

LAURA GASCOIGNE

BLESSED ARE THE ABANDONED

The artist Henry Krokatsis is drawn to disused objects that once had emotional significance and in which he still finds signs of transcendence

The driver of my cab is reluctant to leave me on Vyner Street after dark. Until I give him the address, he has never heard of it, although it's only 15 minutes from London's Liverpool Street Station. The contemporary art galleries springing up in disused warehouses on this rundown Hackney street have obviously not yet appeared on the London cabbies' radar. But here is where I find the latest exhibition by Henry Krokatsis.

Henry Krokatsis makes art from worthless objects – discarded mirrors, stripped-out leaded-glass windows, wood found in skips and unwanted hunting trophies found in junk shops – and “paints” with smoke from the butt ends of candles and burning rags. As a contemporary artist he's not unusual in using junk, but his junk has aspirations above its station. Past exhibition titles – “Angelcote” (2002), “Hard Pressed Heaven” (2003), “Pray for my Beautiful Lost Cause” (2005) – suggest a religious message. His present show, “See Better Daze” – at David Risley Gallery until 24 February – sounds less religious, although its content is possibly more so.

The title piece is a huge set of stag antlers mounted on a circular bronzed mirror. Their ivory colour is deceptive. They're not made of bone, but carefully moulded in wax from the stubs of 4,321 used votive candles collected from churches over the space of a year. A wick extending from each tine tempts us to believe that the accumulated hopes enshrined in the wax might be reignited. Another room contains another reclamation project: a large tripartite stained-glass window, *Leaded Light*, laboriously pieced into a complex interlacing pattern from stray bits of glass picked up near the artist's home in Harlesden. A third room hints at a higher order of conservation: the incorruptibility born of innocence. On a wooden pallet in one corner lies the limp, lifeless body of a fawn, cast in supple non-biodegradable black silicone; opposite hangs a smoky monochrome image of the incorruptible St Bernadette.

Small and unframed, it looks like the sort of icon that might have a candle burning be-

fore it, except that here the candle is incorporated in the image. The surface of the canvas is coated in wax and the image is formed by the smoke from burning votive candles. A similar technique has been used to create the other pictures hanging in the office: a nun, a skull, another St Bernadette and an extraordinarily atmospheric image of a field hospital from the American Civil War with a doctor bending over a wounded soldier in a shadowy, crypt-like tented space. The smoke, in this case, was from oily rags, a material perfectly suited to Krokatsis' purpose, which he describes as “an act of faith in the bankrupt”.

Krokatsis has an unusual religious background. As the child of a Greek Orthodox father and a Jewish mother he attended both synagogue and church – now he practises Taoist Ba Gua moving meditation. However doctrinally confusing his upbringing, it seems to have left him with spiritual antennae highly receptive to what he describes as the “low level hum of lyrical psychosis as it traverses the border between the divine and the destitute”. “See Better Daze” is an experiment in recording that hum and seeing if it will play back as a massed chorus. “Things like votive candles have so much emotional investment in them. If you put them together, will they be imbued with that spirit? Will they resonate?” Krokatsis likes to couch ideas as questions. “Icons are blessed by the priest, but this is a material that already has a heavy spiritual investment, yet it's throwaway.” So you're resurrecting it, I ask him? He laughs. “I'm beginning to sound very religious,” he says, a little nervously.

As a contemporary artist, Krokatsis has cause to be nervous. Coming from the same generation as Damien Hirst, he ought by rights to be making postmodern art that keeps an ironic distance from religion, whereas his work comes so close to the edge that it risks falling in. In contrast to Hirst's glib use of Christian symbols as readymade receptacles for shallow meaning, Krokatsis' imagery gropes in the dark. If it touches a spiritual nerve, it's almost by accident. Unlike Hirst, he is not versed in

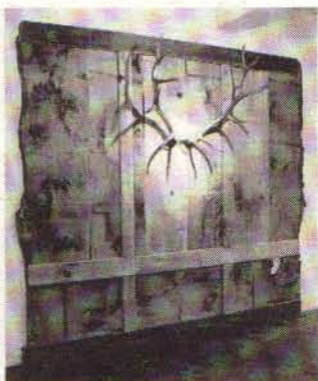


See Better Daze by Henry Krokatsis, 2008

Christian symbolism – he's only dimly aware of the stag as a symbol for Christ and has never heard of the vision of St Eustace. “The things that work for me are not things that have an overlaid narrative and a conclusion,” he says. “It's not a quality to do with logic – it's something else, a much more visceral idea.” He is drawn to objects with an “emotional investment”, whether sacred or secular – objects which have, as the saying goes, seen better days. In such things, “drained of status” and encountered by chance, he finds a special potential for transcendence. Chance is crucial to his artistic process, functioning as a form of divine guidance. His smoke paintings are made by placing a stencil between the canvas and the flame: out of a dozen attempts he may get one that works. “When it does and you take the stencil away, it's like you haven't made it; it has come from somewhere else.”

