

# WORKPLACE

## **England's Lost Camelot** **Simeon Barclay**

10 September - 29 October

Opening Reception  
Friday 10 September, 5 - 8pm

Workplace  
40 Margaret Street,  
W1G 0JH London



Simeon Barclay, *I am down*, 2021, lenticular print on substrate in aluminium and acrylic frames. Courtesy of the artist and Workplace, London.

Workplace is pleased to present *England's Lost Camelot*, an exhibition of new multi-media and installation works by British artist Simeon Barclay. *England's Lost Camelot* is Barclay's first solo show with Workplace and will open this September at the gallery's West End location. The exhibition takes as its starting point the legacy of the gallant knight, examining the persistence of its associated iconography in British folklore and its lasting influence in the construction of still prevalent ideas of masculinity. Combining research of this medieval legend with reference to popular culture and his personal biography, Barclay continues to explore the contestation, and strategic negotiation of cultural narratives that influence our behaviour and conformity to archetypes.

The installation elements, which surround the works in the exhibition, feature artefacts and images borrowed from both British folklore and black political resistance, and function as a way of understanding the often complex and ambivalent nature of belonging and subjectivity. These elements are interspersed with a series of collages constructed from the artist's own personal archive of ephemera. Essential to the artist's practice, this process of collecting, manipulating and reconfiguring these sources allows him to unpack their relation to his personal history as well as understanding their wider impact on the present. The artist states that "*Being a working class, black northern male with roots in Carriacou...yes of course these markers have cultural resonance... I guess what my own archive has allowed me, in a way, is to complicate and curate these points of identification.*"

Dealing with the theme of exclusion, the works within the exhibition are populated by barcodes, fences, and other motifs that aim to obstruct the sight and complicate the viewer's relationship to the images. The barcode, a sign that is ubiquitous across all commercial shop bought items, becomes a means of thinking about perception and how the nuance of identity formation can be, for better or worse, flattened to just a symbol. As a play on words 'bar-code' is a reflection on the intricacies of negotiating, stigma, authenticity, hierarchies, status and regulation and is a recurring motif within Barclay's work.

This theme of exclusion continues throughout the exhibition informing the placement of works and their relationship to each other. A photo collage diptych of young Simeon Barclay reading a red top newspaper is covered in the latticed cage of a wire fence, in situ, and obstructing the work's view are two replica Great Helms emblematic of the helmets worn by knights in battle. They have been battered and then embellished in black powder coated paint and hung at the artist's head height to suggest the confinement of perceptions and the psychological masks needed to navigate the constraints and trauma of exhibiting a unilateral ideal of masculinity. As a code for invulnerability, isolation and defensiveness, the armour and its associated imagery still has a potent appeal. The artist looks at how these are embedded in the national psyche informing contemporary debates on the legacy of imperialism and nationalism and its residue as a history bequeathed to him as his inheritance.

Simeon Barclay (b. 1975, in Huddersfield, UK) received his BA from Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds in 2010 and an MFA from Goldsmiths College, London in 2014. He has exhibited both nationally and internationally including at Southbank Centre, Tate Britain, South London Gallery, London; Liverpool Biennial, Liverpool; Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Workplace Foundation, Gateshead; Holden Gallery, Manchester; The Tetley, Leeds; Cubitt Gallery, London; The Bluecoat, Liverpool; Jerwood Space, London; Galerie Lisa Kandlhofer, Vienna; Rodolphe Janssen, Brussels; Arcadia Missa, New York and W139, Amsterdam.

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