

Grunts and Grapples

Curated by Kerry William Purcell

For those of a certain age, Kent Walton's welcome will evoke the routine of Saturday teatimes in front of the TV, anticipating an exciting 45 minutes of grapples, grunts, and the ubiquitous granny scolding a wrestler. Wrestling was first broadcast on the new ITV station in 1955 but a decade later its established slot became 4pm - 4.45pm (just before the football scores) on ITV's World of Sport.

Part sport, part entertainment, wrestling garnered audiences of over 12 million at its peak, and ITV seemed like a fitting home for a pastime that had emerged from the traditions of the music hall. In many ways, the balance between sport and entertainment that wrestling presented was always an uncertain one. The pull towards celebrity and spectacle that the commercial element of the sport demanded would eventually be wrestling's downfall in Britain. Its presence on British TVs would last for 24 years as a key part of ITV's sports programming until it was axed in 1989 due to falls in audience numbers.

Curated by design historian Kerry William Purcell *Grunts & Grapples* profiles the golden age of British Wrestling from the 1950s until the 1990s. Wrestling was a central part of British national life in this period with iconic figures such as Giant Haystacks and Big Daddy appearing in hundreds of UK town halls and theatres night after night as well as featuring on TV. The exhibition explores how the showmanship of wrestling drew on earlier traditions of public entertainment such as music hall and circus and how this informed the development of the cast of characters, storylines and audience participation unique to the sport.

Through posters, photographs, souvenirs and costumes the exhibition reveals the origins of wrestling's interplay of sport and spectacle and the development of personas. The portrayal of wrestlers as baddies (heels) or goodies (blue eyes) would be combined with prevailing social narratives of otherness and racial and sexual stereotypes. This play of characters across the hundreds of venues that hosted the wrestling and TV screens across the country was a carefully choreographed storyline with long running

grudges, feuds, and resentments. They were all stage managed by the wrestling promoter Joint Promotions, who held a near monopoly on the management of the wrest-lers, the bouts and their presentation during the heyday of British wrestling.

ITV's broadcasting of wrestling was cancelled in 1989 and many argued this was due to the contrived storylines, larger than life characters, and manufactured bouts – the entertainment side of wrestling's heritage - had begun to overshadow the sporting aspect. For many, the protracted battle between Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks throughout the 1980s confirmed this. Judged as a mockery of 'real' wrestling, many fans and wrestlers considered the absence of skill and technique a step too far. With the arrival of Sky TV and the import of World Wrestling Federation (WWF) from America, TV audiences for British wrestling fell. Wrestling continued in town halls, seaside piers and theatres well into the 1990s, but it never loomed as large in the public consciousness as it had throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s.

The exhibition features the original costumes of the legendary wrestlers Big Daddy and Adrian Street together with a mask from the mysterious Kendo Nagasaki, alongside posters, programmes and photographs. Also featuring in the exhibition is *So Many Ways To Hurt You, The Life and Times of Adrian Street, 2010*; a film by Turner prize-winning artist Jeremy Deller.

