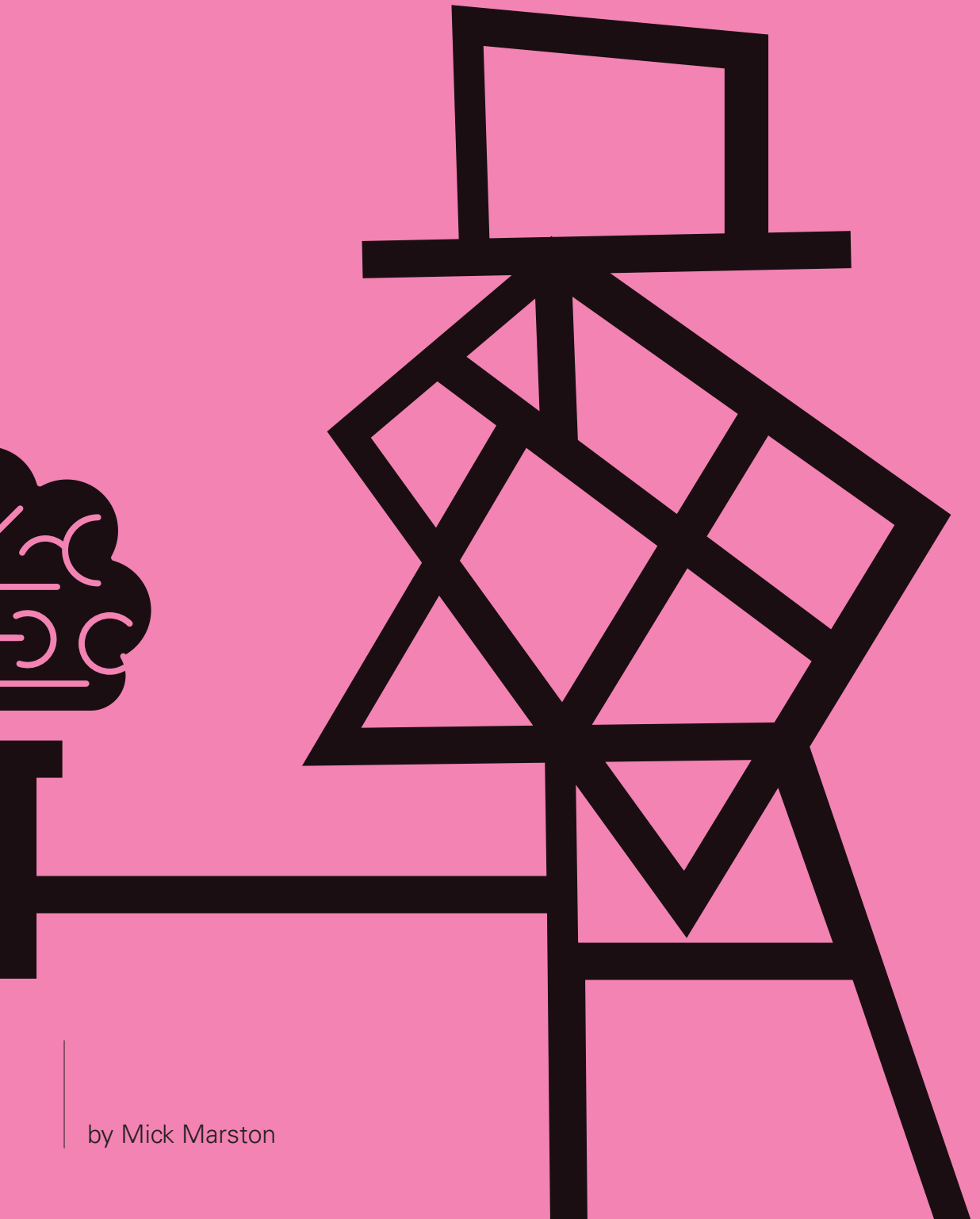


Research Field Station #11

# Brains on Paper



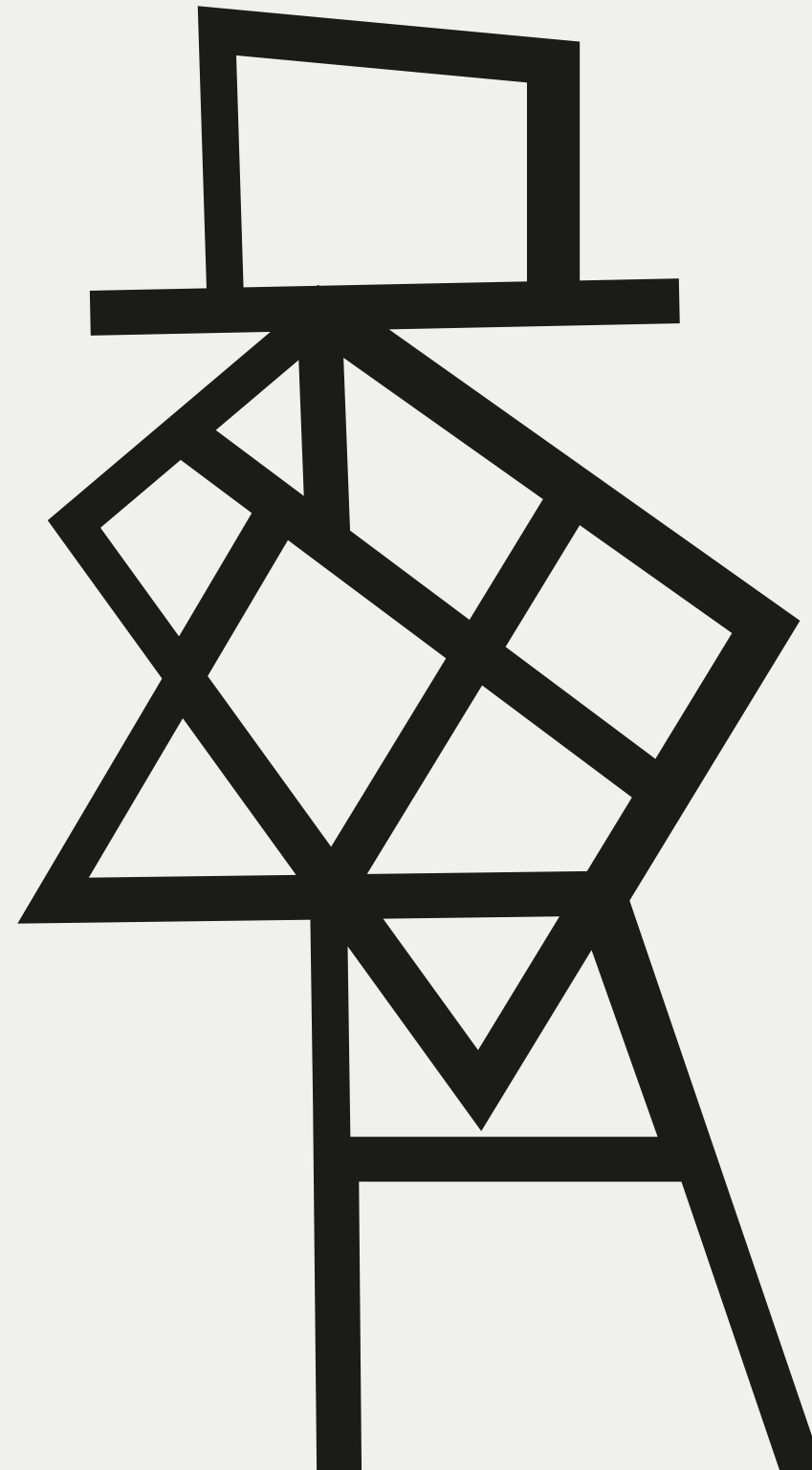
by Mick Marston

Research Field Station #11

## Brains on Paper

**“There was this man who smashed his  
brain in little pieces and then they drilled  
holes and put ‘em back in there”**

