

## MAKING MORE STUFF



BY ANDREW HUNT

Andrew Hunt hosts a wonderful pub conversation with Scott King and Jeremy Deller on the subject of popular public art, with the pub acting as a friendly setting where ideas can develop with extreme ease and until they acquire a form of their own. A free-wheeling conversation on the gigantism of public projects, the ability to revitalise so-called cold spots with popular actions, and the power of collaboration with other artists to work out these ideas to the full.



Above and opposite – Jeremy Deller, Sacrilege, London, 2012. Courtesy: the artist

Top – Jeremy Deller, Sacrilege, Paris, 2012. Courtesy: Art:Concept, Paris. Photo: Rebecca Fanuele

**Andrew Hunt**

This get-together makes sense from my point of view because you're both interested in popular culture to a massive degree in your work, and I suppose what I've been interested in recently is the idea of public sculpture and public projects and public art.

**Scott King** I have to be honest: Andy read this question to me before. I prepared an answer earlier. A manifesto. It's about pub ideas.

**Jeremy Deller** Ideas born in the pub world, and then existing outside the pub. Because the pub world is very forgiving. Everything is fantastic there. Unlike the harsh, sober light of day.

**Andrew Hunt**

If you're on your own as an artist, sometimes you think an idea might be a bit too much, a bit too aggressive. But then you get down to the pub and start egging each other on, and you realise that it's not as harsh as you first thought.

**JD** That's why we often work with other people. Look at Gilbert and George or Fischli/Weiss. Their work is really funny, and they make, or made, a lot of it. I think it's partly about being with someone. You can't be too pompous.

**SK** And you have that second person's confidence.

**JD** Conversations lead you places you've never taken yourself, directions you can never predict. Unless you really do talk to yourself a lot.

**SK** When you generate any sort of collaborative creative work, you rely on the confidence of the second person... When I do stuff with Matt Worley—because Matt is an academic, a historian—if he thinks an idea is great and funny and worthy, in my mind that validates it. Because I always fear it's throwaway crap.

**JD** But also it's the competitiveness between the two people. Egging each other on. If I have an idea, Alan will try and outdo me, and I'll try and outdo him.

**SK** I've been very-forgive the term—*proactive* lately in doing collaborations, and doing stuff that doesn't fit in anywhere, and not waiting around any more for other people's approval.

**Andrew Hunt**

Can you talk a little bit about the *Tubular Bells* idea, Operation See Change's *Tubular Bell of Hope*?

**SK** *Tubular Bell of Hope* is a proposal for a 1200-foot-tall statue to be built over the City of London... a proposal to build the world's tallest-ever public artwork. *Tubular Bells* is a personal fetish for me. There's lots of layers to it. The sleeve is by Trevor Key, he both designed and photographed it. To me *Tubular Bells*... the music is horrendous, the *idea* of the music is horrendous. But the sleeve is one of the greatest sleeves of all time. As a kid you see it and say, "What the fuck is that?". It turns out it's based on a Magritte painting—*The Castle in the Pyrenees*—a picture of a castle floating above the sea. I genuinely love the *Tubular Bells* sleeve... I love that kind of "Woolworth's surrealism".

**Andrew Hunt**

What's interesting, I suppose, is the relationship between design, conceptual art and public art, and the idea of proposals for art that regenerate so-called "cultural cold spots" in the UK, which is a very patronising idea. I'd say you're both involved in a critical engagement with that. Jeremy, was *Sacrilege*, your version of Stonehenge that toured around the country, a critical idea? Was recalcitrant protest involved?

**JD** It was meant to be an absurdist thing, and I suppose it was a bit critical. It was one of those ideas that should have never been made. But everyone loved it. It was meant to be stupid and possibly some comment on heritage culture. Actually, I quite like heritage culture. I like British history and ancestry.

**Andrew Hunt**

When it came to Southend, I turned up midday with a new intern at our gallery. The number of people on it with their kids... it was just fantastic. There was a massive queue. It was really popular. The local council got it straight away. Purely because, I suppose, they've got a commitment to audience numbers.



