

Christopher Bucklow talking with Akihito Nakanishi

You might know his luminous photographic silhouettes, but in his native England Chris Bucklow shows much stranger stuff. In the late '80s he was exhibiting un-natural sculpture made from living plant material. His recent paintings look like throwbacks to those early days of putting things together that should not be so. He insists that it's different – and the same too. I just had to fly over from Japan to his studio in beautiful Somerset, to find out what he meant.

AN: Nice Studio...

CB: Yeah - big enough to run a dance-school in. Cold in winter though – but I just got heating. The ceiling's high though...

AN: Can you think in here? Or is it just a place to work?

CB: Well... no, I don't think in here very much – it was always too cold for that! I probably think too much anyway. I'm sort of thinking my work 24 hours a day.

AN: Here is just for working?

CB: Yeah - Getting on with it. You know, nowadays... it's like I've got to a stage where all the thinking I needed to do has already been done. It's like I stocked my head up with stuff over the years – and now it seems that it's at my fingertips... just ready to come out. So – no – I don't think in here too much. Actually - maybe it's a refuge from thinking!

AN: Sounds strange... but convincing... coming from an artist who deals with the subconscious. So do you think these paintings are a result of a conscious effort to derive a new facet of “Chris Bucklow”?

CB: Kind of.... Well it's new in a way – tricky one.... You mean 'new' as in not like the photographs?

AN: Yes.

CB: Well... No – I mean, things just happen, it sort of evolves. I didn't set

out to change. It's just that making work *changes you*. So if you are going to make work that is true to yourself after that – well, its got to change too.

AN: And the photographs?

CB: - The Guests – they *became* these drawings. You see what I mean? It's all one thing.

AN And “we “ as observers, are to treat it as one work?

CB: Well I wouldn't want to force you – but the invitation's there...

Anyway, look - I'm not sure how conscious we really are. No, I'd better own that one: *I'm* not sure how conscious *I* am.

AN: What do you mean?

CB: It's just... well, you said, did I make a *conscious effort* to arrive at a new Chris Bucklow. But you see, to me consciousness is more of an observer. I think the decisions come from somewhere else. You know... the desire to do anything comes out of the unconscious anyway.

AN: So... consciousness... is?

CB: So consciousness has more of an ambassador role – a representative – only it *thinks* its king. Actually the king hides in the shadows. I suppose what's new for me is that I think my ambassador realized he *is* just an ambassador. That lets you begin to *see* the king – there in the darkness.... maybe for the first time. And it's going to give you new information. And then that becomes the work – the paintings. So yeah – that's new. But the material I'm getting has been around in here all along - since the beginning. Now it's in these paintings.

AN: What do you paint with?

CB: These are oils. I used to like it to be wet for a long time – and it would run – sometimes I would throw turpentine at it. But that was getting to be a bit of a disguise. It was beautiful. A beautiful disguise – but it camouflaged the action between the figures. This drawing I'm working on now is part of a set where that need to hide things seems to have disappeared.

AN: What's going on in there? It's so strange...

CB: Well the image grew into this as I was drawing it. But it's not random. That's what I mean by “in stock”...

AN: You mean the symbols were...

CB: They all come out of stuff I've been thinking about – stocking up on – for the past thirty years. I don't need to look it up... It's second nature to me now. I don't even need to think about it. It's in the soup. It comes out... Well the King pushes it out. I'm just the ambassador. Just the tool. I'm his paintbrush.

AN: But these sticks holding each other...

CB: They're standards – like the ones carried at the front of a Roman legion.

But these ones are topped with I.U.D.s – you know, the contraceptive coil. The little thing women can have put into the womb. Some of the other ‘sticks’ are flags – but the flags are rubber sheaths. Don’t ask me “Why are they all on asteroids?” - I have no idea – yet. All I know is that the asteroid is me.

AN: Isn’t the asteroid belt the remains of a planet that never formed?

CB: You’re right – might form still....

AN:So you just pin-up the canvas on the wall when you paint. Is it the way you prefer?

CB: Well it helps me to feel less precious about the work. When a canvas is stretched it’s a thing already. This way I feel like I can trash them easier... and that makes me feel freer to work. To let that stuff come out.

AN: Does music help you feel freer too when in the studio?

CB: I don’t really know about that – maybe. The music I listen to puts me into a very passionate state. But it’s not as if I go and slap paint on like De Kooning. Because some of it’s soft. For the past few years all I’ve listened to is The Mars Volta. I’m probably just one grade below stalker!

AN: That sounds serious!

CB: I’ve seen them in Atlanta, and in London - a few times. I must have played ‘De-Loused’ more than a thousand times since it was released. And that’s not an exaggeration. I’ve played it every day since 2003. In fact in the first few months I just had it on repeat – so I heard it loads of times every day. It’s pretty full on. But you know, there’s a guy on Youtube who plays one of the tracks – its called ‘Eriatarka’ - on grand piano. So sweetly too. It just kills me. Omar Rodriguez is a genius. Cedric too.

AN: How does it relate to your work?

CB: Well I want that intensity. Also, you know, the variety of feeling. Fast, frantic and then the slow and sweet. Cedric’s voice does punk Zeppelin and Cambridge choirboy! I love that contrast. But really I suppose it’s the way Omar marries passion and structure together. You get the feeling that there’s a real intelligence working in that music – through all of it. I relate to that – I’m a thinker – that’s my poison – I love to think and read... But I want the content – all the stuff - the meanings I put in my pictures to be expressed in a very emotional way. A lot of colour. A lot a variety in the line. Different beats...

AN: I thought you might be a musical-type, because your paintings have some sort of visual tunes attached to them, rhythmical in a sense.... And the whole of the work over the years is like one album?

CB: It’s beginning to look that way. Is that good? Or is that kind of sad – or what?!

AN: I'd say it was a good thing - over time. Am I wrong in assuming you're trying to materialise "time" in your pieces regardless of medium you use?

CB: Well maybe I am obsessed with time. You know the big chart that shows every day of my life on my website? [www.chrisbucklow.com]

AN: The circle right at the beginning?

CB: Yeah – well there are 17,432 days on that drawing – right up to the day it went to be framed. You know a life is only a bit more than 25,000 days. The biblical length anyway – you know the “three score years and ten” - seventy years is only 25,000 days. That seems so short. Every day feels unique to me when I think of that drawing. I logged all my dreams onto it. All the dreams I've ever had – well all the ones I've remembered. And Rifleman in London published a selection of them a couple of years ago. There's a bit on my site where I have an engine that will work out how many days old you are... since your conception.

AN: I'll try that.... but let me ask you why your dreams are special to you in the first place?

CB: It's because.... it's just this: I think making work is like dreaming. Everything in the work is symbolic of your self. Just like in dreams.

AN: So there's a link with the unconscious drive to scrutinise all of your “selves”, including those of the past, the present, the future...

CB: The future...?

AN: So do you think that this makes your central core visible... almost in an “automatisme” manner. Are those squirming images in your mind becoming easier to grasp... as you go along - or do you just end up with bigger questions?

CB: Well you're right. But the questions now are more interesting... Much more subtle. I'd like to think they are closer to some kind of truth.

Akihito Nakanishi is a director of gallery MSSOHKAN in Kobe, Japan