

— October 17, 2012

## Artist Interview: Toby Ziegler

**Jolyon Webber** talks to the London based artist about why he's drawn to unfinished works and how he overcame the cliché of gesture

Words **Jolyon Webber**

Photography **Jasper Fry**



If it is Toby Ziegler's intention to make the experience of viewing his latest installation in Q-Park Old Burlington Street (in the shadow of the wonderfully antiquated Royal Academy) as uncanny as possible, then serendipity conspired to make my experience of the work just that little bit more disjointed. The lifts to take us underground had stopped working and, having to make the subterranean journey on foot, anticipation was neatly prolonged.

What confronts you on entering is about as unusual as anything you might ever find in an underground car park. The sculptures are based on Bruegel the Elder's 1568 painting *The Cripples*, and detail from Piero della Francesca's fresco *The Legend of the True Cross* (c.1466) forms the basis for the six large light boxes that circle the space, casting a gloaming light onto the eerily suspended, abstracted shapes.

The London based artist explains the process that informs his work and his interest in making the unfamiliar.

**Jolyon Webber: Was there anything specific about Brugel's *The Cripples* that made you want to work with it in the way that you have?**

**Toby Ziegler:** For a long time I'd been making sculptures looking at fragmented figures, classical sculpture and [those that had been] shattered and dug up by archeologists and lovingly reconfigured with metal bars that act like prosthetic limbs.

I think that comes from my concern with damaged or unfinished works of art – I'm very attracted to them. You're aware of your role as the viewer to actually complete the work or the image, which I think happens with all works of art.

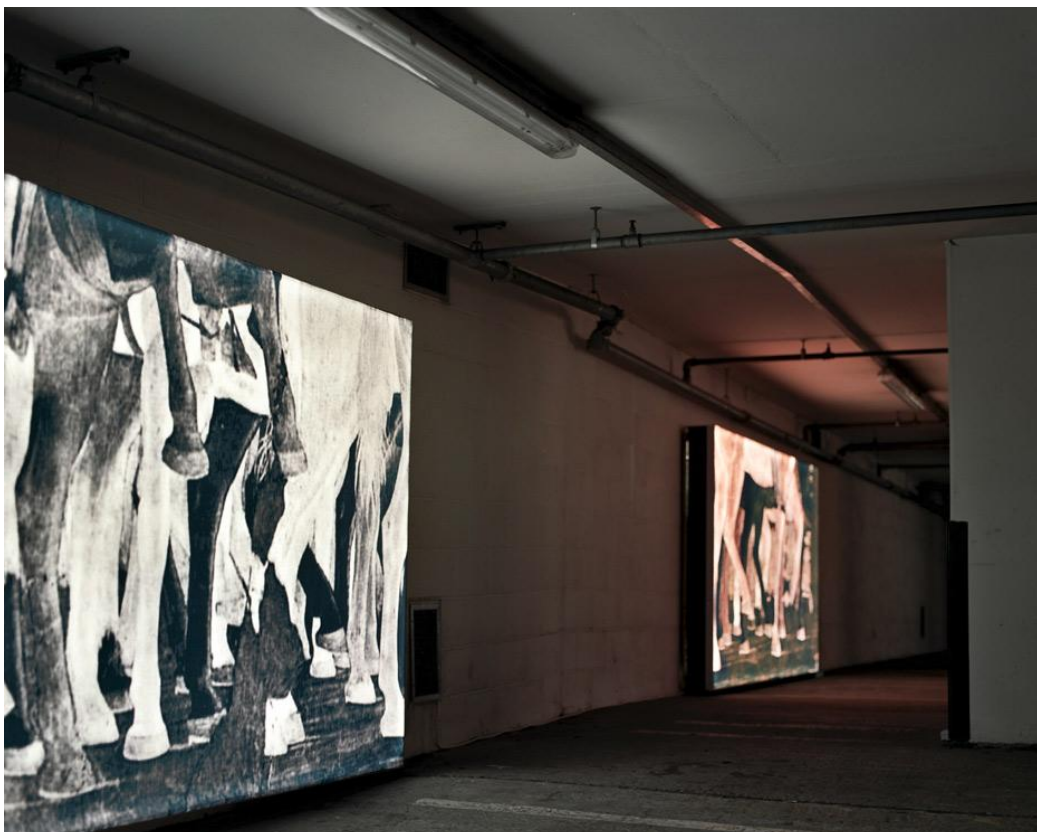


When we look at art so much of it is what we project onto it as a viewer but when you look at something damaged or unfinished you're made conscious of that fact in a Brechtian relationship, you're allowed to suspend your disbelief.

**Jolyon: The idea of different interpretations of things and objects seems to be a theme in your work. How did this motif come to take shape in your work?**

**Toby:** For as long as I can remember that's been a concern really, certainly since I left college. I had a bit of a crisis when I left art-school and gave up making work. I felt there wasn't a way to do it anymore, a way for me to paint and make gestures. This idea of a gesture being a form of self-expression felt like such a loaded cliché that it seemed very hard to actually make a gesture in the wake of post-modernism. So when I did slowly start making work again I was trying to make myself almost machine-like.

I started using a computer to model things in 3D programs. The first thing I modeled was my dad's breakfast set-up. He has this very ritualistic breakfast where he lays out all the plates before going to bed. It's completely transient, but at the same time meticulously laid out in the same place, with the same configuration every day. I started to use those to make drawings.



**Jolyon: So this was a way for you to work away from certain anxieties you had?**

**Toby:** About the cliché of making a gesture and self-expression? Yeah. What happened was that [I was] working through this ridiculously schematic process that was very painstaking, where I was trying to eliminate all idiosyncrasies. It functioned like a sieve and idiosyncrasies still bubbled out. Eventually I got so frustrated that I would allow things to deteriorate and allow things to lose resolution and sharpness and eventually I found I was able to use that as a foil, as a way of trying to make marks again.

I think a lot of the work has to do with how we relate to images, especially nowadays, how we perceive images. We're bombarded with them constantly with billboards, advertising and the Internet in particular. I find myself trying to turn my brain into a sieve, sluicing information, trying to catch some nugget or something to hold onto. It's funny because I do find the relationship with an artwork or with an image is often quite unexpected.

**Jolyon: Presumably, that's the thinking behind having the exhibition in a space like this? It heightens the viewer's sense of the unexpected and unfamiliar.**

**Toby:** Absolutely. First of all I think it's a space where the relationship between the viewer and the object isn't quite so crystallised. I was interested in the idea of speed, and the fact that car-parks are the kind of space that you want to get in an out of as quickly as possible but to shift that comfort a little bit you realise it's actually quite slow down here. You feel totally removed, like you're at the bottom of a well.

The acoustics are important as well. At one point I was thinking about making a soundscape to go with the show, something very subliminal like a drone that you almost wouldn't register.

But having spent some time down here I realised the space already provided that. You can hear the underground trains, or a car approaching, and your footsteps echo around. I suppose that provides an interesting analogy as the work deals with echoes as well.

I looked at a lot of different underground spaces like bunkers and tunnels but I didn't want it to be that "exotic", in a way. I wanted it to be somewhere quite utilitarian, somewhere still being used rather than an abandoned.

*The Cripples is at Q-Park, 3-9 Old Burlington Street until October 20th. For more on Toby Ziegler's work visit [SimonLeeGallery.com](http://SimonLeeGallery.com)*



