

Terry Atkinson

ROLL OVER

CHUCK BERRY

19.08.–10.09.2022

Study 35 (2018), a work by Terry Atkinson from his *American Civil War* series (2018–), depicts military headgear from various American Civil War units. These are collaged onto a pixelated, inkjet background of Jackson Pollock's *Full Fathom Five* (1947): the canvas as territory. A dot labeled "Cody" marks the American painter's birthplace in the town named after William Frederick Cody (Buffalo Bill). Caps on top of this represent each troop's affiliation.

Terry Atkinson could be called a meta-historical painter. Since 1975 he has drawn and painted images of past wars—"cold" and "hot". He is concerned with the question of how history is transmitted and constructed: as a means of reflecting on his specific standpoint as an artist who works with history and on the artist-subject in general. In Atkinson's practice, a critical examination of how the artist's identity and art production and distribution are absorbed into corporate culture—as the artist calls it—is re-informed by its geopolitical dimension: he investigates the relationship between fronts of culture and war that is historically intertwined with the concept of the avantgarde.

For Terry Atkinson's solo exhibition *ROLL OVER CHUCK BERRY*, the exhibition space has been divided into five rooms to reduce the distance between viewer and work and reconcile looking with reading. The artist often works with long titles. These take the form of texts or even diagrams that apply pressure to hierarchical relationships of image and title, viewing and reading. The division of the exhibition rooms also alludes to the *American Civil War* series, which Terry Atkinson began working on in 2018 and which makes up the main part of the exhibition. These images are often configured into grids, suggesting order and organization. As a point of departure, the artist searches for images online and then integrates elements of these into his pictures as drawings or collaged photocopies. His image production appears almost automated, and even if preceded by extensive research and a degree of organization is maintained, these at times difficult-to-penetrate juxtapositions have an intrinsic, machine-like, generative quality.

The first work in the exhibition, the sculpture *Slat Greaser 4* (1990/2022), takes up this aspect of automation on a material and conceptual level: "The analogy that I adopted when conceiving the Grease Works was the hardware/software distinction in computer science. I wanted to make a series of works in which the works would continue to produce themselves (or at least aspects of themselves) after they had left my (the artist's) relations of production."¹ *Greaser's* architectural qualities as a sculpture, whose crevices dictate the ambit of the oily "software", are echoed formally in the exhibition architecture: successively configured corridors determine the layout of the rooms and also form an escape, making it difficult to get an overview. They also take up the aspect of repetition running through Terry Atkinson's practice. In the last room are two *Irish Works* pictures from 1985 depicting phantasmagorias of bomb-making Republican paramilitaries in bunkers in Armagh. The narrow slit of the bunker architecture directs the eye towards the external threat while the dark interior expands, creating a sense of haunting and paranoia. The corridors of the exhibition architecture find a formal parallel in the warlike bunker architecture of the *Irish Works*.

Terry Atkinson's paintings about history are shaped by his experiences of a conflict whose events still reverberate today—the Cold War. "Time-travelling postcard from one civil war to another and vice-versa: ACW <- RCW, into the future and back – endlessly" (Study 59 from the *American Civil War* series): Terry Atkinson draws lines of connection between the American Civil War (1861–65) and the Russian Civil War (1918–21), which fundamentally shaped both superpowers that faced off during the Cold War. "This conflict", Atkinson writes, "permeated every aspect of the lives of my generation, not least the art world in which my own art practice was imbedded from 1958 onwards. The Cold War was fought and marshalled through many proxies and conveyed into every cultural aspect of the so-called West and East."² His exit from the conceptual art group Art & Language in 1974, which he co-founded in 1966, and his turning to a form of meta-historical painting informed by conceptual art can also be viewed against the backdrop of this experience.

1 Atkinson, Terry (2011), *A note on the Grease Works to Primitive robots series of Works 1986 to 2000*, unpublished documents of the artist, Leamington Spa.

