

## The Brits are Back: An Interview with Tim Noble and Sue Webster By Cara Cotner



When Haunch of Venison closed its Berlin doors last October, many thought it was an early sign of the Berlin art scene's demise. Perhaps such fears were premature – Venison founders Harry Blain and Graham Southern are back to launch their new gallery Blain|Southern, which opens on April 29.

The inaugural exhibition *Turning the Seventh Corner* (see our review) features influential post-YBAs (Young British Artists) Tim Noble and Sue Webster, the music-loving artist couple well-known for their light installations and detailed shadow sculptures assembled from trash. We spoke with Sue Webster about the labyrinthine *Turning the Seventh Corner*, her love for Berlin and its famed music history.

### **You and Tim Noble met in 1986 at university, but when did you start working together?**

We left art school in 1989, and in order to avoid the chosen careers of our contemporaries – either hang around the college and bully the undergraduates or move to London in an attempt to get noticed, we decided to head north to Bradford, one of the roughest, but cheapest places to live in England. It was there that we were able to rent a studio and experiment with ideas before exposing ourselves to the rest of the world – a kind of self-exile, like when Lenin retreated to Switzerland to gather his strength before returning to Russia to lead the revolution.

### **What attracts you to Berlin?**

In the early 1980s I remember watching the cult film *Christiane F*, also known as *We Children from Bahnhof Zoo*, which portrays the drug scene in West Berlin in the 1970s. The film featured a live performance by David Bowie. I became fascinated with Berlin and discovered the music of David Bowie. I later discovered that Bowie had lived and worked in Berlin and recorded some of his seminal albums, namely his 'Berlin Trilogy', at the Hansa Studios near the Wall. This is a city that will always have a creative pull.

### **Have you spent much time here?**

When I was a teenager I was thrown into a detention centre for stealing art materials from a department store. On my release, my father, who had to admit that I had paid back my debt to society, rewarded me with an invitation for a weekend break in order to recover from my trauma. "Berlin!" I insisted. It was 1984 and my first trip abroad; the city was divided in two, and I remember thinking of the East side being in black and white and the West being in colour, just like an old and a new television set. That image has always remained with me.

### **Can you tell us about your new exhibition?**

An artist's brain is like one big, creative sponge that draws on every single experience that may seem meaningless to others. The original concept behind *Turning the Seventh Corner* was sparked by a recent trip to Egypt where we visited the Valley of the Kings and the tomb of Tutankhamun. There is also an obsession with the search for hidden treasure as portrayed in the 1969 Western film *Mackenna's Gold*, and, of course, the natural progression of our studio practice.

### **In *Turning the Seventh Corner*, the viewer must first walk through a series of disorienting tunnels in order to experience the artwork.**

Art galleries have become like High Street shopping, where the viewer pops in to quickly look at the work whilst on their way to something else. *Turning The Seventh Corner* is an exercise to put the emotion back into the experience of viewing an artwork.

### **Is your work theatrical?**

No, our work is circumstantial.

### **How did working for another famous British art team, Gilbert & George, affect your approach to making art?**

Gilbert & George coined the phrase 'We two are one,' which means that they make only one type of art, art that could be made only by one person, whereas we two are most definitely individuals.

### **Do you worry that only working together could make your work too insular?**

Care what other people think and you will always be their prisoner.

### **You know the London art scene. How does the Berlin art scene compare?**

The Berlin art scene does not suffer fools.