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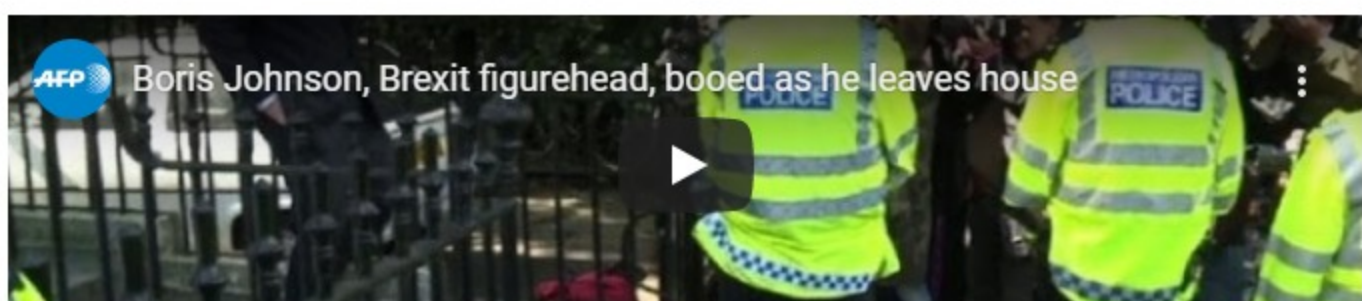
PUT THE KIDS IN BASEMENT AND LOCK THE DOOR. WE DON'T WANT THEM CONSORTING WITH THEM BLOODY FOREIGNERS!

30/06/2016 Michael Eden Society



Britain has cut off its Roman nose to spite its pudgy nationalistic face.

The recent vote on the EU and the campaign leading up to it has brought great division and bitterness to Britain in workplaces and families, not least since one of the most striking divides is generational. Statistics suggest that four of every five 18-24 year-olds voted to remain in the EU, while that figure is turned around for those over 42. Why is our parents' generation so bitter and antipathetic to Europe? At 36 I have a lot of clichés in common with the older generation: I don't like phones, I think reality telly is crap and I loathe many Radio One presenters. But on matters of a more serious nature, it seems my comrades are mainly young. Is this because we are naïve? They, the 18-24s, because of their youth; me because of my quasi utopian ideas of shared problems and international cooperation?



It seems strange that my grandparents, the war generation sadly now gone, seemed more forward looking despite the real hardship they suffered during the Second World War. As aforementioned in a previous article, Churchill was very much in favour of the European project and, like him, my grandparents who lived through this conflict took a very modern attitude after the war. My grandfather always spoke of the hard working ordinary Germans who suffered because of their bonkers leadership; he took up Arabic so he could speak and trade with the Yemeni community that settled in the North East after 1945. His own father had received a medal from Churchill for pulling men out of fire on board a ship and he, a PT instructor in the army, was no hippy.

My grandmother, whose brothers had all fought and been imprisoned by German and Italian forces, visited Germany with her daughter and my cousins in the 1990s, praising the her old enemy's resolve to rebuild its cities and the general decency of the people she met. She had lost close friends in a bombing raid in our home town and saw the changes the conflict wrought on her older brothers but despite this, had compassion and optimism for the future.

What followed in Britain was relative prosperity our parents, and if you are young your grandparents all enjoyed this peace. They were in many cases the first generation who were able to buy their homes, education was improved and extended. My grandfather, like many children in the 30s, left school at 14 (in his case to deliver firewood by horse and cart). His children, by contrast, would attend college and that generation would get their degrees and maintenance for free. They also benefited from guarantees on holiday pay and paternity rights. Baby boomers had secure jobs for the most part, and now they sit pretty owning houses and drawing their pensions. They had it so much better than their own parents and than their own children, if current trends continue (social mobility is down, education is expensive, housing is in crisis).

So what exactly is their problem? There are complex arguments of course, but mostly, this has been about two things for the leavers: a) the abstract idea of sovereignty, which is a rejection of cooperation with Brussels and its leadership dressed up as so called re-claiming of power, and b) immigration – that potent and toxic idea that all pressure comes from abroad. Could it be that the over 42s are simply more in thrall to the tabloids and gross simplification of ideas than their own children are? The intelligent people on the leavers' side (the unlikely bedfellows of David Starkey and Dreda Say Mitchell spring to mind) will now have to struggle to separate their own civilised rationale from the 'kick em all out' racism and xenophobia that the broader debate has unleashed.

