

A&M's Guest Editor David Lock is Joe Orton's nephew and an artist who, until recently, eschewed the influence of his famous uncle, not wanting to trade on the connection. Things changed when he was asked to participate in *What the Artist Saw*, an exhibition inspired by Orton's life and work. Here he describes his large-scale collage installation, *Looted*, which he made for the show, and the value of his uncle's legacy, for himself as a young artist and for gay culture more generally. "Joe was like the Big Bang, the first gay person I was aware of..." he tells Gemma de Cruz.

All images © David Lock

# RELATIVE VALUES

**Gemma de Cruz — When did you start making the *Looted* collage?**

**David Lock** — Michael Petry invited me to take part in the show *What the Artist Saw: Art Inspired by the Life and Work of Joe Orton* about this time last year, and I started physically making the collage with my partner Stephen in the summer. When Michael told me about the show, I felt like I wanted to take part and, originally, I'd wanted to make some paintings, but I had wondered how I could make something that was directly about Joe Orton.

As a painter I really admire Patrick Plocktor, he did a famous drawing of Joe that's in the National Portrait Gallery [Joe Orton by Patrick Plocktor, pen and ink, 1967]. In the drawing, Joe is on the bed with just his socks on, and you can see his swallow tattoo. I thought that overlap offered an initial way in for me. I'd been making very fragmentary paintings at the time and I'd been wanting to make them more naturalistic and had been looking at Plocktor in relation to that, so, I started to think I could approach [what I made for the show] through my interest in Patrick Plocktor and his connection with Joe.

As I was doing the research I went to the Islington Museum to see the [Orton/Halliwell] reworked book covers; they've always got one or two on display. I never like to call them 'defaced'... There is something so quirky, playful and irreverent about them. I got a copy of Ilsa Colsell's book [about the reworked book covers] *Malicious Damage*. Then it just hit me that I should make my own version of Joe and Ken's famous wall collage.

**GdC — Is it right that the collage they made — that yours is based on — was made entirely from plates cut out of library books?**

**DL** — Yes. They're all from stolen library books, as far as I know. This was in the early '60s, of course. Now we live in an image culture where we're surrounded by pictures, but back then even Sunday supplements must have been in their infancy. When the police went to [Orton and Halliwell's flat in] Noel Road they found thousands of library books in various stages of distress. On YouTube, there's an interview from the Eamonn Andrews Show where Joe is talking about a collage he made that no longer exists [*Lady Lewisham's Book of Etiquette*], so there were probably lots more of them that just got lost over time.



David Lock  
*Misfit (Check)*, 2016  
watercolour on paper  
76 x 56cm

David Lock  
*Mirror Moves*, 2014  
oil on linen  
158 x 108cm



David Lock  
*Misfits (Double)*, 2015  
acrylic on linen  
153 x 123cm



at sculpture from antiquity. I also wanted to include film stills that had shaped not just my identity, but which had also been culturally significant. The first image I wanted was from Jean Genet's only film, *Un Chant d'Amour*, and it grew from there.

**GdC — When you were growing up, how did you perceive your Uncle Joe?**

**DL** — I never knew him personally. He'd died a few years before I was born. I grew up in a suburb of Leicester and when I was really young I didn't think there was anything unique about my uncle writing plays and having books written about him. I thought that was quite commonplace in families. It was only later that I realised it wasn't.

**GdC — How was Joe talked about in the family?**

**DL** — They were very proud of him, but they'd fight about him, too. The content of [John Lahr's Orton biography] *Prick up Your Ears* was very provocative.

**GdC — When did you know that Joe was gay?**

**DL** — Oh, always. As it was all in the book. Joe's unapologetic attitude caused a few rows!



This page: Joe Orton and Kenneth Halliwell, 25 Noel Road interior showing bed 1962. courtesy: Islington Local History Centre  
Opposite: David Lock, Looted, collage with paintings (from left) *El Muniria* and *Blue Boxers*, 2017 © David Lock

**GdC — When did you realise that you were gay yourself?**

**DL —** I think I always had those feelings, and they just grew over time. When I read [Joe's] books I felt like I could identify with them.

**GdC — Did that make you more interested in him as a person?**

**DL —** Definitely, but it was all mixed in with "I hate this aspect of myself; I don't want to be this way..." I never felt like being gay was cool and I could embrace it. Growing up in the '80s, at times, it could be quite hostile. I remember when I was 13 or so, and I really fancied George Michael, but I couldn't tell anybody. It was quite a brutal time. It wasn't so easy; I suppose having the idea of Joe in the background did give me confidence, but at the same time shame. It got much easier when I was around 17. Even before I'd actually come out, I would start cruising people in the street and I was aware of those codes. Maybe it was my natural gaydar or because I'd read [the Orton diaries] I was more aware. But I don't know if it was a chicken and egg thing; I'll never know.

