

**'ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR'
(.....AND MUCH MORE BESIDES!)
THE ART OF LAURA FORD**

*What are little boys made of?
Snips and snails, and puppy dog tails,
That's what little boys are made of.*

*What are little girls made of?
Sugar and spice, and everything nice,
That's what little girls are made of.*

Robert Southey (1774-1843) attrib. 1820¹

The proverb, the fairy tale, and the nursery rhyme, are often the hidden guises adopted by life's greater human meaning. They frame the developmental and nurtured stages of our gender and in consequence many of the affects and emotions of our later life. They are the child in the adult before the adult is forged in the child. The work of Laura Ford therefore confers value to the true and appropriate status of childhood, before those values are assimilated and determined by an adult consciousness. Some arguments have been offered as to the psychoanalytical contents of Ford's work, but in truth the psychology (such as it is) is largely behavioural and not libidinal.² An early work like *Elephant Boy 2* (1999), might well owe as much to the picture book schoolboy Babar or Edward Trunk sent to stand in the corner, as it does to any ruptured mental-literary trope of psychoanalytic proportions.³ Equally *Look at Me Now* (2001), could just as easily be read as a perversion of Little Red Riding Hood conflated with Jack and Jill as 'Jill came tumbling after....', and in either case the character is deliberately 'skating on thin ice', which happens to be a shag pile carpet. The point to be made is that the sculptures (objects or things) created by Laura Ford, are not prescriptive or immediately intended to be

illustrative of an explicit narrative as direct storytelling. There is much that is meaningful as intended Nonsense, and that this feeling for the 'nonsense' in our nature (as derived from childhood) is among the most potent of hidden emotions that we ever know or feel.⁴ It is embedded and expressed in our human nature almost as if it were at a pre-cognitive level, where our sense of a propensity or feeling 'for', rather than a feeling 'of' something, is made to happen. The feeling 'for' is an emotional inclination of a shared primary imagination that draws upon what we observe and sense of each other, whereas the feeling 'of' is a uniquely private world bound by personal sensory verification.⁵

A traditional proverb by definition is embedded in culture and is a saying that expresses an intended truth that is based on common sense and practical experience. It is therefore intentionally rational, and this is also the case notwithstanding that the proverb may be allegorical or moralistic in tone. Conversely, an aesthetic 'nonsense' is based on characteristics of visual-linguistic resemblance, namely in that it possesses all the qualities of a human language and symbolic system (pictorial or literary), but that it undermines an identifiable meaning as it is experienced. It is in this latter sense that Laura Ford's works take on a unique and particular quality. Her works resemble a set of intuited affinities but without the fixity or the determinism of a rational language. They have strong associative affects and identities but are not immediately exegetical of that which is referred to. Thus Ford's work is balanced by an acute sense of that which lies between the expression of 'nonsense', at a point where it is about to meet in conjunction with the absurd.

Yet it is not specifically intended as a 'theatre of the absurd' as others have stated.⁶ The absurd or the philosophy of 'absurdism' can accept that which is logically possible, but at the same time it denies that which is futile and humanly impossible. And, it with this sense that Ford's figures assert life that they refute the defiance of the existential absurd.⁷ There are many human anthropomorphic possibilities in Ford's strangely wonderful sculptural figures. These are the openly expressed associations and identifications, the many and increasingly pluralized comic possibilities evoked by her works. Hence the comic aspect of Ford's work lies in the interstices between the nonsensical and the absurd, inflected by both but denying the negative connotations that the former polarities inevitably imply. Comedy be it either black (macabre) or light, is by definition totally human, and it is the containing characteristic of Laura Ford sculptures, since her works are full of contrary expectations that are conflicting, surprising, deliberately incongruous and repetitive. In essence it is a sculptural art born of comedy, humour and irony, that which expresses and often creates visual discordance between what is seen and what is understood. But comedy nonetheless is always born of that which is at least a potentially knowable world, whereas bare tragedy invariably carries the mark of a seemingly unknowable universe by which it is framed

