

In the Shadow of the Hand - Narrative Drawings

Garry Barker

This exhibition brought together four large narrative drawings, alongside small studies. The exhibition was important as it was the first time that I had exhibited large complex narratives in a public space and it was also the first time that critics and other art writers had had a chance to review my work.

As well as bringing my work to a wider audience, I was also able to see the work being used within an educational context, several groups of students using the images as inspiration for their own drawings about what life was like in the city.

A catalogue based on the form of a newspaper was also produced for the exhibition, the reverse side of which opened out as a large A1 print based on one of the works in the exhibition. This was very popular and all the catalogue/prints were quickly taken away by the visiting public.

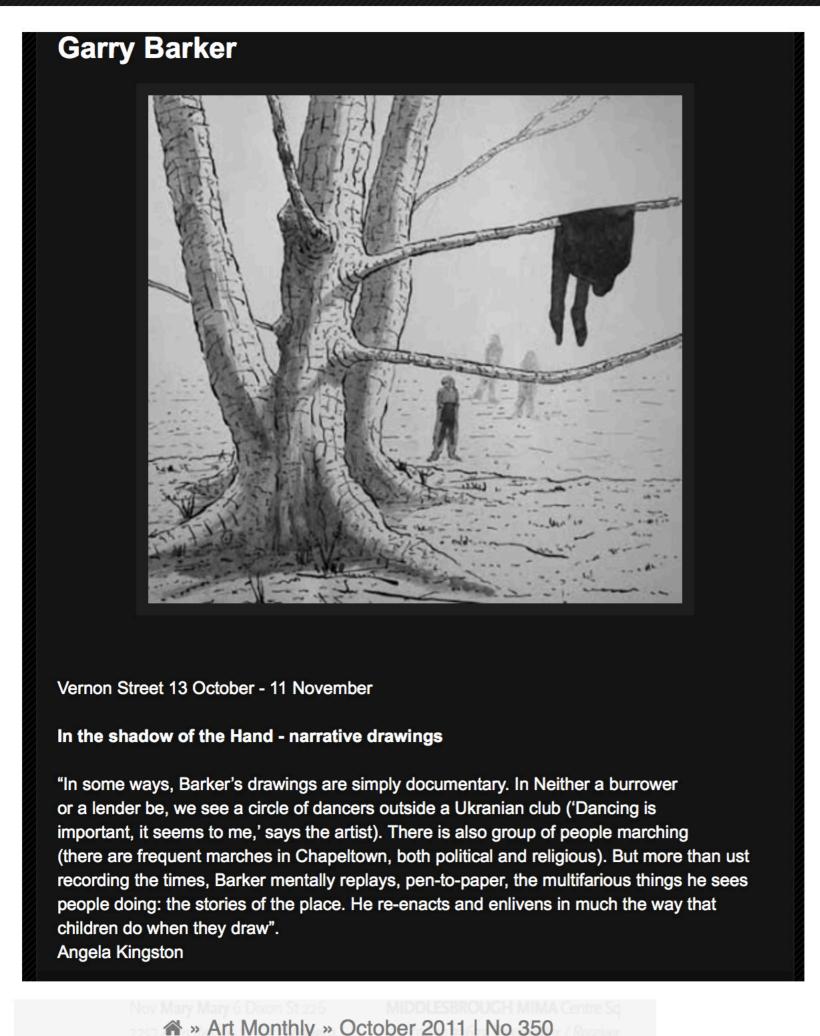
All the drawings were based on conversations had whilst walking, talking and drawing on the streets of Chapeltown. The success that the exhibition had in engendering further conversations about contemporary city living reinforced in my mind that this was a positive direction to take my work into.

