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Maurizio Cattelan Has Installed His Golden Toilet in the Stately Bathroom Where Winston Churchill Once Sat

The mischievous Italian artist has turned the birthplace of Churchill into a subversive spectacle.

Javier Pes, September 13, 2019



Installation view of Maurizio Cattelan's *America* (2016) in "Victory is Not an Option" at Blenheim Palace, 2019. Photo by Tom Lin.

Maurizio Cattelan never got to use his fully functioning gold toilet at the Solomon R. Guggenheim museum. The line for the work, titled *America* (2016), was too long, he recently told the *Guardian*. But he hopes to have better luck now that it's been plumbed in at Blenheim Palace, one of Britain's most magnificent stately homes.

Of all of the bathrooms at Blenheim, the Italian artist has installed his celebrated toilet in Winston Churchill's own former water closet. The great war leader was born

in the house, which was built near Oxford by a grateful Queen and country to reward his ancestor, the First Duke of Marlborough, for his famous victory at the Battle of Blenheim in 1704.

Fast forward four centuries and the mischievous Italian artist has now not only installed his toilet, but also *Him* (2001), Cattelan's sculpture of a young Adolf Hitler, under the Blenheim roof. (Churchill and Hitler never met face to face, adding to the frisson of the juxtaposition.) It's all part of the artist's barnstorming exhibition "Victory is Not an Option," which opened to the public yesterday. It is the latest in an annual series of high-profile shows organized by the Blenheim Art Foundation, and Cattelan's interventions in and around the historic house are the most subversive so far, by a country mile.



Installation view of Maurizio Cattelan's *Him*, (2001) at Blenheim Palace, 2019. Photo by Tom Lindboe.

Back in the historic water closet, visitors will have time to ponder the what ifs of European history had Germany successfully invaded the British Isles in 1940. There are 20 time slots available to book per hour, giving visitors roughly twice as long as the 90 seconds allowed at the Guggenheim.

When the White House asked about possible art loans last year, the Guggenheim's senior curator Nancy Spector dryly suggested the museum send *America*. Cattelan said he would have been honored if Donald Trump had taken up the offer; and he's accepted the Blenheim's invitation for a solo show, his first in Britain, after Trump was a house guest there a few months later. (The US President enjoyed a black-tie

dinner in the summer of 2018 hosted by the then British prime minister, a consolation prize for not getting to visit Buckingham Palace on that trip.)

Cattelan has risen to the occasion by installing his signature works in the Blenheim's most splendid spaces, but putting *America* in the WC that Churchill once used is his masterstroke. A dab hand with the paintbrush, and a friend of artists as well as of the US, Churchill had a robust sense of humor, after all. He was also proud of his American ancestry, famously telling a joint meeting of Congress during World War II that if his father had been American and his mother British, instead of the other way around, "I might have gotten here on my own."



Installation view of *Victory is Not an Option* (2019), Maurizio Cattelan at Blenheim Palace.
Photo by Tom Lindboe.

No one who visits Blenheim this fall will be in any doubt that Cattelan has gone before them. He has laid a gigantic carpet of union flags across the vast front courtyard. Also titled *Victory Is Not an Option* (2019), the site-specific work will get worn and torn very soon. Its frayed edges will, no doubt, be seen by some as an apt metaphor for Britain in the midst of its Brexit meltdown, which threatens the very union that the flag symbolizes.

"Victory is Not an Option," through October 27, 2018, Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire.