

14 Feature

After decades making art in bands such as the Justified Ancients of Mu Mu and poking sticks into the sides of the establishment, Jimmy Cauty has no new ideas and no real interest in making music again

By Jane Cornwell

RIOTER'S BLOC



Commit no nuisance

reads a sign on the wall of a quaint Dickensian street in inner London, a piece of Victorian scolding that has had zero effect on Jimmy Cauty, who lives and works in the house opposite. The English artist and chart-topping musician has been sowing discord for decades, most famously as one-half of pop-trance trailblazers the KLF — who in 1992 stood onstage at the Brit Awards and blasted a horrified crowd with machinegun blanks before dumping a dead sheep at the afterparty. They then deleted their entire back catalogue and in 1994 burned a million quid in a bonfire on a remote Scottish island called Jura.

Cauty, 62, occasionally reunites with Bill Drummond, 66, the ex-A&R man with whom he formed the Justified Ancients of Mu Mu in 1987, a pairing that played out in different guises across the ensuing decade. But it was the heady success of the KLF, which sampled everybody from ABBA to Gary Glitter, snuck illegal rave culture on to the BBC's Top of the Pops and was the biggest selling singles act in the world in 1991, that gave their manic publicity-seeking a platform.

Whether they actually did incinerate £1 million is still a matter of contention, despite a 1995 documentary of the event, and 1997's The Brick, a short film consisting of one three-minute shot of the house brick they made from the ashes of the money.

A successful illustrator before he became a professional musician and producer, Cauty made a comfy return to the art world. His time in the KLF (also called JAMS, The Timelords, K Foundation, K2 Plant Hire) ensured his cult reputation as a provocative outsider serving unpalatable truths wrapped in pithy one-liners.

"You don't need a degree in art to understand my stuff," says Cauty, kind-eyed and wild haired in a basement studio colonised by work tables, art materials and a sound system doof-dooing with what turns out to be Icelandic drum 'n' bass. "It's all pretty obvious." He shrugs. "I'm usually not sure what it's about until I kind of retro-engineer a concept on to it so it has meaning."

With the L13 Light Industrial Workshop, a gallery cum support system for a small group of unorthodox artists including anarchist Jamie Reid, best known for his covers of Sex Pistols albums, Cauty makes work that pokes a stick in the side of the establishment. Which is what he has been doing since the early 1980s, when he shared a large, decaying South London squat house, later nicknamed Trancentral, with the likes of musician Alex Paterson, with

whom he co-founded ambient house DJ-producer act the Orb. So far this century Cauty's projects have included a gift shop installation based on the British government's 2004 Preparing for Emergencies booklet (think "attack hankies" and "terror tea towels"), a Cautese National Post Disservice with limited edition prints of stamps featuring images of the Queen's head wearing a gas mask (which nearly got him prosecuted by the Crown) and 2007's Operation Magic Kingdom, a series of images depicting US forces in Iraq wearing masks of cuddly Disney characters.

The KLF favoured recurring themes and images (ritual burning, anti-pomposity, Druidic robes, cars, pyramids), and so too does Cauty's art.

