

The world is filled with dreamers and chancers, makers and fakers, our needs and desires seem to have been imposed upon us making it almost impossible to escape the merry-go-round.

While we try to grope around trying to make a meaning out of this unsettling comedy, life moves inevitably on.

The Salome Story' Limited edition digital prints



'The Salome Show' 60x90cms



'So what else can you do?' 90x90cms



'Jolly Good Show' 60x60cms

Limited edition screenprint



'Go Home and Lead a Quiet Life' 68x55cms

GERRY BAPTIST

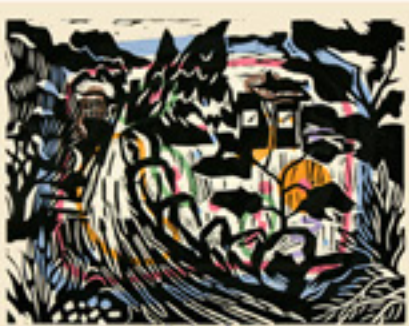
SOME PRINTS



[www.gerrybaptist.co.uk](http://www.gerrybaptist.co.uk)

[gerry.baptist@gmail.com](mailto:gerry.baptist@gmail.com)

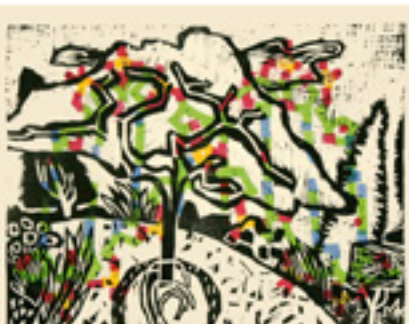




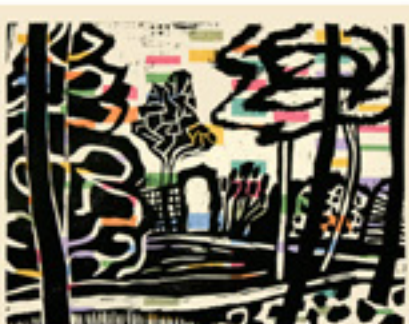
'The Wild Flower Garden' 30x40cms



'The Viburnum' 30x40cms



'The Pear Tree' 30x40cms



'The Crooked Willow' 30x40cms

'Mysteries of an English garden' Limited edition woodcuts



'The Old Conifers' 30x40cms

A L I E O F C U R I O S I T Y

### Much of the gusto so clearly evident in Gerry Baptist's images seems to derive from his mocking and satirical bent.

The *Burgergate* series is a wonderfully rumbustious satire on our appetite for what's bad for us, a lubricious over-indulgent pile-up of high art and poor taste. *The 7 Deadly Sins* may be "an entertainment" (Baptist's description) but its giddy, greedy shoppers, howling mobs and drive-by bankers remind us of all-too-familiar foibles that we both despise and share. Of another of his subjects, *Salome*, Baptist writes, "she could so easily be part of our consumer society, forever grasping for more". And *The Rake*, while he may be doing "what comes naturally", sets a notoriously bad example. The case seems to be made all the clearer by the contrast offered by Baptist's serene aquatints and paintings for the *Rubaiyat*. They are calm, composed and contemplative. So is Baptist advocating the quiet life over contemporary flash, our avidity and moral turpitude?

Is he, in short, a sermonising type, a cold-fish puritan – a bit of a spoilsport?

Not at all. In conversation it is clear he is as often entranced by our human waywardness as he is appalled by it. "Burgers aren't evil," he tells me over a lunchtime pint, as I tuck into my tuna sandwich and him his panini. "Well, 99p ones are!" In the impact they have on health and the environment I surmise, but the conversation has already rattled



'What is it that makes Burgers so appealing?' - after Hamilton' 30x40cms

on to how plants behave in much the same way as humankind, strangling and smothering rivals in the rat race for position and food.

Baptist was especially struck by this idea, he explains, having made the beautiful series of woodcuts, *Mysteries of an English Garden*. Now, a man as well informed as he is knows that a meditation on the English pastoral should point to Eden, not Richard Dawkins. But it is typical of Baptist's pattern of thought that, within the famed harbour of the English garden, he finds himself marvelling at the imperative of DNA simply doing its job – all that struggle behind all that beauty.

Dawkins was interviewed in *The Observer* in September 2013 and Baptist had brought the article along to show me. In it, asked if Darwinism informs his everyday apprehension of life, Dawkins responds: "Well, in one way it does. My eyes are constantly wide open to the extraordinary fact of existence. Not just human existence but the existence of life and how this breathtakingly powerful process, which is natural selection, has managed to take the very simple facts of physics and chemistry and build them up to redwood trees and humans."

Baptist tells me that, "his curiosity in the natural world is not scientific, like Dawkins but

'Burgergate' Limited edition woodcuts



'The Tasty Meal Deal – after Picasso' 30x40cms



'Original Sin – after Léger' 30x40cms



'Burger Queens – after Rubens' 30x40cms



'The All Day Breakfast – after Manet' 30x40cms

made up of vague memories and thoughts, just a rag-bag of imagery."

Some of his models, as is clear from his work, are rule-breakers, very many of them artists like himself: Marcel Duchamp, Pablo Picasso, Caravaggio, Richard Hamilton, Phillip Guston, George Grosz. All of these prefer or preferred a life lived well to one lived by the rules. Printmaking facilitates Baptist's magpie tendency, both in its dynamic mixture of image and technique, but also in its sheer variety. Baptist was an early adopter of digital printmaking, which he has since combined with fiercely carved-out woodcuts. His *Salome* series deploys Pop Art collage techniques, freely appropriating imagery and styles from advertising, comics and consumer products. He has tried etching and lithography (and he is also a fluent, observant painter). He is always looking for different ways to convey his ideas.

Over lunch, he tells me that although he is comfortable learning new printmaking techniques, he is always more interested in ideas, not just imprints on paper. I counter this by reminding him of the excitement he'd expressed at collaborating with as skilled a printmaker and printer as Tony Dyson RE; of his delight, for example, in the physicality of woodcut. He concedes the point adding: "I have to admit that I do get absorbed with the whole process, particularly at that moment when you lift the first print off the plate or block!"

I like to think that the figure in Baptist's woodcut, 'Stop and Stare' (which appears on the front of this mini-catalogue) might be a self-portrait, in the same way that Rodin's Thinker might also be Rodin himself, mired in his quandary in the *Gates of Hell*, or that Paolozzi's massive sculpture in the courtyard of the British Library could be Paolozzi rather than Newton, glumly gestating some dark, weighty notion.

So, what is this Baptist figure doing, sitting on what appears to be a milk crate in a snowstorm, with streaks of fire streaming from his eyes? Baptist himself explains that the image draws on lines by the poet WH Davies: "What is life if, full of care, / We have no time to stand and stare." (Baptist opted for the more urgent "stop" over "stand".) The key point is that all those multi-coloured lights are not streaming out from the figure's eyes, they are streaming in. The figure is not passive, only unresisting, letting all shades in, delighting in their variety.

### Mike Sims

Writer and former deputy editor of *Printmaking Today*. He now works for the Poetry Society.

'The Rake' Limited edition digital prints



'There was no choice' 50x50cms



'Make Believe' 50x70cms



'Soul searching' 50x50cms