

Nottingham
Contemporary

Klaus Weber

If you leave me
I'm not coming

22 Oct – 8 Jan
Exhibition Notes

For more information

If you have any questions or want to find out more about the exhibition, please ask our friendly Gallery Assistants. They're here to help!



Klaus Weber designed this logo for Nottingham Contemporary when we opened in 2009.

If you leave me I'm not coming

Galleries 1 & 2

Klaus Weber's solo exhibition, **If you leave me I'm not coming**, starts before you enter the gallery. Look up from the street outside and you'll see his sculpture **running man**, suspended in mid-air from our highest golden tower.

Like many of Weber's art works **running man** appears humorous. It echoes the cartoon catastrophe of the character who runs blindly off a cliff, his legs still pumping furiously as he defies his inevitable fall. But the slapstick approach indicates something more threatening. After all, we are living beyond our means, economically and environmentally, suspended in a state of disbelief, on the edge of disaster.

Weber's works often draw on natural forces – in this case gravity. These forces act as metaphors for social and psychological conditions on the brink of disorder and breakdown, sudden change or hallucination. The exhibition looks something like a large, unruly laboratory. It recalls the anarchic creativity of the pioneers of science and engineering, whose strange machines harnessed the huge energies of the natural world and tried to tame them.

Gallery 1 & 2

If you leave me I'm not coming can also be seen from the street. Our main Weekday Cross window runs with artificial rain that is cleared by outsized windscreen wipers. The window becomes a windscreen and Nottingham Contemporary a giant vehicle, moving through the city streets. The rain, however, is on the inside – an image of the outside world penetrating the inside of the institution.

Weber has produced a series of alternative fountains in public spaces. In our Reception you can see his video work **Fountain Loma Dr/W 6th St.** A car has crashed into a Los Angeles fire hydrant that spurts water high into the air. Police officers are directing traffic around the accident. However Weber staged the incident, recruiting retired police officers to act as extras. His art work has an extra resonance in Los Angeles, a metropolis built on a desert without water, whose best known industry – Hollywood – is dedicated to producing dreams and mirages.



Klaus Weber, Fountain - Loma Dr / W 6th St, Los Angeles, 2002
Installation consisting of a fire hydrant, 2 police officers, a late model car and a side walk.
Courtesy the artist, Herald St, London and Andrew Kreps, New York

In **Gallery 1**, **Sun Press (Against Nature)** is a work that connects the exhibition to the natural world outside. A heliostat – a circular mirror that turns to follow the sun's path – directs its rays into the gallery below. During the exhibition a book will be printed by the sun, which will bleach the paper around the letters. But the book is JK Huysmans' **Against Nature**, an explicit rebuttal of the 19th century Naturalist movement in literature. Beloved by aesthetes like Oscar Wilde, it was called 'the bible of decadence' when it was written in 1884. Ironically, its contents are here revealed by the ultimate natural power.

Weber's **Bee Paintings** are another unexpected collision between art and nature. Although they resemble intriguing abstracts, the paintings are actually created by the bees themselves. Every year, when the bees first leave the hive, they perform a 'cleansing flight' when they excrete, preferably on clean white surfaces. In this case they have obligingly decorated Weber's canvases.



Klaus Weber, Bee Painting, Large Screen I, 2009.

Image courtesy the artist, Herald St, London and Andrew Kreps, New York

Large Dark Wind Chime (Arab Tritone) in Gallery 2 is Weber's darkly humorous take on the humble wind chime, a garden ornament that makes natural forces pleasantly audible. Weber's work is a play on scale, both aural and visual. It towers ominously above the viewer, while its sound sends seemingly sinister vibrations reverberating around the gallery.

The wind chime is tuned to the so-called 'diabolus in musica' – or the 'tritone' - that spans three whole tones in the musical scale. Such an interval was avoided for many centuries in Western musical composition, and was reputedly banned by the Medieval Church because of its ability to stimulate carnal urges - or even summon the devil. The Romantic composers later exploited its wild and threatening associations. The work is also a reference to the Arabian musical scale, whose tones are much more sub-divided than the Western scale. By combining the Tritone with Arabian tones, **Large Dark Wind Chime** refers to the fear of the Other, specifically perhaps Europe's centuries old fear of the Islamic world – particularly the Ottoman empire. Spreading bad vibes, **Large Dark Wind Chime** plays up to these stereotypes.