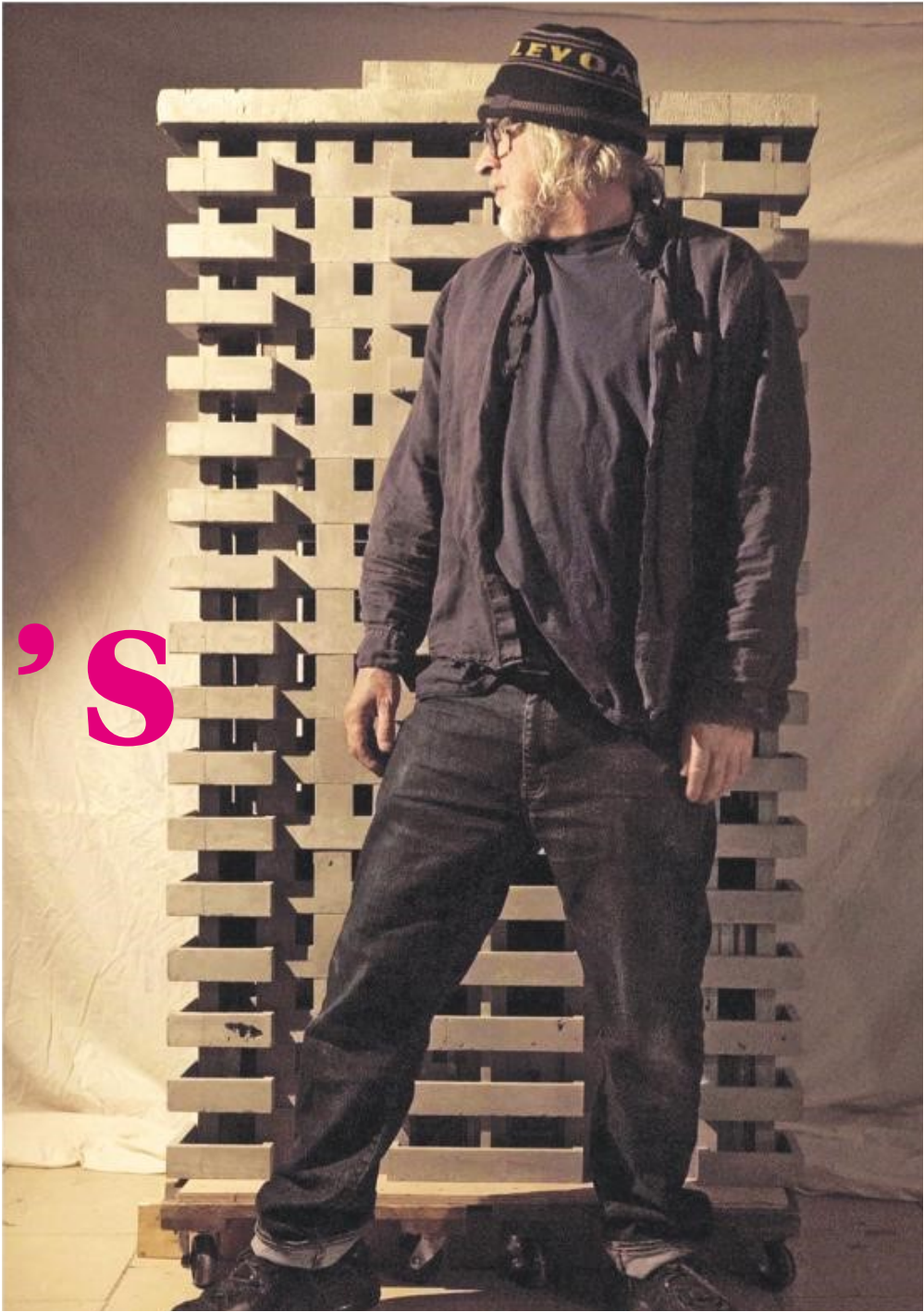
In 2012 he made a short film, Believe the Magic, which starred Blondie's Debbie Harry (a friend of his current second wife, former Thompson Twin Alannah Currie) and told of a road trip taken by a wannabe actor sporting a giant Mickey Mouse head ("It was terrible; I'm not a director").

More recently, he has been obsessed with riots: "I'm not sure how I became this riot person," he says of works including Riot in a Jam Jar — little glass encased dioramas of police and rioters viciously battling it out — and Smiley Riot Shield, ex-police riot gear painted over with the yellow smiley face of acid-house dance culture. So far he has sold a few hundred: "One day I'll bring everybody together and we'll go charging down Whitehall," he says.

He isn't a rioter himself. "In the mid-1990s I was involved in road protests over the Criminal Justice Act" — which targeted Britain's illegal rave scene by enabling the shutting down of events marked by the "emission of repetitive beats" — "and we blocked an entrance to a protesters camp with our armoured tanks. The chief constable would come over and say, 'Look, would you mind turning that music down and going away', which having made our point we usually would."

The KLF always loved vehicles; there was the 1968 Ford Galaxie American police car it claimed sang its first British No 1, the novelty-pop mash-up Doctorin' the Tardis. Then there was the two six-wheel Saracen armoured personnel carriers that Cauty bought after writing off the Galaxie at a demolition derby. The electric wheelchairs in which they whizzed around a stage, dressed as grey-haired pensioners, during a one-off spoof "pop comeback" in 1997.

But incendiary stunts are one thing. Being read the Riot Act is another. "Back in ye olden days if there was violence involving 12



or more people, the police couldn't get stuck in until they recited a [1715] document that said something like, 'His Majesty the King chargeth and commandeth all people assembled immediately to disperse'."

A smile. "I hired my friend Bruce to research civil unrest around the UK, and he found out that literally everywhere has had some sort of riot. Potato riots. Student riots. My favourite riots are the recent ones where people riot just so they can do some looting."