**JD** They got thousands. That's a horribly bureaucratic way of looking at art, but it's one of the reasons we did it. I assumed it would be popular. I couldn't work out why it *wouldn't* be popular. Children went straight onto it.





"Jeremy Deller: Joy in People", exhibition views, Wiels, Brussels, 2012. Courtesy: Art:Concept, Paris. Photos: Filip Vanzieleghem

Opposite - "Jeremy Deller: Joy in People", exhibition views, Hayward Gallery, London, 2012. Courtesy: Art:Concept, Paris. Photos: Linda Nylind

**Andrew Hunt**

Maybe I'm putting words into your mouth, but the way I interpret it is that ancient monuments and contemporary art are usually things that you're not allowed to touch, whereas with *Sacrilege*, you can actually jump around on Stonehenge. It feels like you can smash up or hug a venerated place of worship.

**JD** It was a chance to enjoy an overly sacred space that we take very, very seriously. And also the absurdity of it being in a different place every day. It was touring Britain. This object that hasn't moved for 4000 years was on tour. You went on it?

**Andrew Hunt**

I did. Sophie, our intern, and I jumped around for half an hour with mums and dads and kids, and then came back to the office and did some serious work. A number of councillors were queuing up to advocate it. They loved it. But I suppose there's a tension in the actual message, or political statement. It's about saying that all of these public monuments should be open, and contemporary art should be as embraced as something like Stonehenge.

**SK** When you told me about the idea, I was a bit unsure what I thought about it. One of the first places I think it went to was Glasgow. And my mate said it was just the best thing ever because all these kids who had no interest in art, or didn't think they did, had a brilliant day. It was just a free, bouncy castle as far as they were concerned.

**JD** Something that you naturally go and touch rather than admire. It's not one of those things where you admire the genius of this artist or that artist.

**Andrew Hunt**

Jeremy, about the touring show, *Joy in People*, and your interest in buildings. You added a coffee bar.

**SK** That wasn't a coffee bar, was it?



**SK** That's an important difference.

**JD** It was a teashop.



**JD** Yes, definitely, it was a teashop. A structure within a market. It's in Philadelphia at the moment. They're serving tea in Philadelphia, as we speak. It's toured the world. I think it's like anything, like a pub or a café, architecturally not particularly interesting, but what happens inside is very interesting for me. When pubs close down, it's not really about the buildings, it's about the life that happens within them. You can't list that; it can't be protected. It's intangible, all those relationships.

**Andrew Hunt**

I've only seen it at the Hayward... it was about the way you navigated that space.

**JD** Yeah, we staged it. We call it a journey; it sounds a bit pretentious, but it was definitely a slightly manipulative walk through my career. You start in the bedroom and it's all nice and lovely and Pop Art and tea, lulling you into a false sense of security, and then you go to the miners' strike.

**Andrew Hunt**

What about the title, *Joy in People*?

**JD** I didn't like that title. I gave a talk and someone said to me "oh your work is about joy and people". And I was trying to think of a title for the show and I thought, "that's alright." It worked. It's a bit popular, populist. I'm going to call a show *Animal, Vegetable, Pop Music*.

**SK** That's terrible.

**JD** I love it and I'm going to stick by it.

**SK** I think *Joy in People* is good. I imagine it makes you cringe a bit, but it does illustrate the essence of what you do... of what you're perceived to do...

**Andrew Hunt**

Scott, I really want to ask you about your exhibition at Herald Street, *Finish the Work That You've Started*, which took place after Jeremy's Hayward show. You have this big series of proposals for public artworks—one of them is very similar to the *Tubular Bells* work, which was the idea of Anthony Gormley's *Angel of the North* on top of Nelson's Column.



Scott King, *Long Live Death*, 2012. Courtesy: Herald St, London

**SK** That to me looked like a kind of... It's 1947, Britain has been conquered by the Nazis, and they're putting up a monument to the Luftwaffe in London, and that is the monument.

**Andrew Hunt**

It's funny you should say that, because I remember Brian Sewell described *Angel of the North* as a Fascist monument.