2 Atkinson, Terry (2019), *T*, ed. by SIX di Sebastiano dell'Arte, Monghidoro: con-fine art&culture publishing, p. 23.

Heroes of the Civil Rights movement, Black Lives Matter, and post-war African American popular culture appear in grided configurations in the pictures from his *American Civil War* series. Seen in Study 81 are Proud Boy white supremacists along with one of Goya's figures. These time-traveling figures of a non-linear history run throughout the artist's entire practice. Other time travelers include Picasso's bulls or figures such as Bart Simpson, E.T., or Yoda from Hollywood's history-reinterpreting entertainment industry. The series spans a period extending beyond the immediate events of the Civil War and draws historical links to other conflicts and events: "Seventeenth-century English suprematism, aligned with the holy values of rationalism, industry and liberty, as well as moral justifications for slavery, created the battlegrounds of this 'New World'."³

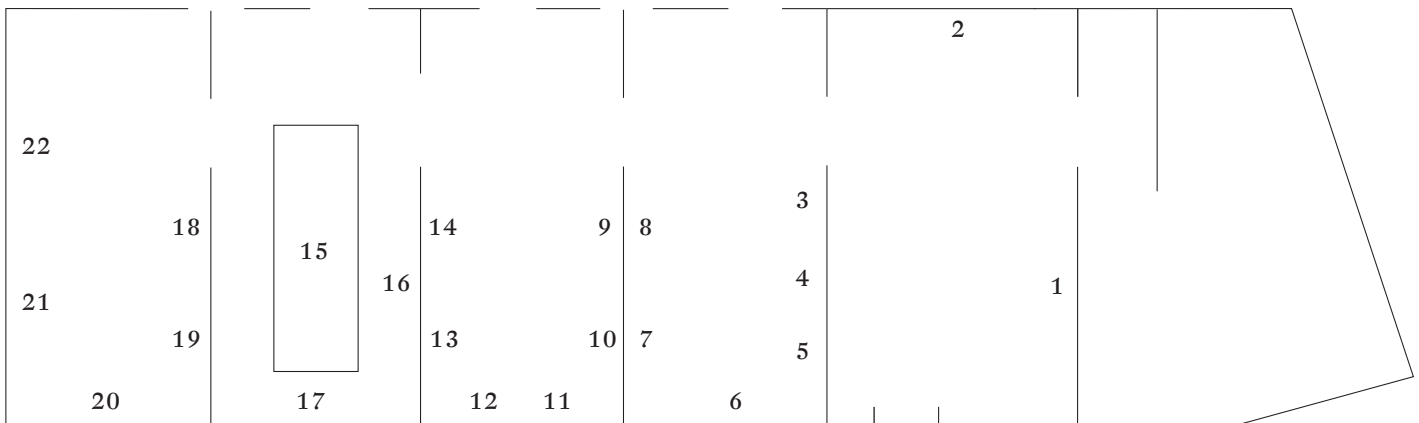
The second-to-last room features Terry Atkinson's artist books, made available to audiences for the first time on this scale. The one-off works offer a glimpse into the various fields of the artist's practice and his exploration of the relationship between image and language. They also reveal the diversity of the artist as a painter dealing with history, whose work "exposes the complacent and sanctified clichés of World War amnesic celebration: the rituals of myth, national self-consciousness, ethnocentrism, and imagined pasts and presents."⁴

ROLL OVER CHUCK BERRY follows up on the exhibition *Greaser sculptures and drawings from the series 'Berlin, East Prussia and the Desert' and 'American Civil War'* (November 27, 2021–February 27, 2022) at Josey gallery in Norwich. The Stadtgalerie would like to thank Terry Atkinson, Benjamin Brett, and Jonathan P. Watts.

³ Josey (2021), *Terry Atkinson - 'Greaser' sculptures and drawings from the series 'Berlin, East Prussia and the Desert' and 'American Civil War'* [Press Release], Norwich, URL: <https://www.josey.co/>

⁴ Ibid.

FLOOR PLAN



1
American Civil War: Study 41
Their time-travelling capacity malfunctioning during their attempt to return to the Quinta del Sordo from Stalingrad in 1943, five Goyaesque ghosts are consequently debouched at the Petersburg trenches in Virginia in September 1864. (1) Burraghost (2) *Senor Mane Grando* (3) *Senor Pequeno Chillida* (4) *Goya flier* (5) *Goya flier*, 2019
Pencil and coloured pencil on paper
59 x 84 cm

2
Slat Greaser 4, 1990/2022
Wood, grease
180 x 260 cm

3
American Civil War: Study 73
Study for a painting: American Civil War Mosaic Reading left to right, top to bottom. (1) *Postcard from Trotsky Head* (2) *Hailing Poussin* (3) *Postcard from Troitsky Head* (4) *Camp Wife, 31st Pennsylvania Infantry, camped near Washington.* (5) *Forage cap* (6) *Prosthetic* (7) *Warrior bust* (8) *West Tennessee hog* (9) *Confederate Five Dollar Bill* (10) *Colfax 1873* (11) *Powder black infantryman* (12) *H T* (13) *Striving Union infantryman*, 2019
Pencil, coloured pencil, photocopy, oil pastel on paper
85 x 74.5 cm

