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PROCESS: The Working Practices of Barney Bubbles

Cited as a major influence to contemporary practitioners including Peter Saville, Malcolm Garrett and Neville Brody, Barney Bubbles was a radical graphic artist. Coinciding with the London Design Festival, last night the CHELSEA Space celebrated its latest exhibition showcasing the working processes of the late master designer.

Born Colin Fulcher (he loved a pseudonym and stuck with Bubbles in 67), the enigmatic designer worked across the disciplines of graphic design, painting and music video direction, working with artists including Ian Drury, Elvis Costello, Billy Bragg and Iggy Pop. Referred to as "the missing link between Pop and Culture" by Peter Saville, Bubbles was most renowned for his work with the British independent music scene during the 70s and early 80s. Fellow designer Julian Balme who created sleeves for Madness, Clash and Adam and The Ants and would often visit Bubbles at his studio, told i-D Online, "Bubbles taught me more than any other university lecturer".

Curated by Paul Gorman, PROCESS includes an array of work never previously shown, most of it borrowed from private collections. The displays are fascinating and represent the varying stages of Bubbles' creative life, including student notebooks, reference materials, his CV, original artwork, books, magazines, paintings, photography, record sleeves, T-shirts, posters, advertisements, badges and stickers and videos directed by Bubbles. Together, the exhibition clearly demonstrates the designer's signature style. His work was loaded with recurring themes and symbols: intense colour palettes, geometric arrangements, deliberate 'mistakes', cryptograms and hidden faces. Bubbles worked as graphic designer between 1960 and 1983, before the introduction of computer technology and desktop publishing; he committed suicide only two months before the first Apple Mac was released. A variety of materials reflect his working graphic design and print production processes in this period including PMTs (Photo Mechanical Transfers), proofs, proposals, paste-ups, use of Letraset and Lithography as well as his Kern & Co. equipment box; long-forgotten in the world of iPads and Adobe Create Suite.

The last time Bubbles' work was shown was in a retrospective in 2001 at London's Artomatic. Gorman and the CHELSEA Space have put together an impressive, must-see exhibition. Bubbles' back catalogue is so extensive, inspiring and enriching it is astounding that it has not been picked up by one of the capital's larger, well-known institutions.

'PROCESS: The Working Practices of Barney Bubbles' at the CHELSEA space, Chelsea College of Art & Design until 23 October. A revised second edition of 'Reasons to be Cheerful: The Life and Work of Barney Bubbles' by Paul Gorman on sale now.

barneybubbles.com

Text Laura Bradley

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