From the outset Ford's feelings for a visual affinity (things loved and familiar) and nonsensical incongruity has always been present. If we consider some of her earliest works like *Buttercup* or *Twiglet* (1991) both of them seem to operate in a state of proverbial or comic parenthesis. Where the gun-toting and flame-headed *Buttercup* is a deliberately perverted or inverted

reminiscence, perhaps, even of Gilbert and Sullivan's "I am called Little Buttercup, dear Little Buttercup. Though I could never tell why, But still I'm called Buttercup – poor little Buttercup. Sweet Little Buttercup !!"⁸ It is an intended incongruity by the artist, something that is extended beyond the ambiguous iconography into the actual free form of the materials used by Ford. In the specific case of *Buttercup*, they are painted aluminium, wood, foam, and canvas. In the case of *Twiglet*, it is fibreglass. This extends a observation once made by Ford "...And when I was a student, I was endlessly reassigned from one department to another, from ceramics to painting to sculpture to printmaking – my tutors couldn't decide where I fitted."⁹ It is a particular characteristic of all Ford's subsequent works, namely that she is never inhibited by any pre-defined or arbitrary conventions that might be associated with given materials. Though this in some respects also owes something to her background growing up with the travelling funfair, where stall prizes were often made of cheap plaster and/or other kitsch materials of numerous description. An example of Ford's attitude being, perhaps, the artist's early installation in the dungeon of Nottingham Castle called *God Pot* (1992), where plaster and cheap fabric-based blinded teddy bears grope around, and a colony of funfair-like 'rogering' rabbits mount each other in the semi-darkness.¹⁰ Plaster is of course a common sculptural material, though usually (historically at least) applied as a preliminary stage in the copying or pre-casting process.¹¹ Hence to quickly survey these early works is merely to show an 'affinity for' and sense of 'incongruity with', that has always been evident in Ford's art from the very beginning. Works like the gun-toting plaster,

steel and wool girl *Bang Bang* (1996), or even the bronze tree-based trio called *Nature Girls* (1996), become subsequently an extension through elaboration of the processes already observed. Thus as stated from the outset the sculptural works operate simultaneously on two general levels, through their subject allusions and the free diversity of the many different materials that Ford uses.

*Hey diddle diddle,
The cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon.
The little dog laughed to see such fun,
And the dish ran away with the spoon.*¹²

The animal-human similes of the nursery rhyme and the fairy tale are found throughout the works of Laura Ford. However, the intention as previously asserted is never directly illustrative. After all creative metamorphosis is a primary mechanism of the human imagination, and without it nonsense, the absurd and the comic would be impossible. Though this does not mean that ideas cannot be derived from 'real events' and sources transformed by metamorphosis. The work called *Sleepwalkers* (2005) was initially derived from a photograph of five Palestinian prisoners being led blindfolded by an Israeli soldier, "What struck me was the prisoners sightlessness, rendering them all the more vulnerable, pathetic, dependent and childlike. The five figures in the sculpture have similar postures, I have turned them into children, dressed them in pyjamas and given them blindfolds. Their feet have plaster slippers in the form of rabbits feet, not unlike the novelty slippers you can buy."¹³ The reference to ideas like the 'Blind leading the Blind' or to

childhood through adult games like 'Blind Man's Buff', and to the pyjama-ed children of Peter Pan are freely admitted by Ford.¹⁴ This is even extended by the artist to the anthropomorphism of the materials and the doubling of the characters she uses. It is evident in her *The Great Indoors* (2002) installation, which included *Glove Boy 1* and *Glove Boy 2* with *Stags*, where the reference is to the failed expedition of Robert Falcon Scott in 1910-13. The event is transferred into childhood, and the notion of sightlessness, or in this instance a sense of 'heroic blindness', is again taken up.¹⁵ Scott had undertaken his Antarctic expedition on foot, rejecting sleds drawn by huskies as used by his rival the Norwegian explorer Amundsen, and who as a result beat him to the South Pole.¹⁶ Scott and his expedition party perished on the return journey. Again the inference by Ford is not that of exposing a literal narrative reading, the Scott events serving only as a point of departure. In many other respects the play is upon comic irony and the naïve 'Boy's Own' adventure mentalities of the boy child in general.¹⁷ Also the *Glove Boys* clearly reprise in a typological sense the *Boystory 1*, *Boystory 2*, and the *Stilt Boy* of a year earlier, though in this instance the sideswipe was, perhaps, more obviously against masculine clichés and artistic practice. Since the boys drag after them the ironic and futile mechanics of sculpture and painting shown by the panels of the transport crates as used by the art world. The itinerant and the nomadic traveller-adventurer are frequent motifs found in Ford's work.

