

FIRST DRAFT of the text which appeared in the Big Issue for 'le degree*', Chapter 2015

I had met Henri Matisse only once before, a few months before at an opening at Galerie Bernheim- Jeune in Paris. On this bright March morning I spied him from my usual table outside Pascal's striding along on the opposite side of the Rue St Dennis weaving through a crowd laden with armfuls of bread. I shouted and after looking behind, he focused upon me and strode came over, scattering the long loaves across the table in front of him on arrival. "Painting bread Old man?" I mocked. Pausing he drew me near to him and whispered "listen". I became aware again of the faint low pitched rumbling, it was always there, on the wind or in the mind; the sound of artillery from the Allied offensive at Artois.

At 44, Matisse was too old to fight but he insisted on sending 600 francs of bread a month to the brave french troops. He understood that food to them like Art to him was fundamental.

Matisse was working at a studio on the qual de Saint Michel, Notre Dame dominated the view from his window. It was to be a productive period before he would move to Nice at the end of the War. "Why shouldn't I paint bread?" he goaded me.

'It is part of life and culture, is it not called the staff of life?'

Earlier in the year archeologists digging in Belgium had discovered traces of flour on the bodies of hunter gathers tribesmen estimated to be from the Upper Palaeolithic era, some 30,000 years earlier. The report in Le Monde was not lost on Matisse who had cut out the article and pinned to his studio wall. "I have yet to make an art work that has as much value as a piece of bread." He exclaimed.

Ten years ago, or ten years from when this was written, Richard Higllett created a work called 10,000 Reflective Copper Discs. It consisted of the artist's fee in the form of pennies glued to the floor of a street corner in grangetown, Cardiff, Wales. The coins were cleaned in vinegar so they shined in the sun, a whisper to the tale of Dick Whittington where the streets of London were said to be paved in gold. The artist looked at whether the metal discs could exist collectively as primarily units of a large floor piece, a minimalist mosaic, behaving to a certain degree as Art looking at how the value of a penny is transformed into something other than its primary monetary function. The primary purpose or use of an object is actually fluid but held, temporarily defined by systems such as human society and language. The work lasted one hour before it was removed by the local community, piece by piece, without invitation, to be spent. Interestingly no one considering what they were doing was wrong and it was essentially a found object. Once the order of the pattern was broken, so to was the spell.

Le degre revisits some of the themes in the 'disc' work as 100 ceramic baguettes are created for an installation in what is previously the Chapter Shop. These will be for sale, the proceeds going to homeless charities in Cardiff. The price of each piece will be based on how much the buyer is willing or able to pay with £25.00 each the suggested price.

Thank you for purchasing this copy of the Big Issue. This text accompanies le degre by Richard Higllett and will not be reprinted anywhere else. Its function is as an artwork within the exhibition le degre.

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Richard Higllett 07/02/15

* le degre title no caps