4
American Civil War: Study 54
Study for a painting: Time-travelling postcard from one civil war to another., 2019
Pencil and photocopy on paper
81 x 114 cm

5
American Civil War: Study 23
Union soldier, 2018
Pencil on paper
50 x 70 cm

6
American Civil War: Study 58
Study for a painting: Postcard exchanged back and forth between two civil wars., 2019
Pencil on paper
57 x 67 cm

7
American Civil War: Study 81
Study for a painting. Remind those Motherfucking Proud Boys that, in the end, Heydrich got a flat tyre. Goya says Hello!, 2020–21
Pencil on paper
56 x 77 cm

8
American Civil War: Study 35
Hat-map 1: Civil War hats on a ground of Full Fathom Five with Cody marked. Wyoming achieved statehood in 1890. (1) *Confederate Forage cap* (2) *New York Hawkins Zouave fez* (3) *Union Cavalry Hat* (4) *Confederate homespun forage cap* (5) *Union officer hat* (6) *Union Iron Brigade hat* (7) *Union forage cap* (8) *Plain Union officer forage cap* (9) *Customised blue forage cap (Iowa?)*, 2018
Photocopy, pencil and coloured pencil on paper
55 x 80 cm

9
American Civil War: Study 31
A two-part drawing of (1) a black and white tableau of three Union soldiers of Meade's Army of the Potomac, carefully posed by one of Brady's photographers (left to right: drummer boy, corporal fresh from skirmishing, young infantryman) is intruded upon by (2) the

swish of an overflying and time travelling giant cousin of Yoda (transmitted from coloured Hollywood digital material from 2004). All this during the rain-sodden pursuit of Lee's Army of Northern Virginia by Meade's Army of the Potomac, July 1863., 2018
Pencil and coloured pencil on paper
59 x 84 cm

10
American Civil War: Study 89
Americana V: Mirror (1) *FH* (2) *TS and Jc* (3) *BT* (4) *KC* (5) *CC* (6) *RP* (7) *Aj* (8) *EH* (9) *CK* (10) *J-P B*, 2021
Pencil on paper
96 x 130 cm

11
American Civil War: Study 42
Study for a painting (reading top left to bottom right) (1) *Prosthetic arm* (2) *Prosthetic arm* (3) *Yell-head* (4) *Profile – Iron Brigade* (5) *Trepanning elevator and Lenticular Knife* (6) *Profile – Confederate officer* (7) *Goyaesque (from Caprichos 67) with leg and bone-saw* (8) *Tourniquet* (9) *Fright-head* (10) *Stare-face* (11) *Shout-head* (12) *Tourniquet*, 2019
Pencil, coloured pencil, photocopies on paper
63 x 85 cm

12
American Civil War: Study 76
American patterns of consumerism, 1860-1960. Reading left to right, top to bottom (1) *Trepanning Instruments* (2) *Union Officer* (3) *Trotsky Postcard Ghost at Antietam* (4) *HT* (5) *Trotsky Postcard Bandaged Head 1* (6) *Trepanning Instrument* (7) *Trotsky Postcard Bandaged Head* (8) *Prosthetic Arm* (9) *Intrusive Quattrocento Image* (10) *Andersonville*

(*Trotsky Postcard*) (11) *Trepanning Instrument* (12) *Trepanning Instrument* (13) *The Shirelles* (14) *Hollywood 1* (15) *Everly Brothers* (16) *Skull* (17) *Hollywood 2 (Yoda)* (18) *Will You Love Me Tomorrow* (19) *Hollywood 3, Distant Cousin of ET* (20) *Cathy's Clown* (21) *Chuck Berry* (22) *School Day*, 2020
Pencil, coloured pencil, pastel and collage on paper
101 x 82 cm

13
American Civil War: Study 86
Americana IV: Baby It's You (1) *Union Kepi* (2) *Missouri Bluegrass: Julianne Petersen singing Fields of Gold* (3) *Union Kepi* (4) *AD* (5) *J-MB* (6) *Baby It's You* (7) *Bart awaits the Jedi Praetorian Guard* (8) *Warhol's Chair*, 2021
Pencil and photocopy on paper
75 x 111 cm