**SK** It started off when we were asked by Hans Ulrich Obrist to do this programme for one of his marathon events and I tried to hijack that publication, really. We spent ages on that project. It was called *A Better Britain* and Matt and I together came up with ten or twelve proposals that would make a better Britain, all of which wouldn't make a better Britain at all, of course, they were wilfully terrible ideas. One of those ideas was to stick *Angel of the North* on top of Nelson's Column.

**JD** I like the rough photocopied nature of the print.

**SK** It was casual. It wasn't like some super-slick proposal. It was like an instantaneous cobbled together thing.

**Andrew Hunt**

That makes it more sinister as well.

**SK** You could imagine Marinetti and the Futurists thinking "this is good!".

**Andrew Hunt**

I remember you saying to me, around the time you made it, that giving this monument back to London is like a simultaneous tribute and rebuke to those people in the capital who make decisions about regeneration in the regions.

**SK** It was about the end of that, in a way. Of course, I'm a bit embarrassed about the Brian Sewell Fascism thing. I didn't want it to be judged purely as that, even though I gave it the title *Long Live Death*, which is an Italian Fascist slogan. I just thought it was quite profound, and I was very pleased... and Jeremy liked it, and



he said it looked like the future... and it did look like some Royal Shakespeare Company take on *Richard III*. It looked like some kind of future *imagining*, like *Fahrenheit 451*, or *1984*. It fitted perfectly into this genre of low-level sci-fi.

**JD** Dirty, British sci-fi.

**SK** Yeah, really, like a crappy British *Star Wars*. I was very proud of it.

**Andrew Hunt**

Can you tell me more about *Balloons for Britain*? It's this idea of "cold spots" again, or "low-engagement zones".

**SK** I devised *A Balloon For Britain* as the greatest insult that Cameron's government could pay to this country. I imagined myself to be a government think-tank that had been employed to regenerate these very poor, post-industrial cities—cities that were built on industry and then ruined by Thatcherism. So I came up with the idea of floating gigantic party balloons over these broken cities in order to cheer them up and encourage regeneration.

**Andrew Hunt**

Like Margate or Gateshead, where regeneration has been attempted by opening contemporary art galleries?

**SK** Yeah. I go to Margate, to Turner Contemporary, quite a bit, and I do generally think it's a good thing. It's not a great solution; it's a "Band-Aid solution"—as we say in think-tanks—it's a small solution to a big problem. It's a nice thing to do *really*, but it's a bourgeois, tourist idea—this beautiful little contemporary art museum has opened up... and all around it now are fancy coffee shops and vintage furniture shops... where once the shops were just boarded up, rundown.

Scott King. *A Balloon for Britain*. 2012.  
Courtesy: Herald St, London



**Andrew Hunt**

I don't want to sound like a tub-thumping Marxist, but it is a class thing. Somehow people think "Essex boy" and "Essex girl" when they think of Southend, for example, when there's actually a natural intelligence to the place. What's interesting is that we're building a new library and gallery at the moment, and it's a gallery with a library rather than a gallery with a café that serves expensive coffee. It's actually just a straightforward, utilitarian building with an art gallery in it. What we're hoping is that the library will bring people to the place, as it has done for the last 30 to 40 years, and the connection with the gallery will provide exciting new ways of capturing the imagination of the local working-class and middle-class communities with art, ideas and literature.

**SK** It's extremely noble and an extremely good thing if one can make good art with a genuinely populist appeal. Many of the things I do have a tragedy to them. I do too many jokes, but it's all underpinned by a genuine despair. That's the best explanation I can come up with.

**Andrew Hunt**

Let's talk more about public sculpture and gigantism. You proposed a 300-foot, gold-plated statue of Lee Brilleaux from Dr. Feelgood for the foreshore of Southend.

**SK** I genuinely loved Lee Brilleaux. I loved Dr. Feelgood because they were brilliant but rubbish. Their slogan—not theirs, but it was given to them—was “The greatest local band in the world.” They didn't fit into punk because Lee Brilleaux sang in an American accent: which was a great punk crime. You couldn't do that within punk, because then you were basically just an *entertainer*.

**Andrew Hunt**

Jeremy, your love of popular music is well documented with the Happy Mondays. I don't know if you want to say anything within the context of what Scott's been saying in terms of popular culture and popular music, and how this kind of English wrongness works in a productive way.