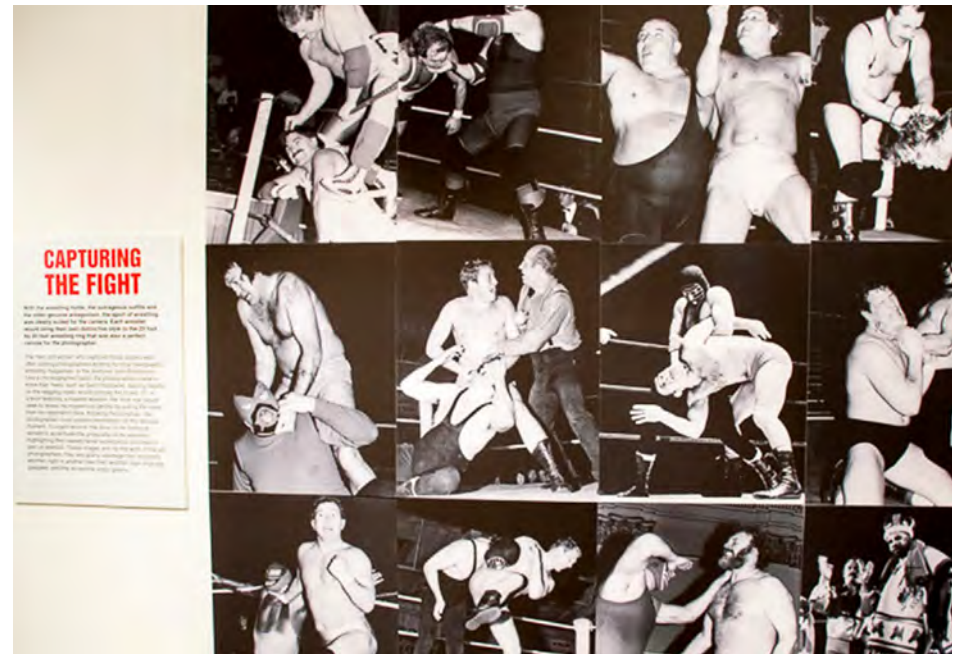
Kerry William Purcell is a writer, theorist and historian. His first book on the celebrated art director and designer Alexey Brodovitch was published by Phaidon Press in 2002. This has been followed by his concise biography on the renowned photographer Weegee (Phaidon, London, 2004) and his comprehensive study of the Swiss graphic designer Josef Muller-Brockmann (Phaidon, London, 2006). He is working towards a PhD on the work of the philosopher Alain Badiou at Birkbeck, University of London, and is Senior Lecturer in Design History at the University of Hertfordshire.



Above Adrian Street with his father
Right



Big Daddy and Giant Haystacks



Grunts and Grapples exhibition
Tunbridge Wells Museum and Art Gallery

BY THE WORLD'S LARGEST PROMOTERS WRYTON PROMOTIONS DIRECTORS OF JOINT PROMOTIONS LTD.

MECHANICS INSTITUTE CREWE

THURS., APRIL 29th
Commence 7-30

WRISTLING

Sensational Middleweight Contest 10 x 5 min. rds.

JACKIE 'MR. T.V.' PALLO
(London) V

JEAN MORANDI
(France)

Middleweight Contest 6 x 5

COLIN JOYNSON v **TERRY NYLANDS**
(Cheetham) (Rochdale)

Terrific Hvywt. Contest 8 x 5 Great Catchweight Contest 8 x 5

GWYN DAVIES V **KENDO NAGASAKI**
Massing The Masked Judo Star

BILL ROBINSON V **ERNIE RILEY**
M/C Brink & European Light-hwt. Champion

Referee: Stan Rylands
M.C.: H. V. Wright
Tickets on Sale at Hall - 1 to 5 pm
THE MANAGEMENT RESERVE THE RIGHT OF ADMISSION

Control Printing Co. (Sheff. Div.) Ltd., Sheffield, York, Toronto, London

BATHS HALL
SHEFFIELD ROAD, ROTHERHAM

ALL-STAR WRESTLING

SATURDAY OCT. 8th 1966
Doors Open 2-08
Commence 3-0

RELWYSKOW & GREEN PROMOTIONS, LTD. in association with **NORMAN MORRELL, LTD.**

SPECIAL TELEVISION Wrestling PROGRAMME

GREAT HEAVY-WEIGHT CLASH!
TEN 5 minute ROUNDS

WELCOME RETURN of the OUTSTANDING **BILLY TWO RIVERS** SEE HIM IN PERSON

JOE CORNELIUS
FULL-BLOODED RED INDIAN WRESTLER and a great T.V. personality.
VERSUS

LONDON. One of the greatest wrestlers of this weight.

YOUNG VULCAN V **JIM HART**
MIDDLE-WEIGHT THRILLER High 7 min. Round

GREAT MID HEAVY-WEIGHT MATCH Two 5 minute rounds

MASAMBULA V **BILL HOWES**
THE WRESTLING CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

HEAVY MIDDLE-WEIGHT CONTEST 7 min. Round

HARRY KENDAL V **ANTONIO MONTORO**
THE WRESTLING CHAMPION OF THE WORLD

Match-maker: G. F. H. de RELWYSKOW

Admission 8.6. 7.5. 6. 4.8. 3.6.

