

Art news

A Rake Revisited: Henry Hudson at the Soane

— November 2011



2 December 2011 to 28 January 2012

A selection of Henry Hudson's grand scale reinventions in plasticine of William Hogarth's *A Rake's Progress* will be exhibited at Sir John Soane's Museum from Friday 2 December 2011 until Saturday 28 January 2012.

Soane purchased Hogarth's remarkable series of satirical paintings, *A Rake's Progress*, in 1802 and hung them in his house at Ealing. The eight canvases, which were painted in 1733-34, and are the basis for the well-known series of engravings, depict the story of the hapless Tom Rakewell, starting with *The Heir* where he comes into his inheritance and ending with *The Madhouse* where the Rake miserably ends his days.

Henry Hudson (born 1982) became fascinated by Hogarth as a student at Central St Martins, admiring the satirical cruelty of his work as well as its humour. As part of his exploration of the horror and glory in Britain's modern psyche, Hudson began working on his own version of *A Rake's Progress* nearly two years ago in his London studio, next to where Hogarth was born.

Hudson paints using his trademark plasticine, melting it and working it in his hand to mix the colours and apply with fingers or palette knives as a thick impasto on the board. With mural-like dimensions of 182 cm by 152 cm, just three of Hudson's eight canvases will be on display at the Soane Museum:

- *The Levee* after Hogarth's second picture in the series where the Rake, now launched into Society appears surrounded by professors of the arts considered necessary for a man of fashion;
- *The Orgy* after Hogarth's third picture, where Tom is depicted drunk at the disreputable Rose Tavern, spending the early hours with a party of women after having, apparently, been engaged in fighting the Watch; and
- *The Madhouse*, after Hogarth's eighth image in the series, sees the Rake removed to Bedlam, surrounded by other victims of insanity.

Henry Hudson explains: 'Hogarth's work defined the decadence and moral decay of his age, revelling in the grotesque and the absurd, but his narratives remain compelling today. Hogarth lived in an era of moral abandon which coincided with the commercialism of art. He was the first to amalgamate the tabloid form with the traditions of the old masters, creating a new visual language and subverting the artistic canon to his own ends. My work seeks to continue this rebellious gesture but with an underlying anxiety.'

Tim Knox, Director of Sir John Soane's Museum, explains: *'There is a pervasive sense of fear that is even more tangible in Hudson's plasticine clad canvases than in the original paintings. His work both subverts and celebrates Hogarth's originals, adding his own story to a work which has become enmeshed in our culture, part of our national consciousness. He embellishes and exaggerates and makes these images from nearly three centuries ago alive for us again, inviting us to look just as acutely at the state of our nation today.'*

Hudson has inserted himself into his version of *The Madhouse*, perhaps the darkest scene of loss and insanity. This image is especially haunting; more vivid, less comic, all together more horrifying than Hogarth's. By using a medium 'without status' and by placing himself in the frame, Hudson begs us to ask the question which surely lurks in the mind of every contemporary artist: 'where do I lie in the legacy of art history which looms over me from the past?'

Hudson explains: 'The figure of me, the young artist is as precocious and arrogant as Tom Rakewell. Like the doomed protagonist of the original, here I'm trapped in my own story.'

Describing his own work Hogarth wrote '...my picture is my stage'. Today the contemporary artist's life has become inseparable from his work, a persona enjoying the all the decadence and destruction that success has to offer, both the hero and victim of their own creation.'

'**A Rake Revisited: Henry Hudson at the Soane Museum**' will be on display at Sir John Soane's Museum in London from 2 December 2011 to 28 January 2012. For more information, visit www.soane.org or call 020 7405 2107.