Exhibition

In the Shadow of the Hand - Narrative Drawings, Blip Blip, Vernon Street, Leeds Arts University, Leeds, 13 October - 11 November 2011.

blip blip blip

blip blip blip is a contemporary art space in Leeds city centre committed to showing a programme of emerging and more established artists. The exhibitions programme of seven shows a year runs from August to May. Two shows each year are curated by guest curators. The programme also includes the annual shows ex and Interim. blip blip is located at Leeds College of Art, Vernon Street Building, Leeds LS2 8PH and is open Monday to Friday 10.00am to 4.00pm



to 27 Nov NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE 01912 Laing

Gary Rough to 7 Oct St Level Photoworks Trongate 103 552 2151 Futureproof to 9 Oct Gayle Chong Kwan 15 Oct-11 Dec Transmission Gallery 45 King Sr 552 7141 Victor Man, Christian Newby to 8 Oct **HELSTON Kestle Barton** Manaccan 01326 231811 Ray Exworth to 30 Oct HEXHAM Queens Hall Arts Centre 3 Beaumont St 01434 652477 Outrageous Fortune to 9 Oct Good Times, Bad Times, All Times Get Over

Victoria Morton to 15 Oct Sorcha

Dallas 5 St Margaret's Pl 553 2662

15 Oct-19 Nov KENDAL Abbot Hall Art Gallery 01539 722464 Richard Long 21 Oct-17 Dec LEEDS 0113 Art Gallery The Headrow 247 8256 Damien Hirst to 30 Oct blip

blip blip Leeds College of Art Vernon St ex to 6 Oct Garry Barker 17 Oct-10 Nov The Henry Moore Institute 74 The Headrow 246 7467 Mario Merz, Darrell Viner to 30 Oct The Stanley

& Audrey Burton Gallery Parkinson Bldg Univ of Leeds 343 2778 The Sadler Gift to 17 Dec **Exhibition Review**

Garry Barker: In the Shadow of the Hand- Narrative Drawings Leeds College of Art, Vernon street building October 17th to November 23rd, Weekdays only Hailing from Chapeltown in Leeds, Garry Barker presents us with his 'Chapeltown stories', a

Art Gallery 327734 International Print Biennale 2011 to 19 Nov NEWLYN Art Gallery New Rd 01736 363715 John M Armleder 8 Oct-3 Jan

Forster to 18 Nov

MILTON KEYNES Gallery Midsummer

Blvd 01908 676900 Anna Barriball

NEWTOWN Oriel Davies Gallery The Park 01686 625041 Paul Granjon to 16 Nov NORTHAMPTON Fishmarket Gallery Bradshaw St 01604 639090 Intervention to 12 Nov NORWICH 01603 The Gallery St

George's St 756247 Reflections on the Self: Five African Women Photographers to 15 Oct Outpost 10b Wensum St 612428 Jack Vickridge to 21 Oct Sainsbury Centre Univ of

East Anglia 593199 John Hedgecoe to 4 Dec NOTTINGHAM 0115 Castle Museum & Art Gallery Off Friar La 915 3700 Annual Open 8 Oct-6 Nov New Art Exchange 39-41 Gregory

collection of seemingly simple documentary drawings. The drawings actually turn out to be a complex and at times puzzling take on a part of Leeds infamous for bouts of crime and unrest. Although inspired by Barker's walks to work, these drawings are more than records of everyday life. Ultimately they become a reflection of Chapeltown personality and hold a deeper meaning.

This multicultural, bustling place provides a brilliant backdrop for Barker to explore ideas of labour, protest, lament and locality. These, at times, fantastical works are actually an expression of truth and humanity. In 'Neither a borrower nor a lender be' we see people dancing, groups of people marching and

people digging up roads. This imaginative storytelling hints at group work, shared activity; community. There is a clear interest in agricultural elements - interestingly ideas of home-grown food are juxtaposed with industrial sized crowds of people. Barker is attracted to the idea of going back to growing things and furthermore, the sense of harmony and unity that comes from shared labour. His work comments on a modern time whilst trying to reconnect with values of the past. Barker's work also has emotive depth. In 'The dues we owe our ancestors', we see people tending to the souls of murdered people in Chapeltown. The piece remembers the murdered in a world where, as Barker comments, 'we're expected to forget these killings very quickly, for the sake of moving on'. For all the fancy delicacy of some of these works, there is a very stark reality. The soft, pastel colouring and imagery associated with pastoral life could fool the viewer into a too straightforward reading of nature and happiness. 'Trespassers into our homes' for example,

considers our maltreatment of nature, with figures pressing their ears to the ground in hope of taking some transfusion from the environment around them. Moreover, one large scale piece

depicts an intricately detailed, apparently birds-eye view map. On closer inspection, however, many different points of view confront the eyes simultaneously. Some trees are upside or appear to lie flat when we feel we should be viewing it from the top. Out of proportion figures spill onto the streets and grow in size. We are left questioning what it means to be part of the local area, a member of society but also of humanity. Although small, this exhibition leaves you with much to think about, and is worth a visit even to solely appreciate the aesthetic side of these wonderful drawings. Naomi Sanders

