

Diana Puntar

*Historical Re-
Anachronism, Ultima
Romanus*

Gerald Moore Gallery
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Timothy Thomas Franklin opened a tin of worms. 'Condiment preserves' scrolled as a neue cursive font face over the ridgy rigid skin lying cold in his hand. Tasty, perhaps. Timothy Thomas Franklin's tin had been in the sun too long. Shelf life well past gone, taste all tainted by mid-Western metal. Tin can in sun ... now festering, the contents of Timothy Thomas Franklin's tin. Drunk on tinned juice, all salty-sour and saline, Timothy Thomas Franklin flips and flops, all demonic, in search of some 'democratic sociality.' His solution that is. Untinned, the long-gone preserves of the past dust Timothy Thomas Franklin's mouth, like pops, like firecrackers, like the original raucous tingles of the Revolutionary War (c. 1775 – 1783). Timothy Thomas Franklin dances and sings in and as a circus parade. His is a spectacular procession in the rain. Damp, deranged, deluded?, dictating drastic decisions, and we are left, served, a rotting pickle.

History has gone somewhat sour for Diana Puntar. A self-professed news-junky, since her in-timely arrival in the UK, in late 2019, the artist has watched the world bubble in unknowingness and burst with extreme acts of political will. That is, through the pandemic lockdowns and in its aftermath she has watched the world fester and ferment, politically. In *Historical Re-Anachronism, Ultima Romanus*,

something of this witnessing finds a physical form in a range of fleshy oil-painted sculptures: somewhat grotesque, gherkin-ous, monuments personifying the ego-driven politics that has suffused the Governmental climates of the UK and the USA in recent years.

Across the research and works for this exhibition, Puntar has focused on tracing the contorted tentacles that connect this contemporary political festering with its historical precursors. Specifically, with her gaze turned to the political climate of the USA, Puntar's work in *Historical Re-Anachronism, Ultima Romanus* comes out from the connections that exist between the American Revolutionary War (1775 – 1783) and acts of Confederate/Conservative rebellion today—an obvious example being the Capitol Riots of January 6, 2021. More than just following the ideological traces that connect today's political right with their historical cousins, Puntar's research draws on the material paraphernalia—the signs and symbols—as well as the political rhetoric used by these distant relatives to further their ghoulishly similar 'democratic' perspectives. Reflecting on how the contemporary right reappropriates the forms of their 18th-century forerunners, the fleshy monuments in *Historical Re-Anachronism, Ultima Romanus*, emerge as re-reappropriations of this reanimated history. Riffing on the way material and ideological forms of propagation have been reaped, reworked and twisted for macho political affect in our contemporary age, Puntar's sculptural works in this exhibition convey how history has become a salted source, cracked open by the right-wing in recent years, in part, leaving us in a socio-political "pickle," to borrow the mundane phrase used by numerous commentators.

Embracing irony and absurdity, as transgressive vehicles, the statuette-like forms in *Historical Re-Anachronism, Ultima Romanus* rise like phallic props or stagerly monuments to out-of-date quasi-(queazy-)demigods—or historical big Men. Veined and deformed, with skins gleaning sweaty, the pickle, or gherkin, emerges here as an incongruous muse and metaphor for Puntar. With their humorous connotations, these nobbly preserves become satirical figureheads dotting the exhibitionary space of *Historical Re-Anachronism, Ultima Romanus*. Indeed, with their gnarled physical presence, these deranged forms echo something of the historically soured ideological refuse canned and consumed by those of the far-right. That is, something of the out-of-date tin rot those on the right seem to be drunk on. Positioned, almost violently skewed, upon gangrenous trunk-like forms, the pickle protagonists presented to us in *Historical Re-Anachronism, Ultima Romanus* have a very particular material reference. Working from quotidian forms of 18th-century agitprop, Puntar embraces the appropriative logic of the far-right, taking the form of the 'Pickle Tray'—an ornate

tiered porcelain dish, used to serve preserved delicacies to guests in British-American colonial homes—and reworking this into a not-so-discreet provocation. Presented in sheening anthropomorphic deformity, writhing drunk-like, and all carnivalesque upon their gruesome column/trays, Puntar’s pinned pickles allude to how the figures of the contemporary right wing have grown fat upon their own dank preservation of the past, something now moulded and well out-of-date.

More than purely satirical monuments, riffing off the right’s anachronistic deformity of history, the surfaces of Puntar’s sculptures are dotted with pertinent dish-like growths. At once a reference to the iconic British teacup and saucer—a gesture that conflates the UK and the USA’s political history—scrawled upon these bone-coloured fungal forms are phrases, dates, and snippets of narrative that directly relate to moments where antiquated Confederate/Conservative worldviews perforate the contemporary political landscape. The phrase, *JUSTIN JONES * JUSTIN PEARSON **, for example, is boldly traced on one of these saucer forms. Writ in a slight sans font text, this textual allusion directly points to the political decision to expel from their governmental positions the two Tennessee-based lawmakers who led a gun control protest in early 2023, an action that defies the constitutional purists of the USA’s right-wing. (It is of note that both Justin Jones and Justin Pearson have now been reinstated in their respective positions.) In this way, Puntar’s grotesque gherkins each speak to how deranged historical sentiments live on today in our puzzling socio-political climate. Together, as a swarm of soured cyphers, Puntar’s pickled bodily forms not only symbolise how the right demonically dresses their agenda in out-of-date delusions but humorously alludes to how this rotted get-up is nothing more than the festering refuse of history gone bad.

—Toby Üpson, April 2023