Lyrics by Charles Thompson,  
aka Black Francis

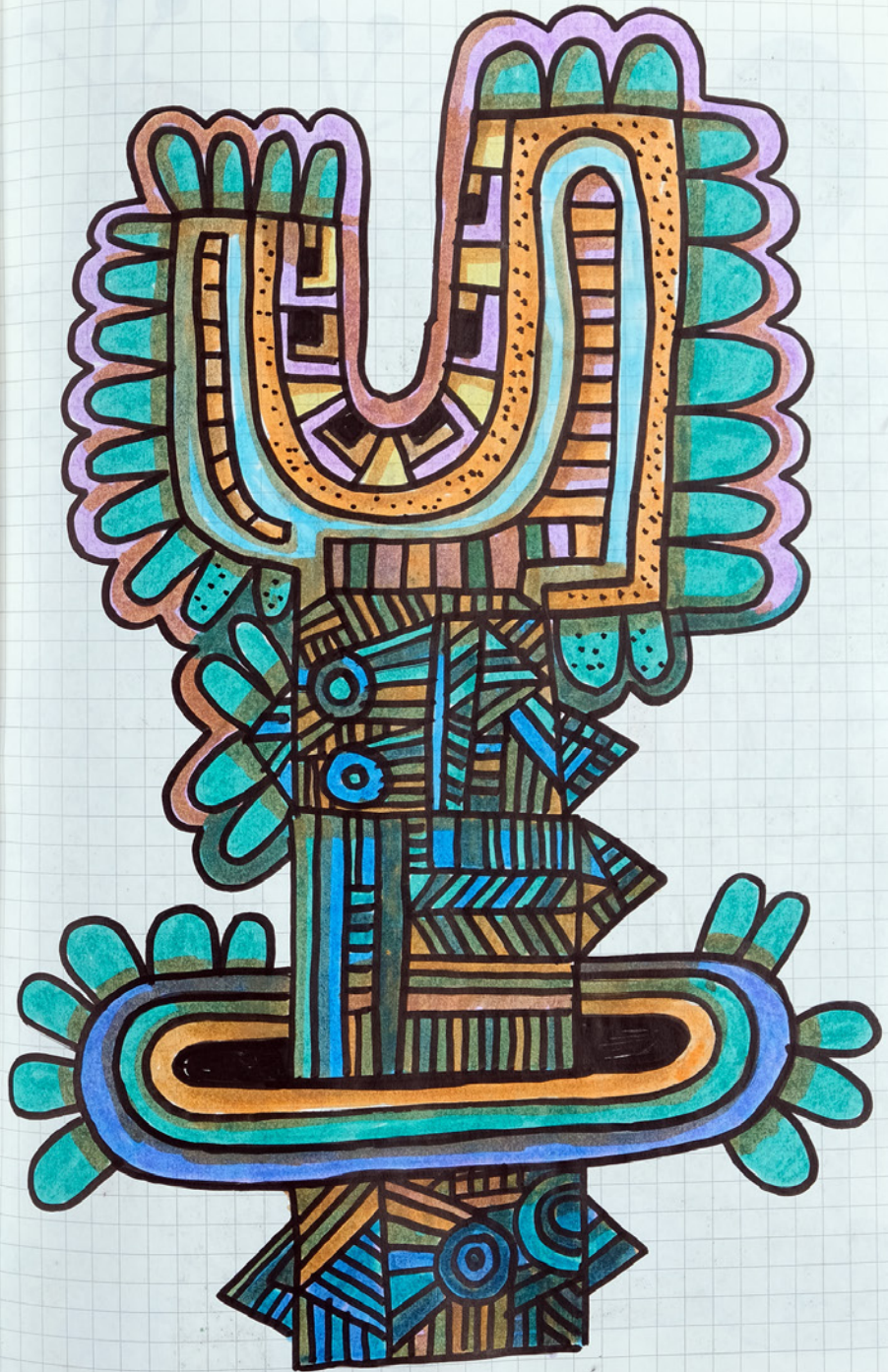
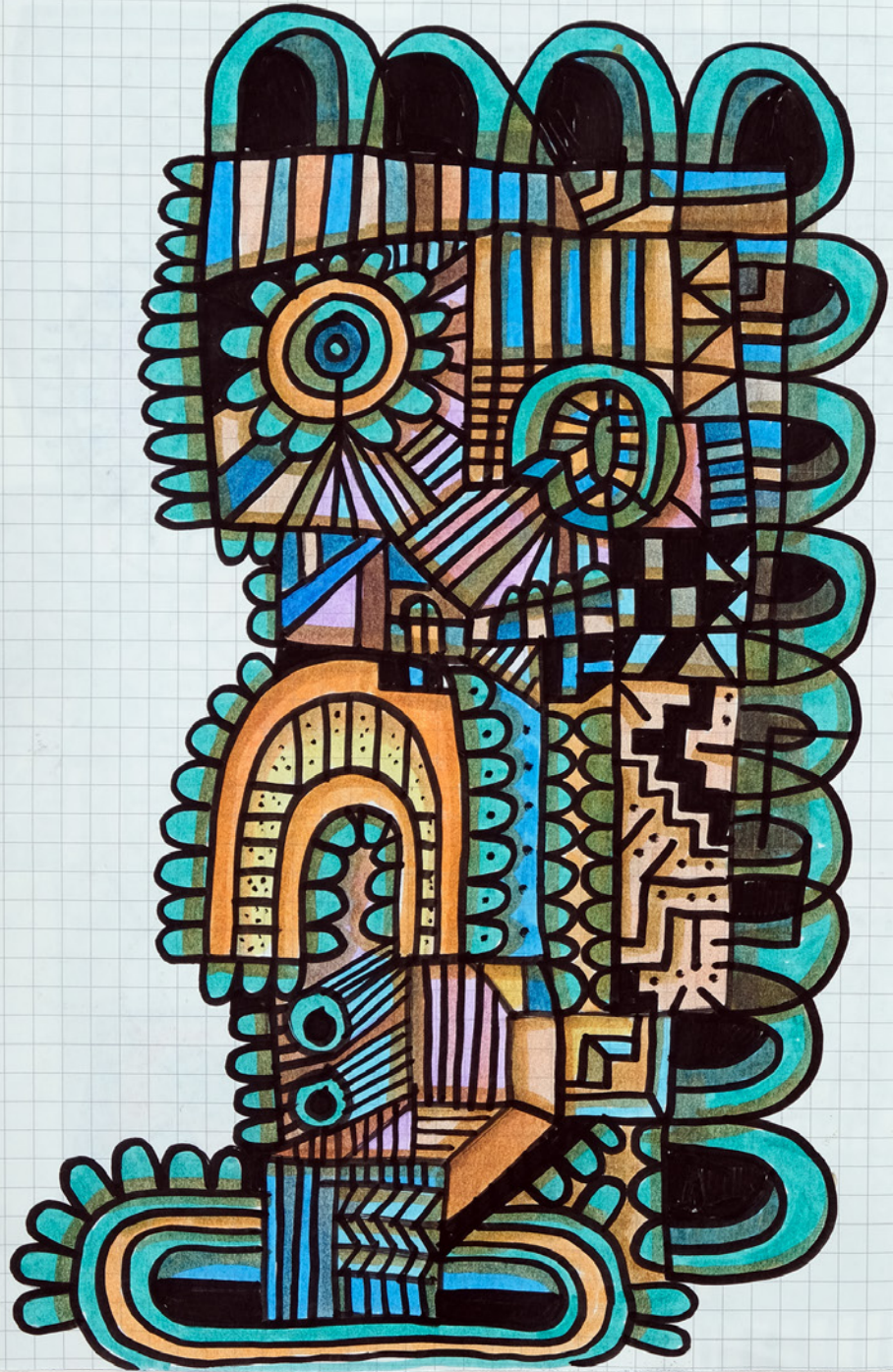