14
American Civil War: Study 85
Americana III
Reading left to right, top to bottom. (1) *Sherman watches the 107th New York storm through Columbia, South Carolina, February 1865* (2) *Bart turns green – whether the approach of the Jedi was the cause of this remains an open question* (3) *CB* (4) *Fallen Statue* (5) *Ghost ironclad on the Mississippi outside Vicksburg, 1863* (6) *Dancing in the Street and Baby It's You* (7) *S C sings into the microphone, 1964* (8) *R P* (9) *Grey Massachusetts mourning bodice, 1864*, 2021
Pencil, coloured pencil and photocopy on paper
76 x 112 cm

15

Artists' books:

- *History Book 1*
- *History Book 2*
- *History Book 3*
- *Visualising Zilch*
- *'Heart' Art versus 'Head' Art*
- *Photo 1*
- *Stalingrad Walls*
- *Signature*
- *By definition art practice ... etc*
- *Korea: an aide-memoire to my early teenage*
- *The Distorted Protocols of Reading 1*
- *The Distorted Protocols of Reading 8*
- *Stalingrad: an aide-memoire almost entirely before memory*
- *Gazette 1*
- *Gazette 2*
- *Gazette 3*
- *Goya, Fuhrerdammerung and Berlin*
- *Figures from the consuming event of my early childhood*
- *The Spanish Civil War*
- *History Book D (David)*
- *Wallet of 10 'Goya' Drawings*

16

American Civil War: Study 37
A masque Goyaesque time-travelling Burragehost encounters a problem with its time-travelling function, and by virtue of this malfunction finds itself, instead of returning to the Quinta del Sordo at the time of its demolition in 1909 (the Burragehost's aiming point), alighting at the burning city of Charleston on February 15 1865. Behind the Goyaesque float a row of Hollywood celluloid digital figures (also time-travellers) culled from Star Wars data bank, but more accurately controlled, that are locked into the same time-frame. It is perhaps hard to detect whether or not these figures (both the Burragehost and the Star Wars figures) are floating above or are somehow

attached to the Earth's surface and this perhaps is a sign of the artist's incompetent drawing. Meanwhile on the other side of the burning horizon, Sherman's Union columns, although not in the picture, stream into Charleston., 2019
Pencil and coloured pencil on paper
63 x 89 cm

17

American Civil War: Study 59
Time-travelling postcard from one civil war to another and vice-versa: ACW <- RCW, into the future and back - endlessly., 2019
Pencil on paper
112 x 73 cm

18

Young Active Service volunteer throwing up in front of an electric plastic wreath in a bunker in Armagh., 1985
Pencil on paper
83 x 113 cm

19

Big split brain under a light in a bunker in Armagh, a figure looks on - outside three British Army helicopters on a history search., 1985
Pencil on paper
83 x 113 cm

20

American Civil War: Study 45
Hat-map 3: Civil War hats on a ground of White Flag with Augusta marked. Georgia seceded January 19 1961, and was the fifth state to secede. (1) Union bespoke sorta Hardee hat (2) Confederate butternut forage cap (3) Union mid-blue forage cap, 2019
Pencil, coloured pencil and photocopy on paper
53 x 82 cm

21

American Civil War: Study 68
Study for a painting: American Civil War Mosaic
Reading left to right, top to bottom. (1) Postcard from Trotsky Head (2) LdV anatomical drawing with pink (3) Skull, not necessarily human! (4) Confederate butternut forage cap (5) Camera (6) South Carolina Owl (7) Trepanning scalpel (8) Tirefond (9) Tourniquet (10) Raspatory? (11) Union forage cap (12) Confederate butternut forage cap (13) Rifle (14) Union forage cap (15) Pope's Antrum Drill (16) West Tennessee hog, directed at Union corpses, not least black Union corpses, 2019
Pencil, coloured pencil and oil pastel on paper
112 x 76 cm

22

American Civil War: Study 84
Americana II
Warhol's Chair: Warhol himself a fomenter of, and by now, the venerable and revered patriarch of American consumership, now finds himself consumed by American consumership., 2021
Pencil on paper
74 x 93 cm

Exhibition opening
Thu, August 18, 2022, 5–9pm

Presentation of artist books
with Terry Atkinson
Fri, August 19, 2022, 6pm

Guided tour with sign-language
translation
Tue, Sept 6, 2022, 6pm

Guided tour of the exhibition
Thu, September 8, 2022, 6pm



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Saturday
12–4 pm