

The Oxford Times

Vivid images of a 'messy' world from artist Dan Baldwin at Cassington gallery

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Stuart Macbeth steps into the complex world of painter Dan Baldwin

Dan Baldwin's painting *Art Therapy* is a big blue still life. From a distance it looks like a cheerful billboard poster made in the style of the Fauvist painter Raoul Dufy. Up close however, you spot the cigarette, knife and Bible perched on the table.

A skeletal bird pokes its head out of a cage. There's a photo frame with weird children in costume. "We're in a room," Baldwin explains, "with bright wallpaper and a view of an old Victorian house. It looks like the old Maidstone mental asylum that I broke into once."

So things are never as simple as they seem.

"I like colour and harmony," he concedes, "but the world is a mess, so I combine everything together. My work often heads off in about six different directions at once!" As well as these works on wood and paper, Baldwin also makes copper plate etchings, ceramic tile paintings and pots. Much of his work uses standout blues, golds and pinks. Some of it features pop images floating on deep Boschian blacks.

The 43-year-old works seven days a week in his West Sussex studio. He rarely ventures out to engage in social chit-chat because, he says, he's notoriously bad at it. Born in Manchester, Baldwin graduated from Kent Institute of Art when he was 24. He was 32 when his work started to sell.

He has subsequently had shows in New York, Los Angeles and London, where his 14th solo show took place last year at the Laurence Alkin Gallery. Among lists of celebrity collectors of his work you can make unlikely pairings. Ant McPartlin and Damien Hirst, Bernie Ecclestone and The Prodigy. But my favourite of all is Nicole Appleton, who spent much of the money in her divorce settlement from Liam Gallagher on one of Baldwin's paintings.

He has also produced a series of silkscreen prints for CCA, formerly Christie's Contemporary Art. These are on display at Hemingway Art in Cassington, alongside a new series of wrestling pictures by Sir Peter Blake. Blake is famously obsessed with the sport, and with the figure of Kendo Nagasaki in particular. Baldwin recalls Blake as an early influence alongside Joseph Cornell and Robert Rauschenberg. "In fact the main reason I started working with CCA," he admits, "was that they worked with Peter. He is a prolific, lovely man who is very generous with his time.

"His work made me excited, with use of old stuff such as badges. He used things I already collected when I discovered him, things that could be assembled into art."

Baldwin has produced 44 prints for CCA since 2006, but this show at Hemingway concentrates on just the past five years, including 2011's *Hope in Hell*. Baldwin adds finish to his prints by slapping on glazes, collages, diamond dust and 3D media.

When we meet, Baldwin is preparing for a new solo show. His vintage VW is parked outside, but gathers dust. His shelves are packed with Norwegian ceramics, children's books and toy soldiers, and there's a copy of The Smiths' debut album on top of the record player. I like his old world integrity, which has seen him reject well paid commissions to design images for iPhones, snowboards, and bizarrely on one occasion, even a pair of flip flops.

"When you have three sell-out shows in one year, you don't need that," he reflects. "Having my work on display in Beverly Hills or Hong Kong, or here with Peter's, is always going to be exciting."

Where and when

Real & Imagined: Dan Baldwin, Peter Blake, Hemingway Art Gallery, Cassington, until February 28. Free

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