**GdC — When did you read Joe's diaries?**

**DL —** When they were published in 1986; I was about 15. I was more interested in the diaries than the plays, actually, although I got interested in the plays later on. We didn't really go to see plays. To me, Joe going to London and becoming a playwright was an exotic idea that seemed like a million miles away for me.

**GdC — Do you think that, as an artist, you have had to actively not look to Joe Orton as an influence?**

**DL —** Absolutely. It's quite good that [curator] Michael Petry invited me to take part in this show after I've been making art independently ever since my MA, 15 years ago. I have thought "why didn't I do this at Goldsmiths?", but I would *never* have done something like this there. The fact that I've made bodies of work and formed my own identity before this opportunity came up means I could use my own collage language, which I've developed over the past ten years.

Going back to how I selected the first images that I put down, I wanted to use sculptures that they had used, but it was also really important to me that it was about queer identity, specifically gay men or male same sex lovers. I was conscious that I didn't want to use women or address women's history, as it's really different in terms of gay sexuality, plus it could not help but be gendered through my male gaze. Michael had also written a book, *Hidden Histories*, about gay artists and this influenced me too. In terms of gay history Joe was like the Big Bang, the first gay person I

was aware of, so gay culture exploded out of that and the collage is really about that. I've intermingled all the gay men that I've identified with throughout my life. I'm not necessarily a huge Boy George fan, but he's in there. I remember, in the '80s, he was prepared to put his head above the parapet.

**GdC — You do have women in there, but not as gay figures per se.**

**DL —** One or two. Linda Evangelista is there with George Michael, and Rita Tushingham is in there with the gay character Geoff, from *A Taste of Honey*. I also only wanted to use stills from films with homoerotic associations. There's a great moment in [Lindsay Anderson's] *If....* when Bobby Phillips [Rupert Webster] looks down at Wallace [Richard Warwick] who looks back at him and then he does this amazing gymnastics move. Nothing happens between them, but it captures a real moment of desire.

**GdC — Do you see yourself as a gay artist or an artist who is gay?**

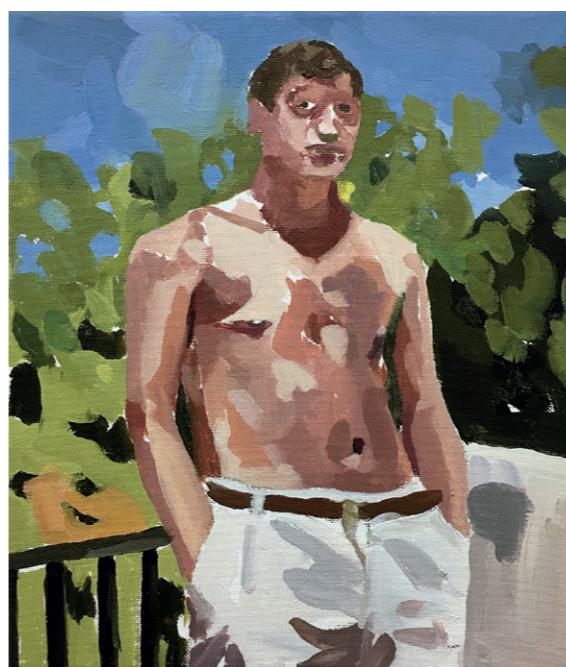
**DL —** I see myself as an artist who is gay but there's definitely something queer about what I'm interested in, and engaged with in my practice. I think, being gay and being disabled, I'm very conscious of 'the other' in terms of normative values. I was reading something the other day about Brexit and it made me think alienation is everybody's problem. It's not just a problem for the person who is oppressed. That's why I was so angry about Brexit, because it is everybody's responsibility to work together, and to retreat is so regressive. A lot of the work I make, the collages and paintings, I call 'misfits' because, for me, it's about being destabilised and asking questions about male identities in formation.

**GdC — You can tell when you look at them that they're not specific people.**

**DL —** It's about producing the articulation of difference; they're just caught in a moment of flux. I see the paintings as performative in that respect.

**GdC — Since you've made *Looted* has it changed your attitude to your painting?**

**DL —** Yes, for sure; mainly in my paintings' relationship with the collage. The collagistic paintings on top of collage was too much. So I just made these naturalistic portraits and I couldn't stop as they worked really well with the collage. The collage itself had other issues. I started to think about artists like Richard Prince. Some of the images I wanted to use were owned by Getty and I thought I can't make this collage because I'm going to be sued



David Lock  
*Uncle Joe (Joe Orton)*, 2016  
oil on canvas  
31 x 26cm  
© David Lock

that emerge just from the poses and staging. I find that when you make the best paintings they feel like they've made themselves.

