

# Jason Greig

b.1963

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Oily black printers' ink, sooty black charcoal, chemical black toner: a non-colour it may be, but for Jason Greig's gothic fictions, black is his colour of choice.

Greig makes predominantly black and white drawings and prints that share a lineage with Odilon Redon's *Noirs*, the prison etchings of Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Francisco Goya's *Los Caprichos*.<sup>1</sup> He has also been influenced by film and literature – notably by great storytellers with a supernatural bent, such as Robert Louis Stevenson (*Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*), Mary Shelley (*Frankenstein*), and Edgar Allan Poe (*The Fall of the House of Usher*).

These artists and writers shared what the 19th century poet and art critic, Charles Baudelaire, called “a love of the ungraspable”. He was talking about Goya's *Los Caprichos*, a series of etchings whose imagery has the capacity to disturb viewers, even today. Beaudelaire likened them to the “dreams with which our sleep is periodically besieged”. Goya saw himself exposing “forms and attitudes that have hitherto existed only in the human mind, clouded and confused by lack of understanding or influenced by uncontrollable passions”.

Greig, too, embraces the zone of darkness in his imagination. He has stated “it's healthy to get into a state of unbalance, and to draw things that aren't necessarily normal or that have rules. What are they going to do? Arrest me for drawing Satan spitting on the sidewalk?”

His 'sympathy for the devil' has a rock 'n' roll aspect that can be traced to heavy metal's persistent hold on his imagination: “Well the thing that got me going was Black Sabbath... it was fuel – stuff to chew on – the imagery and the weight of it. It made me want to draw stuff. I do heavy, laden drawings – dense. When I hear some really loud guitars it gives me the same feeling”.

Just as heavy metal music has borrowed from 19th century classical music (particularly from Richard Wagner's *Gotterdammerung*), Greig's aesthetic has its tap root deep in old soil. He believes certain morbid 19th century images

are 'catching up' with us and in his work there is a haunting sense they may have slipped their moorings in the past. He has described how some of his figures appear to be stranded like creatures from another 'dominion' – a disturbing effect that hints at multiple realities co-existing in time. If you have seen the films of David Lynch, such as *Mulholland Drive* and *Lost Highway*, you will have an inkling of what can happen between parallel realities. While they remain strictly in parallel all is well, but when they intrude upon one another there is cause for grave disquiet.

Imagery from ancient mythology also figures in Greig's work, the conjoined man and beast in one body, for instance. In *Dragonfly* he takes this a step further, using a photocopier-and-collage technique to graft human forms – a giant flayed head (the kind you see in medical textbooks, that Greig likes to draw) onto a flimsy, antique flying machine. Dragon flight doesn't look like flight so much as suspension. Suspension in time – remote and mute.

## Gerald Barnett

<sup>1</sup> Seurat was another great draughtsman who was a master of black. An online exhibition can be seen at: <http://www.moma.org/exhibitions/2007/seurat>

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