

Steven Claydon's second exhibition at Sadie Coles HQ, *The Gilded Bough*, features a series of sculptures and installations in which he probes and dismantles notions of meaning, aura and currency. Throughout, Claydon returns to the counterintuitive idea that cloaking an object might allow it to be seen more clearly – a paradox found in the process of scanning electron microscopy, where samples are typically coated in ultra-thin layers of gold before going under the microscope (the conductive material increases the quantity of 'secondary electrons' that can be detected from their surfaces). Using gold plating as a material and a metaphor, Claydon equivocates between the surfaces and essences of objects. Gilding becomes a means of scrutinising.



Claydon's latest works express the fine – often fugitive – line between culturally-accrued significance and pre-fiscal 'objecthood'. The exhibition's title refers to James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (first published in 1890), a seminal work of late-Victorian anthropology. Frazer's understanding of ritual objects – as materials in which some special nature or aura may reside – offers an analogy for Claydon's conception of the cultural artefact, in which meaning and materiality are suspended in an uneasy dialectic. In *The Gilded Bough*, classical statuary, rough-hewn timber, votive items and other objects appear in a variety of real and synthetic forms. Each oscillates between the status of an autonomous vessel and a vehicle for narratives.

Ambiguous in their authenticity and excised from their habitual contexts, these items enter into fluid dynamic in which signification is indeterminate. By misquoting Frazer's title, Claydon raises the idea of the alchemical mutations or degradations suffered by cultural artefacts over time. Certain works slyly profess their own artifice (for instance, a timber beam proven false by its hollow ends): the solidity connoted by goldenness is here supplanted by the ersatz quality of gildedness. Gilding thus recurs as a symbolic and literal conceit, expressing the idea of projecting a (potentially deceptive) beauty or sanctity or financial worth onto an object.

Weaving between the arcane and the technological, Claydon draws unlikely and improbable equivalences between sources. In so doing, he recalls Frazer's intuitive and cross-cultural mode of anthropology. He equally evokes the arbitrary, sometimes felicitous interconnections of Internet searches. Throughout *The Gilded Bough*, the lens or framework via which objects are understood flips to become the subject. Collectively, Claydon's works are captive to (perhaps dependent on) their cultural context, and yet all the while, they profess their survival as objects that are indifferent to history and society. This tension is magnified in the space of the exhibition, which Claydon describes as "the pressurised moment when works are aggregated, hostages to context, and yet quietly resistant to temporality."

Steven Claydon (b. 1969) lives and works in London. He studied at Chelsea School of Art & Design and Central Saint Martins, London. He has exhibited internationally, with major exhibitions including *Analogues, Methods, Monsters, Machines*, CAC Genève, Geneva (2015); *The Fictional Pixel and The Ancient Set*, Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen (2015); *Culpable Earth*, Firstsite, Colchester (2012); *Mon Plaisir... Votre Travail...*, La Salle de Bains, Lyon (2011); *Golden Times*, Haus der Kunst, Munich (2010); and *The Ancient Set and The Fictional Pixel*, Serpentine Pavilion, London (2008). In 2015 he curated (with Martin Clark) *The Noing Uv It*, at Bergen Kunsthall, Bergen; and *Strange Events Permit Themselves The Luxury of Occurring* at Camden Arts Centre in 2007. His films *Grid & Spike* and *Mimicry Systems* were broadcast as part of ICA's Channel 4 Random Acts in 2013. Claydon has also been involved in experimental electronic music for over 20 years, most notably as part of the bands Add N to X, Jack too Jack, and Long Meg. A book on Claydon's work is forthcoming from Mousse Publishing.

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