



EXHIBITION PREVIEW

# Visions of art agitator

Artist JEFF PERKS tells Len Phelan why his stimulating and unabashedly political new show at the Stockport Art Gallery is not 'a comfy sofa'

IT'S not often that you'll see a retrospective which packs as political a punch as the one which opens in a few weeks at the Stockport Art Gallery.

Political Furniture, Not A Comfy Sofa is a must-see exhibition of work by the Derbyshire-based artist Jeff Perks, which wittily and provocatively views the world from an unavowedly socialist perspective. These striking, polemical images and constructions are beautifully crafted.

A filmmaker, painter, printmaker, publisher and sculptor, Perks has had his work on show at the Whitechapel Gallery's Art For Society exhibition, Race Against Time for the TUC at Congress House and he produced the graphics for Michael Rosen's enormously popular poem on the history of the slave trade.

Perks is also credited with recently producing the largest lino cut ever made, part of his We Will Not Walk Away From Iraq show at Battersea Arts Centre, a sardonic swipe at Tony Blair's declaration of intent.

At six feet tall and 21 feet long The Training Ground tells the history and horrors of the British army's involvement in Ireland and it'll be on show in Stockport along with prints on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and ceramic sculptures which deal with the politics of everyday life in a humorous and original way.

Explaining the exhibition's title, Perks is at pains to point out that the retrospective is designed to make us think about why the world is the way it is.

"The painter Henri Matisse described his own work as 'a comfy sofa for the bourgeoisie to relax in'," he says. "This exhibition is definitely not a 'comfy sofa.'

"The work will inevitably be called anti-politician. It is, and against all those men who too quickly rush to solve the problems of our nuclear world by military action," he stresses. And he's clear too about the committed nature of his work, citing Pablo Picasso's declaration that he had never looked on

painting as an art "for mere pleasure or amusement."

Perks left school aged 15 with only two qualifications in art and woodwork, which maybe accounts for his use of so much reclaimed material in his three-dimensional work. "Wherever possible the materials I use are either reclaimed industrial



**POLEMICAL:** (Clockwise from top) The Training Ground; Matchgirls; No 10; Chicken In A Basket and Pig In A Basket

wood or steel or from trees uprooted from storms — this helps to maintain the existing native woodlands and landscape," he says.

"Their shape both inspires me and defines the resulting sculpture."

After what seems like a hugely active artistic life, embracing work in advertising, publishing and TV — where he made programmes about artists, cartooning, punk and women comics — Perks sees the Stockport show as a return to his first loves of painting and sculpture.

"You could say my life has come full circle and that at last I've put my two O-levels to good use," he says.

■ *Political Furniture, Not A Comfy Sofa* runs from September 20 until October 20 at the Stockport Art Gallery, Wellington Road South, Stockport. Free. The exhibition will be opened by poet and broadcaster Michael Rosen on September 19, details: [stockportart-galleryproject.com](http://stockportart-galleryproject.com)