Also, I've always been interested in artists like Chantal Joffe, Marlene Dumas and Elizabeth Peyton, who make (amongst other things) portrait paintings taken from fashion magazines. It's very important to me that I'm articulating something about an ideal... that it comes from outside myself, and that these are society's 'ideals' of contemporary masculinities. So I want to play with those too and bring them into my work. That fantasy and desire. I also like taking images from blogs such as Tumblr. People are sharing other images all the time, I want my paintings to be an extension of that.

**GdC — How do you want the paintings to interact with the photographs?**

**DL —** I want them to have a presence, with one informing the other. I wanted a Tangiers feel. One of the paintings is called *el-Muniria*, which is the hotel that the Beats stayed in, and where William Burroughs wrote *Naked Lunch*. I wanted this semi-tropical environment that had a queer feel but was comfortable and not awkward. I want the whole thing to be unfolding and transforming.

**GdC — Do you think any of the men that you've used in the collage are awkward?**

**DL —** No. For me it's a celebration. It's in flux, it's very contested and it's very easy for us to be in a late capitalist democracy and say we can feel comfortable about being gay; but it's actually only half the world that feels that way. I feel that's really tragic. Margaret Atwood said something really interesting; she said that liberal society will push and push, but only so far until it gets pushed back the other way. We can see that happening now, of course, and that's what's under threat – liberal consciousness and liberal discourse. These are not things that we can take for granted and that's why I've put specific photos of people like Keith Haring in. I love his t-shirt, it says *AIDS is political, biological (germ) warfare*; and Felix Gonzales Torres, because these people are real touchstones for me.

**GdC — Do you use the word 'queer' to describe yourself?**

**DL —** Probably only when I'm making art, in discourse. If I was out with my mates I'd call myself gay. That's what I really admire about Joe; when he was active, most gay men were very clandestine about it, but he was completely comfortable with being gay. It's as if he could almost anticipate that the old world was dying. I guess him not being able to acknowledge Ken shows it wasn't all so easy though.

**GdC — In Leonie Orton's book, she talks about the family not knowing Joe and Ken were a couple until after they died. Did your mum talk to you about that?**

**DL —** She did. She said the last time she saw Joe, he asked her to come to the pub and she said she couldn't because she couldn't get a babysitter, and he said "Oh, just try", and she said that's her last regret, because she didn't go, and she hoped that maybe they could have had a chat in the pub and he would have come out to her. You really can't appreciate how hard it is to come out to somebody, especially back then.

It seems absurd now, but when I was young I personally found it really hard to come out as gay to my twin brother Chris; to actually say it and get it off your chest is a hard thing to do – maybe because you've spent your whole life up to that point keeping it wrapped up.

**GdC — You said you were initially more interested in the diaries than the plays; which of the plays have most influenced you?**

**DL —** I really like *Entertaining Mr Sloane*. It would have been interesting to see the direction the plays would have taken if Joe had lived. I think the last one, *What the Butler Saw*, is really quite convoluted, and I don't know how far he could have gone with that idea of creating these absurd situations. That's why I like *Sloane*, because it's structurally very simple with wonderful dialogue. I wonder if he would have gone back to that sort of simplicity. Then again, I could see an amazing production of *Butler* and it would completely change my mind. That's the thing, even today the plays are hard to get right.

**GdC — Do you regard this body of work as a homage to Joe? How do you see it?**

**DL —** I'd like to think so. I think I'd have to make more work, afterwards, to know, really. It's definitely the most ambitious thing I've done. I'm too close to it at the moment and it feels very specific to the MOCA show. It certainly allowed me to articulate things in my practice that I hadn't been able to before. I had wanted to create destabilised environments and I feel like this collage did it for me in an effective way. I was interested in the way Dexter Dalwood puts narrative scenarios together, but when I was trying to do it in paint I was too interested in the fragmented body for it

to create something that wasn't just specifically *about* the body. While I've been making this collage, out of real moments and real people, society and history, I felt I was creating my own history paintings, a quality that I think is so strong in Dexter's work. So, in a way, this collage enabled me to say something really strongly about a queer discourse; something that I'd never managed to articulate in my own painting.

