



Selected letters from *Seven Secret Alphabets*, 1971
 ©The Estate of Anthony Earnshaw, courtesy Flowers, London

8 September – 8 October 2011
 Private View Saturday 10 September 4 – 6pm

Book launch Saturday 1 October 2-4pm with artist and friend
 Patrick Hughes, art historian Dawn Ades and Gail Earnshaw as guest speakers

Short films on the artist and his work will be screened throughout the exhibition

FLOWERS

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Anthony Earnshaw - The Imp of Surrealism is a survey exhibition spanning over fifty years of his work. An original and witty artist and writer, Earnshaw was born in Ilkley, West Yorkshire in 1924, the year Lenin died and André Breton published his first Manifesto. In the latter half of the 20th Century Earnshaw's unique vision led to a rich and varied range of work, establishing various 'periods' in his creative life: paintings, drawings, boxed assemblages, an idiosyncratic comic strip, pictorial alphabets and two published collections of his aphorisms. At the age of 20, through an interest in poetry and literature, he discovered Surrealism which had a profound influence on his thinking and creative development.

During the 1950s, Earnshaw worked as a gantry crane operator for Thomas Green & Son, Engineers in Leeds where he was living. Within the confines of the crane's cabin Earnshaw found periods of time to explore his emerging interest in painting.

Between lifts, most drivers read the racing page. Not me. Much to the amusement of my workmates I painted what they called, 'Daft pictures'. Perforce, they had to be small - have you ever been in the cramped cabin of a crane?
 Anthony Earnshaw

Earnshaw's partnership with his 'oldest friend' Eric Thacker saw the creation of two illustrated, 'irregular' novels *Musrum* and *Wintersol* as well as collaborating on a comic strip, *Wokker* whose main protagonist was of a particularly mercurial nature.

His demeanor, as I recall, pompous and pontifical, his speech verbose and finger wagging. (HA HA, no fingers to wag.) Wokker embodies the seemingly contradictory characteristics of mischief maker and an innocent abroad, dismayed by the prospect of existence.
 Anthony Earnshaw

In 1970 the Institute of Contemporary Art, London mounted an exhibition titled 'Comics' that included twenty *Wokker* strips. These came to the attention of 'The Times Educational Supplement' who published the strip from 1972-73. Later on *Wokker* would be featured in 'Knuckleduster Funnies' and 'The Truth'.

From the mid 1960s Earnshaw devoted his attention to making boxed assemblages which spanned the period of 1965 to 2001. In some of these boxes he paid homage to his Surrealist heroes: Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, E.L.T. Mesens, René Magritte, Max Ernst and Marcel Mariën. These beautifully crafted boxes built around surprising juxtapositions of manufactured objects, as well as *objet trouvé* would come to represent 'his finest hour' believes Patrick Hughes.

Contained in wooden frames and sealed behind a pane of glass is an imagist poetry given a concrete existence in the materials he collects across the space of his life and wanderings in side streets, toy shops, flea markets and the carnivals of the mind. The art, though, almost always takes place in the gap between elements, much like the works of a well-known poem we carry with us in our heads.
 John Slyce

Anthony Earnshaw - The Imp of Surrealism will tour from Flowers Galleries to Cartwright Hall, Bradford Museum & Galleries, Lister Park, Bradford, BD9 4NS. The exhibition will run from 17 March - 8 July, 2012, www.bradfordmuseums.org.

A monograph, edited by Les Coleman and published by RGAP (The Research Group for Artist Publications) will accompany the exhibition. This includes essays by Dawn Ades, Michel Rémy, Paul Hammond, Patrick Hughes, Gail Earnshaw and Michael Richardson among others. This hardback with full colour illustrations throughout is available at £24.95.

OBITUARIES AND MEMORIES

All over the country, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the seeds of Surrealism took root in the minds of young men and women, especially in the north, where they were unaware that metropolitan smarty-boots were rejecting the movement as old hat. Tony invented several surreal strategies; he would board a train, descend at will and mount another, and continue this practice for several hours, sometimes in the company of his best friend Eric Thacker. He was unaware that the original Parisian group had played the same game with cinemas, which they entered and left at random. They were also obsessed with arcades, and, like Paris, Leeds is rich in these mysterious 19th-century invitations to linger.

Earnshaw hated capitalism, bullies, exploiters and rule-makers, but described himself, typically, as "an armchair anarchist". His subversion was through his work.

George Melly 'The Guardian' 2001

Earnshaw found out how to get toothpaste out of a tube and put something else in. He replaced the toothpaste with picnic mustard and put the pristine tube back on the chemist's shelf. It is pure devilry for him to imagine the surprise of someone, somewhere, sometime, in the bathroom carelessly squeezing mustard on to their toothbrush and wondering "How? Why? Who?"

Patrick Hughes 'The Independent' 2001

The poetics of Tony's imagination help to liberate us from the routines of daily life. But at the same time, his daydreaming remained rooted on terra firma, at times engaging in a scathing commentary about the social injustices he perceived within the English class system. Towards the end of his life, he often included angels in his drawings. To what degree these represented portents of approaching death, or were just ghoulish winged figures, I found difficult to disentangle. Whatever, they appeared more monstrous than angelic. But then everything about Tony was imbued with impish perversity and abrasive black humour. It was these qualities that made him into the unconventional person and remarkable artist he was.

Les Coleman 'Manticore' 2002

COLLECTIONS

Arts Council England, Leeds Art Gallery, Graves Gallery Sheffield, Dean Clough Galleries, Halifax and The Sherwin Collection. Private collections include: Glen Baxter, Mary Rose Beaumont, Louisa Buck, Les Coleman, Angela Flowers, Damien Hirst, Patrick Hughes and Tom Maschler.

PUBLICATIONS

- 1968 *Musrum*, (with Eric Thacker) published by Jonathan Cape, London and Grove Press, New York
- 1971 *Wintersol* (with Eric Thacker) published by Jonathan Cape, London
- 1972 *Seven Secret Alphabets*, published by Jonathan Cape, London
- 1973 *25 Poses, hors commerce*, Bradford
- 1982 *Flick Knives & Forks*, published by Transformaction, Harpford
- 1987 *Carping & Kicking*, published by Hourglass Press, Paris
- Aspects des Bas-quartiers*, published by Camouflage Press, Paris
- An Eighth Secret Alphabet*, published by Hanborough Press, Oxford

TELEVISION PROGRAMMES

- 10/10/87 Saturday Review Special on BBC 2: eighteen minute film showing the artist and his work
- 7/12/89 On The Edge, Tyne Tees arts programme: ten minute film showing the artist and his work

With regard to my boxed assemblages; which can be best understood as 3-D collages, it is my manner to lift two or more commonplace objects from their customary setting and by juxtaposing, give them a new poetic role to play: thereby banal reality is subverted. Humour, if not black then at least charcoal grey, is the lever I use to upset the applecart.

Anthony Earnshaw



The French Connection, 2001