Klaus Weber, *Large Dark Wind Chime (Arab Tritone)*, 2008.
Image courtesy the artist, Herald St, London and Andrew Kreps, New York



Enrico Baj, *Fire! Fire!* 1963-4
Photo © Enrico Baj and Tate, London 2011

Already there!

Galleries 3 & 4

200 objects spanning a million years.

Our sense and understanding of the natural world has changed throughout history. 'Natural' can also refer to the underlying assumptions we all share within a given culture and epoch. But as science progresses, those beliefs are constantly destroyed and recreated, as is our view of ourselves within the universe, and within society itself. Klaus Weber regards the objects and art works he has selected in **Already there!** as the 'foundations' of his art. The exhibition is also an archaeology of abandoned thought systems. In the future, our own artefacts, together with the functions and beliefs they served, will seem just as archaic too, he seems to suggest.

Already there! looks like an unruly museum run by an eccentric curator who has disregarded the objects' usual, carefully controlled intellectual and institutional contexts. Weber chose them himself, from the Science Museum, Tate, The Ashmolean, the collections of University College London and from his own collection. Weber's fictional museum crosses the boundaries of human anatomy, natural history, fine art, psychiatry, anthropology and social history, and much else. The art works themselves span varied periods, national schools and movements. They are all subtly and inexplicably strange, in terms of themes and composition. The world they refer to is ajar.

Gertrude Hermes
Kathleen Raine (1954)

Gertrude Hermes made a bust of the poet Kathleen Raine after she had watched the writer from the street, at work in her room. Eyes downcast she is transcribing her thoughts. Although she is physically present her mind is elsewhere. In the process her body appears to have half disappeared.

Bird cage from Sussex Lunatic Asylum
England (1859 – 1939)

Photographs of asylums show that many kept caged birds. This cage held three parakeets and is one of the few remaining in museum collections. It has the pathetic irony of a cage within a cage, together with what must have been a liberating reminder of the world outside for the human inmates.

Olduvai Gorge Lithics from Lower Palaeolithic era
(1,600,000 – 800,000BC)

These flints were used by hominids, our early human ancestors, around a million years BC. Such tools are thought to be important in evolution, since they made tasks such as preparing meat for food quicker and easier, contributing to brain development. They are displayed as Weber found them, neatly laid out in a storage drawer. Weber is interested in how museums function as the storage area of human history, and in their methods of ordering and categorising our past.



Bird cage from Sussex Lunatic Asylum, England (1859 – 1939).
Photo Science Museum/SSPL

Klaus Weber

Shape of the Ape (2007)

Weber has collected a variety of kitsch copies of a 19th century sculpture of an ape, squatting on a stack of books, contemplating a human skull, like Hamlet. The sculpture was originally a satire on Darwin's theory of evolution – a scientific discovery so profound that it utterly reordered our previous understanding of the world. The collection surrounds an enlarged version of the sculpture shattered into a number of pieces. Artworks on the walls around the sculptures refer to its other surprising historical connections – to Lenin, to an American businessman, to the Nazis, etc.



Klaus Weber, Shape of the Ape, 2007.

Image courtesy the artist, Herald St, London and Andrew Kreps, New York

Gallery 3 & 4

Cast of skull of Piltdown Man (1939)

In the summer of 1912 the skull of an early human was discovered in an East Sussex field. It appeared to be the vital “missing link” between apes and humans, required by Darwin's theory. However, 40 years later, “Piltdown man” was exposed as a fake, rocking the scientific establishment, which had confidently followed a bogus evolutionary trail.



Cast of Piltdown Man (1939).