The idea of art “coming from somewhere else” is as old as magic, going back to the days when art and religion were one. It's odd to find it somehow still surviving in this newest outpost of contemporary art. But contemporary society, Krokatsis points out, is as obsessed as ever with the search for transcendence. The difference is that today we draw a line between those routes to transcendence our culture views as downward paths – for instance, drugs or gambling – and those sanctioned by religion. “What I'm interested in is finding images or objects that hover on that line.” Unlike other contemporary artists who hitch rides on religion, Krokatsis is pursuing his own line of enquiry. “When I start making these things I don't know what they're going to look like. I make art to find out things I didn't know before.”

Henry Krokatsis

@ David Risley
Gallery

Henry Krokatsis is an artist who deals with nostalgia and history. He appropriates found objects and reinstates them as items of aesthetic value.

A number of original 1950s mirrors hang in a grid pattern on the wall, like sections of a Mondrian canvas. They create a potent image, for the reflected viewer is cut up and reassembled in disconnected parts, rather like those in a Cubist painting. It is never possible to see the whole self. The subject can only be glimpsed in fragments or at oblique angles. A pair of stag antlers rescued from a junk shop is cast in aluminium and mounted on Georgian wood panelling – an iconic as well as ironic image that takes a trophy, once associated with privilege, and then displays it emptied of all those associations.

The thinking is a little arcane, but the one idea is, I think, to suggest that what was once organic is now inert, frozen in time like a photograph. Indeed, photography plays a significant role in the large drawings and two small works fashioned in wax. Using smoke from burnt rags, allows it to stain the surface of the paper, melting and imbedding itself into the wax. He creates ghostly, poetic evocations that seem to drift into view like photographs emerging from developing solution. Chance is an important factor and underlines the fluid and incidental nature of history. There's an image of Russian royals boating, a sedan chair carried by boys and a wounded figure from the American Civil War being tended by orderlies.

As a martial-arts expert, Krokatsis is interested in meditation. The use of smoke echoes the process whereby thoughts meander and logic is relinquished to something more organic. Meaning is not overt but implied. As he insists, "This is not art to make sense of the world – it is an act of faith, it is art as a spell."

Prices range from £1,300 to £10,000, excluding VAT.

Sue Hubbard

Henry Krokatsis

David Risley *East End*

Henry Krokatsis deals in the imaginary histories of people and places. Favouring fantasy over logic, he finds new contexts and purposes for found materials. Whereas previous investigations into memory and association have been characterised by architectural constructions, this time he plays junk-shop archivist with secondhand images.

Wandering into his show at David Risley's new gallery is a bit like passing through a stranger's reception room – it's decorated with the odd domestic item and what could be personal imagery. Attached to rubber-coated Georgian panelling, a large pair of silver

antlers takes pride of place on the back wall. Contrasting bar-room kitsch with fine-art pretension, Krokatsis transforms the grizzly trophy into a poetic memorial for 'lost causes'. This skewed gung-ho sensitivity underpins the show. Monochrome canvases depict fragile carbon deposits of shadowy figures; it might be possible to blow them off the canvases had they not been firmly fixed in wax grounds. Stripped down to a basic visual language of negative shapes, they become difficult to decipher. In 'Bearer', a line of statuesque women carrying pots could be slaves; a man in a peaked cap in 'Head' might be a war casualty. But for all the sober undercurrents these rather pretty works offer a more whimsical than didactic experience. *Rebecca Geldard*

Henry Krokatsis.

Angelcote.

Private view 29th November
6.00-8.00
Issey Miyake.
52-53 Conduit Street.
London W1.

Issey Miyake have invited the artist Henry Krokatsis to make a temporary exhibition in our flagship store on Conduit Street. For this show Krokatsis has made an Angelcote. This consists of a two storey, octagonal structure. Access is made through a small door on the ground floor, or alternatively through a similar door directly into the first floor space, six feet from the ground. The main structure of the piece is made from aged pine, reclaimed from a disused church. This is fitted together using traditional Japanese carpentry joints. The floor inside the Angelcote is a beautifully crafted parquet of wenge and quarter sawn oak, alternately limed and French polished.

Its skewed octagonal structure recalls the interiors from late medieval painting, the type of spaces in which annunciation scenes occurred in the paintings of Giotto, Piero, Massaccio etc.

Anglecote seems to question the definition of angels and their place within the imagination. Angelcote acts as a mediator between the seen and the unseen. It is a cipher which helps enable the immaterial become material. The sculpture becomes a place for quiet contemplation and escape within Issey Miyake.

Henry Krokatsis graduated from the Royal College of Art in 1990 and has recently had solo shows at Zwemmer Gallery, London and Nils Staerk Gallery, Copenhagen. In 2002 he has projects in Florence, San Jose and the London Art Fair, Islington.

