



## Fever: Jean-Philippe Dordolo

30 September - 9 October

Opening 30 September, 6-9 pm

9 French Place, E1 6JB

"The aguey tendon, the sin, the sin.

O auto-da-fe! the purple men,  
Gold-cruised, thick with spleen,  
Sit with their hooks and crooks  
and stoke the light."

"The tinder cries.

The indelible smell

Of a snuffed candle!

Love, love, the low smokes roll"

"Such yellow sullen smokes

Make their own element."

Early earth was completely molten, 4 ½ billion years ago the planets formed hot. This allowed all the elements to stratify, the heavy elements sunk down to form the iron rich core and the lighter elements rose to form a crust.<sup>2</sup>

This body of work - sculptures, cast paintings and drawings - demonstrate states of change, sweating ossification.

"Fire is an image coming into being, revealed in a process."<sup>3</sup> Like sedimentary rock, the future and history are welded. We can feel all the phases from Stone-Age to Modern Design.

Jean Philippe Dordolo has never made a chair before.

Anthropomorphised, the chair has arms and a back, its

face is held up and collapsing. There are multiple ears, gaping mouths, a reorganised body. Dordolo has removed the eyeballs. "There's something very direct about being looked at and looking at something. Maybe they didn't want to stare at the truth. Maybe I didn't want to be judged by them." The scaffold is more like a peg leg or wood from a shipwreck holding up a dias of ears for multiple languages: French, English, German. On the chairs, hats moulded from a clay prototype are multiplied and replicated in jesmonite (a thread throughout Dordolo's work), like a Buster Keaton movie. Early influences from splatter horror movies have evolved a treatment of the body that becomes elastic and grotesque.

Fever is a defensive mechanism. Manifesting in high body temperature which may indicate infection, it can result from physiological stresses, such as strenuous exercise, nervous excitement or fierce passion. It is often accompanied by shivering, headache, and in severe instances, delirium.

An almost primary palette has something to do with leisure and time, soaked in memories from childhood in the south of France. "You can't look into the sky as the sun is so bright." Shiny, febrile, accidental sweat like the sculptures

<sup>1</sup> Sylvia Plath. Selected Lines from "Fever 103". Copyright © 1993 by Ted Hughes. Collected Poems. HarperCollins Publishers Inc, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Carolin Crawford. Royal Society Research Fellow at the Institute of Astronomy in Cambridge. Podcast, In Our Time with Melvyn Bragg. 27<sup>th</sup> May 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Sergei Eisenstein. *On Disney*. Pg 84. Seagull Books Publishing, 17 Nov.2017. ISBN No: 9780857424914

**BROOKE  
BENINGTON**

LONDON lily@brookebenington.com +44 (0)7557 036181  
FULMER george@brookebenington.com +44 (0)7988 941056  
brookebenington.com @brookebenington

have been fried, the pale cooked yellow of melted cheese. Dordolo likes talking about cooking, “it reveals the sculptures and the process, it’s a way to reflect it.” If we were going to describe these works as food they would be honey, *Puddingschweiß*.

*Raubvögel* is like a banquet painting, a jar, a bird, a wing. Tired of making human noses, Dordolo turned to birds. In the 11<sup>th</sup> Century the doctors used to prescribe a rooster, a hot and dry bird as the perfect tonic for a cold.<sup>4</sup> Different states of rawness are present simultaneously: these are regal birds, fish beaked and gill-less in spiced fruit colours of damson and burnt berry and the pouring feel of “noble liquid”<sup>5</sup> and baked in sensibility of raku firing. Glistening effects of light, texture and colour roast jeopardy into the work. Vulture symbolism is linked to death, rebirth, equalizing and cleanliness. Vulcan, the Roman God of Fire was marked by a rite of unknown significance: the patriarch of Roman families threw small fish into the fire.<sup>6</sup>

As a state of heat, Fever is ultimate sickness, a kind of boiling madness. Amazing and distressing – the inside, outside dichotomy that you can be boiling but cold. *Roter Himmel und Verbrennungsanlage* is like a Hestian<sup>7</sup> doomsday engine with chimneys; a potential outlet? As a sustained position, the fever would ravage causing material damage or physical eruptions of the skin – we are looking for it to go down but there is room for it to go up too. ‘The idea of love as a sickness is well established in literature and music. In popular music, this notion reached its apogee in the sultry smoulder of that perennial torch-song classic, *Fever*.’<sup>8</sup> The postpunk 80s band *The Cramps* rendition of *You give me fever*, shouting with passion between breathy phrases as the *Fever*, takes over the body. In medieval times the heart was considered the chief organ in the hierarchy of the body. In medieval warfare the fire was one of the most dangerous weapons.<sup>9</sup>

Fire is raging in Dordolo’s cast paintings – through a window we see a town on fire, in another, a very cropped image burns across the whole surface. Fire doesn’t stand still, it consumes.

“Fire can spread but as the artist you can also decide how quickly to fuel it or where you create barriers or hurdles – like fire fighters starting a fire ahead of the raging fire in order to stop it. You can set intentions like that in the studio.”

Initially curious about the aesthetic representations of fire, Dordolo alighted on peasant revolts, a time when passion lighted fires and caused real change. Medieval images of fire remain on the studio wall, infernal tongues, a blazing circle or a limb shaped conflagration. The flame initially presented the challenge of blending; the flickering colour spectrum, the idea of blue moving through yellow to red, the hottest and the coldest parts. It has become a cartoon parody, which cannot be blown out.

In this year, as Covid 19 continues to fuel our feverish times, this work reflects with great feeling and dark humour our attempts to adapt and cope. The drawings, visionary dreamlike scenes involving suited men, *Der Feuerlöscher* and strange architectural bodies on fire, *Dom* are angry and resigned, embracing this fever, the sculptures their shivering palimpsests.

Dordolo’s work inhabits the fervour of making, straight on, poured, caked in gory physicality with the complex angers and agitations of being a maker in our present moment, and the delirium and turmoil of being human. Like amalgamous mash ups of the multiple Gods associated with fire, these flaming beasts, fever factories, restless monuments sizzle with fever. What a lovely way to burn<sup>10</sup>.

Text written by Emma Cousin.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibn Butlan. Taqwirn al-sihha, The Almanac of health. 1531

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-dutch-lifes-dark-secrets-hide-exotic-delicacies>. The Dutch called milk “noble Liquid”.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Vulcan>

<sup>7</sup> Hestia the Greek Goddess of hearth and its fires. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_fire\\_gods](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fire_gods)

<sup>8</sup> Ian Gittins DECEMBER 5 2017 FT

<sup>9</sup> Phil Slavin, a lecturer at the University of Kent. <https://www.karwansaraypublishers.com/mwblog/fire-and-medieval-warfare/>

<sup>10</sup> Lyric from the song Fever.