

"Jeden Pies" or "Many Pies"

An interview conducted by Beata Nowacka with S Mark Gubb

B.N.: In your statement you wrote a lot about "pop" culture. As an artist, are you a subject or an object of "pop" culture?

M.G.: A subject, definitely! It's something that I've always grown up in and around, ever since my cousin introduced me to rock music when I was 8 years old. I was constantly listening to music from a very young age and watching television and films and radio and these kinds of things. So these are the subjects I draw on in my work. The things that I love, basically. So, I am definitely a subject of it. I am a devotee of this kind of stuff.

B.N.: You've also highlighted "low" culture as an area of your main interest. How does "low" culture relate to "pop-culture"?

M.G.: It's interesting being an artist and talking about low culture because a lot of art is immediately given a status of being high culture... just because it's art. By 'high' culture, I mean, things that we naturally assume to be high culture, which are theatre, classical music, art, these kinds of things ...And so, by low culture, I am talking about - for example - everyday television and films. What makes the distinction is it's the more everyday version of culture that I am interested in.

B.N.: And the relationship between "low" and "pop" culture?

M.G.: I think they are one and the same thing, because, pop culture or popular culture - by default - is what I am talking about when I am talking about low culture, which is engaged with by the masses, as opposed to high culture, which is engaged by, in comparison, a few...

B.N.: What fascinates you so much in culture? Your work is very firmly based on reality, not nature but reality. For you "reality" is culture, is that true?

M.G.: You know, I could try and make a grand statement about spirituality in my work, but this is not something I can claim to know anything about. As I said, it's drawn from what I know. It's what I've grown up in and around and I think that if you look back through this culture, lessons can be learned. Low culture is classed as TV programmes and horror films and things like that. When they first come out, when they are first released to an audience they are just seen as that, they are seen as TV programmes and films ...But, I think, there is a lot to be learned from re-examining popular culture and the role it plays. For example horror films for years, as you know, were just horror films. The directors took them seriously, they knew what they were saying when they were making them, but it is only really in recent times that they've been given the credibility they deserved. Do you know the George A Romero film, "The Night of The Living Dead"?...the Zombie film? It's saying a lot about a post-Vietnam America and things like that. When it was released people just watched it and it was a film about Zombies. But when you watch it now and you contextualize it within the social and political history of the time, it is very obvious that the director is making a comment about people returning from Vietnam. And so, it's on that level that my work's engaging. It's taking well known imagery and using them again to get people to (re)question what they are about.

B.N.: What do you think about culture? It has roots, origins...Culture carries experience. Isn't "this whole culture" artificial for you?

M.G.: That's an interesting point. It's not something that I've ever discussed before; about the nature of the source material that I use. We are all influenced by the culture that we've grown up in. We slowly become aware that what we've been told can be different to what the reality of the situation is. It is an interesting sort of thing to work with, within the

construct of the work I make. I made a piece recently called "An Important Moment in Hi(ck)story", as opposed to history. It was taking footage from the first Gulf War, a night time invasion of Baghdad, and I created a new soundtrack for it; for the explosions and the gunfire. The noises were made by the American comedian Bill Hicks, who - in the course of his comedy - would often make noises of that kind. At that time he was one of the most outspoken comedians against the first Gulf War and the corruption in the American government and things like that.

B.N.: You want to investigate young democracy, right? In what terms, then? Has anything surprised you?

M.G.: Well, I can not say anything has surprised me. I was told that the Polish, as a nation, are friendly, welcoming people and that's exactly my experience since I have been here. The Polish artists I've spoken to have the same kind of experience and outlook on the world as myself. There have been no surprises on that level...

B.N. You arrived in Cracow with a fixed project and then after two or three weeks you changed your mind completely, creating a completely new one. What was the reason for that?

M.G.: That has much to do with my own working method as anything. Coming here I had ideas about things I might like to do. When I arrived, it was a matter of 'I am here for this period of time and I want to make sure I've made some interesting work, so, let's push on with this idea I had before I got here.' As I always find when I get somewhere, the things I discover when I'm there are more interesting than the ideas I brought with me, and that's why this shift has come about. A lot of the research I've been doing is just wandering the streets and the conversations I have had with people. You know, the kind of research you can't do before you get

somewhere. It became more interesting to me to follow a different path in the work. So that's why this shift happened. After having spent two weeks here there were certain things that I have noticed about Cracow and Poland which were more interesting to me.

B.N.: ...like what...?

M.G.: Some of the things we've already been talking about ... Things like how beautiful Cracow is physically... with the old town, and the old square and all the surroundings ... Then the kind of unification that comes from democratization, which means that when you walk to the old square you're 50 meters away from McDonalds, which also has a big sign telling you that you are 50 meters away from McDonalds. One thing that really struck me was a conversation with an artist I had here, who is only a few years younger than myself. He told me a story about his mother queuing for sugar. You know, having grown up where I did, that's something I could never properly comprehend. I became interested in the kind of aspirations I had when I was growing up, in comparison to the aspirations that people of my generation had in Poland; how different they might be...

B.N.: Could you tell me something more about the project you are going to carry out in our gallery?

M.G.: There will be a couple of works in the space ... different elements drawn together to make a new thing. There will be a collection of signs, a collection of placards. The kind of things that people would take on a protest march. The way they are going to be set up in the space comes from a story that a friend in the UK told me. Her friend's father was a cultural attaché in Warsaw, I think it was back in the 70's. And she, as a young girl, went to visit her friend and her father and there was a protest

happening in Warsaw. She said people had signs, they had placards, but they were facing the wrong way. There was a courtyard where the protest was taking place and instead of the placards facing out, they were facing in...So, therefore they were allowed to do it and that's what really interest me; the idea of these things, of these protest signs, being positioned in such a way that you can't see them. Taking that, when you walk into the space, there will be these placards which will be facing the end wall ...

B.N.: Shouldn't we stop now..?

M.G.: But that's just the beginning...I also plan to include image, sound and....

B.N.: We want to have an audience in the gallery, do we not?

M.G.: ...(laugh)....

B.N.: What will be your strongest memories from Poland after you have left my country?

M.G.: Good ones...

B.N.: Any particular words or feelings?

M.G.: Well, yes, there is something special...maybe silly, but still very special. It is the word for dog in Polish - "pies". As you know, in English "pies" is plural for "pie" a kind of food that you eat. I like dogs a lot and I've noticed that the Planty is a popular area for walking dogs. I love coming to the gallery in the morning or leaving it late afternoon and the view of numerous "pies" being walked around...That's very pleasant and funny...

B.N.: Thank you very much...