

# Tinsel & Twinkle

## 'Affluence and Avarice'. When Mama met Dada

*"We will teach our twisted speech to the young believers"* **The Clash, 1977**

**ONCE UPON A TIME;** long, long ago in a Britain that time wishes it had forgotten, a significant majority of artists behaved in a manner that was informed by socialist and humanist values. But as the remnants of the YBAs and Thatcher's children, the 'me' generation, turn into cynical, self-absorbed middle aged ATMs and cash cows, it's refreshing to find work that is politically and emotionally engaged. No politics please; we're British.

The 'toxic' trinity of capital, celebrity and the media is now well established as the dominant culture. Young Farmers and YBAs united in Tory values.

*"I must create a system or be enslaved by another man's; I will not reason and compare: my business is to create"* **William Blake**

Tinsel and Twinkle are instinctive socialists. They believe in equality and collective action. Previously, much politically motivated work would have claimed it's authority by occupying the high moral ground whilst becoming – as one commentator put it – 'poor art for poor people'. It became didactic and rhetorical. A constipated mix of convention and dogma. This was also the hey-day of victim culture.

During the intervening forty years a lot has changed. Tinsel and Twinkle are aware of this rich and complex legacy and behave accordingly. Their work is affirmative and often political. Never didactic. They enjoy what they're doing. But more importantly; they believe in what they're doing – whether they're painting or making music. They strive for some sense of authenticity in an inauthentic world.

They choose to paint because it still offers them the opportunity to discourse and to 'play'. Play is an often belittled and misunderstood term that lends life value and meaning. Play makes life bearable. Play 1 – Work 0.

Their work is influenced by the spirit of Dada and the attitude of fin-de-cirque composers like Erik Satie. It was Satie who sold whistles in the foyer during performances of his operas so that the audience could express their disapproval. At its core, the work of Tinsel and Twinkle reflects the values espoused by the Guerrilla Girls of 1980s New York and the Riot Grrrl movement of the 1990s.

*"My karma ran over my dogma"* **Anon. San Francisco, 1960s**

The assertion that addressing issues surrounding identity, racism, misogyny

and poverty would make work somehow relevant no longer holds water. It's seen as posturing. Particularly problematic in this context is the work of Anselm Kiefer which has come to be regarded as monumental political kitsch. Utter bombast. Tinsel and Twinkle's work addresses both performance and painting with equal and parallel conviction. This is pursued with a healthy sense of the absurd. Hogarth would've approved. The fact that the 'hard-of-thinking' regard painting that is humorous as slight is a reflection of convention and prejudice. Tinsel and Twinkle's work illuminates the fragility of understanding. They're work spins a fine but sceptical thread. Scepticism is often wilfully misrepresented as cynicism. This is done in order to neutralise any doubt. It's 'No scepticism please; we're British'. Any expression of dissent is immediately labeled 'negative'. Caring is fast becoming a liability. Conversely, in this rather apolitical climate cynicism is seen as sophisticated. We should remind ourselves that sophistication is a form of decadence. Sophistication has become a euphemism for world weariness and a form of self defence. It's too easy and down right lazy.

*"The Shaggs, they're better than the Beatles – even today"* **Frank Zappa**

Let's play. Anyone who still regards play as something facile, childish and dissipated should think again. How often have you dreamt of going to shows with titles like *'We Kidnapped A Banker'*? It beats the mind numbing – Recent Paintings – hands down. What next? *'We Kidnapped A Banker And Posted His Body Parts Back To His Wife'*? I'm fairly confident that I'm not alone when I say that I'd love to see that show.

It's also worth mentioning that their approach is informed by their long-term friendship. In fact friendship and inter-dependance are central to their work. They've been 'playing' together since they were nine years-old. Playing in this context carries multiple meanings.

Within their cosmology Tinsel and Twinkle 'run' a bank. But the only currency that The Bank of Tinsel & Twinkle really trade in is hope, wrapped in gentle satire. Faith in a better future. Confidence that only they can make their lives richer and the world a slightly better place. Start small and think big. After all – this is it.

*"If I had to lay bets, my bet would be that everything is going to hell, but, you know, what else have we got except hope?"* **Richard Rorty in interview, 2003**

'Just go out and do it'. That was the rallying cry of the 70's punk movement. It's this sense of self reliance that's at the centre of their work. Don't take no for an answer and don't ask permission. Tinsel and Twinkle offer a different state of mind. Their best work offers hope. Not only do they collaborate as visual and performing artists; in 2012 Tinsel and another friend, Catherine Magnani founded 'A Side B Side Gallery'. Tinsel and Twinkle have shown there. It's the kind of gallery that offers emergent artists an opportunity to exhibit their work in London. Tinsel and Twinkle offer us social awareness instead of social autism.

