

TOY STORIES

OR, HOW NOT TO MAKE A LIVING AS AN ARTIST



A NEW SHOW

BY CHRIS DOBROWOLSKI

PRODUCED BY



menagerie



Meet Chris. Chris is a 54-year-old artist financially trapped in the house where he grew up. The garden shed has become his studio, where he tries to create works of art that will allow him to come to terms with the absurdities of modern living - or else to escape his daily life entirely.

In the past, Chris has made full-size vehicles which have taken him on intrepid and sometimes foolhardy journeys. Recently, however, he has returned to the toys of his childhood - especially his Scalextric cars, via a glamorous commission with Central Bedfordshire libraries.

In this new show, he shares stories of his latest projects, from his efforts to make friends with Essex taxi drivers to his quest to understand more about his Polish heritage (without speaking a word of Polish). *Toy Stories* sees Chris dig up some metaphorical ghosts of the past, as well as a real German tank dating from the Second World War, and reminds us how little has changed in populist politics between then and now.

Part stand-up comedy, part performance lecture, *Toy Stories* takes the audience on an irreverent adventure through art, contemporary politics and twentieth-century history.

A NOTE FROM CHRIS

Trying to make sense of the world, one of the things I'm most interested in is authenticity. Picasso describes art as 'the lie that shows a truth'. A lot of my work has played on this notion of art as an illusion that gives a fresh perspective on the world. For a previous project I took plastic toy penguins and other representations of real, Antarctic-based things to the Antarctic itself; documented them there and brought them back as authentic 'real pretend' Antarctic objects.



Currently I find myself living in the house where I grew up, surrounded by some of the actual toys I had as a child. These toy cars and trains are representations of real things yet also in a sense pretend objects. What is certainly real, though, is the special personal resonance with which they are imbued; these toys are keepsakes from a certain time in my personal history when things felt more certain or simple. I use them to go on a journey through our contemporary world; a world of fake news and phoney populist politicians. When the world feels like a really cheap, crap version of the Matrix, you're not sure what to believe, so sometimes familiar things like my toys become an anchor in reality. Trust no-one! (Apart from maybe Wikipedia.)

HISTORY

Toy Stories was developed with the support of Menagerie Theatre Company, a leading new writing company in the east of England. A work-in-progress performance was given at Cambridge Junction in July 2022 as part of Menagerie's Hotbed Festival. Now ready for touring in 2023, the show is written and performed by Chris Dobrowolski and directed by Paul Bourne, Co-Artistic Director of Menagerie Theatre Company.

Menagerie's previous productions include successful UK tours of *Egusi Soup* by Bruntwood Prize-winner Janice Okoh; *Out of Your Knowledge* by Steve Waters; and *Two into War*, a double bill of plays by Naomi Wallace (who has been awarded an Obie and two Susan Smith Blackburn Awards) and Fraser Grace (winner of the Verity Bargate Award and the John Whiting Award).

Chris Dobrowolski's performance work includes the acclaimed *Antarctica* and *All Roads Lead to Rome* (produced by Artsadmin), and *Poland 3 Iran 2 with 30 Bird*. His work has been produced in theatres, libraries, community centres and art colleges.



REVIEWS OF PAST WORK



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Three Weeks



"takes us from the personal to the political, across a great swathe of
20th Century history"

The Scotsman



"an hour of charismatic storytelling"

Broadway Baby



"a multifaceted work that
interrogates the nature and
purpose of art"

Matt Trueman

"one of the best shows I have
seen in a theatre"

Colchester Evening Gazette

"entertaining because it was
fearless"

Entertainment Focus

"an entirely beguiling
personal tale of possessions,
loss and consumerism"

In Suffolk

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

The show has a touring company of 1 and a running time of 60 minutes. The minimum get-in time is 2 hours and the minimum get-out time is 1 hour.

Venue to provide:

- Stage measuring at least 4m x 4m
- Projector and screen
- Lighting rig capable of giving a general wash
- PA system
- Technician to operate show



For more information, please contact producer Jessie Anand:
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