Graphic Eye, Peculiar Pleasures

Chris Harper

Biography

Chris Harper is an illustrator and Associate Senior Lecturer in Illustration. Chris has an MA in Communication Design (Illustration) from Central St Martins, London, and his illustration work was recently peer selected for the Association of Illustrators publication and exhibition *Images 34: The Best of British Illustration 2010*. In his freelance practice Chris works in illustration and graphic design, creating hand and digitally generated imagery and design work. His graphic design commissions include websites, identity design, conference publications, CD albums and CD ROM design, promotional graphics and TV production, including work for clients such as Ecover, Harper Collins, Tearfund, Alliance Music and Granada Television. Illustration commissions include editorial, publishing and design work for clients such as Random House, Waterstones, Beavis Keane and Building Magazine. His work has also featured in Creative Review and Eye magazine. His freelance practice provides him with an in-depth working knowledge of illustration and graphic design for a broad range of communication contexts. In addition to this practice, Chris also undertakes external examining and visiting lecturing as an illustration specialist, including examining of the BA(Hons) Fashion Illustration programme at the London College of Fashion (University of the Arts London) and lectures on his professional practice at institutions such as Staffordshire University, Brighton University and Central St Martins.

Current Research

The range of his freelance and academic experience demonstrates the interdisciplinary nature of his approach to communication design. Chris's practice-based research explores the relationship between autographic drawing processes and visual communication for illustration and graphic design. A primary facet of this research examines the pictorial use of language and the explicit and implicit synthesis of linguistic forms and structures in relation to visual communication. Illustration has an intimate relationship with language within both historical and contemporary practice and their applied contexts. Language is often the conceptual precursor to the creation of an illustration and illustrations are predominantly contextualised by language and typography. The dynamics within this relationship, and the exploration of the rhetorical interplay between text and image, directly informs Chris's creative direction, prompting research questions about the role of illustration in regard to creative objectivity, subjectivity, design and authorship.

In his studies he examines these questions through practice, with work exhibited nationally and internationally. Recent peer selected exhibited work includes *Making of a Monster (parts 1 and 2)* in *Peculiar Pleasures, An international exhibition of art and illustration* at the Milkwood Gallery, Cardiff. Invited artists were asked to respond to a
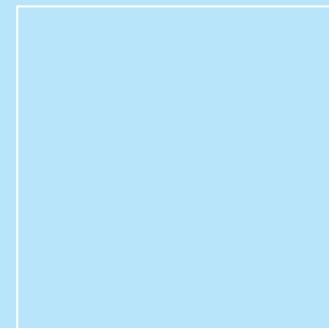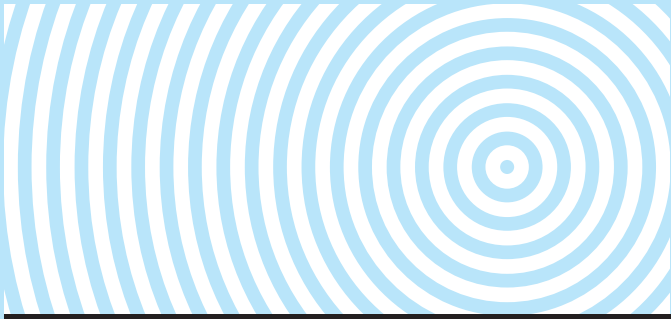
theme inspired by Jorges Luis Borges' 1957 publication *The Book of Imaginary Beings*, exploring through visual practice "the physical world and those ethereal spaces that stand on the margins of our consciousness between the known and the unknown." The illustration *Sleep of Reason* from Chris's *Half Light* series explores the line between conscious and subconscious thinking, referencing Goya's etching *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*. This image was selected for exhibition at the Busan International Design Festival in May 2009 and the Busan International Environmental Design and Cultural Forum (September 2009) in South Korea. The illustration *A Cleaner Slate* on the theme of personal and social redemption was selected for the same events in the previous year (2008).

In 'Return of the Picture' Rob Mason (2000) writes, "what unites Foster, Van Ryn, Williamson, Christopher Harper and Caroline Tomlinson as contemporary picture-makers is the sense of something solid, a core to their work."
The thematic core to Chris's visual practice lies in the exploration of both morality and spirituality. The visual dialogue in his current illustration work engages with the questioning and transposition of moral lessons from religious parables, traditional proverbs and social aphorisms into contemporary cultural commentary and axiom. The allegorical illustration *Wrestling with Angels*, exploring the conflict between conscience and action, was selected for the 2008 AOI supported exhibition *A Thousand Words* featuring 15 selected illustrators, and more recently the images *The Corruption of Rust and Moths (1 & 2)* were selected for publication in 20x20 magazine. This four-part sequential body of work, based on Matthew 6:19 "Lay not up for yourselves treasures on earth, where rust and moth doth corrupt", and the familiar biblical parable of "hiding your light under a bushel", explores notions of insularity in an era of ideological scepticism.