by Mick Marston

These books represent the engine room of my practice.  
The commercial world of illustration can be limiting.  
There is little room for experimentation.  
You can't deliver the unexpected.  
Revealing the 'wizard' behind the fancy curtain.  
They date from July 2020 to February 2023.  
I have heard the term 'brains on paper', which works for me.

This practice is habitual and is for personal enjoyment above anything else.  
They are useful too, everything starts here.  
Please excuse the digressions.  
I digress all the time.  
In speech, in writing, in thinking and importantly, in drawing.  
The word – sketchbook is a misnomer, I rarely sketch anything.  
Doodle books maybe?  
Doodlebugs.  
Lines and lines and lines and lines.  
Thick ones, thin ones, good ones, bad ones, indifferent ones.  
Straight ones, curved ones, uncertain ones, bold ones, coloured ones, diagonal ones.  
And shapes.  
All the usual interesting shapes such as squares and triangles and cubes and circles.  
Might be the odd hexagon too.  
You'll often find me looking for a good shape.  
Tropes.  
The concentric, the tile, the isometric.  
Stripes, concentric circles, lumps, dots, dashes, arcs, archways, cubes, holes.  
And there's also automatic drawing  
And replicating automatic drawing – which is probably contradictory.  
Pencils, pens, sticks, tape, brushes and paint.