In speaking of doubling it is not just that of the characters since the *Glove Boys*, and the *Boystory* characters, draw upon the earlier *Elephant Boy* and share the same trunk-like proboscis expressed through different fabric

uses and characterisations.¹⁸ But it can also be said that doubling also takes in a complex semiotic and material sense of meaning at the same time. The comic play on blindness, in the Scott reference doubled to 'snow blindness', appears throughout nearly all of Ford's works, and is extended through the notions of the wordplay common to a proverb, "there's none so blind as those that cannot see," and is echoed metaphorically in the repeated nonsense words (diddle-fiddle, moon-spoon) of the nursery rhyme. In matters of the materials used another sort of doubling takes place. The off-white shag pile material elements of *Look at Me Now* from 2001, turns up again in the *Glove Boys*, and similarly objects that might have served one function are doubled to serve an alternative purpose. For example the *Glove Boys* snow shoes are old tennis rackets. In other words the tools of a game turned towards a distant unrelated usage. It would be easy to argue a Surrealistic purpose (as some have) through "the bringing together of distant realities." But there is little that is strategically surreal by intention in the works of Ford.¹⁹ Indeed, the artistically profitable re-using or re-cycling of materials seems essential to any comprehensive understanding the artist's work. With the exception of the exotic *Chintz Girl* series (1998-2000), which emphasised the scrupulous and detailed sewing of new print fabrics in Laura Ashley type chintz, Ford's work always hints at that which is adapted and re-used. Her *Joseph Beuys Boy* (2002), made of wax, felt and mixed media, exactly mimicked and repeated the biographical materials associated with Beuys's life as an artist. While at the same time it satirised many of his shamanistic pretensions, casting him blind in a pseudo-medieval smock-like garb and knitted wool head and trunk-

proboscis. The military coloured khaki is no doubt an acid reference to his supposed mysterious wartime experiences as a glider pilot, an event that served in the frequent retelling for many of his subsequent artistic self-justifications and pretensions.²⁰

The numerous anthropomorphic animals that run throughout Ford's work like *Moose* (1998) and the pantomime *Donkey* (2000), are made with fabrics like blankets and are the sort of materials often given to charities like Oxfam and Cafod. With the stocking-clad *Stags* from *The Great Indoors* the comic character is played up with the cheap cloth of a pseudo-camouflage, and with wooden branches as antlers and torn scraps of cloth wrapped over them. The image is made even more witty since the scraps of cloth are unravelling and is an immediate parody of the annual shedding of antler velvet, while understanding that the stag actually assists this process by the rubbing of his antlers against the branches and trunks of trees. More perhaps of the this artist's use of doubled meaning. In speaking of fauna it occurs that Ford often favours animals that have been domesticated as beasts of burden and labour, the elephant, the camel, the donkey, and coincidentally in nearly every instance they are plant eating herbivores. But more significantly perhaps they are the most common and benign animals of childhood toys and picture book storytelling. Thus it seems true to Ford to state that the child is the grounding point whence a meaningful adult must begin. In *Some Mother's Sons* (2002), we have a frayed and ragged Hessian attired figure that originally appeared in the same installation as *The Great Outdoors*. The sculptural figure is cast as a somewhat forlorn and introspective entity posed

as he is within the iconographic language of melancholy. There seems often in Ford's works to be an implied critique of male childhood stereotypes, where boy-to-adult figures occur in Ford's works they are always seen either in physical labour (pulling sledges), or in states of abnegation, defeat or introspective passivity. A similar figure to *Some Mother's Sons* turns up as *Beast* (2005) as part of the *Glory Glory* installation for the Welsh Pavilion in Venice Biennial.²¹ Made explicitly of storage sacking in what Ford called "an emasculated lion figure," we experience again the same sense of bereft introspection. Reduced simply to the word 'Beast' diminishes any sense of a subjective identity. Conversely, when females appear in the artist's work they tend most often to be pro-active, either as dancing figures like the *Chintz Girls*, or earlier gun-toting figures like *Buttercup* or *Bang Bang*. If we ever doubted the comedic take on boyhood, then it is dispelled by the cruel series of works called *Headthinkers* (2003), where each frail boy's body carries an oversized donkey-head. So heavy in fact that the donkey boy must rest the head on a ledge or plinth. We need not tarry here with the phallogentric and male intellectual self-delusions so often associated with the donkey and the ass.²²

*Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross
To see a fine lady upon a white horse
With rings on her fingers and bells on her toes
She will have music wherever she goes.*²³