BY THE WORLD'S LARGEST PROMOTERS WRYTON PROMOTIONS DIRECTORS OF JOINT PROMOTIONS LTD.

BEST/WRYTON PROMOTIONS LTD. your T.V. Promoters present

THURSDAY 18th MARCH at 7.45 p.m.

WRESTLING

VICTORIA BATHS. NOTTINGHAM
LEISURE CENTRE

★ **THE GIANTS OF THE RING CLASH** ★

REX STRONG
HUGE 22 stone BARREL CHESTED MASKED POWERHOUSE
VERSUS
BIG DADDIE
25 stone BLOND BELLY - BUTT BLOCKBUSTER
I will defeat and smash this character - Then for Neppski!

CATWEAZLE
Furry, hairless antics
VERSUS
DAVE THE RAVE SHADE
A smashing all action stylist

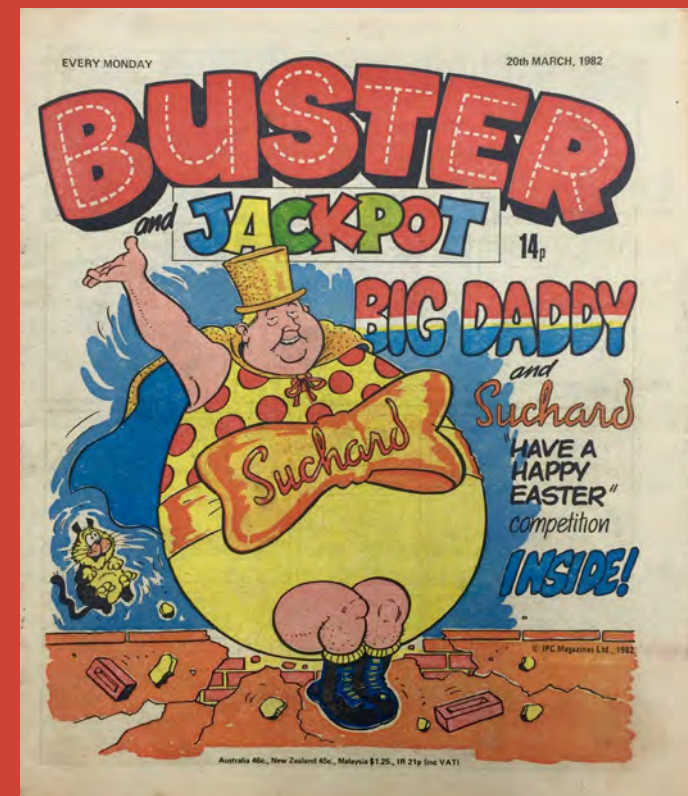
WINNER OF THE 4th MARCH CLASH BETWEEN 'CHAMPION' JIM BREAKS AND STRONG-MAN ALAN DENNISON

BOBBY RYAN
European Lightweight title holder
LONG HAIRIED FORE-ARM SMASH SPECIALIST

'IRON MAN' STEVE LOGAN
LONDON, Mick McManus' side kick! VERSUS
KING BEN
Appeared in the Freddie Trueman Indian league world-wrestling championships

PRICES Ringside **£1.00** 85p 75p INCLUDING VAT

ADVANCE BOOKINGS AT THE VICTORIA BATHS LEISURE CENTRE 7-11 PM OR AT THE DOOR ON NIGHT OF PROMOTION (LICENSED BAR)



★ PRESENTING ★
**GRUNTS &
★ GRAPPLES ★**

"TWO FALLS, TWO SUBMISSIONS OR A
KNOCKOUT TO DECIDE THE WINNER"

16 SEP/16 – 14 JAN/17

EXHIBITION OF A GOLDEN ERA



**BIG
DADDY
ADRIAN
STREET**
JACKIE TV
PALLO

FEATURING ARTEFACTS
AND FOOTAGE FROM THE
1950s – 1990s



**BLUE
EYES**
— Vs —
**THE
HEELS**

**NAGASAKI
UNVEILED**



'EASY, EASY, EASY'

TUNBRIDGE WELLS
MUSEUM &
ART GALLERY



TUNBRIDGE WELLS MUSEUM & ART GALLERY
TUNBRIDGE WELLS MUSEUM, CIVIC CENTRE, MOUNT PLEASANT RD, ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS, TN11 1JN



Kendo Nagasaki

**You are invited to a special preview of
Grunts & Grapples**

Curated by design historian Kerry William Purcell this exhibition profiles the golden age of British Wrestling from the 1950s until the 1990s. It features posters, films and the costumes of some of Britain's most iconic wrestling stars including Big Daddy and Kendo Nagasaki. Also featuring in the exhibition is *So Many Ways To Hurt You*, *The Life and Times of Adrian Street*, 2010; a film by Turner prize-winning artist Jeremy Deller.