The same xenophobia is also spreading to France, where the Brexit has buoyed up the national front. I feel a great pity for the eastern Europeans looking west to a now diminished Europe, fearful of Russian aggression. Perhaps the French and Germans will help them. I feel pity for the Greeks who have struggled with so much more financial hardship, but nevertheless remained in union with their neighbours. I feel pity for the immigrants and migrants fleeing slaughter who now have a clear message: you are unwelcome here, and for anyone with an accent or darker skin tone feeling less welcome than they did last week. Lastly, I feel pity for the young who have been betrayed for, at best, nostalgia and at worst, outright racism.

The counter arguments for remaining are pointless now, let's simply look at what's happening in the wake of their defeat. The exiters said they would lower immigration, now they are back-pedaling. They said they would spend millions more on health, now they are back-pedaling. They said Scotland wouldn't risk a second chance at independence, well it seems they will (along with Northern Ireland). They haven't answered worries about where funding will come from for Wales, Yorkshire, Cornwall and the North East (all received lots of money from Europe).

What a mess. A public soaked in half-truths and lame tabloid logic, addicted to sneering satire, has been given the chance to make a decision and lo, they really screwed it up! To 18-24 year olds, I would say this: you have been written off and mocked as porn-addicted computer gamers, your interests have been ignored, and you should be angry. You are in a less safe, less optimistic continent because of the backward thinking of the generation above you. They have a long time yet to live. You must become a politicised generation and take action, or the congealing ideas of the old will rot you too!

Image: Pixabay/Succo



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About Michael Eden > 77 Articles

Michael Eden is the Arts Editor for Trebuchet Magazine, an artist and researcher working in London and the south east, his artistic practice is concentrated on painting and he divides his time between this and lecturing in art history and contextual studies.



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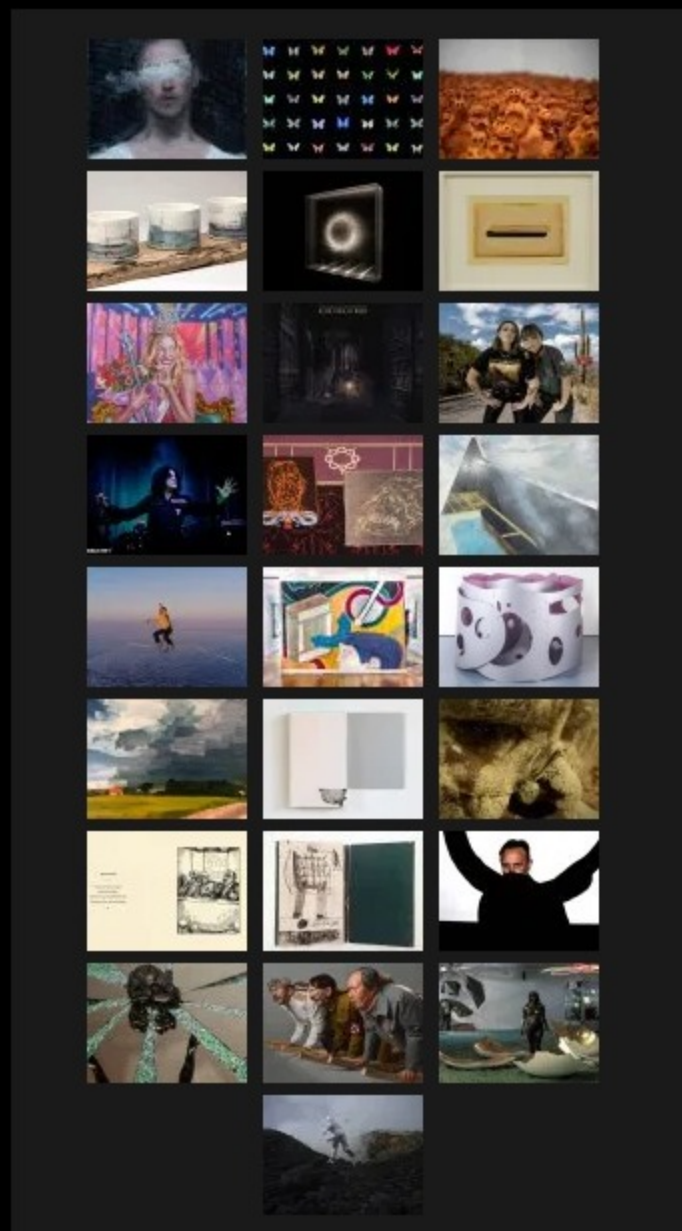
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