



The Battle of the Books

Chris Orr 2021



## Curiouser and Curiouser.

Satires or our time.

Prints come quite naturally in series. The artist can develop a theme, construct a multi-level narrative and explore many aspects of ideas and techniques. A turning point in my career came through making 10 etchings about the life of John Ruskin back in the 1970s. I went on to make many prints and paintings that have serial themes.

In 2021, with endless fanfares and raspberries, we are on the cusp of coming out of the state of paralysis to a fragile new, and not so new normal. For myself and everybody else the ground has shifted. My new collection of satirical prints are for our time.

"The Battle of the Books" came from the ubiquitous Zoom meeting background of bookshelves that trumpet the learning of the participant, or even their latest publication. It was Jonathan Swift who did the original Battle of the Books in 1704 as a satire on the conflict between ancient and modern learning. My battle is much more random with The Tiger who came to tea pitted against War and Peace, and the Da Vinci Code up against The Highway Code. It was Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire that started me off. If that dropped on your head, it could be fatal.



“34 Actors in search of a Play” echoes the Pirandello play 6 characters in search of an author. I invite the viewer to join the Actors search. I identify with the Actor’s lonely wait for somebody to employ them. The plays are hinted at in visual jokes and metaphors. For example, a man leans against a wall listening — “Noises off” by Alan Ayckbourn. A hamster works on its treadmill - The Taming of the Shrew. A full list of the plays will be given to any interested party.

“What Artists did in Lockdown” has something to do with a recent TV series “What do Artists do all day?” the implication being they laze around a lot. Accusations abound that for some folk Lockdown was a bit of a gift. Most Artists have probably worked harder during the pandemic, but my picture has them dog training, bank robbing, building model battleships out of matchsticks etc. etc. The double meaning of the satire is that Artists are also essential workers

“Scientists hit the Jackpot” incorporates a selection of great scientists strutting their stuff. Archimedes getting into his bath, nearly treads on a young Einstein discovering his famous formula. Copernicus stares into the heavens on a very rickety platform. Mary Anning is gathering fossils and Pythagoras is playing with his hypotenuse. My thoughts are about the magical moments of discovery for both artists and scientists. Schrodinger, bottom right-hand corner, speculates on whether the cat is really in the box. I share his worry.

“The All England All Sport Final” is a festival of numerous sporting endeavours in one stadium. The way sports TV and Radio programmes are broadcast today, frequently blurs the lines between one activity and another. Jumping from cricket to athletics and back to hockey in virtually one breath, commentators presume a seamless world of sport. This print is the logical next step. My problem with sport is that I always want the other side to win —that is the side that is not winning. If of course they start to win, then I have to switch sides again. Very confusing

“A tea party (you are all welcome).” In the back of many many people’s minds is the story and original illustrations by Tenniel for Alice in Wonderland. My mother got Alice as a school prize in March 1920 for being first in English and Mathematics and 4th in General Progress. I like to think that it was in the back of her mind throughout her life. It has influenced me (I still have her book). In reworking the Mad Hatter’s Tea Party, I have pushed the scene a step further by collapsing the tea table and threatening the whole affair with Hokusai’s great wave. 2 lobsters are dancing, and the Cheshire Cat is chasing a clockwork mouse. You may notice that the mad hatter has a ticket for Bit Coin stuck in his hat. The all important question is not “What is the meaning of life?” but “Why is a raven like a writing desk?”

All prints are engravings with stencil hand colouring, printed by myself in my workshop at Worton Hall Isleworth London in 2021. They are in editions of 25 with 5 artists proofs each image. The first 5 are portrait format 70 X 54cm. The other 1 is landscape measuring 54 X 70cm.

Chris Orr November 2021