Drawing with a brush that is too big for the task.  
Deliberately clumsy.  
At what point does an image made with paint become a painting?  
When does it transcend the drawing made with a paint brush stage?  
Rulers, stencils, compasses, scissors, and scalpels.  
Drawing with scissors.  
Plain paper, lined paper, squared paper, graph paper, thin paper, thick paper and coloured paper.  
Drawings of drawings, over drawings.  
Reassembled, covered up, redrawn, never abandoned.  
Raising the abject.  
Colouring in.  
Adult colouring books.  
Or should that be colouring books for adults?  
Your pink will probably run out first.  
Literal titles.  
Draw something, see what comes out, describe it as seen.  
'A Man From the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Wielding a Lead Pipe Whilst Shouting Obscenities'  
'A Baboon Growling at a Flower'.  
This is often subliminal.  
This hopefully lets the viewer know what they are looking at whilst pondering why there is a man from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century wielding a lead pipe whilst shouting obscenities, or a baboon growling at a flower.  
The act of retrospectively deciphering what I was probably thinking.  
Although I do acknowledge the continuing spectral presence of Jacob Rees Mogg.



## Aeroplanes



### “Eight miles high, and when you touch down...”

Always warplanes.

Paul Nash — ‘Totes Meer’  
and ‘Battle of Britain’.

Although you don’t see any  
aeroplanes in the latter.

Just the vapour trails and the smoke.

Usually WWII bombers like the B17  
Flying Fortress.

Cumbersome, awkward, foreboding,  
overwhelming, clumsy.

An occasional cold war jet might appear, like  
an English Electric Lightning F.1A.

These are sleeker, more aerodynamic  
and much less fun to draw.

But they have that cone at the nose  
which makes up for it.

Lines again.

To indicate panels and windows  
and guns and doors.

And dots.

Dots make good rivets.

Decals too.

Stars, roundels, crosses, arbitrary numbers  
and letters, and chevrons.

Airfix instructions.

Roy Cross did the box art for Airfix.

The promise of the artwork on the  
outside didn’t match up with  
the contents.

But that was OK, the making was  
the most important bit.

And sniffing the glue.

And getting the ‘glass’ cockpit stuck  
on your finger.

Putting the decals on without  
bothering to paint it.

And then shooting at it with  
an air rifle.

Nose art.

Aeroplane nose art, not art made  
with your nose.

Although my dogs make marks on the  
windows with their noses which reveal  
themselves whenever we have condensation.

A possible hint of Hannah Barbera’s  
‘Catch The Pigeon’.

Bad aeroplanes.

Drawn from memory by a distant tribe.

Aeroplanes don’t look very interesting  
side on.

They look like a slender tube.

You need to see both wings  
at the same time.

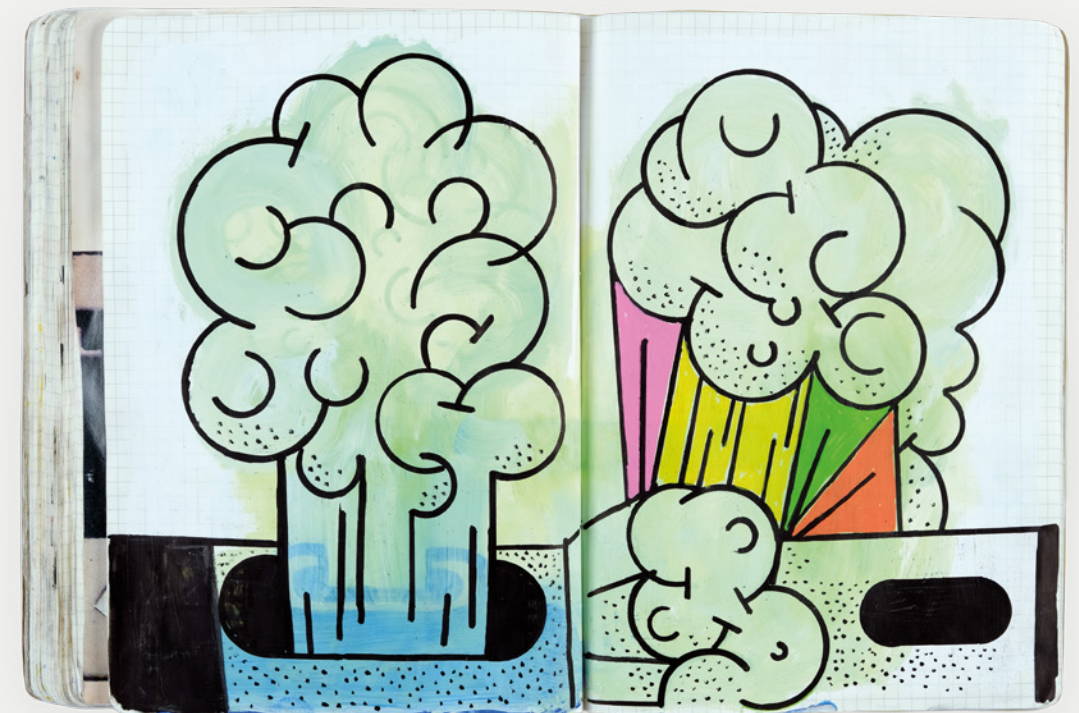
“You’ll find that it’s stranger  
than known”