Which eventually brings us to the Aftermath Dislocation Principle, one of Cauty's many pieces de resistance, a vast dystopian miniature landscape made using modified components of traditional railway model kits and stuffed inside a severely graffitied 45ft shipping container. Which as we speak is making its way by sea to Dark Mofo in Hobart, where it will be installed outside the town hall and other yet-to-be-disclosed sites, staffed by volunteers and accompanied by a pamphlet detailing local riot history.

"I'm expecting it to be smashed to pieces on the sea crossing," says Cauty cheerfully, "so I'm flying down with a massive tool kit. Though any kind of damage only makes its idea stronger, even if the graffiti now looks a total mess."

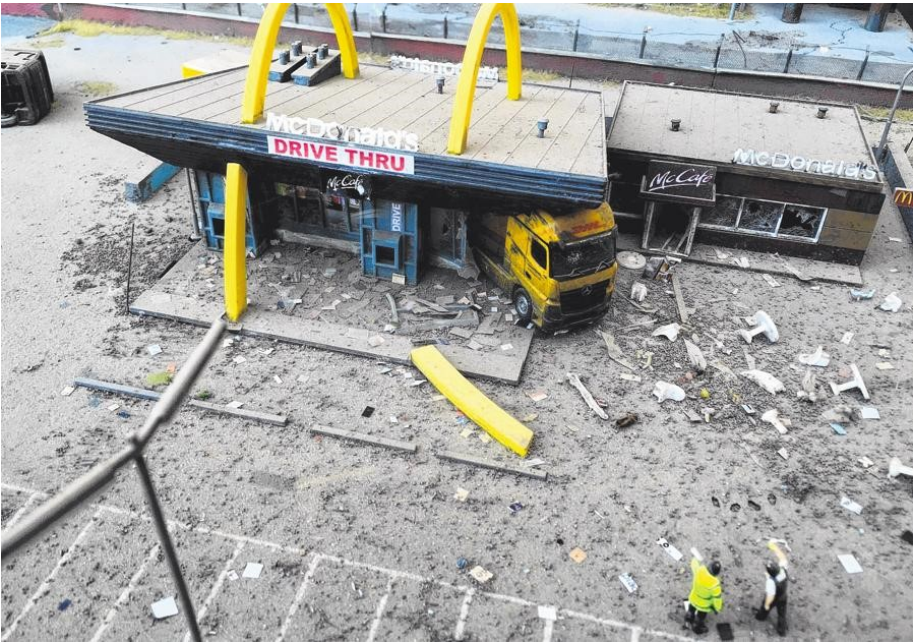
"We took it to some of the worst housing estates in the UK" — as part of a 36-date tour of riot sites suggested by community networks — "and left it switched on and connected to the mains, expecting the worst. But people loved it, took care of it."

Modelled at a scale of 1:87, representing a square mile of an Everytown in Middle England, the diorama depicts a post-apocalyptic landscape where something terrible has taken place: perhaps a riot to end all riots.

Peer through the glass-fitted peepholes that strafe the container and depending on your angle, you'll see motorway pile-ups, a broken bridge, deserted tents, a retail park with smashed windows and a lorry slammed into a McDonald's, all lit by the flashing strobes of emergency vehicles. And wherever you look, you'll see police — 3000 plastic riot cops figurines — making the most of their take-over. Playing golf. Sliding down slides. Setting up gallows. Milling around hazard tape.

Just police. There are no civilians. Wondering why that is, where they've gone, is all part of the attraction. As is attributing meaning: a political statement about societal freedom and state control, perhaps? Cauty isn't saying.

"I went a bit mad in the end," says Cauty, who with volunteers



Clockwise from top left, Bill Drummond and Jimmy Cauty arrive as the Justified Ancients of Mu Mu; a model to scale of a lorry slammed into a McDonald's drive-through; Selfie at Disaster Zone; a piece of graffiti hijacked by police officers

(including some of the five adult children, three his, two hers, that he shares with Currie) worked on the project for months.

“After I started assembling the police on the edge of the broken bridge, looking over into the void as if they knew they were only little plastic models, I thought, ‘F..k, I’ve really got to get away from this.’”

Aftermath Dislocation Principle wasn’t encased in a container when, in 2015, it caused a buzz at Dismaland, a pop-up project featuring 50 artists organised by street artist Banksy and built in a disused lido in the English seaside town of Weston-super-Mare.

Inspired by the attention, Cauty packed up his miniature scene and took it to his workshop under some railway arches near his home. There he unpacked and rebuilt it again, adding turnstiles and entry at £4 a head, before “accidentally” viewing his handiwork through a plank of wood with a hole in it.