Thursday 15 September 2016 6–8pm

**Tunbridge Wells Museum & Art Gallery
Civic Centre, Mount Pleasant Road
Royal Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1JN**

The exhibition runs from 16 September 2016 – 14 January 2017

www.tunbridgewellsmuseum.org

www.gruntsandgrapples.com



With the arrival of Sky TV and the import of World Wrestling Federation (WWF) from America, TV audiences to British wrestling felt. Wrestling continued in town halls, seaside pier and theatres well into the 1990s, but it never soared as large in the public consciousness as it had throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s.

The exhibition features the original costumes of the legendary wrestlers Big Daddy and Adrian Street together with a mask from the mysterious Kendo Nagasaki. Also featuring in the exhibition is *So Many Keys To Hurt You: The Life and Times of Adrian Street, 2010*; a film by Turner prize-winning artist Jeremy Delair.

Unmasking Kendo
Left: Adrian Street in the ring
Right: Adrian Street in costume

Gerry Weiser Purcell is a writer, theorist and collector, his text book on the collected art director and designer Alamy Doboschitz was published by Reaktion Press in 2002. This has been followed by his London biography in his recent photographic memoir *Pravda* (London, 2004) and his comprehensive study of the Spain graphic designer Josef Müller Brackmann (Princeton, London, 2005). He is working towards a PhD on the work of the photographer Allen Barbois at Epswick University of London, and is Guest Lecturer in Design history at the University of Manchester.



Let Big Daddy and Short Grapple.

Grunts & Grapples events

Behind the Scenes of... Grunts & Grapples
Wednesday 28 September
Time: 2pm
Cost: Free

A new London-based guided tour of Grunts & Grapples with special 'behind the scenes' stops, of just how the exhibition came together, and special touring. These tours are ideal for partially sighted visitors and those with learning difficulties.

*Audience complimentary tour of tea or coffee.

Grunts & Grapples with exhibition curator
Kerry William Purcell
Saturday 22 October
Time: 6pm
Cost: £10

A very special tour with Grunts & Grapples curator and design historian Kerry William Purcell. During this exclusive tour, Kerry will discuss the golden age of British wrestling, and all the drama and spectacle that has sporting entertainment brought to British culture. Highlights will extremely limited, so advance booking is required.

Golden Age of Wrestling: Oral History Day
Saturday 19 November
Time: 1 - 4pm
Cost: Free

Do you remember when wrestling used to come to the Assembly Hall Theatre? Do you remember watching something as a child? Did you have that Big Daddy himself? If so, we want to hear from you! On this special day we will be collecting precious wrestling memories to add to Grunts & Grapples, and potentially to our own collection as well. So come down and share your memories in this drop-in session.

Exhibition Feedback

'Takes me back to my childhood. Mum shouting at the TV. We really thought that is was all real. Kendo Nagasaki – we all hated him! He looked so ugly when the mask came off. Interesting to read the stories'

'Daddy is back!'

'Loved it! Love the fact that the art behind the pulp has been recognised. Spending the day thinking of my wrestling name.'

'Fantastic! As a modern wrestling fan it is great to see the British roots of the sport. Maybe play more than three matches? Thanks!'

'Fabulous exhibits. Really interesting and enjoyable!'

'Great! Brought back wonderful memories! Thank you'

'Loved it! Relived my youth. Thank you'

'Brings back happy memories of when a friend and I used to come and watch wrestling at the Assembly Hall. Wrestlers like Jackie Pallo and Giant Haystacks etc. Fixed some of it may have been, but great fun.'

For further information please contact

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