

Jeremy Deller: Joy in People

CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM ST. LOUIS / FEBRUARY 1-APRIL 28, 2013

Over the past two decades, Jeremy Deller has created a remarkable and influential, yet largely intangible, body of work. Describing himself as a “self-taught conceptual artist,” he is an assembler of things and a “stager” of events, orchestrating, curating, and directing projects including films, processions, historical re-enactments, and exhibitions. Combining a flair for mischief-making with an engagement with current affairs, Deller’s work helps to expand our idea of art—of the roles it can play and the shapes it can take. Much of his work is collaborative and participatory, and many of his free-ranging, open-ended projects are explorations of a kind of folk or vernacular culture, or alternative ways of life.

Born in London in 1966, Jeremy Deller studied art history at the Courtauld Institute and at Sussex University. After meeting Andy Warhol in 1986 he spent two weeks at the Factory in New York. He began creating artworks in the late 1980s, often making fleeting and subversive interventions in everyday situations. In 2004 he was awarded the Turner Prize, dedicating it to “everyone who cycles in London, everyone who looks after wildlife and bats, the Quaker movement, and everyone I’ve worked with.” Since then, he has continued making collaborative and participatory works. Among other projects, he has commissioned the building of a bat house in London, organized urban parades, and traveled on a cross-country journey across America—along with an Iraqi citizen and an U.S. war veteran—with a bomb-destroyed car from Baghdad.

Though Deller is fascinated by life’s contradictions and absurdities, the real impetus for his work is his interest in people and their relationships to each other. Believing that “art isn’t about what you make but what you make happen,” much of what he creates is ephemeral and short-lived, and is intended to be experienced in the public realm—beyond the confines of conventional galleries. *Joy in People* reconvenes a wide variety of his collaborative projects, documentaries, and seldom-seen examples of his early practice as well as major new works and interventions. Above all, this presentation reflects the curiosity and engagement that lie at the heart of all his endeavors.



Jeremy Deller, *Joy in People*, 2011. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Linda Nyliind. © Jeremy Deller

 **Audio Tour:** Download the CAM app at camstl.org/app or ask for an iPod at the front desk to hear directly from the artist and curators on the audio tour.



Jeremy Deller, *Open Bedroom*, 1993. Installation view, Hayward Gallery, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre. Photo: Mark Blower

Open Bedroom, 1993/2012 🎧

Entering *Joy in People*, visitors walk straight into a re-creation of an exhibition held nearly twenty years ago. Deller's 1993 show *Open Bedroom* was staged in his childhood home while his unsuspecting parents were away. It took place at a time when other artists were having "open studio" exhibitions, but Deller, who was still living with his parents in his mid-20s, had no studio and used his bedroom as a workroom. The original exhibition was, he says, "an act of opportunism." It was seen by about twenty people: "I displayed some paintings I'd made about the life of Keith Moon, the drummer of The Who. And I also displayed some photographs, pieces of paper, graffiti, t-shirts; small things, basically, that were cheap and easy to make." In the end, the show took over most of the house.

My Booze Hell, My Drug Shame, 1993

The t-shirts emblazoned with the tabloid headlines "MY BOOZE HELL" and "MY DRUG SHAME" worn by CAM's Visitor Services Associates were originally sold at a Covent Garden shop where Deller worked part-time. The fragments of text, which Deller describes as looking like parts of the Dead Sea Scrolls, are scraps of gossip about celebrities. He explains that they "come from first- or second-hand accounts. . . . Some of the stories are so libellous that you could never print the whole text."

Beyond the White Walls, 2012

Beyond the White Walls is a slideshow with a spoken commentary documenting projects and artworks that Deller has made in the public domain, including places like nightclubs, student common rooms, and gardens. Because the projects themselves could not be shown as physical entities, for this exhibition Deller has produced the sort of presentation that he might give as a public talk.

The Search for Bez, 1994

Deller has always had a special affection for Manchester and its music scene. In 1994, a year after the "Madchester" band Happy Mondays split up, he made a pilgrimage there in search of Bez, the band's charismatic dancer, who had disappeared. Deller didn't find Bez, but made a film about his quest and documented the project with this installation.

I ♥ Melancholy, 1993

Deller explains that this work was a reaction against 1990s machismo: "I wanted to celebrate something that wasn't active, dangerous, or 'manly,' something that is actually introverted, non-active, and potentially depressing." From time to time, this black-on-black wall painting features a human component, a person quietly reading or engaged in a "non-electronic" solitary activity as a part of the work.

American Travels, 2001-2003

A number of Deller's projects have involved explorations of America. On September 11, 2001, he embarked on a twelve-month residency in Oakland, California. Using his honorarium to buy a beat-up Jeep (with a bullet-hole in the driver's door), he set out to create a guidebook to California, which he titled *After the Gold Rush* (after folk-rock icon Neil Young's classic 1970 album). His aim was "to go out and discover things about the state and in some small way test the level of the culture." One of the most bizarre things he came across was a veterans' parade held shortly after September 11th. Eighteen months later, in Red Hook in upstate New York, he made a photographic portrait of the town as part of a project about local musicians and musical tastes.

