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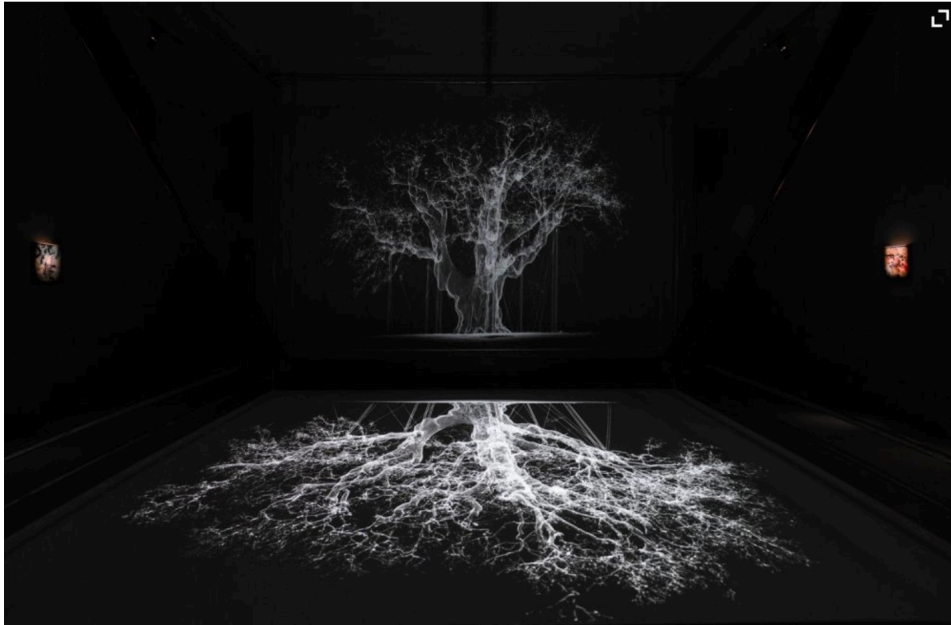
## The Grinders Cease

BY ELLA CARR    JANUARY 18, 2019

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Courtesy the artist and Blain | Southern. Photo by Trevor Good



## Blain|Southern

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BY ELLA CARR JANUARY 18, 2019

British artist Mat Collishaw's first Berlin exhibition in ten years takes inspiration from the *vanitas* tradition: a genre of painting that reflects the transience of earthly life. Its title, taken from the Bible's Book of Ecclesiastes, alludes to the stage in life when your body begins to decay – and gnashers literally start to rot – when it becomes time to contemplate death. Similar tropes of decay within life haunt the exhibition. *Albion*, for example, depicts the Major Oak in Sherwood Forest: a centuries-old tree whose branches have been propped up by metal rods since the 19th century. Conceived at the time of the Brexit referendum, this ghostly installation (a laser image of the tree projected onto a diagonal piece of glass), with its rotting, hollow core, draws parallels with the past golden age being desperately peddled up by UK nationalists – an Albion that probably never existed. *Last Meal on Death Row, Texas* consists of a photographic series of recorded last meals, styled as Dutch 17th century *vanitas* still lives. Ensclosed in Baroque gloom, the images drip with symbolism and poignancy – the veneer of civility in a glass of wine or a dish of fruit thinly veiling the barbarity of imminent death. The grande finale of the show is *Seria Ludo*, a swiftly revolving chandelier animated by strobe lighting. The kinetic illusion of the zoetrope activates scenes of debauchery at each level: flabby bodies gyrating against poles, pissing off the parapets and swigging wine bottles. The orgiastic cycle quickly becomes desperate, reflecting on our age-old compulsion to get wrecked even as we hurtle towards death (and the ultimate expression of the *vanitas* mantra, “Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die” – Ecclesiastes 8:15). Small but powerful, *The Grinders Cease* toes a beguiling line between beauty and repulsion, and draws uncanny reflections between past and present – not one to be missed.

*Through February 2*