

*The Science of Imaginary Solutions*  
 (A series of objects forming an incomplete history  
 from the 8<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE to the present day)

*Anonymous, Charles Avery, Marcel Broodthaers, Steven Claydon, Alexandre da Cunha,  
 Matthew Darbyshire, Ruth Ewan, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Barry Flanagan, Lucio Fontana,  
 Andy Holden, Yayoi Kusama, George Henry Longly, Ella McCartney, Albert Renger-Patzsch  
 Katie Schwab and David Thorpe*

Unit 1, 249-251 Cambridge Heath Road, London E2 6JY  
 Private View: 9 June, 6 – 9 pm  
 10 June – 17 September (August by appointment only)  
 Wednesday – Saturday, 12 – 6pm | Or by appointment



Image: Steven Claydon, *Convolute*, 2012  
 Courtesy the artist and Sadie Coles HQ, London

Object led narratives are the backbone of museological display. We rely upon them for knowledge of a particular culture, place, or time and yet so much of what we know from archaeology and history is conjecture or best guess. The process turns upon a temporally and culturally specific participant filling in the details, evolving meaning and narrative to shape disparate objects into a coherent framework. *The Science of Imaginary Solutions* asserts the power of objects to tell us truths about human history, while celebrating the contingency of their meaning across changing epochs and contexts. The exhibition queries the foundation of knowledge in object led history, picking at the thin division between factual and fictional narratives by giving equal weight to historical artefacts and the work of modern and contemporary artists addressing related themes. Moving back and forth across cultures, places and periods over thousands of years, the exhibition presents a restless, shifting analysis of objects and their role in our understanding of humanity through material culture.

*The Science of Imaginary Solutions* takes its title from the work of absurdist playwright Alfred Jarry (1873 – 1907). 'Pataphysics, or 'the science of imaginary solutions', is a nonsensical philosophy, existing in the realm beyond metaphysics to examine imaginary phenomena. It exerted a significant influence upon the subsequent movements of Dada and Surrealism.

The exhibition's oldest object, a Neolithic stone basin and pestle, dates from the 8<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE, the dawn of technology, agricultural cultivation and permanent human settlement. It sits alongside the plough and wheel as a key technological development of its time.

A collection of Gallo-Roman, Anglo-Roman, Ostrogothic and Migration period brooches from the 1<sup>st</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> centuries AD are testament to the ongoing importance of jewellery and its role as a form of portable wealth. Jewellery is remarkable for the consistency of its value over significant passages of time, with its intrinsic beauty as relevant to its value at the point of origin as to the present era.

Stephen Thompson's *Antiquities of Britain*, a series of vintage albumen photographs produced in 1872, record objects and artefacts held in the collection of the British Museum. They include items from the Anglo-British, Anglo-Saxon, Byzantine, Gothic and Renaissance periods, many of which were found in the river Thames. As such, two historical moments are collapsed into each image: the date and period of the objects themselves, and that of the photographic prints, betraying the Victorian devotion to museum collections and museological classification.

Vintage gelatin silver prints by Albert Renger-Patzsch (1897 – 1966) belong to the German Neue Sachlichkeit or New Objectivity movement of the 1920s and reflect the photographer's central belief 'there must be an increase in the joy one takes in an object, and the photographer should be fully conscious of the splendid fidelity of reproduction made possible by his technique'. Like his contemporary Edward Weston (1886-1958), Renger-Patzsch maintained a search for the underlying essence and universality of objects.

Works dating from the 1960s, 70s and 80s represent the diversity of artistic positions in the post-war period and connect the legacies of Dada and Surrealism with Spazialismo, Conceptualism, New British Sculpture and concrete poetry. Lucio Fontana (1899 – 1968) was the leading proponent of Spazialismo, whose manifesto extolled closer relations between art and science. Elements of Yayoi Kusama's (b.1927) practise create a humorous, psychosexual narrative in the Surrealist tradition while referencing a superficial Pop Art allure. Following early connections with the Belgian Surrealists, Marcel Broodthaers (1924 – 1976) continued investigation into the limits of language and institutional critique. *Les Animaux de la Ferme (The Farm Animals)* (1974) extends this objective. Setting image and text in opposition, the work satirises taxonomic knowledge systems and parodies the modes used to communicate them. An artist who moved freely between an abstract, material-led practice and a figurative preoccupation with natural imagery, Barry Flanagan (1941 – 2009) contributed to discussions surrounding conceptualism, the emergent Land Art movement and more traditional modes of sculpture.

