

David's Soul

Solo exhibition: **Merlin Carpenter**

Quality Of Life Gallery Glasgow, 29 November 2025

Apropos beside David: who propels himself - selfpropelling astride a manic contrivance of German precision, his person enveloped in Gore-Tex, that dual emblem of impermeability and rectitude alike, as he descends the slope downhill with the austere gravity of a Victorian cavalry officer utterly persuaded that the world itself bows to his itinerary. Each meddlesome revolution of David's foot-operated gear levers within that ingenious apparatus offers a miniature conquest of the sublime, a rhythmic proclamation of endurance, refinement and the tragic necessity of taste in the realms of UK Plc.

Seeking restoration from the mischiefs of management and the ravages of midcareer burnout he recites calming catechisms of professional reflection: "What might be invisible in this map?" or more often than not, "You have to respect the rind; it's part of the narrative." Yet! Amidst these heroic reveries creeps a vulgar arithmetic of modern hospitality; each respectable hostelry is a hypothetical hallucination, every modest Airbnb is a shimmering pin of unmaterialised comfort - having become totally pre-legered by patrons, booked out by the "wealthier-than-thou" indeed! An affront so intolerable

that it assumes, in David's mind, the proportions of a national scandal. With each dutiful grip and joyless upland shift of spoke-borne mudship mechanism, gentlemanly dreams of a "peaty dram" insinuate themselves further and further away. Worse still, a fingerous quaff of this turfy nectar is only possible through that most novel instrument of progress - the QR Code - whereupon one's telephonic instrument must perform feats of near-magical correspondence with the firmament. And Alas! Then, these curiously quadratically patterned ciphers *haunt* David, impossibly following his tour o'er Highland vales as though Islay herself - wounded, digitised, and infinitely remote - had dispatched them forth to exact rituals of networked humiliation before bestowing her boggy benedictions.

We crest A-roads and "bag" Munros like an Analytical Engine performing a variety of tasks in the style of Sir Edwin Landseer (English, 1802-1873), buck bucking, surfing the gloam, David's handlebars the bars of huge antlers echoing his exhipster 'tache of Movember whiskeryear... and on to lowland scene: landscapes render with a precision to delight even the most exacting painter of highly detailed and sentimental depictions of animals, or colourists: lochs, hills, and glens assembled with a meticulous care that leaves nothing to chance, as if every contour was summoned by mum. David - small, trembling, absurdly relevant - feels himself both pilgrim and supplicant before the cruel ALTAR of contemporaneity.

And from the depths of a still and secret lochie, Nessie bubbles, a quiet admonition that even the most carefully drafted exhibition press release cannot entirely forestall the inevitability of fate when some wandering SOUL clatters into his artful contraption/mountain bike...

- Nessie popping up means surprises happen when you don't expect them.

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Lo, in the yere of our Lord, when frost yet clung to hed and rill, we came to Boxland, a farm-based storage farm, and anon we ope'd the first chamber, and marvel, a little folk of mice sate at a table no bigger than a nut, sipping their meagre tea and harkening to The Archers countrie talk as pilgrims hear the gospel.

Their secret ways, the mice-runs and burrows of the mind, wrought strange fellowship with our artful things, and Boxland songs did mingle with the sighs of the arttechnician craftsmen; You might consider, for example, how to escape from a cage must surely require, foremost, awareness of the fact of the cage.

Then rose those craftsmen; those hitherto silent keepers of wheel and wrench, and with hammer and Makita they made a great clamour, not for blood, but for redress.

I shan't toil upon Master Simon Lee's farm again,
for he did leap into the threshing machine in
Midwinter harvest, even as Frieze loomed!

Thanne from beneath and olde rain-cloak a thousand and
ten score Mice fashion'd that image of wicker and effigy
to mock the high and vaunting Gormley and with stout
hands they pull's it doen from its petty pedestal and
spoke thus:

Enjoin, villagers! The tech-wights wax mightily and
the contemporary artists dwindle 'neath sun and
rain!!!!

