

Press Release

Rear View Mirror: Jack Milroy, Five Decades of work.

25 April – 12 May 2019

This is a celebratory exhibition to chart Jack Milroy's artistic evolution from art school rebel of the late 1950s, to his heretical 'evisceration' of books and printed matter, which continues to this day. The recent works are consummate examples of his pioneering treatment of the printed page, revealing him to be a gentle and wry surrealist commentator. There is genuine astonishment at his virtuosic facility – but it is a skill that is simultaneously underpinned by a steady intellect and purpose.

Jackie Wullschlager, chief visual arts critic of the Financial Times, has commented on Milroy's output in her round-up pieces for '*Critic's Choice*' observing that "Jack Milroy's sculptural collages blend fairy tale and conceptual art, mediations on rhythms and shapes with references to Darwin". She points out that sometimes his rearrangement of species, gravity, day and night – is fraught with twenty-first century tension about science and nature. This is clearly the case in the two metre tall *Grey Skies*, 2015, where the metallic greys of aeroplanes designed for war dominate the upper section, with bountiful cottage flowers clustered in colourful array beneath them, tended in the margins by pretty butterflies innocently echoing the perilous pattern of flight implied above.

Milroy's titles alone tell you that he is a man of verbal as well as visual wit. There is often brevity and subversion: he uses his scalpel cut things up, but in doing so, he sets things free, revealing them, re-ordering them, liberating or juxtaposing them to convey his point of view. His overall interest lies in regeneration, and the paradox of creation through destruction. His work in the Victoria & Albert Museum's collection is called '*The Librarian's Garden*', 1999. It is a table top piece in which the prickly cacti emerge in three dimensional form from the book's pages onto a rectangular surface – 'a beautifully evocative piece which uses the book as both container and liberator', the label explained.

Latterly, digital prints have emerged from the studio – one of them an arrangement of words from a lively collaboration with the author A S Byatt called *Into the Dark Wood*, 2002. And there are still actual books, hard covered and sculptural, with their contents popping out of their covers as in *Francis Chichester*, 1992, or in *Surgery as a Pastime*, 1997, where anatomical body parts tumble down from the book's pages, suspended in streams of cut up medical text.

Ophelia 2015 belongs to Milroy's 'art about art' output, like the earlier *Garden of Earthly Delights* series, inspired by Hieronymous Bosch or *Le Rouge et le Noir*, 2010 which is Milroy's version of a Jackson Pollock. He takes liberties with his updated renderings, paying tribute to the original painted compositions, while using digital printing methods and exploiting the three dimensional possibilities of his paper or acetate film constructions, which he arranges in Perspex boxes with topical inclusions (spot the Tesco plastic bag floating in *Ophelia's* watery world).

Milroy's developments within different series over five decades consistently demonstrate the range and the calibre of his ideas alongside the constant testing, teasing, thoughtful approach to the codification of knowledge, the products, and the art of the times in which we live.

Cut Out, (Black Dog Publishing, 2016) is a fully illustrated monograph on Jack Milroy's work, containing essays by Philip Hensher, A S Byatt, and Andrew Lambirth, with William Packer as the overall author and co-ordinator. It offers a most engaging lexicon of the artist's work over a 50 year period. Copies are available from the gallery during the exhibition, and from Art First thereafter.

For further information and exhibition, biographical and collection history, please visit our website: www.artfirst.co.uk or contact us for the pricelist and out of hours visits :

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Exhibition opening times are Tuesday – Saturday 11am – 6pm

Venue Tel: 0203 441 5152, email: abps@project-spacelondon

Bermondsey Project Space, Bermondsey Street, London SE1 3UW (adjacent to White Cube)

By Bus: C10

By tube: London Bridge, or Bermondsey (from where the C10 bus takes you to Bermondsey Square, a few metres from the exhibition space).