

Joe Sweeney: Take Away at the Cob Gallery

CULTURE ART



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Artwork by Joe Sweeney

Labelled an “archaeologist of the present”, Brixton artist Joe Sweeney’s debut solo exhibition *Take Away* is a dialogue of the streets where he lives. The Cob Gallery in Camden currently hosts a collection of his that combines the word on the street with the words in the streets, a narrative entombed amongst the urban topography.

Sweeney studied at Chelsea College of Art where he achieved a BA in fine art. Now in the freedom of his post-studying days he’s become a self-professed people watcher, with time to absorb the city in all its forms. He has an ability to turn seemingly prosaic nuggets of civilisation into a bullion of captivating mundanity. A sharp sense of humour is cultivated in his art, something that he claims to have inherited from his

parents, his mother also being an artist. But It’s the streets on his doorstep that have had the biggest influence on him.

He explores the markets of Brixton as a means to reverse the focus upon the art market itself, playing the temporal against the regenerative. There’s a wry smirk behind each piece, a self-mocking melancholy. This is nowhere more evident than in his depictions of commonplace market produce against backdrops of market floor literature, such as newspapers and lottery tickets – unifications of totally unrelated objects, brought together by virtue of chance, commerce... and waste.

Waste is a prominent theme, which is where comparisons with the art market arise. Where art goes post-exhibition is no different to the fate of discarded fried chicken bones (see *Archeological Study of Brixton Road*), so, in making art from waste, Sweeney is distorting the cycle. Other notable pieces include a campsite of upturned pie trays in a forest of glossed-over marrowfat peas entitled *I Haven’t Got All Day*. It’s another example of limitations increasing creativity. Creating using only found objects appears to liberate Sweeney, whereas endless access to materials may serve to stultify.

Given the raw nature of his work, it speaks very loudly about everything from chance, nostalgia, the future and class to limitation, repetition and anthropomorphism. It brings to life inanimate objects and reduces human nature to a pure, animal level. There is a maturity and a juvenile innocence coexisting in his work, which displays an astute self-awareness that is often absent from this kind of material. Though it's eloquent, it doesn't command attention, it welcomes it, and there is good reason to believe Sweeney's is a voice that will carry.

Joe Sweeney: Take Away is at The Cob Gallery from 23rd March until 2nd April 2016, for further information visit [here](#).