They unloosed the gilded seams, unbolted the brazen
nameplates, and set the fancy goods to homely use; a
crate once freighted for high fayre of Art Basel was
plann'd anew to carry coals to Glaschu 'ere the midwinter.
The mice drank on, untouched; the craftsman laugh'd and
sang a simple lay of Skreich o' Day, and Boxland, for all its
quarrels, was made whole in small and honest (t)oils.

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Ah, now then let's take a little wander down the lane to
The Post Studio Complex, shall we? Mind your head on
the lowrider beams, and do try not to trip over anything
fragile. It's a right old labyrinth in here - boxes stacked
higher than a Hipster's knee, crammed with unposted
content and those sad clip frames left to weather

themselves so wearily. Every unit is a cosey cup o' dreams where someone meant to tidy up but got distracted by life, telly, a tax return or perhaps a nice cup of tea – and the dream stayed exactly where it was put, gathering equal measures of dust, ambition and potency.

But hark still, listen closely - shhh!!... now. If the wind drops just so, you might hear it: the tiny patter of very determined paws; the contextual purchase of tiny feet, shovelling scraps of old important exhibitions (by slightly celebrated artists that moved out of London) around the barn's great containment continuum.

And there! Scuttling between crates, is Little Mouse - the Supreme Curator of Boxland, Chair of the Royal Commission on Deferred Liberation, Inspector-General of Collective Singularity! Whiskers womble furious footnotes in the air as he threads the barn's vastness with the precision of a micro-tyrant overseeing a series of impossibly large, site-specific commissions by a government that prizes wealth and influence over human rights. The humans see boxes, the mice see flight-lines and, curator-runs along which the fragments of old exhibitions become a gnarled travesty, and monstrous agglomeration in a successful escape from time. To he, every cardboard box is a throne, every relic a site of potential cheese, every artisan yurt flap is a curatorial statement from the big beyond. Traversing frenetically, tiny paws tapping, he observes Boxland's desperate choreographies of production and possession; his territorial micturition's scent-mapping affinities between art and non-art luxury items alike. Within towers of human

consciousness reaching to rafters with contents
reverberating like distant thunder in the repurposed
pastoral container of his mind he sings

I'm truly sorry Man's dominion
Has broken Nature's social union,
An' justifies that ill opinion
Which makes thee startle At me, thy
poor, earth-born companion An fellow-
mortal!

Clever little fellow isn't he? Well done, Little Mouse!

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Merlin Carpenter (curated by Lindsay Jarvis) is in a state of exquisite, unrelenting disquiet. *David's Soul*[1] - his delicate, almost sacramental reference to the 70s actor and singer David Soul, since immortalised in stage and screen, storage and exhibition - and comprising, most alarmingly, four impossibly expensive Mercedes-Benz mountain bikes - yes, 4 - enfolded somewhere in the sprawling vertiginous Jengaland of Box, and he cannot, will not, dare not, even for a frantic heartbeat, stop imagining their ruination. Those mice! Those tiny, whiskered agitators plotting and whispering in malign conspiracy, munch delicately with that fanatical quivering intent of mini crocs.

Merlin paces, cuffs meticulously adjusted, muttering *sotto voce* about insurance, curatorial propriety, and the shocking impropriety and inexcusability of entrusting objects of such taste, and wealth, and mechanical splendour, to a barn that reeks faintly of hay, damp, and the peaty musk of Richard. Every imagined creak of door becomes a fanfare of impending calamity; every speculative squeak, a tiny, accusatory cackle in the theatre of his nerves.

Parish chatter evokes a malevolent presence amongst the furrows whose impulses might vacillate between malice and folly - and, in some moment of petty spite or sublime indifference, discard or pawn these most marvellous radial contrivances as one might cast aside a tarnished paperweight, or an obsolete god.

- Additionally, one cannot make the journey into art when hi-spec full-suspension Mountain Bikes are left in a minus ten degree Suffolk barn through the screeching of midwinter on an old RAF airfield haunted by bomber command ghosties as gnarled IRL statues.

