



The  
Pygg Bank  
Project

Gregor Kregar



## CLAY CURIOS OF THE UNCANNY KIND

### Gregor Kregar's Pig Project

The piggy bank occupies a special place in the western cultural imagination. It is the object that harbors the dreams and aspirations of one's youth and invariably teaches us the benefits of thrift through the material joys accessible once the piggy has been shattered to reveal the hidden wealth contained within. The consumerist ethos is taught at a young age; money goes in, pig grows fat and the object of desire is acquired and so the world goes round.

The piggy bank or pygg bank can be traced back to 15th century England when the orange clay known as Pygg was the predominate material used in cooking and home wares in lieu of expensive and often unattainable metals. Pygg jars were commonly used for storage and in many instances this included the odd coin or two. The pig shaped container we are familiar with now was in fact first conceived by way of a misnomer. In the eighteenth century an English potter mistakenly inferred that a client had requested pig shaped containers, rather than pygg (the clay) jars. However, the trend caught on and the modern day piggy bank was born aided, somewhat by the morphing of the word 'pygg' into a colloquial term 'piggy bank'.

In Gregor Kregar's Pygg Project we are confronted with these familiar and seemingly harmless piggy banks en masse. Hundreds of eyes peer wantonly up at us, and the nostalgic vision becomes slightly unsettling.

Kregar's piggy banks each with a slot in their back seem to be a symbolic testament to the history of consumption. However, they have little historical value. They are not handed down artifacts, cherished and imbued with memories, rather they have been pumped out on a faux production line over the course of six weeks.

It is evident in the sheer quantity of uniform piggy banks that Kregar has a penchant for production line style labour. Whilst each piggy has a personal touch at the hand of the maker we are captured by the mass production aesthetic: the generic form, the uniformity of the pigs painted suits. It is this production line ethos that leads us to the world of multiples in Kregar's oeuvre and the underlying theme in much of his recent work: the uncanny. The German word heimlich was used by Sigmund Freud in his essay 'The Uncanny' (1925) in an endeavour to explain the notion of the English equivalent.\* Heimlich, it is suggested, has two meanings: belonging to the house; friendly, familiar, comfortable; but also concealed, secret, withheld from sight and from others.\*\* The antonym, unheimlich therefore points towards the unfamiliar the uncomfortable, the weird, that which should be kept secret but has been revealed. Unheimlich or uncanny is all that unnerves us, a slight twist on the familiar so that we no longer feel at ease in the object's presence, it is the thing that has remained locked in the attic, away from prying eyes but has now been exposed.

The uncanny can also relate to the idea of the double, which is particularly relevant in relation to Kregar's past work. There is often uncertainty as to whether the double, a lifeless object, could in fact be animate such is the likeness. Think of the world of Madame Tussaud's wax museum, the proverbial temple to the uncanny. Kregar's recent series I appear and I disappear 2003 and I disappear 2005 consisted of sculptured ceramic figures cast as replicas of the artist, each anatomically correct, complete with the artist's work overalls and work boots. On first impression they are an exercise in self-portraiture, the artist's 'double' in a variety of sizes. Following on from the work of Freud, German philosopher Otto Rank suggests that the creation of the double is originally insurance against the destruction of the ego, a counter against the fear of death.\*\*\* In the mind of the child this is an exercise in primary narcissism, in the mind of the adult the double becomes the uncanny harbinger of death - the familiar entity that is forever preserved in the face of our own mortality.

Kregar's doubles offer a humorous take on the uncanny as they literally decrease in size, effectively retreating and thus abating the threat. Kregar's multiple doubles are on the one hand a likeness but at no time a viable substitute, never an automaton and therefore never a source of terror. We, like the artist himself, can safely differentiate between the feeling of the familiar and the recognisable from the unreality of the series as a whole.

In much the same way, Kregar's multiple piggy banks are open to a multi-valent reaction. On the one hand we are seduced by the nostalgic humor and on the other we are taken aback by the uncanny. Fortunately, there is no threat of the double, unless of course we wish to see ourselves metaphorically in the image of the consumerist pig, an unsettling connotation to be sure. However, these curious objects when viewed en masse seem to have a purpose: to unsettle, to cause discomfort and certainly to call into question the rules of consumption. Ironically, they are not presented in a slick over designed and manufactured way as is prevalent in the capitalist market place. These small ceramic objects do not gleam with the luster of pseudo wealth; they avoid the magnet of kitsch, and are more aligned with the handcraft tradition. Kregar's use of materials (he has a penchant for a particular liquid Duncan colour glaze, a commonly used glaze amongst amateur ceramicists for its kiln friendly qualities) the visual appearance, and the prevalence for primary, monotone colours all aptly work to locate the pigs within the innocent realm of the hobbyist. The pigs are, in this sense, parodies of the original piggy bank, made for our enjoyment and our consumption but not our use. As such, they curiously oscillate between a nostalgic zone of comfort and an unsettling position in which the seemingly infinite number of pigs threaten to entrap us in their weird world of the uncanny through their unrelenting gaze.

\*Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. & Trs. James Strachey, vol XVII (London" Hogarth, 1953), p219.

\*\*Hari Kunzru, Useful Magic: Francis Upritchard in the Attic, 2004 [www.harikunzru.com/hari/franny.htm](http://www.harikunzru.com/hari/franny.htm)

\*\*\*Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny"

Essay by Nicola Harvey

*I appear and Disappear*, 2003, 2004, 12mx10m, ceramic





## The Pygg Bank Project

by Gregor Kregar

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