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Artist of the week 178: Steven Claydon

His mysterious, teasing fusions of old and new, raw and manmade are born of Steven Claydon rewriting history as a series of marvellous “what ifs”

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Recalling a classical bust ... Omar (Emergent) 2008
by Steven Claydon.
Photograph: Neil Libbert

Steven Claydon's art almost comes from another dimension: one that must be a lot like Earth, but where history's out of sync and culture's all jumbled up. His arrangements of objects on sack cloth-covered screens and boxy stands recall the musty exhibition style of old museums. But the artefacts they display seem out of step with time. Take his resin heads: they recall classical marble busts, but what's with the retro space-age bobbed wig, gold bouffant or Bart Simpson complexion?

What would future societies make of Claydon's meticulously presented skeins of yellow electric cable, or lovingly fashioned wood offcut sculptures, if they came across them buried in the sand? They would surely have a job deciphering the elusive references at play in his sculptures, photos, paintings and videos. You'll be as likely to find modernist architecture meeting ancient myth as the Smurfs getting cosy with the similarly stocking-capped philosopher, Heidegger. Claydon's allusions are deliberately teasing and hard to pin down, born of his rewriting of history as marvellous “what ifs”. They nod to the infinite complexity of how art and culture comes to be.

Culpable Earth, Claydon's current show, explores the journey right through from base matter to artefact. He uses primary colours and cubes that recall atomic models and pixels, suggesting the point where it all begins, both in the real and virtual world. A bust of the Victorian evolutionist Alfred Russel Wallace underlines a sense of growth and transformation.

Claydon's mysterious fusions of old and new, raw and manmade, include a large plastic industrial oil drum presented like a ceremonial urn beside a rough clay idol with teat-like studs and a foil mandala made from Mylar, the material of astronauts' space blankets, and embossed with cartoon characters. Atoms and pixels might be the literal origins of the things we see, but an object's cultural resonances are far harder to pin down.

Why we like him: For Trom Bell. Made in the Whitechapel Foundry where Big Ben was cast and modelled on a local bell, Claydon's hybrid instrument has an aluminium brick for a clapper and a stripey rope. It's rung to a timetable that corresponds with the East London bell in Celine's experimental, first world war-set novel *Guignol's Band*.

No Logo: Claydon's 2007 series *New Valkonia* was a collection of artefacts from an imagined eastern European nation. He named his fictional country after a T-shirt he picked up in Warsaw, which pictured a man whipping a horse beneath the slogan *Nie Val Konia*, which means stop masturbating.

Where can I see him? At First Site, Colchester until 7 May.