He imagines the vile farthings, those paragonal emblems of Teutonic exactitude and his own imperious discernment, their surfaces once immaculate and glacially serene under electrically conveyed radiance, now reduced to oxidised shells of steel and shame.

The mere thought of this ruination seizes Merlin with a horror so profound that, were he not consumed by dread and passing marvels, he might have laughed out loud - laughed out loud indeed - at the absurdity of such exquisite peril.

Relax, dud...

Said Richard, enjoying a mid morning cup of kombucha in Glasgow's WestEnd,

...the A12 from Lowestoft to London via Boxland traces the old geese drovers' track - an ancient path where farmers once drove their flocks to market, protecting their feet with tar for the long journey. Today it is a major road in a radical metaphor carrying the weight of this press release instead of animals, but the principle remains movement, trade and the slow transfer of value from periphery to centre.

He burps and continues apace, eyes rolling as twin moons in his own skull:

If the well-fed contextualists are geese, then they gulp conceptual paintings becoming ""phat"" with meaning, nurtured on history, waddling toward the frozen markets of your mind

The drovers guiding them along well-worn paths,
are curators, critics, facilitators - powerful artworld
figures; in other words: those who have never once
questioned their entitlement to Satisfaction and
Meaning. We steer concepts toward relevance,
shape discourse, and make sure nothing strays
too far into the bearded hedgerows of
abstraction...

He intones all this hurriedly, like the Deleuzian “lad-Dad”
he is. [Actually I see myself as a father first and foremost.
Everything I do is for my kids. I’m a dad first-everything
else, second kinda guy etc.]

Time waits for nomads... on the road to the road...

...he Blurtons, spewing his tea.

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So the two brothers of Latter-Day Art take an epic and
relational van drive

Where are we, Merlin?

The answer is not clear.

Then a booming voice booms out

You are on the road with artist Merlin Carpenter and Richard Parry. Precursors: MERLIN DROVE AN EMPTY VAN FROM LONDON TO PORTO AND BACK 2012 - Plus Burberry Propaganda Tour 2013!

Then you arrive at the first crossroads:

- **Option A:** Follow the containers east toward Boxland in the dawnin'. Perhaps the quiet of the morning will reveal hidden patterns in the mundane? → *Go to Boxland*
- **Option B:** Head west to Sudbury in the dawnin', retracing the paths of earlier drovers. → *Go to Sudbury*

Sudbury at dawn: The town stirs as the sun rises, casting long shadows on queuing container stacks.

- **Option A:** Take the northern route to Peterborough, glimpsing LinekerLand in the glimmer. → *Journey to LinekerLand*
- **Option B:** Explore the nearby retail parks and service stations, critically observing the rhythms of capitalism with Dan Mitchell and Jeremy Glogan for Delme/GOMA mid-career retrospective. → *Investigate Retail Zones*

LinekerLand in the glimmer: Crisps crunch like dry autumn leaves.

- **Option A:** Continue northwest toward Manchester, chasing a runaway coffin on skateboard wheels across Satanic landscapes. → *Head to Manchester*
- **Option B:** Detour south through the countryside, searching for Folk Archives, Monster Chetwynd or Supersonic Festival. → *Detour South*

Manchester to Preston at dusk: Dads doing that thing where they harmonise in Wonder as shadows swagger.

- **Option A:** Push onward to Carlisle in the glooming, where the borderlands begin to whisper the secrets of the squeak o' bubble. → *Journey to Carlisle*
- **Option B:** Pause at Preston's edge, documenting the tension between public and private space → *Pause in Preston*

Carlisle to Dumfries in fainlicht: Drizzle mires the road as shadows deepen.

- **Option A:** Push north to Glasgow, arriving in the shroud o' nicht, reaching your ultimate destination: Quality O' Life Gallery. → *Arrive in Glasgow*
- **Option B:** Wander through Dumfries unresolved, documenting the liminal spaces between independence and union. → *Explore Dumfries*

Destination Glasgow

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Destination Glasgow

Destination Glasgow indeed.

