

## Thomas Houseago

There was a time when art and life seemed to blur together, was it then or now, I'm never sure. Thomas emerged in some ways fully formed, he was touched by the faerie it seemed and he already knew the names that the Earth called itself. He seemed to know that the world wasn't dumb, that it was waiting for those who speak its language. While Thomas was passing through the Art College in Leeds, he, if I remember rightly, stole a few words from myself and few from a dear old friend called Graham. He was quick to weave them into his own song and went on his vagabond way to find other names for what had always been there; and he would eventually go on to find forms for songs he had never even known the tune for.

I remember him dark with smoke, orange hair disappearing behind the black soot of his burning metal Scud missile, bent over on a college flat rooftop, energetically fanning the flames of a turpentine-soaked rag-packed imagination. Or am I thinking of his future? His image sometimes drifts away from one time and moves into another. Sometimes I come across his work unexpectedly. His sculptures can be huge but still the song is in them, and as I walk towards their mass I can see him inside, speaking in tongues that shape matter, I can see that he still speaks the language of the Earth.

I'm writing sitting at a table in Leeds, a Yorkshire place, once a home for Vikings, a place the Romans passed through and left; the place that Thomas Houseago grew up in. There is evidence that in the Dales and in the West Riding, that belief in the faerie and in boggarts survived into the twentieth century. You can find a boggart anywhere if you look carefully; they shift shape and become whatever you fear. I sometimes think that Thomas picked the bogget's pocket before he left, because it seems to me that he can easily put the fear of God into what he makes, but that's not for Yorkshire folk to worry about, they know their own. Like Henry Moore who also trod up those sandstone steps into the Art College, or Leeds Arts University as it is now, a sensibility was shaped by an idea of the North, of a hardness with a backbone of Yorkshire grit.

But we were younger then and still had games to play, Sesame Street howled in the kids brains and people still believed smoking was good for you. A half swigged can of cheap lager and a packet of rolling tobacco were all a young artist needed to feel fit for purpose in those days. And I'm still there, still talking to students and making images and finding I don't really understand what art is, but then making something that tells me yes I do.

I still look out for Thomas in the art-world press, as his journey continues and he hones his voice. I hope he still grins maniacally when he's on to something good and I hope he still hits it with a hammer when that something good disappears.

Garry Barker 2019

