

## Drawing the Dream: Llareggub

*Peter Blake, the UK's greatest living pop artist, has spent nearly three decades lovingly creating his interpretation of Llareggub, the setting for Dylan Thomas's play for voices, Under Milk Wood. The resulting 170 intimate works can now be seen at the National Museum, Cardiff. At the exhibition's opening he talked to CCQ about drawing and the joy of appropriation. Words and portrait: Ric Bower.*

**Ric Bower:** Do you have a ritual that you observe whilst drawing? And if so, is it a process you engage with on a daily basis?

**Sir Peter Blake:** I don't engage in it every day, by any means, but over the years I've drawn constantly. We have a desk in our sitting room, so probably the television would be on and Chris would be watching, knitting or whatever, and we would be talking. I was once given a metal box for a full range of pencils, so I use that as my base station so to speak. There's one row that goes from F through to 7H and there's another that then goes from F to 8B, I work with the F to 7H range primarily, the 7H is like steel, it's very, very hard.

**Ric Bower:** Almost like engraving then....

**PB:** Yes, when you look at a drawing, it's quite different from even the very best reproduction. There are dents and marks in the paper and it shines in places. It's a physical object.

**RB:** Utterly unreproducible?

**PB:** It is, really.

**RB:** If you had been drawing in a different environment, i.e. not with your feet up in front of the television, would it have changed the nature of this particular body of work?

**PB:** Of course, a friend of mine phoned me once and said, "We're going to book a life model each Monday," and I thought, "I would like to do that."

So, for about a year, I met up [with them] and drew every Monday. The project ended up being called *1000 Life Drawings*. We'd set up a few 30-second poses, then a few one-minute poses. Whatever I drew in that particular environment became part of that particular project. They were numbered from one to 1000 and on each of them was written precisely how long it took to complete.

**RB:** I think it was David Hockney who said that it's always the last drawing of the day that's the keeper.

**PB:** Hockney is the most brilliant line draughtsman. He's the master of achieving a likeness with a pen. He does it better than anybody. Other artists, like Frank Auerbach for instance, draw inspirationally, but in a different way. There are, after all, so many different ways of drawing, but David is the master of that process, I think.

**RB:** What did you think of the drawings he has done using the Camera Lucida?

**PB:** He's covered everything over the years. He now sends a drawing each morning to his friends on his iPad as a present.

**RB:** Are you on his list?

**PB:** I'm not on his list. I should get myself on it.

**RB:** Appropriation – you were doing it long before the majority of artists were even considering it as a legitimate vehicle of expression. To what extent was it a conscious thing? How did you come to adopt it as a working process?

**PB:** I once did a series called *Appropriating Jack Pearson*. He's an American artist who uses letter forms. He discovered what I was doing and he told me that he, in turn, had been influenced by my work; so there's this double appropriation thing going on, a kind of conversation between artists. My first series was called *Appropriating Jack Pearson*; the next was called *Ripping off Jack Pearson*; and then there was *In Homage to Jack Pearson*. When he heard I was doing this, he said "Oh boy, that really spooks me" and so, I called the next series *Spooking Jack Pearson*.

Appropriation, to answer your question, is always valid. All artists should appropriate.

**RB:** If you were to go to art college now, how would you deal with it? Working figuratively in the fifties, I suppose you were working counter-culturally to a certain extent.

**PB:** I was so lucky. I didn't know I was going to go to art school. I took an examination for a technical school and the art school was part of the technical school, and they just offered me a place. I was taught silver-smithing, metalwork, woodwork, architecture, anatomy, a whole range of things. I had an amazing education. Quite recently, I went to an art school in the North of England. Everyone was working on the computer, nobody was drawing. There was a group of old ladies doing an amateur class, they were the only ones painting. So times have changed, I guess.

**RB:** In the case of Dylan Thomas the myth is very much intermingled with the man. Does this idea resonate with you?

**PB:** There was one month where Dylan Thomas and I might have met. I started at the Royal College in October 1953 and he died, I think, in

November. So we were probably in the same pubs for one month. I'm not sure we would have got on, but I wish he could have been here today, to see the work.—**CCQ**

*Sir Peter Blake's Llareggub is at the National Museum, Cardiff to 14 March 2014 as part of the Dylan Thomas 100 Festival.*

Following spread, left hand image: *titbits and topsyturvies bobs and buttontops, bags and bones, ash and rind and dandruff and nailparings, saliva and snowflakes and moulted feathers of dreams, the wrecks and sprats and shells and fishbones, whalejuice and moonshine ...*, Peter Blake

Following spread, right hand image: *She shakes her brass nightgown*, Peter Blake

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