For more details contact David Risley. 07855 994351
Or Sam Brown 020 78514620

NILS STÆRK

Henry Krokatsis
"Better Lies"
August 31 - October 27 2001

Combining make-do opportunism with highly-developed craft skill, Henry Krokatsis makes sculpture that is at once functional and subversive. Drawing upon the design of pornographers' darkrooms and ornithologists' hides, Arctic fishing shacks and the archetypal garden shed, he explores our physical, emotional and intellectual reactions to enclosed architectural space.

In the main room stands a slender oval hut made in part from salvaged local wood. Coated with latex rubber, it appears to be either sinking into or emerging from the asphalt floor. The effect of fusion is enhanced by the tone of the exterior, which lightens progressively towards the top. It could be a spontaneous emission of the surrounding architecture, or an *objet trouvée* conjoined with a new situation. The floor of the hut is constructed in Versailles Panel from Black Walnut, with Oak staves and a French-polished Wenge border. Warm, dark and luxurious, it is in direct contrast to our first impression of the whole. The hut's roof boasts a stained-glass window depicting an old-fashioned cottage. Also made from salvaged materials, this suggests both an affection for, and a suspicion of, the traditional domestic ideal.

In the smaller room, Krokatsis shows two small, quiet oil paintings, one of a waterfall, the other of a horse and cart. Like the hut, these images are familiar, yet sufficiently ambiguous to act as screens for the projection of mutable interpretations, 'better lies' that may prove more useful than the truth.

Michael Wilson
New York 2001



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Henry Krokatsis, *Good Hiding*

February 3rd - March 10th

Private View- Thursday, February 1st 6:00 - 9:00pm

In *Good Hiding*, Henry Krokatsis turns the archetypal garden shed literally and metaphorically inside-out. Painstakingly constructed from new and reclaimed wood, then wrapped in a reverse rubber skin bearing the imprint of its richly textured superstructure, this dark edifice dominates the elegant space of Zwemmer Gallery.

Good Hiding conflates the eccentric and the fetishistic, the good-natured hobbyist and the potentially dangerous obsessive. Krokatsis presents us with a familiar signifier of suburban banality glimpsed as if in fevered vision, its habitually concealed association with deviance made inescapably visible. That the work is not rectangular but oval in plan and boasts a parquet floor made to unusually exacting standard introduces further references, other moods. Krokatsis has drawn upon the design of pomographers' darkrooms and ornithologists' hides, arctic fishing shacks and the TARDIS to create a neo-gothic icon straight out of Unpleasantville.

Michael Wilson. 2001

David Risley. Director.
Zwemmer Gallery

For details and news on upcoming shows, please contact Zwemmer Gallery on the number given above.

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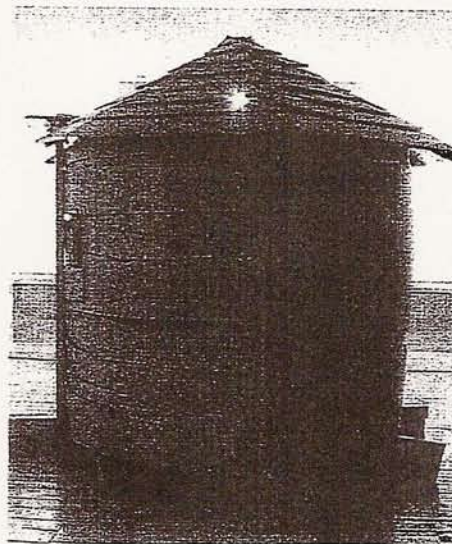
Reviews

Henry Krokatsis

Zwemmer West End

In the middle of the gallery a shelter has been lashed together. Off-cuts of Douglas fir, a material not known for its flexibility, have been steam treated so that they could be bent around the uprights. The resulting oval-shaped structure is like a tightly coiled spring; it looks as if it might explode at any moment and take the gallery with it. Because the lengths of timber aren't well aligned, the structure seems more desert island shack than suburban shed. Henry Krokatsis has indulged in detail, nonetheless. A hinged panel in the octagonal ceiling acts as a sunroof and a small, low door allows restricted access. Crouching down, you realise that a parquet floor has been laid inside. Made of quarter-sawn English oak (apparently, the best that money can buy), it's polished, honeyed tones contrast with the timber frame which, painted a muted buff colour, is covered with latex and looks calcified – dead.

It's a confounding sight. If one thinks of the covert, perhaps sinister activities



sometimes associated with the garden shed, it could seem tinged with a frisson of morbid obsession – a solitary lightbulb hints at clandestine activity. Yet this seems a benign structure, an ambiguous space ripe for projection and fantasy – a folly that is best left to work its own quiet magic. *Martin Coomer*

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