Thus the nursery rhyme is being increasingly evoked by Ford in several different ways. Her more recent work called *Riding a Cock Horse* (2007) leaves little doubt that it must refer generically at least to the famous rhyme of

that name. The chivalric knight and his lady is a common narrative theme as familiar today (though in a different sense) as it was in the Medieval Ages. Many films and video games are littered with it as a perennially revived and marketed subject matter. However, it is cast again by Ford into the fantasy and nonsense projections of childhood, where a boy rides a sack covered kitchen chair, wears boxing gloves, has a tin can and plume on his head, and has armour made from the tin foil plates and dishes used for takeaway meals – while the sword is a broom stave. The nursery rhyme and its link with childhood games, the hobby horse, and wish fulfilment are all expressed through the work. Though perhaps, the evocation of the subject of chivalry and knighthood owes as much the major series of five bronzes called *Armour Boys*, executed by Ford a year earlier in 2006.²⁴ Again there is a fivefold numerical propensity, as in *Sleepwalkers*, the five national figures of *Glory Glory*, the five *Headthinkers*, and the five original *Chintz Girls*.²⁵ The inspiration for the *Armour Boys* came following a residency at the Scottish Sculpture Workshop and in seeing a small armour collection in the baronial style Fyvie Castle, in Aberdeenshire. After a preparatory process of straw-filled doll models, wax armour and the deliberate use of deformation, the child-sized series of knights were cast (using the lost wax method) into bronze component elements and then subsequently assembled. The bodily deformation or pummelling distortions of the preparatory stages of the *Armours Boys*, is not without precedent in the artist's work, and we have already seen it in works like *Look at Me Now*. The physical and emotional violation of children, and Ford has spoken of a filmed death of a Palestinian

child in respect to this series, is recurrent inference in the *Armour Boys*.²⁶ The many recent wars in Africa that have used child soldiers is nothing new, but simply reconnects itself to an older knightly tradition of the Early Middle Ages and the Child Crusade of 1212, where many thousands of children suffered slavery and death in their phantasmatic quest to drive the Muslims from Europe and to free Jerusalem.²⁷ In the Scottish context the young *Armour Boys*, recalls the bloody battlefields where many a 'fife and drum' boy soldier lost his life. Casting the child into what is generally seen as an aristocratic adult garb such as armour, offered to Ford a sense of perverse critique since the gravitation from boy child to squire to soldier is an age old stereotype that she continues to question.

If childhood is the preparation upon which is established our adult lives, Laura Ford seems to take a harsh and satirical view of conventional ideas of gender socialisation. Her series of works called *Rag and Bone* (2007) suggests the anthropomorphic world of the animal-human possesses an insight and sincerity that the fully human does not seem to possess. This series of works draws upon a long nineteenth and twentieth century British tradition of literary writings devoted to children and childhood. In an obvious sense works like *Rag and Bone With Bin*, and *Rag and Bone With Bags* draw analogies with the small figures derived from the writings and porcelain produced characters of Beatrix Potter.²⁸ Though they could just as easily reference books like Kenneth Grahame's 'Wind in the Willows' (1908), or Richard Adams 'Watership Down' (1972) and numerous others. What has happened to the idyllic rural characters like Badger, Brock, Hazel, Mrs Tiggy-

Winkle and numerous others, is that they have become 'urban dossers', as Badger pokes his was into the modern litter bin, with its familiar logo 'Keep Britain Tidy'. What were once country dwellers are now street dwellers who sleep rough and grub out an existence from that which thrown away or discarded by their urban betters. The idiomatic British term 'Rag and Bone' derives from men who were junk dealers in scrap iron, and who in earlier times travelled the streets of British cities with a horse drawn cart gathering old rags that were subsequently turned into fabric or paper, or collecting bones to turn into glue. These finds they traded for other items of limited value. But as everyone in Great Britain of a certain age knows the most famous 'Rag and Bone' men were the television characters Steptoe & Son.²⁹ The point to be made is that they were archetypal recyclers in which nothing was thrown away that could be re-used, or which possessed even the most marginal of material values. We have already seen how the notion of recycling the language of materials has been central also to Ford's principles of sculpture production. However, given that the artist has increasingly moved towards bronze production, there is surely some further intended comic irony, namely by the fact that the humble 'Rag and Bone' subject matter has been elevated into bronze, a material traditionally associated with the 'high art' of sculpture. A work like *Rag and Bone with Blanket* again plays humorously with yet another double meaning, the fact that foxes have in reality become a modern urban dwelling phenomena, and that the Mrs Fox's cheap old candlewick bedspread has been morphed into the timeless immortality of bronze. Works like *Rag and Bone Squirrels*, or *Hedgehog in Blankets*