*"There's no such thing as society"* **Margaret Thatcher, 1984**

Music has always been an important part of their partnership. In fact, to

described their collaboration as a partnership is selling it short. What they have is a longstanding friendship. They seem to know how to share. In 2000 Tinsel and Twinkle along with Sparkle and Lindsay Lights started Pushing Pussy Records. The name of the venture is self-explanatory; it's a record label that specialises in promoting music by women. They take their inspiration from acts like Hole, Courtney Love, The Slits, The Raincoats and to a lesser degree The Shaggs. There's a theme emerging – the double entendre. An established ingredient of British institutions like the Carry On films and Whitehall farces.

When it comes to performing; The Fairies Band can really cut it. The group which includes Sparkle and Tinky, at its height became an eight piece outfit that played with the urgency of punk but with the musicality and power chords, reminiscent of bands like Guns 'N' Roses and The Strokes. Their song Random Boys should've been adopted as a post-punk, feminist anthem. It's punk, but served in a mouth-watering Gillray inspired sauce, topped off with a twist of Austen. It's all beginning to sound rather English. The Fairy Band plays tunes like the memorable Pink Socks Rock (*'Fuck My Hole'*), a haunting little ballad about the lives of everyday screwing folk and their unbridled lust.

*"Just go out and do it"* **Anon, 1976**

Since the early 1990s the market has set the agenda for the public museums and galleries. Any discourse that doesn't involve celebrity is marginalised. It's probably worth mentioning at this point the toxic effect that all that dirty money, celebrity and the media have had upon the market. This has led to a return to the shiny, a-political wall furniture, which has always been popular with the nouveau riche. Liking things is rapidly becoming a lazy way of expressing one's prejudices and sensibility. A blatant reflection of a consumerist mentality. The constant and nagging desire to buy stuff – to shop. The media and the internet are constantly cajoling us to 'like this'. The only intelligent response to the ubiquitous internet thumbs up logo is a middle digit. As droves of middle-brow academics 'theorise desire and consumption' – the market thrives. These texts are both esoteric and politically benign. They acquire an almost symbolic status and – unsurprisingly – go largely unread and ignored. They're tokens. The critic George Steiner has described such texts as 'academic kabbalah'.

*"Oh bondage – up yours"* **Poly Styrene of X-Ray Spex, 1977**

Tinsel and Twinkle are the kind of people that take the past and the present personally. They're involved and care. Their work may appear immediate, but it's always studied; they respect the craft of painting and aspire to become 'better' painters. They strive to understand themselves and their practice. Their work combines a sense of injustice and anger with good humour and common decency. They've embraced empathy.

*"The bird a nest, the spider a web, man friendship"* **William Blake**

The idea that they could grant wishes is as absurd as it is brilliant. A blatant

suspension of the rational. An invitation to The Land of Far, Far Away for lunch with Shrek. The fact that they claim 'to make your wishes come true' is as generous as it is barmy. But isn't that what we all want to hear? All this when society is becoming increasingly fragmented and our democracies all over Europe are starting to crack. Fairies 1 – Politicians 0. Fairy culture or fairy-lore as it's described in *'The Burning of Bridget Cleary'* by Angela Bourke. A fascinating and remarkable book about misogyny and female emancipation in rural Ireland in the early 20th century. The author describes fairy-lore as a guide to good husbandry which is backed up with the threat of a grave punishment meted out by the fairies. Supernatural coercion.

*"The fairies break their dances  
And leave the printed lawn"* **A E Housman, 1922**

Imagine, you're on your way to work. It's an overcast, cash strapped Monday morning in London's New Cross. The rush hour traffic hurtles past inches away and 'The Fairies' are out and about granting wishes to unsuspecting passers-by. The Fairies are dressed in denim hot pants. They're toting magic wands and wearing faux-gossamer fairy wings. It sounds like rather like the synopsis for a new sitcom on Dave.

In the early 20th century things were different. Fairies were everywhere. As a child I was told that fairies lived 'at the bottom of the garden'. One garden in rural Cottingley is particularly relevant in this context. It was here that two teenage girls, Elsie Wright and Frances Griffiths took their now famous faked photographs of fairies. The paintings of the Victorian Richard Dadd are now synonymous with fairies. The authenticity of Tinsel and Twinkle's fairies isn't in doubt. They exist and they've been seen playing in the traffic on the A20.

*"Culture is an observance. Or at least it presupposes an observance"*  
**Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1949**

Tinsel and Twinkle don't shrink from moral issues. They know where they stand and if you hang around long enough – they'll let you know too. They're aware that the kind of work favoured by the market celebrates the gulf between rich and poor, the indifference of male dominated politics and the criminality of banks and multinationals. It's not all politics though; their recent paintings demonstrate an increasingly ambitious grasp of their practice and a restlessness that is symptomatic of their need to create.

They steer a very fine course between the vernacular idiom and a subtle sense of self mockery. Generosity and decency prevail. Hogarth would have approved. There's a genuine tenderness and a sense of celebration rather than the narcissism and sense of entitlement that has pervaded so much work recently. On four; one... two... three...

*"Oh, girls, they wanna have fu-un"* **Cindi Lauper, 1985**

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