



The Londonist, juillet 2008
Interview: Glen Baxter



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Glen Baxter – icon of the surreal, London resident, and this Londonista's favourite living artist. His 1930s style sketches with their far-from-obvious but usually-side-splitting captions are a personal treasure, a bit like the music of Nina Simone, the scent of fresh roses or old episodes of Fawlty Towers – 100% guaranteed to put a smile on the face.

He is a prolific cartoonist, and has an impressive portfolio: since 1979 he has held umpteen exhibitions (in London most often at the Chris Beetles Gallery) across four continents, and has produced nearly twenty books of his work, some just collections, and others with a themed 'story'. His pictures adorn some of the most influential walls of the land and have graced the pages of many national newspapers.

We caught up with the Yorkshire-born, South-London-based master-doodler to ask him a few questions, like:

Why do you live in Camberwell?

I live in Camberwell because it is so convenient for a cycle ride to Peckham Library, which as everyone knows in the Headquarters of The Treen Foundation. I always live in hope of catching a glimpse of The Mekon as he makes an exit from the penthouse suite there on that terribly natty little flying platform-jet scooter thing of his.

(Readers will know that I refer to the arch-enemy of Dan Dare, the startling creation by the genius of Frank Hampson for The Eagle comic.)



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Where do you get inspiration for your work? We know you like chiaroscuro and tofu, but there must be more to it than that? What are your muses?

Everything changed for me when I was a young lad growing up in the industrial wastelands of Leeds (now a fashionable, thriving metropolis). In those days it seemed relentlessly dreary until one day I came across a painting by Giorgio de Chirico, "The Evil Genius of a King". That was a defining moment. I've never looked back.

Londonist thinks that as your work is hard to pigeonhole, you have perhaps created a whole new genre (Baxterism?) – would you agree with this?

I am more than happy to avoid being 'pigeonholed' though I am often accused of fanning the flames of the sinister cult known as "Baxterism".

Why do you think that the Brits don't get as excited about cartoon books (bandes desinees) as the French and the Belgians, or the Japanese, for example?

The Belgians , French and Japanese all have a penchant for the graphic arts.

In Angouleme, in France they have a wonderful museum dedicated to the art with a great collection from the early masters like Carand'Ache and Benjamin Rabier through to the 20th C American masters such as Winsor Mc Cay and Ernie Bushmiller. I think the French were the first to realise the importance of these early works, long before the Americans and the British began to take notice. Things have changed these days though serious consideration of the comic strips still lags way behind the French....

Are good cartoonists born or made? Did you grow up wanting to be a serious artist or have you always been funny?

When I was at nursery school , the teachers organized an open day to display the work of all the children. My parents came along and saw three trestle tables filled with hundreds of tiny clay models.

"Which ones were made by our son Glen?" my mother asked.

"These two tables" replied the teacher.



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Is London inspiring for a cartoonist? We haven't seen a lot of obviously London-based Baxter prints around.

I have always lived in cities. It's the hustle and bustle, cinemas, theatres, bookshops and real coffee I crave.

What makes you laugh?

The Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain

Buster Keaton

WC Fields

and curiously, tweed

And your favourite artists?

Uccello, Ed Ruscha, Adriaen Coorte, Walter de Maria

What is your best bit of London?

I like my garden, where I can sit and ponder my lupins.

And your worst bit of London?

That has to be the car park at the back of Peckham's multiplex cinema.

It is rumoured that Glen Baxter will be appearing at the Peckham Literary festival in November. If the Mekon lets him.