intentionally evoke a sense of the sentimental – a deliberate feeling of kitsch in collision with fine art. It is the radical fusion of sentimentality and the postures of high art where Ford fundamentally challenges the viewer in this series of works. They touch upon conventional emotions (sentiments) and challenge them with aesthetic passions (strong feelings) that should cause one to link them by inference to moral actions.

Laura Ford's current fascination with bronze is not totally new in itself, she has used bronze earlier in the three part girl-tree sculpture called *Nature Girls* (1996), where the tree elements (coniferous, deciduous, and trunk) stand on stockinged little girl's legs, feet, and red painted shoes – all very Dorothy and Wizard of Oz.³⁰ Indeed, she has returned the idea of the tree girl or woman, in a recent work called *Espaliered Girl* (2007). To espalier is a traditional way of trellising tree growth and is frequently used in modern apple production. Though whether Ford intends this as an indirect and witty Eve reference is not made clear. It will not have escaped the reader that I have approached this essay in a largely synchronic manner, this is because I have wanted to infer that Ford does not work in a developmental or schematic way, and often ideas from fifteen or twenty years ago re-emerge at different points of realisation. For example a recent sculptural work *Girl With a Cloud Head* (2008), derives from an ink, gouache, and acrylic drawing called *Curly Locks* executed in 1993. In fact some ideas of Ford are of long gestation, but this is not always the case. Her work *Little Weed* (2008), with her flower head and spindly legs appears as a new idea. Neither should we always assume to direct one-to-one relationship to a drawing, things are often adapted in the

processes of developing an idea and the resulting sculpture differs accordingly. Hence a drawing for *Little Weed* appears as a child or doll with a weed head, but the actual realisation as a sculpture has nearly no body and all but totally legs, though with no free standing abilities.. To anyone of my generation it immediately brings to mind the character 'Weed' from the children's television programme 'Bill and Ben the Flower Pot Men' where Weed is the third character that lives between the two large flower pot homes of Bill and Ben. The two Flower Pot men speak nonsense words and sounds like *flopadopalop* in different depths of voice, tenor and bass, while Weed merely bleats continuously in warning *weeeeeeeed.....*

Ford's latest series called *Muthers* (2008) appears still to be in the process of development. They are figures like raggedy doll characters from a modern day picture book. Made up of strips of fabrics not unlike those found on the head of a floor mop, with small blue trouser legs, one puzzled and standing figure looks down on another collapsed on the floor. Unusually and noticeably they are not obviously gendered, though the title *Muthers* tends to infer that they may be female. The position is querulous and it seems perhaps an ideal point from which to attempt to summarise the approach taken by Laura Ford to her work. The comic and the humorous that serves as the motivational force does not obscure what at times seems a darker side of Ford's work, though her pessimism in some measure is redeemed by her valorisation of children and the potentially positive affects they bring to life. But our world is increasingly politicised and even her *Bunny Boy* (2003) appears to wear a suicide bombers belt, while kneeling and holding his hands

over his ears. Comedy does not necessarily improve the world but makes it more tolerable. It does, however, have the power to surprise and challenge, and through patterns of incongruity cause a state of self-reflection. Laura Ford's work allies this to deeply embedded memories of childhood, and those are memories which are still capable of finding a faint (less feint) echo in our adult lives. It is not an assertion that children are in any way wise or particularly innocent for that matter. It is only, perhaps, that childhood is the place when we are most open to experiencing the world. Ford's art is an 'art of openness', and it requires from the viewer a sense of self-trust. The love of nonsense, proverbs, nursery rhymes and fairy tales, are all part of the self-trust that leads through imagination to self-knowledge. There is a letting go of the free imagination, and like laughter released we know that we feel all the better for it.

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Thursday, 12 March 2009

ENDNOTES

¹ Mother Goose Society, 'What Folks Are Made of? ', see, Gloria T. Delamar, *Mother Goose: From Nursery to Literature*, Jefferson, NC., Mc Farland and Co Inc., 1988.

