

Tim Noble and Sue Webster

Tim Noble (b. 1966 Stroud, UK) and Sue Webster (b. 1967 Leicester, UK) met in 1986 while studying Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University and have worked together for over seventeen years. The artists live and work in London.

The artist-duo create sculptural artworks that challenge the eye by fusing opposites. What appears to be a nightmarish pile-up of road kill turns out to be a self-portrait of shadows projected onto the gallery wall; scrap metal metamorphoses into copulating rats; a heap of trash transforms into silhouettes of 'Tim and Sue' having a drink and smoke, apparently content with the work they have made and in which they take star billing. The sculptures consist of the material, tangible rejects of modern society in combination with ethereal light – they become visible through the combination of two total contraries.

The concept of these shadow sculptures is applied in reverse to their light sculptures: constructions out of computer sequenced light-bulbs that reference iconic pop culture by creating images reminiscent of cliché kitsch tattoos and the tinsel-town arcadia of working-class sea-side Britain. The artists visually challenge the relationship between the spectacular, the serious, and the entertaining and echo concepts of perceptual psychology in their transformative art. What is considered low culture or a wasteful artifact reveals itself as an entirely different object against what the observer would expect and associate. Our social and economically conditioned information-processing short cuts, which we have learned to apply since childhood, become confused.

The play of shadow and light simultaneously recalls one of the oldest philosophical critiques: Plato's Cave Allegory: that it is the artist's responsibility to create objects that can transcend terrestrial life by giving us a glimpse of the metaphysical. Art can exceed the gloomy world in which we live and show us the beauty of what lies beyond – the magnificence of all those things that throw the lesser shadows onto the cave wall that make up our reality.

Notable is, of course, that Tim Noble and Sue Webster's 'originals' are the literal and metaphorical trash of contemporary culture, and nothing like the divine beauty Plato talks about. It should come as no surprise then that the artist duo cite music – in particular Punk – as one of their great influences when it comes to making their art. Noble: "I think anything that's a bit of a rocket up the arse, anything that kicks against the routine, against the mundane things that close down your mind, is a refreshing and good thing. Punk did that very successfully. It offered a direct and instant means of producing products or things."

The artists combine form and anti-form to bring about the unexpected, developing new modes of portraiture and abstract art. Webster: our art is "your worst nightmare of what art can be." However, there is a system behind the consistently confusing or contradictory aesthetic – between what Noble calls "consistently inconsistent": it is a means to critique what Tim Noble and Sue Webster consider the toxic influences of our contemporary consumer culture and its narcissistic obsessions. The two artists seem like successful alchemists: they metaphorically turn base metal into gold, thereby creating anti-monuments to our every-day reality.

“On one level, Noble and Webster's work is infused with the shock dynamic that has coursed through much of 20th century Modern Art - in recent times most obviously from Punk through to the YBA's et al. There's always a desire to throw the viewer off, to test the limits. This, I suspect, is basic to their personalities, but as one-time outsiders who have been accepted by the art world - to some degree - it's also a necessary reflex action to keep things fluid, interesting, unpredictable.” Savage, Jon, *Adventures in the Fifth Dimension, Nihilistic Optimistic*, BLAIN|SOUTHERN London, 2012.

In 2009, Tim Noble and Sue Webster were awarded Honorary Degrees of Doctor of Art at Nottingham Trent University in recognition of their contribution to contemporary British Art and their radical influence on younger generations of artists. In 2007, Tim Noble and Sue Webster were awarded the ARKEN Prize at Arken, Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen, and the show *Polymorphous Perverse* (Freud Museum, 2006) was nominated for the South Bank Prize.

Selected solo exhibitions include: *Sticks with Dicks and Slits*, Blain|Southern London, UK (2017); *The Folly Acres Cook Book Reading and Exhibition*, Other Criteria, New York, US (2015), London, UK (2014); *Tim Noble & Sue Webster, Blind Painting*, The Suzanne Geiss Company, New York, US (2014); *Portraits from the Bottom Up*, Other Criteria, London, UK (2013); *Nihilistic Optimistic*, Blain|Southern, London, UK (2012); *Turning the Seventh Corner*, Blain|Southern Berlin, DE (2011); *The Head of Isabella Blow*, National Portrait Gallery (solo room), London, UK (2010); *20 Modern Classics*, Triumph Gallery, Moscow, RU (2009); *Tim Noble & Sue Webster*, The Goss-Michael Foundation, Dallas, US (2008); *Polymorphous Perverse*, Deitch Projects, New York, US (2008); *Electric Fountain*, Rockefeller Plaza, New York, US (2008); *Polymorphous Perverse*, The Freud Museum, London, UK (2006); CAC, Malaga (2005); *Tim Noble & Sue Webster*, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, US (2004); *Tim Noble & Sue Webster*, P.S.1/MoMA, New York, US (2003); *Ghastly Arrangements*, Milton Keynes Gallery, Milton Keynes, UK (2002); *Masters of the Universe*, Deste Foundation, Athens, GR (2000); and *The New Barbarians*, The Chisenhale Gallery, London, UK (1999).

