



GEORGE UNDERWOOD



The Ensemble, 70 x 70cm

George Underwood 2019

CATTO GALLERY

100 Heath Street • Hampstead • London NW3 1DP
Tel: +44 (0)20 7435 6660 • art@cattogallery.co.uk

In a parallel world, George Underwood could easily have been a greengrocer. Instead, he has been in a pop band with David Bowie, designed cover art for T Rex, created film posters for Mike Leigh and become a celebrated artist with collectors all over the world.

How do you like them apples?

George was born in 1947 in Bromley. There were no artists in his family. His father was - you've guessed it - a greengrocer. But it was George's grandmother who spotted his talent for art and encouraged him to pursue it. George became obsessed with drawing. In 1963, he enrolled at the Beckenham Art School.

This should have been the start of George's career as an artist. But that would come later. Instead, art school pushed George towards music. He teamed up with his childhood friend David Jones (later to become David Bowie) to form a band called The King Bees. Later, he launched a solo record under the name Calvin James.

In time, George lost his music mojo. His drive to forge a career in pop waned. By the late 1960s, he returned to art. He found plentiful work as an illustrator of fantasy, horror and science fiction book covers.

Perhaps inevitably, George was soon designing album covers too. His old friend Bowie was on his way to superstardom, and began to introduce him to other acts. One was Marc Bolan, who hired George to design the cover for the T Rex album 'My People Were Fair and Had Sky in Their Hair...But Now They're Content to Wear Stars on Their Brows'.

The end result was a fantastical vision that combined elements of magic and myth. It was very 1960s. George remembers the reaction. "People would look at it and say: 'When you painted it, what were you on?' I'd say: 'I was on my mother's carpet in the front room'."

A lovely phlegmatic reply. But for all his groundedness, George was - and still is - deeply interested in a fantastic strain of European art. He designed the T Rex cover with reference to Gustave Doré Dante's *Inferno* paintings. He loves the work of the visionary Norway-based painter Odd Nerdrum. And he frequently finds inspiration in artists such as Ernst Fuchs, Rudolph Hausner and Eric Brauer from the Viennese School of Fantastic Realism.

George remembers the impact when he saw this work for the first time. "Art goes in circles," he says. "But this came out of nowhere. I had never seen anything like it before, this kind of imaginative vision. It harked back to Brueghel and Bosch, and that crazy world that exists only in the imagination. It was just amazing."

The collective influence of these visionary artists surfaced in the hundreds of book covers, LP designs, posters and advertisements George made in the 1970s and 1980s. It also emerged when George wound down his corporate commissions and began painting his own original work in oil. His first exhibition came in 1975.

Perhaps it was inevitable that an artist so obviously brimming with ideas would move away from commercial work. "I think I was tired of solving someone else's problems," he says. "I wanted to solve my own."

On the plus side, George's years of working to specific briefs gave him rigour, versatility and skill. This was liberating when he 'went solo'. He rarely uses live models, for example. He simply knows how to conjure people out of nothing - taking them directly from his mind's eye to the canvas.

In his new show for the Catto, George's technical facility combines with his vivid imagination. The works are rich and strange - and they certainly speak to the Northern European tradition of the fantastic. A case in point is *All The World Is Green*, in which a doleful figure's hair erupts into a writhing mass of people and vegetation.

Another is *Time and Tide*. Here, an inscrutable figure stares at the viewer from a lavishly detailed throne. Behind him, a vaguely ominous seascape rises up. Like other works in the collection, it was loosely inspired by an Albrecht Durer self-portrait, with its scrunched sleeves in stripy fabric.

George says that working on his paintings is a joy and a battle that sometimes takes on a transcendent quality. "Although the people in my paintings don't exist in real life, I am persevering to give them authenticity and convince myself that they might have existed beforesomewhere perhaps. It's not easy but like the alchemist, I keep on trying."

