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Historical Re-Anachronism... Ultima Romanus

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Historical Re-Anachronism (H±R-A) was born of my ill-timed move to the UK from the US on the precipice of the global pandemic. After the initial shock of the pandemic morphed into the stasis of lockdown my considerable news-junky habit reached a new level, leading to my current project.

H±R-A... Ultima Romanus, translation “the last Roman”, a series of sculptures produced for the Gerald Moore Gallery, is the first in a series of works under the title, Historical Re-Anachronism.

For most of 2020-21 I felt as if I were between countries, living in but not connected to the UK and with no address in America. I was preoccupied with global events; Covid, Trump & Boris, rising right-wing sentiment, Brexit, and the Climate Crisis. Mostly, I focused on the US, watching it fall apart under Trump and drift ever closer to failed state status. Of course, it wasn't just the US, I could switch the TV channel to witness Boris leading the UK into the worst pandemic response in Europe or news of a far-right political movement gaining power elsewhere in the world. Clearly, there are multitude of existential stresses, all moving parts of the same geo-political shift but for my research I chose to focus on US & UK shared history.

When a crowd of Trump insurrectionist stormed the US Capital on 6 January 2021 the red MAGA spectacle complete with military camouflage and banners emblazoned with pre-revolutionary war slogans and symbols brought the previous few years to an absurd and violent climax.

There's nothing new about the American far-right rebranding 18<sup>th</sup> century anti-monarchist symbols to represent their agenda but seeing it all from here made it appear even more ironic. Historical Re-Anachronism is an attempt to make sense of the events that has led American democracy to be on the brink while looking at the absurdity of using pro Republic symbolism in support of an oligarch wannabe dictator as he attempted to overturn a democratically held election.

Alongside reading the history of the people, politics, and circumstances of the American colonies I'm looking at the objects they produced. The revolutionary war was about economics. The goods, materials, and resources that came out of North America were at the heart of the conflict. I want to say here that the economics of England during this time were the economics of the slave trade. There is no way to separate the trans-Atlantic slave trade from the colonization of North America. I am not making work that directly investigates slavery but it's important to acknowledge that making work about this era automatically includes the impact of slavery and all its horrors.

The objects I'm focused on are flyers, flags, porcelain, and other home-goods that American colonists produced for communication and trade. The colonists became master craftspeople with access to an abundance of resources. The quality of their goods rivalled the finest in England and here lies the problem. The Monarchy heavily taxed these goods, through The

Stamp Act. They also forbid inter-colonial trade in an attempt to keep colonists' dependant on England and profits consolidated.

The colonists reacted by turning their goods into agitprop, social resistance embodied in an object. The most well-known examples are tea pots glazed with "No Stamp Act", anti-monarchist skull and cross bone stamps to replace the official English stamp, and "Don't Tread on Me" snake flags. I've become most fascinated with a less known example the "Pickle Tray", an ornate tiered porcelain dish used to serve delicacies to guests. These were produced in America, owning one alone was an act of rebellion, but to push it further these beautiful dishes were decorated with anti-monarchist adages revealed as guests selected a treat. A discreet form of rebellion embodied in a gorgeous sculptural object.

Central to Historical Re-Anachronism is the image of "The Pickle", more often called a gherkin in British English. For me, the pickle is muse, metaphor, and formal trope. While I'm serious about the research, and conceptual framework of my work I am also acutely aware that talking about pickles is unavoidably humorous. Like many artists, I'm interested in humour as a provocative medium. It provides a space to be transgressive and explore challenging ideas with impiety but it's not irony that I'm after. It's a vehicle to explore the troubling history of colonisation and its continuum, which are reflected in our many current existential crises.

The works are made from wood, carved synthetic substrates, epoxies, Jesmonite, various other materials and painted with oils. The painted and glazed "pickle" parts have a ceramic like quality while the structures in which they are imbedded appear to be made of aged and/or decaying wood. Porcelain-like plate parts with current and colonial era slogans, symbols, dates, and references jut out of the sculptures. All the text is lifted from either historical or contemporary sources. While I'm in the studio I listen to books, podcasts and news shows to find quotes, dates, and names to be included in the works.