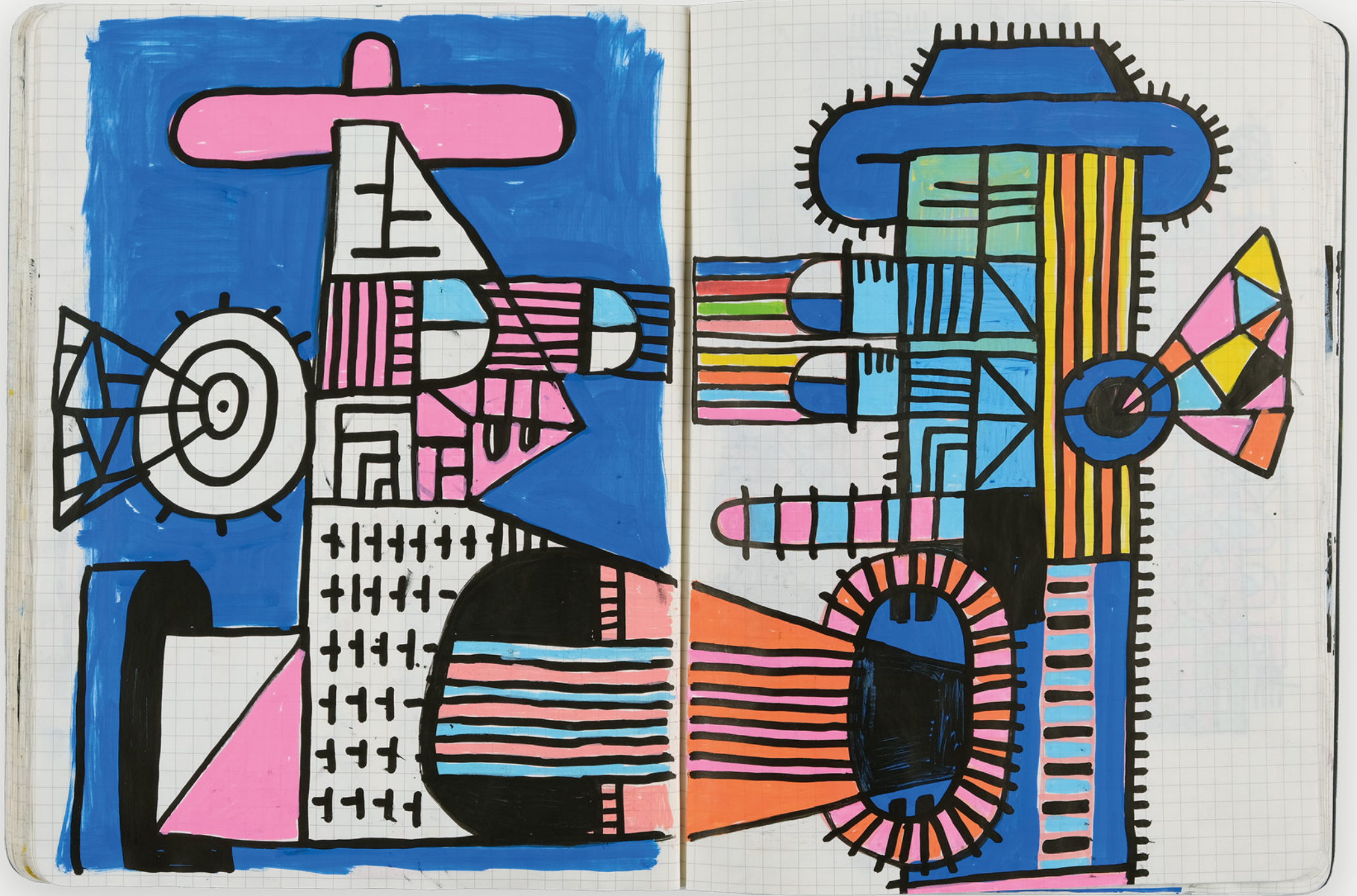
**“Rows and flows of angel hair,  
and ice cream castles in the air...”**

