

Art made from LEGO®, not LEGO Art

By John Cake and Darren Neave

We are John Cake and Darren Neave, formerly known as *The Little Artists*. We have been professional artists for about fifteen years. Our work has involved many different materials and themes but our pieces made in LEGO® are probably the most well-known.

From an early age, both of us used played with LEGO. As we got older we found that we could use it to visualise our ideas, and it was one of the reasons that we became friends at art college. We are still totally obsessed by LEGO, constantly reading FBTB, Brothers Brick and of course HispaBrick! It would be nice to be able to make our own non-art models but we are way too busy. We always say that one day we will build a massive *Hogwarts* castle.

LEGO is a great material to quickly make something solid or illustrate an idea. It is a material that we totally understand, we

think of everything in terms of LEGO dimensions or how we can use it for real-world applications.

We were actually using it to make a mould for something at art college in 1994 and we saw the potential for a Damien Hirst shark tank piece. So, the original project was dropped and the first LEGO shark tank was made.

This piece sat around the studio for a while because we weren't too sure what to do with it. Then in 1999, we worked out that we could make Salvador *Dalí's Lobster Telephone* and started to think a bit more about what this meant. There was no art in the LEGO System or City themes, and there wasn't a Modern Art LEGO theme, so we started to think of something between these two ideas. We wanted to create pieces that followed the "grammar of LEGO" and were as if LEGO had made a range of Modern Art sets, almost souvenirs of the Artworld. This then led us into putting these pieces back into





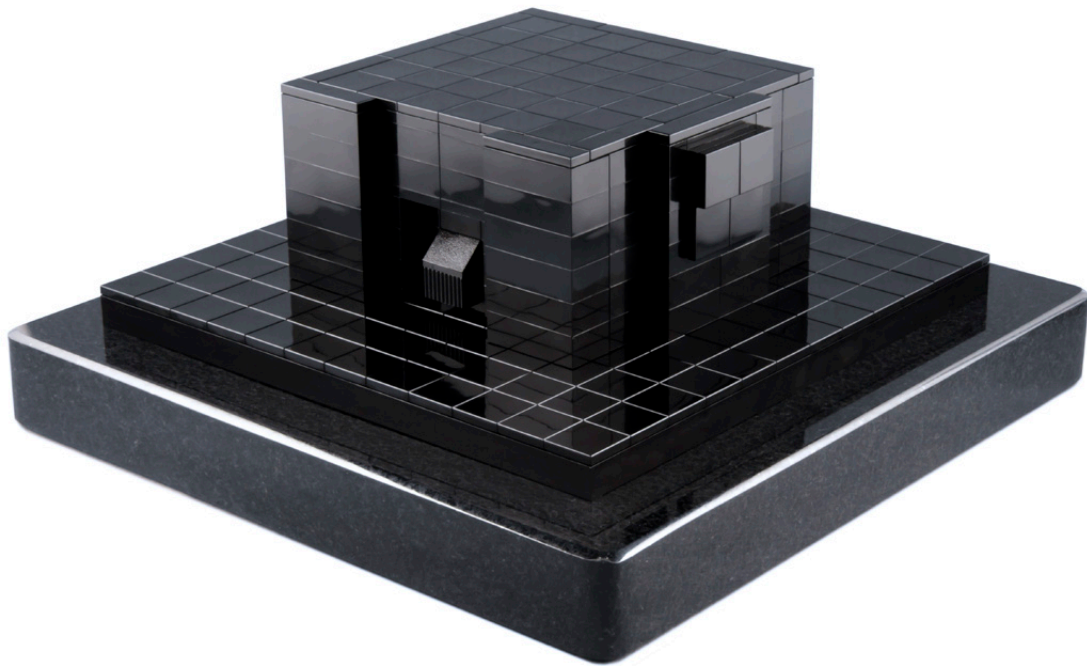
the LEGO® world, in photographic scenes depicting these artists, their work, the galleries and the associated myths. It was at this time that we discovered Bricklink and that opened up everything for us. Recreations of works by Jeff Koons, Andy Warhol, Chapman brothers, Rachel Whiteread and many others soon followed.

This all culminated in a big exhibition, that travelled to Liverpool, New York, Poznan and Auckland. The main sculpture in this show was *Art Craziest Nation*, which has changed a lot over the years. It is a sculpture that is a gallery for all the LEGO recreations we have made; normally we exhibit each piece on an individual plinth. It follows the LEGO logic of being an open building where you can get to the interior but have a sense of the exterior at the same time.

The first version, from 2003, was a very straight, classical building, with white walls and a grey floor. We kept it very simple in order to show the smaller sculptures. We also filled it with hundreds of different minifigs so it looked like a gala opening at the museum.

What we call the *Final Version*, was done in 2009. This time we were asked by an art collector to produce some work to raise funds for the new wing of the Museum of Modern Art Tel-Aviv. We were fascinated by the architect's plans and were really inspired by the recent *UCS Death Star* set. The architect had twisted the building, so we wanted to somehow recreate that. We decided to build in a sideways SNOT style so that we could get lots of different angles into each floor, all centred around a light-well – just like the *Death Star*. It was really cool to get to build something that pushed our building techniques further. It also started us thinking in more abstract sculptural terms, moving on from the recreating-the-world-in-LEGO approach.

Our most recent work comes from this approach. We re-made a lot of our original art sculptures, such as the Rachel Whiteread room and the Tracey Emin bed, but this time in all black. This removed the cute character of the bright colourful pieces and obscured the visual relation to the original artists' works. The results were surprising. We found that we had to look at them differently to make sense of them. The solid, shiny black was hard to focus upon, so you could only really work out the shape when you moved and the reflections changed. They



also seemed to have a sinister feeling, which sort of acted as a catalyst for the next piece...

PKS 0521-365 is a sculpture based upon the house from Hitchcock's film, *Psycho*. We wanted to build something that would be very imposing and would be recognisable as a sort of silhouette. An important attribute of the *Psycho* house is that it becomes more iconic when it is darker. The starting point was a collection of the original production plans of the house, which we transposed into minifig scale. The really awkward part was getting all of the pieces in black and in pristine condition. The roof corner slopes, in particular, were very hard to get hold of. The whole piece took us about 6 months to make, is about 45cm high and has over 2000 bricks for the internal support structure alone.

We are currently working on a sculpture that takes the Brunel University Lecture Theatre as its starting point. This piece of brutalist architecture was used in the film *A Clockwork Orange* as the *Ludovico Medical Facility*. Again, it has a striking shape that is imposing and sinister, and bears a slight resemblance to the bridge of the *Imperial Star Destroyer*. We are using *Ldraw* quite heavily in the development of this piece. It means we can enjoy working out the details and interesting parts, without having to worry about devising a massive support structure just yet. We think that this piece will keep us busy for quite a while...

Images:

Art Craziest Nation Final Version - 2009 LEGO® 120cm x 120cm x 70cm

PKS 0521-365 - 2011 LEGO 540mm x 600mm x 430mm

H 1705-250 - 2010 LEGO on Black Granite 240mm x 240mm x 160mm

The Mengele of the Animal World - 2007 Lamda Print 30cm x 21cm
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