



Special B

BY MARK ROZZO MARCH 27, 2021

David Bowie said that the work of Derek Boshier “cascades over the decades and is utterly real and convincing.” At age 83, Boshier is at once a living legend and an unsung hero of postwar British art.

A working-class kid from Portsmouth on track to take up the trade of butchery, Boshier got himself into the Royal College of Art at just the right time, becoming, along with his studio-mate, David Hockney, and Peter Blake, one of the avatars of British Pop art. His 1961 *Special K*—an eye-grabbing riff on the familiar cereal box—made a splash around the same time Hockney was doing his Typhoo tea, Ed Ruscha his Sun-Maid raisins, and Andy Warhol his Campbell’s soup.

A *New York Times* critic called him a “supersonic Parsifal,” and in the intervening 35 years, Boshier, peripatetic and protean, has jetted his way from London to India, to Texas, to Los Angeles, where he lives today. Boshier’s paintings, drawings, and graphics—with their jittery line, raucous color, and rueful humor—have ranged similarly, unpredictable to the last. As one observer noted, approvingly, Boshier “has always been nothing if not inconsistent.”

Derek Boshier: Alchemy Alchemy, on now at New York’s Garth Greenan Gallery, proves that the artist’s capacity to surprise is intact. These new paintings and drawings were executed during the pandemic year of 2020, and they are spring-loaded and jam-packed, as if the need to bust out of lockdown were being channeled onto flat surfaces.

“I collect images,” the magpie artist has said, “and like to use them randomly.” And so *Primavera* is a painted pastoral landscape out of a BBC period drama that happens to be overrun with giant rabbits; the macabre *Black Dahlia* explores the notorious unsolved L.A. murder case with a nod to Duchamp; *Afghanistan (Christmas Day)* is crowded with happy snowmen along with a scene of that war-torn country. The pencil drawings are filigreed narratives taut with geometry and overflowing with references to Beckett, Hollywood Westerns, and Archie comics. They’re superimposed with images of luxury wristwatches, a puckish commentary on advertising, which is a perpetual theme.

As is rock ’n’ roll. Boshier famously worked with Bowie (see the 1979 album *Lodger*) and the Clash; he’s a founding Pop artist who happily went pop. Two of the most compelling paintings here take inspiration from John Lennon’s posthumous hit “Nobody Told Me,” bringing together flying saucers and bits of Hieronymus Bosch. (According to Boshier, Lennon once told him that Bosch was his favorite painter.) Sly, funny, enigmatic, they confirm their maker to be an artist who, as Hockney put it, “has never lost his sense of wonder.”



Nobody Told Me (Stranger Days Indeed) for John Lennon, one in a series of the British Pop artist’s works on show now at Garth Greenan Gallery, in New York.