

ROB TUFNELL

AT

1 SUTTON LANE
LONDON EC1M 5PU

HYPERBOREAN MANNERS

28 NOVEMBER 2009 – 30 JANUARY 2010

Art & Language, Anton Beeke, Walead Beshty, Jack Bilbo, Mike Cooter, Ruth Ewan, Ian Hamilton Finlay, Conrad Frost and Josep Gual, John Kent, King Mob, Bernard Leach, David Musgrave, Cady Noland, Eduardo Paolozzi, Herbert Read, Jamie Reid, Humphrey Spender, John Stezaker, Wolfgang Suschitzky and Edith Tudor-Hart

Joseph Conrad's novel *The Secret Agent* (1907) opens with the description of a late Victorian, Soho stationery shop selling pornography, comic books and anarchist literature:

"The window contained photographs of more or less undressed dancing girls; nondescript packages in wrappers like patent medicines; closed yellow paper envelopes; a few numbers of ancient French comic publications... a dingy blue china bowl, a casket of black wood, bottles of marking ink, and rubber stamps; a few books with titles hinting at impropriety; a few apparently old copies of obscure newspapers, badly printed, with titles like the *Torch*, the *Gong* – rousing titles... And the two gas-jets inside the panes were always turned low."

Inspired in part by Conrad's setting, *Hyperborean Manners* features art works and related books and ephemera, many of which adopt or document confrontational positions. Inclusions may appear to embody one another's political antonyms and yet, at the same time, somehow form a series of strange and inadvertent allegiances.

Adolf Verloc, *agent provocateur* and proprietor of the shop in Conrad's novel, describes his handler, a foreign diplomat named Mr. Vladimir, as possessing 'Hyperborean manners.' In the late 19th century *Hyperborea* (thought by the Ancient Greeks and Romans to be a climatically clement culture lost amidst the arctic wastes) was metaphorically applied to Anglo Saxon enclaves to describe cold climates populated by savages or, conversely, enlightened communities of intellectuals. In the twentieth century, ideas of *Hyperborea* inspired the *Hyborian* epoch of comic strip character Conan the Barbarian written for *Weird Tales* by Robert E. Howard in 1932 and resurrected by the incumbent Governor of California in a 1982 film adaptation co-authored by conspiracist Director Oliver Stone.

"Civilized men are more discourteous than savages because they know they can be impolite without having their skulls split, as a general thing."

–'The Tower of the Elephant', Robert E. Howard, *Weird Tales*, March 1933

"The true, greatly misunderstood passion of the collector is always anarchistic, destructive. For this is its dialectics: to combine with loyalty to an object, to individual items, to things sheltered in his care, a stubborn subversive protest against the typical, the classifiable."

–'Lob der Puppe', Walter Benjamin, *Literarische Welt*, January 11, 1930

For further information and images please contact mail@robtufnell.com

Gallery open Thursday to Saturday 12 – 6 pm and by appointment.

Closed 23 December to 7 January.