**JD** The Who were a bunch of losers and the Kinks were a bunch of losers. The Happy Mondays were a bunch of losers.

**SK** The greatest losers. Small-time criminal poets.



Scott King, *Tubular Bells 8*, 2011. Courtesy: Herald St, London

**Andrew Hunt**

You made a work about the family tree of the singer of the Happy Mondays, Shaun Ryder.

**JD** Scott and I did that together.

**SK** You did it; I designed it.

**JD** We did it together. We wanted to see if he was the real thing. Of course he was.

**SK** A really simple idea. As an artwork it's quite beautiful. It was like a test, I guess. His family were labourers and cotton mill workers for generation after generation. They got richer and richer from one generation to the next until—eventually—they had an inside toilet.

**JD** It was to show the lineage and the links between industrial culture and music.

**Andrew Hunt**

You've collaborated with Nick Abrahams. When did you first meet Nick?

**JD** In 1992 or 1993. I worked in a shop that became very fashionable and all kinds of people came in and out all the time. Super-famous people. But also people like Nick, by which I mean hustlers for culture, always up to something. Sometimes you need help when you make a film, so going back to the beginning of this chat, it's really good to work with someone else as a process. I met Bruce Lacey, this elderly artist, and I thought, he's 85, and someone has to make a film about this guy before he exits. Someone's got to document him properly as he lives, as he is as a person. I thought I could do it in two days. But as soon as you begin to make a film you realise how complicated it's going to be. We had to go back, find him in different situations, get more information from him, film him performing, film him not-performing, just being himself. It's not a film about his career, everything he's done, about him as a person.

**Andrew Hunt**

I had to write about the show *Better Books: Art, Anarchy and Apostasy* for *Art Monthly* recently. One of his sculptures included in the show has in its medium list “cobwebs.” Because it had been obviously in a garage or somewhere. There was also this metal figure, which used to have electrical parts that worked. It was like an archival remnant of what it used to be.



Scott King, Self Portrait as a Pie Chart on the Verge of Collapse, 2004. Courtesy: Herald St, London



**JD** He wanted those things to be in the show we did at Camden, but we didn't have the space. Have you ever seen him give a talk?

**Andrew Hunt**

I saw him give a talk around the *Better Books* show. It was amazing. He came on with a T-shirt containing a shamanic portrait of himself with a strange haircut, and a multicoloured fur coat. He had so much energy for someone who's 85. And he brought in a theremin from the 1960s that still worked.



**JD** He's an electrical engineer. A lot of the things he made still work, because he's quite skilful, very resourceful.



Bruce Lacey at Tate Stores, London, 2011. Photo: Jeremy Deller

Left - Jeremy Deller, *The Bruce Lacey Experience*, Norwich, 2011. Courtesy: the artist

**Andrew Hunt**

It comes across. I didn't realise he used to work with The Goons, Spike Milligan and Michael Bentine.

**JD** He's worked with everybody. He knew Terry Nation, the guy who invented Dr Who. It can't be proved, but it's rumored that Dr Who is based on Bruce, as he was working in TV at the time. The original Dr Who lived in a junkyard, Bruce's house was like a junkyard, and he's a mad-professor type.

**SK** He makes *Stuff* doesn't he?—I have a theory about *Stuff*—*Stuff* can transcend art and become "genuinely popular culture".

**Andrew Hunt**

What do you mean?

**SK** Well, Jeremy has made *Stuff*. *Acid Brass*, *The Battle of Orgreave*... even *Sacrilège*. *Stuff* is comparable to a great song, a great T-shirt, or a great film... it's an attempt at *genuinely* popular art. You do it too, Andy... your mail-outs, your side projects, they're very inclusive... they're often closer to *Stuff*.

**JD** Thanks Scott, we should have a civil partnership—not a gay one—a mates one.

**Andrew Hunt**

I like it. We should all make more *Stuff*.

Scott King, "The Trial Continues", exhibition view, Bortolami Gallery, New York, 2008. Courtesy: the artist and Bortolami Gallery, New York