Warrior 12, 119 x 69cm





The Lady Rides, 97 x 107cm



Going Out, 95 x 100cm



Chieftain, 76 x 66cm



Show us the Way, 76 x 66cm

Triumvirate, 92 x 117cm



George Shimerwood 2018



Noble, 122 x 81cm



Prime, 122 x 81cm



Bully for You, 61 x 66cm



Hybrid Ride, 61 x 66cm



The Boatman's Dream, 61 x 76cm



Warrior 10, 104 x 95cm



Go with the Flow, 61 x 76cm



In Stripes, 66 x 61cm



Warrior 7, 89 x 115cm



Warrior 8, 89 x 115cm



All the World is Green, 92 x 117cm



Dreams Ahead, 110 x 110cm

George Underwood - Timeline

- 1947 Born in Bromley Kent
- 1951 St Mary's Primary School, Bromley
- 1958 Bromley Technical High School for Boys, Bromley
- 1963 Beckenham Art School
- 1964 Ravensbourne College of Art
- 1966 Pye Records Art Department
- 1967 New English Library Art Department
- 1968 Freelance Illustrator
- 1971 Formed 'Main Artery' Studio, Covent Garden
- 1972 USA with David Bowie on Ziggy Stardust tour
- 1973 Main Artery finished. Continued as freelance Illustrator/Painter
- 1975 Exhibition at Denholm Elliot Gallery, Ibiza, Spain
- 1977 Exhibition at Mirandy Gallery, London
- 1978 Exhibition at Bella Centre & Town Hall, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 1979 Exhibition at JCA, Tokyo, Japan
- 1980 - 1989 Various freelance Illustration work
- 1990 Greenpeace exhibition at Fouts & Fowler Gallery, London
- 1992 Exhibition at Cromwell Ward Gallery, Soho, London
- 1993 Exhibition at Figure of Eight Gallery, London
- 1994 Exhibition at Andrew Usiskin Gallery, Hampstead. London
- 1995 Exhibition at Elms Lesters Painting Rooms, London
- 1996 Exhibition at Elms Lesters Painting Rooms, London
- 1997 One-man show titled 'About Face' at Elms Lesters Painting Rooms, London
- 1998 Two paintings in RA Summer Exhibition
- 1998 Exhibition at KDK Gallery, Portobello Road, London
- 1999 Exhibition at Artbank Gallery, London
- 2000 Exhibition at Artbank Gallery, London
- 2001 Three paintings in RA Summer Exhibition
- 2002 One painting in NEAC Exhibition, Mall Galleries, London
- 2003 Mixed Exhibition at The Portal Gallery, London
- 2004 Mixed Exhibition at The Portal Gallery, London
- 2005 One-man Exhibition at The Portal Gallery, London
- 2006 Two paintings in RA Summer Exhibition
- 2006 Exhibition at The Bank Gallery, Brighton
- 2006 Exhibition at The Troubadour Gallery, Manchester
- 2007 Exhibition at The Portal Gallery, London
- 2007 Exhibition at The Red Rag Gallery, Stow-on-the Wold, Gloucestershire
- 2008 Exhibition at The Red Rag Gallery, Stow-on-the Wold, Gloucestershire
- 2008 One painting in RA Summer Exhibition
- 2009 One painting in RA Summer Exhibition
- 2009 Solo Exhibition at The Portal Gallery, London
- 2010 RBA Annual Exhibition, Mall Galleries, London
- 2010 Solo Exhibition at Tag Andersen's Gallery, 'Gunillaberg' Sweden
- 2010 Discerning Eye Exhibition, Mall Galleries, London
- 2011 Exhibition at Medici Gallery, Cork Street, London
- 2011 Summer Exhibition at Medici Gallery, Cork Street, London
- 2012 Historicism Exhibition at Medici Gallery, Cork Street, London
- 2012 Exhibition at The Chalk Farm Gallery, Santa Fe, New Mexico, USA
- 2012 Exhibition at Art Swanson Gallery, Marbella, Spain
- 2013 One painting in RA Summer Exhibition, London
- 2014 Exhibition at The Fosse Gallery, Stow-on-the Wold, Gloucestershire
- 2014 Exhibition at Medici Gallery, Cork Street, London
- 2015 One painting in RA Summer Exhibition
- 2015 Exhibition at The Catto Gallery, Loule, Portugal
- 2015 Exhibition at Graham Fine Art, London
- 2015 Exhibition at Imagine Gallery, Suffolk
- 2016 Exhibition at Graham Fine Art, London
- 2016 Exhibition at The Fosse gallery, Stow-on-the Wold, Gloucestershire
- 2017 Exhibition at Kunsthall, Grenland, Norway
- 2017 Exhibition at Wing Gallery, Wadhurst, East Sussex
- 2017 Exhibition at The Fosse Gallery, Stow-on-the Wold, Gloucestershire
- 2017 Exhibition at Imagine Gallery, Suffolk
- 2018 Exhibition at The Fosse Gallery, Stow-on-the Wold, Gloucestershire
- 2018 Exhibition at Wing gallery, Wadhurst, East Sussex
- 2018 Exhibition at Imagine Gallery, Suffolk
- 2019 Exhibition at The Fosse Gallery, Stow-on-the Wold, Gloucestershire



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Opening times: 10am - 6pm Mon - Sat • 12.30pm - 6pm Sunday • and by appointment
Exhibition dates: 14th November – 2nd December 2019