

## Notes for the Joker displays for Portico Gothic Exhibition

Tim Burton's and Christopher Nolan's different Joker designs – make up and meaning.

There are very different uses of clown make-up for the Joker in both Tim Burton's *Batman* and Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy. In Burton's 1989 film, the Joker (played by Jack Nicholson) relies on make-up and plastic surgery to undergo his physical transformation after his fall into a vat of acid early in the film. He is consistently seen either covering up or revealing his chemical pallor in the film. His dastardly plans include poisoning make-up products to use on the hapless citizens of Gotham, with each victim in turn bearing their own eerie Joker smile. The distinctive symmetry of the make-up is very deliberate in Burton's film too – the Joker's own precision-painted smile distinctly echoes and mocks Batman's bat logo.

Christopher Nolan's own distinctive take on the Joker (played by Heath Ledger) in *The Dark Knight* (2008) contrasts completely with Burton's precise, rictus –grinning villain. The Glasgow smile scars that are carved into the Joker's face demonstrate his own flesh-and-blood commitment to his destructive cause, only to be ghoulishly amplified by his messy and patchy make-up. Here, the make-up and scars (most likely self-inflicted) are used for intimidation and to instil fear rather than feel uncanny or strange, as it does in Burton's film. For Nolan, the 'war paint' make-up neither reveals nor conceals the Joker's true identity – usually greasepaint (or a mask) is used to conceal a person's identity beneath a painted visage. Representing disarray and confusion, and heavily contrasting with Batman's streamlined batsuit and physically rigid cowl, Nolan's Joker make-up should be read as a visual extension of the character's chaotic and violent mind, a flow of colours and contours against Batman's fixed mask.

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For more on this see,

Ní Fhlainn, S. “‘Wait till they get a load of me!’: The Joker from Modern to Postmodern Villainous S/laughter.” *Villains and Villainy: Embodiments of Evil in Literature, Popular Culture and Media*. Anna Fahreus and Dikmen Yakali (eds). Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi, 2011. pp. 71- 92