



## Print Isn't Dead™ Element 004 / People of Print Interview 2016

### What was the first illustration of yours to go to print?

That would be a small book that I did for a Dutch publisher via The Partners design company straight after graduating from Kingston University. I had distributed a number of photocopied folded books that had been seen by them, so I was commissioned for a book celebrating the life of the publisher. The book contained a CD with the publisher talking about his experience in the business and the drawings were a combination of drawings and collage, and one page was scratch & sniff - So a really nice print job, involving the readers experience of the book as an object. At the same time I was commissioned by Trickett & Webb to work on one of their famed illustrated calendars, which were beautifully screen-printed.

### What was your big break into the world of illustration?

This was probably during my second year at the RCA. Bloomsbury publishers approached me to illustrate Peter Bowlers 'Superior Person's Book of Words' at a time when there were very few novelty books. It was a great job, allowed me to translate what I was doing at the college, into a successful printed outcome, that was in the bookshops for Christmas after my graduation. As that job was going into production Penguin Books commissioned me to illustrate Zadie Smith's second novel 'The Autograph Man'. I learnt so much on that job, quite a long lead in time as Zadie was still writing it at the time so I was given quite a bit of freedom to interpret ideas around the book. I was still to work with a computer at that time so the designer that I was working with had a lot of trust in me to create the right handmade feel to the jacket design. I was part of choosing the right paper stock, the cover was a folded down poster printed on both sides that became the jacket. It felt very creative to learn on the job, using printed offcuts from the Letterpress department at the RCA to make the typography and give the cover some colour, since the initial drawings were in black & white. The book got quite a bit of exposure, and got me known in a relatively short period of time - it became one of those signature pieces of work professionally.

Strangely I've always been fortunate in getting interesting illustration commissions, unusual print jobs, which I've learnt a great deal from whilst completing. Much of my work comes from the USA these days, I like being a little anonymous as an illustrator in the UK, it seems to offer me the freedom to evolve and not to be type cast in an industry which tries to do so very much.

#### What tools and techniques do you use when creating work?

The work is a combination of drawing, handmade elements that are processed through digital. I'm a drawer, but like to contrast the linearity of the drawing with graphic shapes or silhouettes from handmade stencils that I spray paint. Recently I've used more devices such as a rolling ruler to help mechanize some of the drawings - I'm interested in the tension between pictorial depiction/space and abstraction, precise figuration and graphic abbreviations. I use mechanical processes such as photocopiers to distance the work from the original drawing, at times to pick up the dirt or to throw the drawing optically that leaves smudges or pushes them focally. These imperfections, graphic elements or component parts sometimes become the work itself, or are re-contextualized in later drawings.

Sometimes the tools have a purely conceptual rationale - the drawings done for Nicolas Bouvier's *The Way of the World*, that represent half glimpsed memories of cities seen along a journey across Iran in the 1950's had to be rendered in felt-tips that were not lightfast pigments. So that whilst the print reproduction remains fixed, the original drawings will move, the colours will fade with exposure to light. Very early on I wanted a specific colour palette unique of felt-tips, and a medium that reflected the fragility of memory.

#### Where do you gather inspirations?

Visually I've always been drawn to contemporary art and photography/film. I see a lot of art, I read quite a bit of both fiction and art theory, watch many films. In my teaching I advise students to look away from illustration as much as possible, to seek inspiration from other creative sources. For any job I spend much time researching visually, both for material to draw from, but also to create a colour palette for reference.

The studio plays an important part also, the dialogue with other practitioners, I talk much with Ian Wright to be honest, but also with writers such as John O'Reilly. Inspiration can come from many divergent sources - it's in the act of creative making that they inform, or you see their effect upon you.

Teaching has also greatly impacted upon me. The students especially at the University of Brighton have always inspired. Not in terms of the look of my work, but in the ambition of work etc. Moving into animation and film was a surprise, or I should say an opportunity to discover another aspect of my creative personality. Writing has followed this as well... something else that I didn't imagine.

#### Tell us about the AOI and your involvement.

I was approached to apply for a position on the Board of Directors. At the time I had recently co-founded the Mokita illustration forum with Geoff Grandfield and Darryl Clifton of Kingston and Camberwell educational institutions respectfully. So when I was asked by the AOI to become a director I was already thinking of the wider illustration profession, and the changing nature of illustration as a discipline. In my short career as an illustrator there have been massive changes, not only in how work is made, but the effect of the Internet on the industry and it's popularity. I'm privileged to have a portion of my contract at Brighton for research - To be given the time to explore and to make known the emerging opportunities for and challenges that face the illustrator today, and tomorrow.

The role is voluntary and none paid, looking after good governance, making sure that the AOI is secure financially, strategic planning and the direction of the company. Knowing that the AOI is the only trade organisation for illustrators, and it's work promoting and looking after the interests of illustrators nationally, means that it's important to invest time as a director, and in recent times the position of Deputy Chairman to help support it in whatever way I can. One of my roles is to help support illustration research it is within the academic that you see how the discipline is developing, engaging with new technologies and the possible future spaces for illustration.

### Do you draw everyday?

I go on cycles with drawing. I understand the need to train like a gymnast at drawing, of having a regular artistic practice, but I also like the breaks - to allow for the freshness of re-learning to draw, or the adventure of a new medium, also of building up the energy for the next series of drawings - creative procrastination I guess? I'm always busy, whether that be with commercial jobs or drawings that I'm initiated myself - important for my practice that I do both. I'm looking all the time though - there is that necessary combination of drawing, of making marks on the paper, and then looking, one informing the other. They're not necessarily the same thing, and I've always been interested in the communication aspect of the drawing, what it is trying say.

### What films, books and magazines do you recommend that we run out and buy?

#### Films

The filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky had a profound affect upon me.  
L'Appartement by Gilles Mimouni  
Le Samouraï by Jean-Pierre Melville  
The Fearless Vampire Killers - Roman Polanski

#### Books

Elephant by Raymond Carver  
The Garden of Forking Paths by Jorge Luis Borges  
The Rings of Saturn by W.G. Sebald  
Utz by Bruce Chatwin  
On Being an Artist by Michael Craig-Martin

#### Magazine

Varoom Magazine, Eye Magazine, Works That Work, and Frieze Magazine I regularly read.

### What are you working on at the moment?

There seems to be quite a bit of writing, and curatorial work, speaking at various international conferences etc. There is a growing network of illustration research, which is important to support and to help the burgeoning discourse around the discipline. In terms of personal drawings there is an ongoing series - Depictions of haunted houses from horror films. Once again for me there is this interest in reality and fiction of source material that become the subject of drawings. They are depictions of film sets and locations that in the narrative of the film are haunted.

There is some moving image work that I'm working on - Much of my work is sequential, or requires time to understand, so animation and film interests me much. Then some work based upon Venice, an ongoing project exploring the image of the city. Of course there are commercial commissions always to be negotiated, but I like to be busy, to be making work for others, and some for myself. They feed into each other and help keep my practice developing.

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