Valerie's Snack Bar, 2009 🎧

For Deller, processions reveal much about the society they spring from. In 2009, working in collaboration with local groups and subcultures, he created a procession for Manchester's International Festival. He wanted it to be "a little like living in Britain; annoying, funny, and a bit of a mess," and coined the term "social surrealism" to express its embodiment of the strangeness of everyday life. One of the floats presented a life-size reconstruction of Valerie's Snack Bar from Bury Market, which is redisplayed here, together with some of the original processional banners designed by Ed Hall (and one by David Hockney). Visitors can enjoy a cup of tea while watching a video of the event, which included young people identified with goth and emo rock music, unrepentant smokers, car modifiers, sellers of the British magazine *Big Issue* (a publication sold by the homeless, similar to St. Louis's *Whats Up* magazine), and a Hindu bagpipe band—as well as a celebration of the town of Oldham's claim to be the birthplace of the first fish-and-chip shop and a funeral cortège honoring Manchester's deceased but still much-loved social spaces.



Jeremy Deller, *Valerie's Snack Bar*, 2009. Installation view, Hayward Gallery, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre. Photo: Mark Blower

The Uses of Literacy, 1997

The Uses of Literacy was one of Deller's earliest curatorial projects. Described by a reviewer as "a poetic visual record of the screams, sighs, and whispers of some remarkable young people," it was a collaboration between the artist and fans of the Welsh rock group Manic Street Preachers. Deller admired the band's allegiance to art, literature, and philosophy at a time when most British music was determinedly anti-intellectual. Suspecting that the group's followers would have similar interests, he invited fans to make drawings, paintings, poetry, and prose for an exhibition. As well as voicing personal thoughts and feelings, their contributions—which included actual books that the band referred to by authors such as Italian chemist, writer, and Holocaust survivor Primo Levi; nineteenth-century French poet Arthur Rimbaud; and English writer Aldous Huxley—revealed the extent to which the Manic Street Preachers had served as an alternative educational resource. The project's title is taken from British scholar Richard Hoggart's 1957 book that provides insights into working-class life and culture from an insider's point of view.



Jeremy Deller, *History of the World, 1997*. Installation view, Hayward Gallery, 2012. Courtesy the artist and Hayward Gallery, Southbank Centre. Photo: Linda Nylind

The History of the World and Acid Brass, both 1997 🗣️

The History of the World shows the lateral thinking behind Deller's musical project, *Acid Brass*, in which a traditional brass band plays acid house anthems. The diagram reveals unexpected social, political, and musical connections between these two apparently very different cultures, and charts the way in which Britain has changed from being an industrial to a post-industrial society. A film of *Acid Brass* is one of four of Deller's music videos shown in the video program in CAM's cafe.

So Many Ways to Hurt You (The Life and Times of Adrian Street), 2010 🗣️

This investigation into the life and times of the wrestler "Exotic" Adrian Street was prompted by a photograph taken at the top of a mine shaft in Wales in 1973 depicting a middle-aged coalminer (Street's father) with the much younger Street dressed in extravagant glam-rock, semi-drag fashion. Deller sees the image as encapsulating "the whole history of Britain in that period—of our uneasy transition from being a center of heavy industry to a producer of entertainment and services." The personal story behind it tells of a young man whose dream was to escape life in the mines and become a professional wrestler. Deller reports that, today, "Adrian is still very much alive and still wrestling in Florida, where he has settled. His story has a Dickensian, epic quality to it, as he reinvented himself for the late twentieth century."

My Failures, 2004–2011

This section documents a number of projects that Deller wanted to complete but was not able to pursue. His proposals for the Fourth Plinth in Trafalgar Square—an empty public pedestal in central London used for changing displays of artworks—featured different victims of the war in Iraq: an exploded car and a figure of the British scientist David Kelly, who was accused of sharing his doubts regarding the government's notorious dossier on weapons of mass destruction with journalists and, under immense pressure from the media, subsequently took his own life. *Mission Accomplished* was an idea Deller had for an exhibition in Pittsburgh in 2004. It refers to former American President George W. Bush's televised address on board the USS *Abraham Lincoln* on May 1, 2003, announcing the end to major combat operations in Iraq (although the United States would actually withdraw its troops eight years later in December 2011). About *Rejected Tube Map Cover Illustration* (2007), Deller says, "Transport for London asked me to design a cover for the [London] Tube [subway] map, which I eventually did. The first idea, though, was to depict a bicycle symbol in the colors of the map. The word came back that it was a confusing message, which was kind of the point in the first place."