Group exhibitions include: *Group Show, 12 Solos*, Blain|Southern Berlin, DE (2016); *Pillow Talk*, Palm tree Gallery, London, UK (2016); *The Funnies*, MOT International, Brussels, Belgium, BE (2015); *Kunsten Festival Watou 2015*, Watou, Belgium, BE (2015); *NGORONGORO*, Lehderstrasse 34, Berlin, DE (2015), *The Nude in the XX & XXI Century*, S|2, Sotheby's, London, UK (2015); *The Face to Face: British Portrait Prints from the Clifford Chance art collection*, Sir John Soane's Museum, London, UK (2014); *Lexus Hybrid Art 2014*, VDNKH, Optika Pavilion, Moscow, RU (2014); *The Space Where I Am*, Blain|Southern, London, UK (2014); *Diacore presents Ron Arad's Last Train*, Ron Arad Studio, London, UK (2014); *Forever*, The Metropolitan Art Society, Beirut, LB (2014); *Paper*, SMAC Art Gallery, curated by Keith Coventry and Helen A Pritchard, Cape Town, SA (2014); *Isabella Blow: Fashion Galore!*, Somerset House, London, UK (2013); *Glasstress: White Light/White Heat*, Fashion Space Gallery, London, UK (2013); *Frida Kahlo: A Life in Art*, Arken Museum of Modern Art, Skovvej, DE (2013); *ArTricks*, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, IS (2013), *GLASSTRESS:White Light/White Heat*, collateral Event of 55th Venice Biennale, Venice, IT (2013), *The Art of Chess*, Saatchi, London, UK (2012); *Burning, Bright: A Short History of the Light Bulb*, The Pace Gallery, New York, US (2011); *Family Ties*, GALERIE THOMAS, Munich, DE (2011); *The Unconscious in Everyday Life*, Science Museum, London, UK (2010); *Rude Britannia—British Comic Art*, Tate Britain, London, UK (2010); *The Surreal House*, Barbican Art Gallery, London, UK (2010); *Distortion: 53rd Venice Biennale*, The Gervasuti Foundation, Venice, IT (2009); *Statuephilia: Contemporary sculptors at the British Museum*, The British Museum, London, UK (2008); and *Apocalypse—Beauty and Horror in Contemporary Art*, The Royal Academy, London, UK (2000).

Their work is in the permanent collections of the AISTHI Foundation, Beirut; Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide; Arken Museum of Modern Art, Copenhagen; Artis-François Pinault, France; The

British Museum, London; Dakis Joannou Collection, Athens; The Goss-Michael Collection, Dallas; Honart Museum, Tehran, Iran; Museum of Contemporary Art, Denver; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; National Portrait Gallery, London; The Olbricht Collection, Berlin; Project Space 176–The Zabłudowicz Collection, London; Saatchi Collection, London; Samsung Museum, Seoul, Korea; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

Available publications include *Nihilistic Optimistic*, published by Blain|Southern London on the occasion of the inaugural exhibition at Hanover Square of the same title October 2012 with an interview by Hans Ulrich Obrist, an essay by Jon Savage and foreword by Gustav Metzger; *Turning the Seventh Corner*, published by Blain|Southern, London, 2011, with texts by David Adjaye and James Putnam which comprehensively documents the conception and realisation of the artists' exhibition at Blain|Southern, Berlin, 2011; *British Rubbish*, an updated survey of the artists' work from 1996 to 2010 with an essay by Jeffrey Deitch, and new texts by Michael Bracewell and Nick Cave, published October 2011 by Rizzoli, New York; *Polymorphous Perverse*, a documentation of works exhibited at the Freud Museum, London, providing a fascinating insight into Freud's theories and how they relate to art practice with critical essays from the distinguished American art historian Linda Nochlin and James Putnam, published by Other Criteria, London, 2008; and *Wasted Youth*, a survey of the artists' work from 1996 to 2006 with essays by Jeffrey Deitch and Sir Norman Rosenthal, published by Rizzoli, New York in 2006.