“That’s when I realised it could be mobile,” says Cauty, who surrounded Aftermath Dislocation Principle with a perforated fence that offered voyeuristic glimpses. The idea of a shipping container — a transportable, permanent display — was born.

Post-interview, we’ll walk around to the workshop, a huge dank space behind a metal roller door that curl-creaks up beneath a sideshow banner announcing “James Cauty Esq. Model Village Makers”. In the gloom is a pile of old dodgem cars, property of another artist with whom Cauty shares the space. But the object that commands attention stands more than 2m and 17 concrete storeys high, windowless, deserted and lit up like, well, a tower block: a work-in-progress called Estate.

There’ll be four such towers, he’ll tell me as I gawp inside the floors, pushing my finger into the side of a tiny saucepan on a tiny stove in a tiny kitchen wallpapered with images of former British home secretary Amber Rudd. All so sturdy they can be left to blend into derelict land on the outskirts of towns.

“I don’t know exactly what this project is yet, but it’s a great thing,” he’ll say.

Cauty’s father was a former army officer who liked to make toys for his five children; Jimmy, the second youngest, got a model of the Somme for Christmas when he was eight. His mother, who’d worked in a munitions factory, tended to her husband after he contracted polio, making ends meet in Wirral, Cheshire, then Totnes in Devon, where Cauty attended the local comprehensive and hung out with hipster rich kids who went to Dartington College of

“Out of all my (siblings) I was the one who would not give up on anything”

Jimmy Cauty

Arts. “We were quite poor,” he says, doodling on a note pad, a reminder of the fact, at the age of 17, he made a small fortune by drawing a popular poster of Gandalf from Lord of the Rings for British retailer Athena.

Asked if his siblings are artistic, he doodles some more. “Guess so. Not really. Out of all my brothers and sisters I was the one who would not give up on anything. I mean, I was in the music business for years before anyone took any notice of what I did” — he’d played guitar and keyboards in a series of bands — “but whatever it is, I just won’t stop. I’m lucky because I still get royalties for some KLF songs, which pays some of the bills and lets me do what I want to do.”

He’ll never make music again. He doesn’t care, has no ideas and doesn’t even listen to it any more (“I only have the Icelandic thing on because I heard it the other day and thought it would be good for working”). While the competitive nature of contemporary art world — worse than anything he ever encountered in the music biz — drives him nuts, it nonetheless lets him do what he wants.

Which includes his latest venture with Drummond, the People’s Pyramid, to be built in Toxteth, Liverpool, using bricks containing human remains — 34,000 bricks rising 23 feet high. One hundred and fifty years in the making.

The pyramid’s first (and so far only) brick, which was laid on the foundation stone last November, contains the “mumu-fied” ashes

of Cauty’s artist brother Simon, who made the ceremonial horns the KLF wore in the video for Justified and Ancient, its 1991 hit with Tammy Wynette, and committed suicide in 2016 (“He would love the notion of being the first brick in the pyramid”).

To date 500 people have already signed up to receive a customised brick into which 23g of their ashes will be sealed when the brick is refired.

“Do you want to disappear in a puff of smoke, or do you want to be part of something that’s left behind?” reasons Cauty. “As the Justified Ancients of Mu Mu, this is what we’re concerned with now, not making records. I know it’s easy to make it sound like a joke but this is a deadly serious long-term project.”

The KLF was always serious, he says, batting away any idea the duo were pranksters, scam merchants.

“OK, the thing about the car making the record obviously wasn’t true, but to hoodwink people into believing something? I don’t think we ever did that.”

The £1m, then. An artistic statement about ... what? The disposability of artists? The inherent meaninglessness of money? A purging of their embarrassment about their success? A Situationist two fingers to capitalism? The KLF let others make their minds up.

A burning question, of course, is, did they really do it?

Cauty reaches for a small cardboard box on a bench to my right, and hands me what’s inside: a brick. Speckled, as if something has been mixed into the clay.

“Not many people know it exists,” he says. “That’s the million quid. The ash of the million pounds is right there in that brick.”

Whoa, I say, weighing it up and down in my palms.

“Don’t go dropping it,” warns Cauty. “That brick’s got a lot of meaning.”

Aftermath Dislocation Principle opens next Friday in Hobart as part of Dark Mofo.



Exhibition until 15 June 2019
Wednesday to Saturday, 10am-4pm
(or by appointment)
60 Tanner Street, Richmond VIC
DLANDAVIDSON.COM.AU
JOHN MAWURNDJUL, Yawkyaw, 1990
164 x 84cm, \$120,000 (DETAIL)