

Stephen Friedman Gallery

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Anatomy of an artwork: Jonathan Baldock's 'I'm often silent when I'm screaming inside'

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Passion play ... The cartoon smiles and love hearts evoking emojis or ecstasy place the British artist Jonathan Baldock's applique wall-hangings firmly in recent times. Yet you could easily imagine these banner-like creations waving in a medieval carnival procession or as the mute witnesses of an occult ceremony. The smiling, heart shaped mask at the top of this blood-red work from 2019 beams rays of light like a masonic eye. Candles are placed ritualistically. The figure lies in an embryonic sacrificial pose. The entire composition forms a mask-like face. Can this end well?

I heart ... Baldock's unsettling mix of outward smiles and inner anxiety strikes at human problems that are both time-less and shaped by our moment, where bodily desire can be met with casual hook-ups while emotional needs are cut short. The disembodied hands that shoot outwards from the heart give impersonal caresses.

All in the eyes ... Mouths, eyes and other orifices are muddled and there's a confusion of physical and psychic feeling. The figure's stomach is a hungry grimace. The "nose" at the centre looks like a gargoyle, but is actually composed of two stuffed, felted and realistic inverted human heads. Their upside-down mouths become the nose creature's eyes.

Follow the thread ... Yet there's a therapeutic dimension to Baldock's way of making, too. The upside-down heads have eyes of red jasper stones, which are used in crystal healing. Textiles have a protective dimension, worn over the skin while projecting our public identity. Fashioned in hessian, felt, silk thread and precious stones, the work speaks of the meditative rhythms of sewing. Each stitch has been made by the artist's hand, forging a human connection with the audience. Included in Threadbare, Stephen Friedman Gallery, W1, to 15 May.