² David Lomas 'The Great Indoors', *Laura Ford*, ex. cat., Centro de Arte de Salamanca, 2002. Lomas cites both Freud and Winnicott.

³ *Babar the Elephant* is a popular French children's book fictional character who was conceived by Jean de Brunhoff, appearing in *L'Histoire de Babar* in 1931 enjoying immediate success. An English language version, entitled *The Story of Babar*, appeared in 1933 in Britain and also in the United States. There have been many editions subsequently as well as many films and film and television series. the BBC began broadcasts each day from 1969, called simply Babar. Laura Ford (b. 1961) was eight years old at the time. *Edward Trunk*, is the playmate of *Rupert the Bear*, in the Daily Express comic strip (began, 1920), and in countless children's annuals; ITV television series 1970-74, Animated TV Series (1991), Second Animated Series (2006)

⁴ Nonsense in literature is particularly associated with writers like Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll. Nonsense, as opposed to senselessness, is encountered when a proposition is even more radically devoid of meaning, when it transcends the bounds of sense. However, the fact that the intention is to empty out the immediacy of meaning creates a unique space of imaginative speculation born of its inherent contradiction and possibilities of juxtaposition. For an extraordinary accumulation of wide ranging Nonsense literature see, Carolyn Wells (1862-1942), *The Nonsense Anthology*, Charleston, SC., Bibliobazaar, LLC, 2006 This American writer spent her life collecting vast amounts of Nonsense literature.

⁵ What Antonio Damasio defines as 'The Brain Knows More than the Conscious Mind Reveals', Chapter 2, 'Emotions and Feelings', *The Feeling of What Happens: Body, Emotion and the Making of Consciousness*, London, Vintage, 2000 (pp. 35-81) pp. 42-50

⁶ Lomas, *op cit.*, p. 30

⁷ The origin of the 'absurd' and of 'absurdism' emerges from the existential writings of Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), in *Fear and Trembling* (1843) under the pseudonym Johannes de Silentio, and particularly his pseudonymous Anti-Climacus text *The Sickness Unto Death* (1849), London and Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1941. As a modern system of ideas it derives from Albert Camus *The Myth of Sisyphus* (Fr. 1942), London, 1955; and the atheistic existential 'theatre of the absurd' in the plays of Beckett, Adamov, Genet and Ionesco. To which Martin Esslin (1918-2002) who first coined the term, later added Harold Pinter.

⁸ The verse is the first of the four verse aria that comes from Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera, *HMS Pinafore*, Act One, Scene One (Opera Comique Theatre, London, May, 1878) The verse structure relates to the so-called 'Bab Ballads', which are a collection of light verse by W.S.Gilbert illustrated with his own comic drawings. Gilbert wrote the Ballads before he became famous for his comic operas with Arthur Sullivan. In writing the Bab Ballads, Gilbert developed his unique "topsy-turvy" style, where the humour was derived by setting up a ridiculous premise and working out its logical consequences, however absurd. There are strong analogies with Laura Ford's sculptural practice. For an overview, see Michael Ainger *Gilbert and Sullivan, a Dual Biography*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002

⁹ Interview with Rachel Withers and Laura Ford, *op. cit.*, ex. cat., Centro de Arte de Salamanca, 2002, (pp. 33-37) p. 33

¹⁰ The slang verb 'to roger' means to copulate, or to fornicate, though it is particularly appropriate when speaking of rabbits. The character Roger Rabbit was therefore aptly named given the long historical association of rabbits with prolific rates of reproduction.

¹¹ There are some exceptions like George Segal (1924-2000) who used bandage-strip plaster-based sculpture as an end in itself, see, Sam Hunter, *George Segal*, New York, Rizzoli International Publications, 1989. Though in the latter stages even Segal gravitated towards bronze, as for his highest selling sculpture *Chance Meeting* (1989) cast in bronze.

¹² The earliest recorded version of the poem dates to 1765, though the expression of the first line as 'high diddle diddle' has its origins in Elizabethan times, and appears frequently throughout Shakespearean literature.