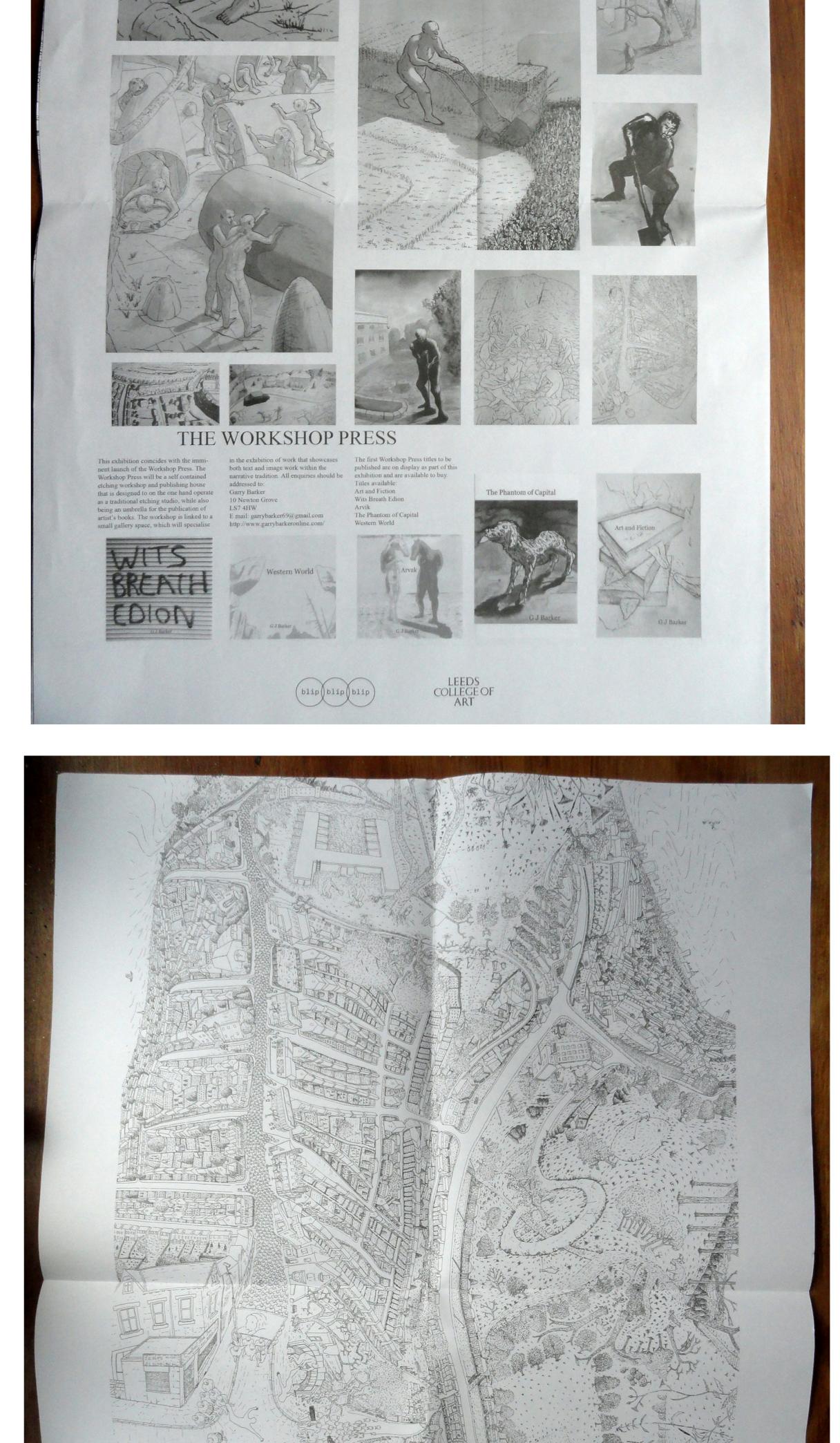


Exhibition Opening



GARRY BARKER





Garry Barker lives in Chapeltown, a part of Leeds notorious for crime and unrest, and characterised as a 'no-go' area. It's also exceptionally multicultural. In the different quarters of many UK cities, there will be perhaps two or three main immigrant populations. In Chapeltown this cultural mixing is markedly intensified: different languages and traditions would seem to emanate from every house, business and social club. And because of the sheer density of population here, this whole humanity spills onto th streets. In Chapeltown people are more visible, and more audible, too.

Many artists will opt to live in this kind of inner-city area, in part because they get a lot of space for their money. But Barker is unusual in how much he engages with his environs, both as an artist and as part of a local community group. Chapeltown is a story of which he finds himself a

Stories of Chapeltown Exhibition Angela Kingston

essentially a story-telling animal. He is not essentially, but becomes through his history, a teller of stories that aspire to truth. But the key question for men is not about their own authorship; I can only answer the question 'What am I to do?' if I can answer the prior question, 'Of what story or

He walks to work, leaving a little early so as to be able to make what he calls his 'ordinary' drawings: of a house, or a mosque, or a fish and

especially, at their most fantastical, his drawings - to use

MacIntyre's phrase – aspire to truth.

*... man is in his actions and practice, as well as his fictions,

stories do I find myself a part?'*

part.

Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1981

chip-shop, say – all very straightforward. But back at home in his studio, and a couple of stages of drawing later, it's all quite transformed. It's as if he's lifted himself into the air and taken crane-shots with a distorting lens. Rendered in pen and ink and watercolour, on very large sheets of paper, there are swooping vistas of interconnecting streets. And, thanks to the myriad perspectives, many different things can be seen at once.

In some ways, Barker's drawings are simply documentary. In *Neither a burrower or a lender be*, we see a circle of dancers outside a Ukranian club ('Dancing is important, it seems to me,' says the artist). There is also group of people marching (there are frequent marches in Chapeltown, both political and religious). But more than just recording the times, Barker mentally re-plays, pen-to-paper, the multifarious things he sees people doing: the stories of the place. He re-enacts and enlivens in much the way that children do when they draw.