The Battle of Orgreave (An Injury to One is an Injury to All), 2001 🗣️

Acting as catalyst or instigator, Deller creates provocative works about social history or recent events that encourage us to look at one kind of "culture" through the lens of another. *The Battle of Orgreave* documents a violent conflict that took place during the 1984–1985 miners' strike, at the height of England's then-Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's administration's campaign to quash trade union power. As a young person in his final year at school, Deller witnessed the confrontation on TV. For Deller, the image of thousands of striking miners being pursued by riot police had the appearance of a war scene rather than a labor dispute. He began to dream of exhuming this event from the recent past and re-enacting it as "living history." The restaging involved almost one thousand participants, with about eight hundred historical re-enactors and two hundred local people—including former miners and a few former policemen—who had been part of the original conflict. In the film, Deller states: "This isn't about healing wounds; it's going to take more than an art project to heal wounds. But it was definitely about confronting something—to look at it again and discuss it."

Our Hobby is Depeche Mode, 2006 🗣️

Jeremy Deller's interest in the social character of pop music, and the enthusiasms, rituals, and passionate partisanship of fans, is far-ranging. *Our Hobby is Depeche Mode* reflects on how people intimately embrace pop culture and embed it in the fabric of their lives. For this project, Deller and co-director Nick Abrahams traveled to numerous countries to film fans of the band. In Eastern Europe, Depeche Mode had been a symbol of resistance during the time of Communism, and afterward became a symbol of freedom. In Iran, a country that has banned all Western music since the Islamic Revolution, fans take huge risks in listening to Depeche Mode today. For Deller, the project is about community, about "how people group together and form their own interpretations of something to fit their own circumstances. It is a kind of folk history."

Exhibition Programs

Free and open to the public unless otherwise noted. For a complete list of programs, please visit camstl.org.

Opening Night

Friday, February 1, 7:00–9:00 PM

Artist Talk

It Is What It Is: Conversations About Iraq

Saturday, February 2, 11:00 AM

Deller is joined by artist Esam Pasha, an Iraqi refugee; Jonathan Harvey, Iraq War veteran; and Creative Time Chief Curator Nato Thompson for this unique discussion. *Complimentary breakfast.*

Curatorial Tours

Chief Curator Dominic Molon leads a walk-through of the exhibition. On March 28, Molon is joined by St. Louis artist, curator, and educator Daniel McGrath.

Saturday, February 9, 1:00 PM

Thursday, March 28, 7:00 PM

Thursday, April 25, 7:00 PM

Unhappy Hour

Thursday, February 14, 6:00–9:00 PM

Take part in Deller's installation *I ♥ Melancholy* during this alternative Valentine's Day celebration.

What the F(ilm)? Screenings

Explore the intersection of cultural history and music in these three fascinating films.

Friday, February 22, 7:30 PM—**24 Hour Party People** (Dir. Michael Winterbottom, 2002)

Friday, March 8, 7:30 PM—**Brassed Off!** (Dir. Mark Herman, 1996)

Friday, April 19, 7:30 PM—**Cracked Actor** (Dir. Alan Yentob, 1974)

Jeremy Deller: Joy in People is organized by the Hayward Gallery, London, where it was curated by Director Ralph Rugoff. The exhibition is coordinated at the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis by Chief Curator Dominic Molon and is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalog (\$40).

Support for CAM's exhibition program is provided by Jeanne and Rex Sinquefeld; Nancy Reynolds and Dwyer P. Brown; William E. Weiss Foundation; and the Crawford Taylor Foundation. General operating support is provided by Whitaker Foundation; Regional Arts Commission; Missouri Arts Council, a state agency; Bank of America Charitable Foundation; Wells Fargo Advisors; Arts and Education Council; The Trio Foundation of St. Louis; and members of the Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis.

Tea Talks

Join us in *Valerie's Snack Bar* for the English custom of afternoon tea while experts lead discussions on a range of exhibition-related topics.

Saturday, February 23, 2:00 PM—**Parade Culture** (Bill Griffin, Veiled Prophet Parade)

Saturday, March 23, 2:00 PM—**The "Madchester" Music Scene** (Dominic Molon)

Saturday, April 27, 2:00 PM—**Crowd Psychology** (Prof. Mike Hulsizer, Webster University)

Concert: Acid Brass

Thursday, March 14, 7:00 pm

Enjoy a special live performance of *Acid Brass*, in which acid house dance hits are played by the award-winning Saint Louis Brass Band. In partnership with KDHX. \$10; free for members. Tickets available at camstl.org/acidbrass.

Sunday Studio: Social Practice

Sunday, April 14, 1:00 pm

Join Community Arts Training Institute artists and educators from the Regional Arts Commission in a workshop that examines the social aspects of making art. \$10; free for members. Register at camstl.org/sundaystudio. Recommended for ages 16 and up.

In partnership with *Kitchen Kulture*, CAM's café features a seasonal take on British pub fare for select programs throughout the season. Visitors are also invited to enjoy complimentary tea in *Valerie's Snack Bar* in the Main Galleries.



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