**GdC — If you knew nothing about Ken and Joe's work, the library books and collage, how do you think you might interpret them?**

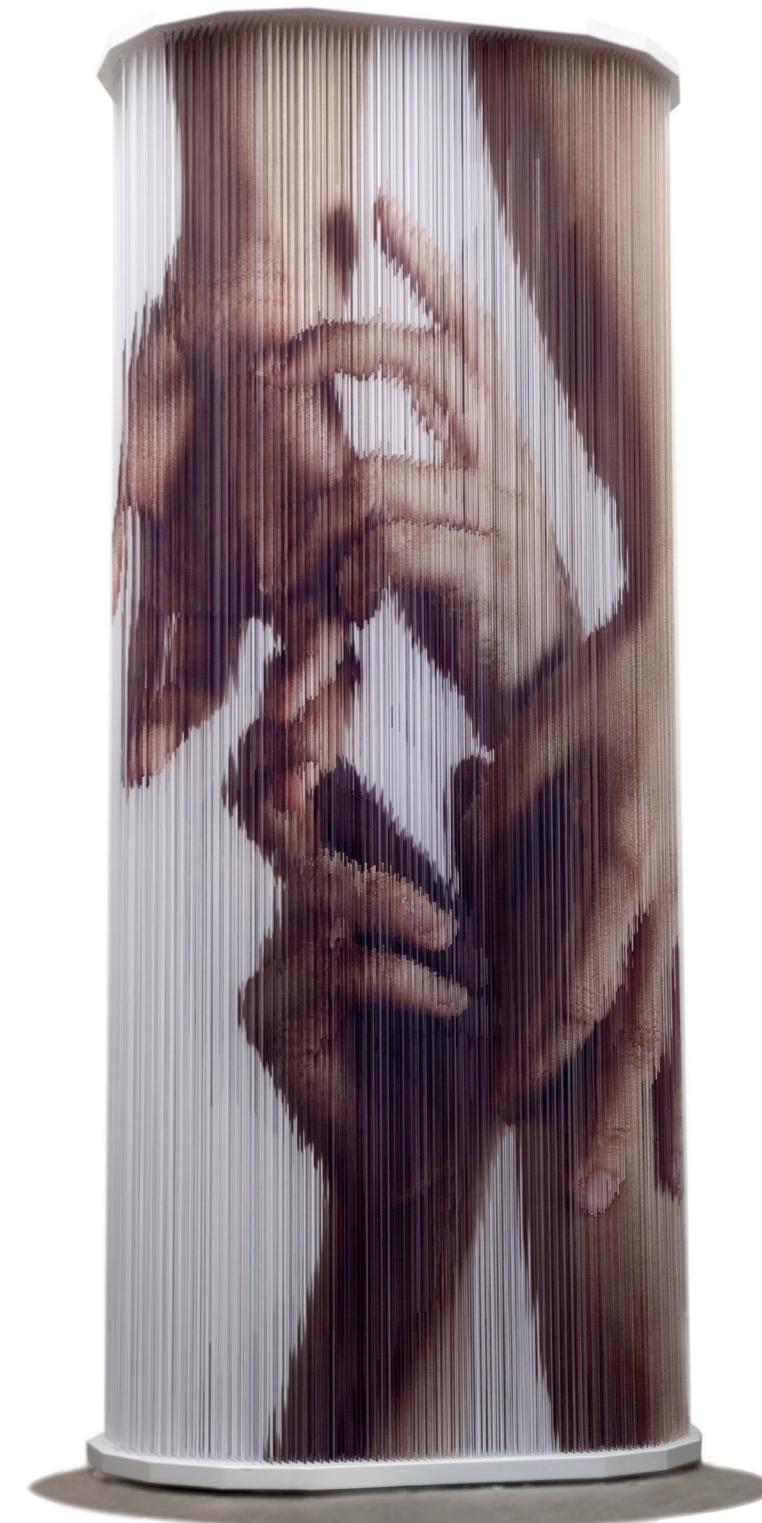
**DL —** Sometimes I've asked myself this in a different way. Would I have ever come across Joe if he were not my uncle? I'm sure I would have stumbled across him and thought he was amazing and Joe would have been on the collage and he would've been as important to me as Francis Bacon and Derek Jarman.

**GdC — If you had a younger relative who wanted to be an artist what advice would you give them?**

**DL —** I'd say go with your gut, and if you're not sure and you have a couple of options always go with the risky option. I think that's what Joe did and that's what gave me the confidence to own this collage.

— JOE ORTON:  
50 YEARS ON, A SYMPOSIUM.  
UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER: 9 AUGUST, 2017

— CRIMES OF PASSION:  
THE STORY OF JOE ORTON. NATIONAL JUSTICE  
MUSEUM, NOTTINGHAM:  
22 JULY-1 OCTOBER, 2017



String Column 0155 | 2016 | Mixed Media | 210 x 90 x 60 cm (82.5 x 35.5 x 23.5 in)

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## Hong Sungchul Solid but Fluid

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