Dedicated to rigorous classicism, concrete poetry and language orientated conceptualism, Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925 – 2006) frequently carved stone panels with an elegant script. As a poet Finlay's work makes allusive connections with phonetically similar words. The classical tradition and the appropriation of classical sources informs the work of both George Henry Longly (b.1978) and Matthew Darbyshire (b.1977). Longly's *Doryphoros* (2015) takes the canonical and much copied work of the same name by Polykleitos (c.450 – 440 BCE) and recasts it as a metal armature with a fetishistic inclusion of three dimensionally rendered right hand and shin. *A Trophic Cascade in the Making* (2015) is part of the artist's ongoing series of wall-mounted marble panels combining classic sculptural materials with modern industrial processes. Darbyshire's *Bureau (tableau vivant)* (2016) appropriates the similarly canonical and much copied figure of the *Farnese Hercules* by Lysippos (4<sup>th</sup> century BCE). Exploring industrial prototyping and 3d digital printing, Darbyshire's ongoing *Bureau* series freely mix Greco-Roman sculptures and contemporary design classics using hand-cut layers of material. They form part of a larger practice examining the concept of taste and collecting as a form of institutional critique. Both Darbyshire and Longly develop new techniques of mimicry and formal evolution, copying and re-representing them as openly as the Romans copied Greek sculptures, changing scale and material at will.

The wider interests of Steven Claydon's (b.1969) work encapsulate the exhibition's conceptual engagement with objecthood, museology and cultural artefacts. Feeding upon a diverse catalogue of nineteenth century anthropologists and evolutionary theorists, Claydon produces hybrid objects which feel both entirely familiar and disconcertingly alien. *Convolute* (2012) presents a bi-cephalous bearded bust of ancient philosophers with weathered faces. Fabricated with a combination of resin casting and bamboo fungus, the work sits equivocally between ethnographic artefact, art work and geological specimen.

Comparably informed by theories emanating from the nineteenth century, David Thorpe's (b.1972) meticulously rendered objects are produced with traditional skills and materials, evoking a romantic, politicised vision of the dignified craftsman. *A Ripening* (2012) and *A Rude Body* (2012) resemble discrete sections of wattle and daub panel, made using oak, sand, clay, hair, dung, slake lime and rabbit skin glue. Caught between Victorian revivalism and future history, Thorpe's work exudes an atmosphere of nostalgia and a Ruskinian longing for artisanal practices.

Katie Schwab's (b.1985) practice considers the politics of and relationships between, craft and design, exploiting the potential of functional objects to explore the values, behaviours and politics of their owners, users or makers. For this exhibition the artist has produced a suite of new plates reworking the Barkcloth design from Nigel Henderson and Eduardo Paolozzi's *Hammer Prints* (1954-75). Schwab removes references to mechanics and modernity by embracing hand-made processes. *Wall Hanging* (2015) is a handwoven tapestry influenced by the bright colours and abstract shapes of the Bauhaus weavers.

Since 2005 Charles Avery (b.1973) has been dedicated to the mapping of Onomatopoeia, an immersive fictional realm peopled by The Islanders. Neither utopian nor dystopian, Onomatopoeia functions as a mirror of our own world in which philosophical propositions are amplified, expanded and, ultimately, tested. Avery presents two new works related to the Square Circle, a radical philosophical group in Onomatopoeia whose motif he describes as 'nonsense, in the exalted sense of the word'. The rational and nonsensical tension of Avery's sects mirror the central interest of the exhibition.

Ruth Ewan's (b.1980) expansive practise takes social history as its subject. Objects are ciphers of lived experience, often engaged with political and activist contexts. The mechanisms of historiography and orthodoxy of objecthood are redrafted, maintaining a living history and allowing historical continuity through the present and into the future.

Alexandre da Cunha (b.1969) likewise investigates materiality and display, describing his process as 'pointing' as opposed to 'making'. He directs attention to objects that are often overlooked in unexpected or contradictory combinations, reinterpreting the Duchampian readymade. Ambitious structures are formed from combined utilitarian and traditional sculptural methods, calling for new ways of looking and open ended interpretation, engaging ideas of Arte Povera and Fluxus.

Perception and the manipulation of physical properties forge the basis of Ella McCartney's (b.1985) approach. Taking light as her primary material, obsolete photographic processes are revived through the application of experimental and defunct scientific methods. McCartney's unique photogram combines a form of temporary collage with one of the earliest photographic processes, challenging our knowledge of familiar materials and giving way to a larger body of research focused on transformation over time.

Andy Holden's (b.1982) practise conflates cultural theory with an eclectic encyclopaedia of interests. Holden's amorphous, totemic sculpture *Felt touches only observed* (2016), shown for the first time, indicates 'thing-ness' at work in his approach at large, set against the conditions of art production. Despite its sculptural solidity, *Felt touches only observed* maintains a jaunty cartoonish character in line with Holden's ongoing research into the history of animation, recently realised in *Laws of Motion in a Cartoon Landscape*.

The e-catalogue with images and a full exhibition text will be available on the gallery's website shortly after the exhibition's opening. *The Science of Imaginary Solutions* is Breese Little's first exhibition at their new premises in Bethnal Green.