¹³ Mark Gisbourne, 'Scenes From Childhood', in *Kinderszenen/Child's Play, Rohkunstbau 12*, Schloss Gross Leuthen, 2005, pp. 28-33 German/English. The quote is from Laura Ford's 'Artist's Statement', p. 94

¹⁴ One immediately thinks of the biblical reference to Luke 6:39 'Can the blind lead the blind?' and to Pieter Brueghel the Elder's famous painting of 'The Blind Leading the Blind' (1568), in

Museo di Capodimonte, in Naples. Also games like 'Blind Man's Buff' are deeply embedded in the historical psyche and originate in England at least from the Court of Henry VIII, where it was played by his courtiers, and renewed yet again as a popular parlour game in the Victorian period.

¹⁵ The immediate inspiration was the reference to the Scott Expedition found in Beryl Bainbridge's book *The Birthday Boys*, London, Penguin, 1991.

¹⁶ Roald Amundsen (1872-1928) also died in mysterious circumstances when his aircraft disappeared in 1928 over the Barents Sea, and his body was never found. See, Roland Huntford, *The Last Place on Earth: Scott and Amundsen's Race to the South Pole*, New York and London, Modern Library Inc., 1999.

¹⁷ The Boy's Own Paper, ran from 1878-1967 and served a narration of moral masculinity and heroic adventure, having had such contributors as W.G. Grace, Arthur Conan Doyle, R.G. Ballantyne, and Baden Powell the founder of the Boy Scout Movement. Robert Falcon Scott (1868-1912) perfectly fitted the moral stereotype of publication. See, Kelly Boyd *Manliness and the boys' story paper in Britain: a cultural history, 1855-1940*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003; also Karl Sabbagh, *Your Case is Hopeless: bracing advice from The Boy's Own Paper*. London, John Murray, 2007, and Jack Cox, *Take a Cold Tub, Sir!: the story of The Boy's Own Paper*. Guildford, Lutterworth Press, 1982.

¹⁸ Rachel Withers, *Laura Ford: Desperados*, ex. cat., London, Houldsworth Gallery, 2001, np.

¹⁹ Blindness and masked vision is a constant theme within Magritte and many other Surrealists like Eileen Agar. See, David Lomas, *op. cit* p.22

²⁰ The famous story promulgated by Joseph Beuys in 1979, that he crashed on the 16 March, 1944, in the Crimea was found by Tartar tribesman and kept alive by their wrapping him in felt and animal fat. See Alain Boer and Lothar Schirmer, *The Essential Joseph Beuys*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1997.

²¹ *Somewhere Else: Artists From Wales at the Welsh Pavilion*, ex. cat., Venice Biennial, 2005, np. The work *Beast* was shown again in 2006, at the Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, Swansea.

²² The legendary Priapus myth, the *Golden Ass* narrative of Lucius Apuleius in the second century, and the central role of Bottom's head turned into that of an ass or donkey in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night Dream* (Act III, Scene I), all play their part in defining the 'asinine' elements of the male stupidity and gender.

²³ This nursery rhyme first appeared in print in 1784, but derives clearly from a much older oral tradition. Who the 'fine lady' is remains unresolved, some argue a Royal visit of Elizabeth I, others for the naked Lady Godiva (wife of Earl Leofric of Mercia), and others still the Welsh goddess Rhiannon. The 'cock horse' can have two meanings, namely an archaic term for an adult stallion and child's 'hobby horse'.

²⁴ *Armour Boys – Laura Ford*, ex. cat., Royal Scottish Academy (12 August- 10 September), Edinburgh, 2006.

²⁵ The artist's sculptural editions of each individual bronze work also runs into series of five examples.

²⁶ *Armour Boys – Laura Ford*, *op. cit.*, p. 11

²⁷ For an extended discussion of the 13th century 'Child Crusade', see Steven Runcimen, *A History of the Crusades: The Kingdom of Acre and the Later Crusades*, Volume III, London, Penguin, 1990.

²⁸ Morgan Falconer *Rag and Bone*, ex. cat., Turner Contemporary), Droit House, Stone Pier (6 October – 2 December), Margate, 2007, np.

²⁹ *Steptoe and Son*, was a hugely popular BBC television comedy series written by Ray Galton and Alan Simpson, starring Wilfrid Brambell and Harry H. Corbett and ran through four series from 1962-65, and again from 1970–74.

³⁰ The theme of 'red shoes' has a long literary and film history beginning with Hans Christian Andersen's tale *The Red Shoes* (1845), the famous *Wizard of Oz* (1939) film character Dorothy played by Judy Garland who tapped her red shoes together to produce magic, and the acclaimed Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger post-war ballet film called *The Red Shoes* (1948) starring Moira Shearer.