Ideologies sinking like

mismatched plumbing snaking through Kersland Street

Imperial-to-metric conversions shaping everything

as if reality itself was a confection made of two

shortbread-style biscuits

sandwiched together with

Today's prequel - to

untethered minimal modernism,

on-brand frugality

for parsimonious bank directors

who think of nothing

at night

In bed

Asleep.

The bell that never rang

The fish that never swam

An art scene that never was

Spillover into recoveryzones

flood planes of whitewashed brick

tramsheds,

concealing unwhitewashed brick tramsheds

Betwixt vaulting 1890s civic ambition

and depoliticised 1990s conceptual art:

themes, topics,

vapours of social realism.

A Turner Prize Judge breathes in outside, in the
Southside.
Sensing just enough to sense
Whiskers quiver, wary of thought,
Teetering o'n the edge of decision's twilight moan.

Glasgow O Glasgow,
laboratory of ideological smearing,
your canvases emptied
then touched up
Education, education, education -
extraction, extraction, extraction
Lo! I wander bike lanes,
Mountain bike in one hand
Sketchbook in the other
thinking I understand,
then thinking again,
In a claik o' timeless smirr.

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Then Richard and Merlin generously enter West End
Cycles: A fine gallery of wheelz.

Who tf are youuuuu?

...challenged a horned-headed dude, voice raised in
startled challenge. At this pronouncement, we both speak
in unison:

Hail, we come from the future! Behold these silver
Mercedes electroclash bicycles, in grievous need
of re-chroming!

The master of wheels grumbles and mutters, as though a
smythe confronted with cursed pig iron; one must act
with haste, lest his temper BOIL...

Then a conga line of every Glasgow International Director
from 2004 until the end of time, led by Dr. Paul Pieroni,
Zibi's Book Club and Neil Clements plus Adam Lewis
Jacob and, Sarah Cameron, Merlin James, Alasdair Gray
etc., you know the rest... slowly undulates up Byres road
like a living accordion of sensory pleasure, scored to
some inaudible Franz Ferdinand riff.

They're here to engage with (and learn from) the
environment and each cultural producer is so happy and
excited to be here amongst the gorgeous light, the
energy, the artists, the communities (and even the rain!),
transforming a routine journey into a psychedelic
enactment of meaning, that society has called for.

And then, in perfect unison each, casting a knowing wink
over their shoulder, whispers in hysterical breath:

Yes I see the brake cables on this £80K artwork
have been devoured by miniature rodents, and yes,
it's hilarious, and yes, this is extremely funny
thank-you.

And so the Koons-lan bike upgrade labour was undertaken: a blur of wrenches and spanners, in tongues of oil and dust, as artisan, rodent, and celestial completion twined in a dance of absurd diligence, half mortal and half mad.

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18:00: A henge of mountain bikes stands timeless, consecrated in the dreich. Low sun threads the gaps in secret, hallowed ritual; sacramental beams hawk the gloaming, casting a solemn *light* across the scene. It is proud to present a solo exhibition by Merlin Carpenter at Quality of Life, and even the sun, or so it seems, scans the bohemian cell, like a timebomb seeking commodities to archive, sell or barter... and galaxies themselves bow to this bleak audit of completion, an exhibition of David's Soul.

Thus was the tale told in our cab - brief, plain, and worth the telling - that when pride is unmade the common hand may stitch a truer cloth.

END

- The whole story means the art world is funny, busy, and a little bit amazing.

[1] **Merlin Carpenter**, *David's Soul*, 1999/2007

Mercedes-Benz mountain bike, edition of 3(+1)

Exhibited

Cologne, Galerie Christian Nagel - "Survivors" 24
April – 31 May 1999 (an earlier model of the bike,
borrowed from Mercedes-Benz Cologne).

Cologne, Kunstverein - "Élégance"

3 November – 23 December 2007

Basel, Art Basel, Galerie Christian Nagel

13 June - 17 June 2007