious as a student. That element of lost opportunities. It's called lifelong learning... I sound like an old age pensioner. I'm a nosy person. I like finding out about things.



This page and overleaf: JEREMY DELLER, *Sacrilege*, 2012. Inflatable structure, 30m diameter. Photo by Jeremy Deller © Jeremy Deller



Gavin, Francesca: 'In search of everyday strangeness', Sleek, 09/2012



Gavin, Francesca: 'In search of everyday strangeness', Sleek, 09/2012



“You don’t know what’s going to happen minute-to-minute when you do something in the public realm or with the public. It has none of the constraints of a gallery setting”

The Bruce Lacey Experience, 2012. Production still from a film by Jeremy Deller and Nick Abrahams about the artist, and musician Bruce Lacey. 1h12mins. Photo by Jeremy Deller. © Jeremy Deller/Nick Abrahams

What do you like about using such an accessible language in your work?

It’s much more like pop art. I’m not saying it is pop art but it’s like the way pop art addressed and used everyday imagery and events and was very recognisable. Working and playing with culture.

And you hung out with Warhol. How old were you when you met him?

I was 20 years old but I looked about 15. I was playing on that. At that age you do what you can. I was in New York for about two weeks at the Factory helping out. They had this TV programme and I helped on that. I was actually filmed for that but it was never shown because he died soon after that. I was there in September and he died in February...

Do you relate what you do to performance?

There’s a performative element but I’m not a performer myself. I like setting up situations, like the Stonehenge piece [“Sacrilege” for the London 2012 Festival]. A few years ago there was lots of money to do mega projects for the Olympics and I wanted to make bouncy structures of British buildings – one was Stonehenge; one was [British government intelligence centre] GCHQ, where all the interceptors of emails and phone conversations are, and another those golf-ball-like listening stations on the Yorkshire Moors. All these structures with these sacred or profane elements, which you can’t visit. In the end I plumped for Stonehenge, as it could be life-size.

Was it the biggest bouncy thing ever made?

It was one of them. It’s big and a very painless process. It took about 10 days to make. It’s all hand-painted by this artisan guy who paints these structures. It’s very mouldy with lichen and moss. Stonehenge is very green actually. It’s supposed to be stupid, and funny and wrong and silly – all those things. It’s meant to be ridiculous and funny and irresistible and not just for kids.

There’s a real physicality about it.

It’s hands-on. The problem with a lot of public art is you can’t touch or interact with it. I wanted a piece of public art that would appear or disappear. Did I really do that? Was it there?

There’s a political element there too, about access. How do you look at politics?

People often get disappointed that I’m not doing certain things, like I’m a political party. You’re meant to behave in a certain way. It’s really about what interests me about things or obsesses me, and then doing something about it. I’m like a journeyman with interests. I’m low-level obsessed, not neurotic.

Do you feel distanced from your subjects?

Sometimes. I’m not a great joiner-inner. I find it very difficult going on big marches and demos, people saying the same thing at the same time. I’m quite a cynical person. I automatically take the opposite opinion. I’m slightly contrary, a slight loner in that respect. I don’t even like talking about myself in these

terms even. I make art to become interested and engage in things.

It’s interesting, as a lot of your work is about other people coming together.

I’m quite happy for people to do things on my behalf. Or to do things they do anyway.

Why have you drawn on musical references?

It’s fertile ground. It’s very rich iconography. A love of music but also the culture of music, the look of music, what it says about society and the people making it.

How did you end up adapting the visual language of music posters to publicise imaginary exhibitions?

I did that in 1994 or 1995 as part of a silkscreen course at the London College of Printing, for more or less unemployed or bored housewives. I did all that work over six months. Originally I was going to do a whole series of posters relating music movements to great moments in art history – gothic, romanticism, modernism – and do all these fake posters for exhibitions about The Gothic, but it was actually about goth music. A very straightforward pun. But I changed it to exhibitions about individuals, not movements. Those shows will happen.

Is there an element of narrative or journey in your works?

Journey’s a better word. There’s movement. I like the idea of touring. I don’t know if that comes from my interest in music. I love the

idea of Stonehenge touring, this huge structure touring around. I love that. You don't know what's going to happen minute-to-minute when you do something in the public realm or with the public. It has none of the constraints of a gallery setting.

There's a real interest in the handmade in your work, such as banners or drawings. What do you like about looking at that approach in an age that is all about technology?

I think we're still attracted to things that are handmade. We still understand that. We still recognise value in it. If someone's handwritten a sign you're going to understand it more. I suppose it's the idea that there's a personality in the handmade that there isn't in something printed out in a factory.

Your early works of British Library toilet graffiti are a perfect example. When you work on projects, is there always a spark of inspiration? Well, there was for that project. I was literally sitting on the toilet reading this graffiti, which was the funniest, intellectually frustrated,

sexually frustrated graffiti. It was funny in the way most graffiti isn't. It doesn't really exist as much. Maybe people have other outlets to put ideas to the public. Or it's just not tolerated the way it was. People having arguments with each other, putting one over on each other. It was amazing. There were probably some quite famous or known academics at that time doing it. Just brilliant writing. I very simply documented it and transposed it.

Your approach to work seems to be to take the everyday and find the strangeness within it.

Yeah. The everyday can be very odd, very strange – and funny as well. I'm very much into recording daily life with these amazing things within it. A mixture of the everyday and the fantasy.

www.jeremydeller.org

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The Battle of Orgreave, 2001. Police officers pursuing miners through the village. Photo by Parisah Taghizadeh. © Jeremy Deller

