



POISON

OHS PROJECTS

Is art and intoxication inextricably linked? Look at the history of art and our obsession with intoxication goes back centuries. Artists have a long and complicated history with substances stretching into the present day; undeniably, most events in the art world are still instilled with alcohol, a bucket of beer or a glass of cheap champagne omnipresent. But this exhibition will delve deeper than the surface level, seeking to cast a critical yet deferential eye on the way in which intoxication has influenced the artists in this exhibition; whilst rejecting the stereotype surrounding the self-destructive artist.

The starting point for the exhibition was certainly a fascination with our relationship with alcohol, but this expanded into hedonism, excess and the self-destructive nature of humankind. We know alcohol is bad for us, but we continue to drink it; we know drugs are bad for us, but we continue to take them; we know smoking is bad for us, but we continue to do it. Humans have an innate tendency towards self-destruction. When you have meaning in your life you feel euphoric and intoxication is a short cut to this euphoria, in turn creating a substitute for meaning. So, the question is, are we using intoxication to create artificial meaning in our lives? Or does intoxication enable us to discover our true purpose?

Some works in the exhibition overtly reference drinking culture and the community that is built around the British pub. **George Richardson** encourages the audience to consider the quirks of humanity, how things are often not what they seem, and further still, the traces that people leave behind in their community. George investigates environments like the local pub and snooker table, taking a critical and nostalgic lens to contemporary English life. With a nostalgic, historical, and humorous perspective, **Katie Surridge**'s ceremonial drinking chalice *Jue* (2023) references British drinking culture, but in the form of an ancient Chinese vessel used to serve wine during ancestor-worship ceremonies. Whilst **Vanessa Garwood**'s *Tobina Jugs* reference the figures usually found in her paintings who consider the macabre incongruity of modern life, using satire to express the despair and compassion the artist feels for the light and dark all around us. These vessels can be seen as receptacles for alcohol, but they are also representations of how humans can be vessels for certain ideas: negativity, positivity, self-destruction and our innate hedonism.

Lee Johnson's painting *Busker* (2023) depicts the ecstasy of care-free drinking whilst *Midnight* (2023) considers a more personal, solitary experience of that sense of abandon. Whereas **James Cabaniuk**'s work uses personal and canonical histories to consider how we experience hedonism, whilst debunking myths of shame around the queer experience. During their MFA they transformed the men's toilets in their studios into the gay bar LIPS, hosting parties and installing a glory hole. However, the contorted faces of the two *Ritual City* sculptures by **Benjamin Orlow** reference the more negative impact of hedonism – seemingly influenced by the drunkard scenes of William Hogarth. *Gin Lane* (1751) by Hogarth depicts the results of such abuse in the eighteenth century and highlights many of its social consequences. Indeed, many of the artists exhibiting in POISON are concerned with how the consumption and impact of alcohol has been depicted throughout history, and the folklore that surrounds this. **Faye Rita Robinson** explores mythical representations of poisoned chalices in *shiver!* (2023) and *drenched with sleep* (2023), weaving dreams and lived

experiences with the collective imagination of medieval mysticism and folklore of the past.

Religious and mythological imagery undeniably influences the work of **Molly Martin** whose figures seem to be purging, but exactly what remains unclear; is it alcohol, sin or the devil? **Campbell McConnell** looks to the legend of sin eaters, who swallowed bread and beer during funeral ceremonies in the 18th and 19th century. It was believed that the sin eater would free the corpse from past offences, appropriating the punishment to themselves. **Charlie Chesterman**'s monumental painting *Dual Action* (2023) could be a sin-eater, but the artist was initially inspired by Monty Python's Mr. Creosote, who is served a vast amount of food and alcohol whilst vomiting repeatedly. A repulsively beautiful sketch which cautions the unbridled pursuit of pleasure. Chesterman explores the intricate relationship of human desires, shining a critical light on the themes of greed, hedonism, abstinence, and waste. The artist aims to provoke introspection, challenging the viewer to question their own impulses and the consequences of their actions.

Ross Taylor considers bad habits – his work being concerned with an emergent space; a swilling and churning dual sphere of production and consumption where all that enters is incessantly gnawed, singed and regurgitated. A topsoil, fizzy with habits and indecision, where practice and method become redundant and in their place the monstrous and all that is unidentifiable seep. A contemplation of how the subconscious can be unlocked is infused into **Jonny Green**'s practice, whose recent paintings reject reality, living in a liminal space of fantastical confusion. The monumental paintings and hypnagogic drawings of **Dale Adcock** draw upon the artists investigations of his own psychology and imagination, a daily practice of drawing allowing the artist to access his subconscious to draw out his understanding of life and human history.

However, Adcock's painting *Lumbar* (2018) deeply considers the aftermath of intoxication. In the artists words: *my mum.. broke her L3 Lumbar in that car accident, the police didn't press charges for drink driving, but the universes sentence of paraplegia was more severe... I imagined that broken bone, its architecture laid down millions of years ago, redrawn into a sculpture, turned, to balance on its round edge on a plinth like the closed wings of an early Renaissance diptych, the size of a sperm whale vertebrae.* This personal reflection on the influence of intoxication is reflected in **David Cooper**'s *Unconscious Drawing* sculptures, the artist states that *they are the figure; the body and state of mind... internal portraits, the shadow between skull and brain, a head hole, as self as self as.* A bodily cycle of the human experience. **Dominic Watson**, whose often satirical work employs humour as a tool to explore the feeling of existing in contemporary Britain, considers cycles in *Milk and Honey* (2023), which is in itself a de-constructed water fountain, the exposed piping and wires exposing reality – forcing us to consider the cycle of this bucket of cider, trapped between vomiting and consuming.

Art and intoxication must be inextricably linked since the creation of art is entwined with our human experience, and our self-destructive nature provokes us to engage with the euphoria of intoxication. What emerges from this for each of us is unique, but its impact on our personal and collective histories is undeniable.

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Open Friday -Saturday 1PM-5PM

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