The realization that each of the figures in the drawings is a self-portral is puzzling at first. But it fits with the intense identification that Barker brings to what he draws. And also, perhaps, he is conjecturing himself as Everyman, someone easy to identify with; someone who helps the viewer enter the story too.

And crucially, there's still another, inventive kind of storytelling. In *Neither a burrower or a lender be*, individuals and groups dig up the roads; some reveal tree roots that are transformed into cabling; others plant and harvest corn. There's a future story that's anticipated here; in which perforce, we grow food locally, as happened during the 1939-45 war. 'I was attracted to the idea of growing things again, on the ground around; I

like the sense of commonality of labour among the distinctions,' says Barker. (Incidentally, he connects the value he places on shared activity to

the loss he feels, years after the steelworks where he worked closed down: 'It was close-knit,' he says. But that's another story.) Two further large drawings involve other fantasy narratives set within the same streets. One, called * The dues we owe our ancestors*, shows people tending to the souls of people murdered in Chapeltown: 'we're expected to forget these killings very quickly, for the sake of moving on,' says the artist. Another, called *Trespassers in our own homes*, a lament for our maltreatment of nature, features figures with their ears pressed to the ground. 'Some of them

are taking transfusions from nature, that's what's * actually* happening,' explains Barker. When I start to make connections with Stanley Spencer's paintings – particularly his Biblical scenes set in the village of Cookham, where Spencer lived – Barker is pleased: 'Yes, he is an all-time hero, certainly.'

Like MacIntyre (quoted at the beginning), the philosopher Mary Midgley places great significance on storytelling. The arts, with their myths and other stories, are 'meant to throw light on the difficulties of the huma situation, and if ... we refuse to use that light, we sign up for death and darkness' (*Wickedness*, 1984). We see here, in Barker's artworks, a vivid engagement with narrative and with that light. Even, and perhaps