Photo Science Museum/SSPL

Gallery 3 & 4

Maya Deren

Meshes of the Afternoon (1943)

Maya Deren's experimental, hallucinatory film work shares some qualities with the Surrealists, although she refused to define herself as part of that movement. The tense and paranoid atmosphere depends on the recurrence of symbolic objects like the knife and the key, while Deren herself takes the part of the mysterious principal character, governed by her unconscious, and unable to tell the difference between fantasy and reality. Deren's film can be related to "Elisabeth" a sculpture from Webers private collection, a cast of a sculpture originating from 1235 AD which he veiled with shipping blankets.



Maya Deren, Meshes of the Afternoon (1943)
Courtesy of The Artist / LUX, London

Gallery 3 & 4

Amphorae

(circa 2000-700 BC)

Eight amphorae (or large ceramic pots) are displayed in the same way that they were originally discovered by Weber in the stores of the Institute of Archaeology, University College London. They are balanced on plastic buckets, waiting to be repaired and conserved. The amphorae were used to store and transport oil, wine or grain in ancient Palestine. This combination of ancient and modern, precious and prosaic, allows a humorous glimpse into the backstage of a museum, where the historical importance of ancient, revered objects collides with the practical necessities of the present day.



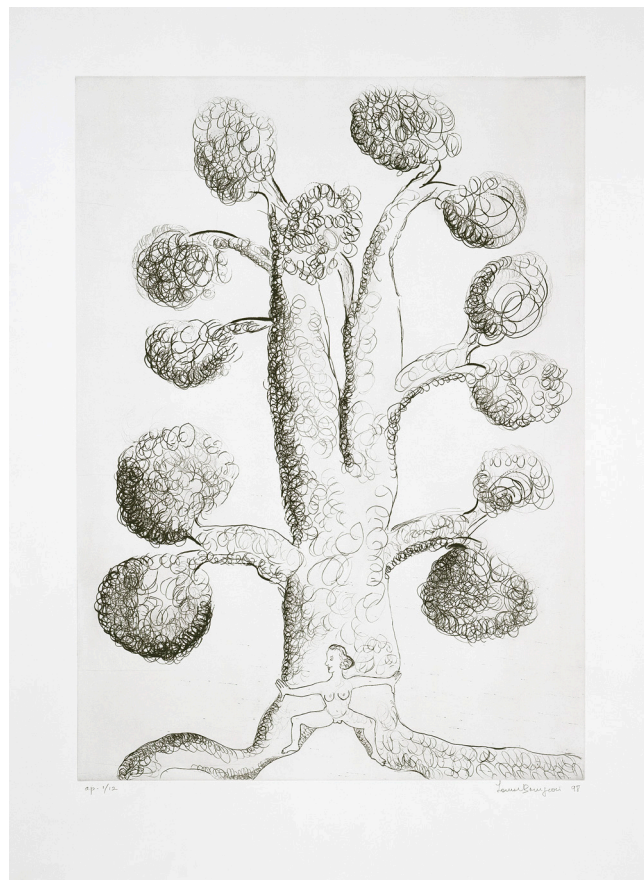
Amphorae, (circa 2000-700 BC).
Courtesy Institute of Archaeology, University College London.

Gallery 3 & 4

Artists in Already There!

Sir William Allen
Cristofano Allori
Andrea Andreani
Louis Anquetin
John Armstrong
Lucio Auri
Balthus
Clive Barker
Francis Barlow
Louise Bourgeois
André Breton
Reg Butler
César
Emanuel de Critz
George Fullard
Gilbert & George

Nan Goldin
Philip Guston
Gertrude Hermes
Sir George Howland Beaumont
William Hogarth
Henri Michaux
Paul Neagu
Eduardo Paolozzi
Cornelia Parker
Sigmar Polke
Kurt Schwitters
David Shrigley
Sir Hamo Thorneycroft
Richard Wentworth
Frederico Zuccaro



Louise Bourgeois, *Tapiary, the art of improving nature*, (Plate 3), 1998.
Photo © Tate, London 2011

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ARTS COUNCIL
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the Stratford-upon-Avon
Theatre Trust



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