Nebulous.  
I like things to be nebulous,  
it provides possibility.  
Making the invisible, visible.  
Abstract or figurative?  
Voices, exhalations, coughs,  
and odour made tangible.  
A comic book tradition.  
Clouds and smoke and steam  
and energy.  
Explosions, tracers, vapour trails  
and trajectories.  
What makes someone’s voice poetic,  
angry, happy, sad etc?  
What differentiates singing from shouting?  
Laughing from cursing?  
What colour, shape or form,  
line thickness, length and extent?  
Saul Steinberg.  
He was the master of this stuff.  
The year of Covid led to a series  
of coughing drawings.  
For obvious reasons.  
Visualising music.  
Like those mid century jazz album  
covers by S. Neil Fujita.  
And Barney Bubbles in the 70s and 80s.  
What does the sound of G Major look like?  
And how does it compare visually  
to D Minor?  
Is fuzz a different shape to distortion  
and how does flange differ from phase?  
Echo, reverb, delay have subtle differences.  
That’s just electric guitars.  
I haven’t got round to brass  
and woodwind yet.  
I’ve been attempting to draw my own  
tinnitus and occasional migraines.  
Scintillating scotoma.  
Like animated CMYK linear castellations.

**“And feather canyons everywhere,  
I’ve looked at clouds that way...”**

**Emissions, Sounds  
and Language**





**“in the city there’s a thousand things  
I want to say to you...”**

I often (always) have songs in my head.

Sometimes this is unwanted.

Like **“Step Into Christmas”**  
in the middle of June.

Anyway, where am I?

Italo Calvino – Invisible Cities.

These ones are visible though.

Paul Klee – ‘Castle and Sun’.

Hundertwasser.

Jean Dubuffet – ‘Le Cirque’.

Alexandra Exter.

Using squared paper so I must  
follow the squares.

Them’s the rules.

Just broken a rule.

Staircases,  
steps,  
ziggurats,  
mesh,  
walls.

Archways become eyes  
and mouths and noses.

Do buildings have genders?

No circles allowed.

Just circles allowed.

Unpopulated. Empty cities.

Dead, one horse towns.

Wild west towns in films,  
with nothing behind the facades.

The buildings become the people  
and sometimes animals.

Buildings for animals.

Kennels and dovecotes and cages.

Buildings having arguments.

Buildings that hate their neighbours.

Rival towns.

Unfeasible buildings.

Escher.

Buildings on stilts.

Buildings on legs.

With shoes.

Glass, girders, aerials.

Tony Bevan.

Mazes, tunnels, plans.

Pipes and wiring.

Walls.

Churches,  
temples,  
skyscrapers,  
shopping malls,  
office blocks,  
castles,  
public sculpture.

and multi storey car parks.

Early Renaissance paintings  
with the strange perspective.

Pieter Bruegel the Elder –  
‘The Tower of Babel’.

John Speed – ‘Nonsuch Palace’.

Saul Steinberg.

Jim Flora.

Factories.

Yakov Chernikov.

Brutal,  
Classical,  
Romanesque,  
Baroque,  
Art Deco,  
Gothic.

Eclecticism.

Mock Tudorian.

Metropolis,  
Gotham City,  
Emerald City.

When you visit a castle  
and there’s a pylon next to it.

And a kebab van.

I like that.

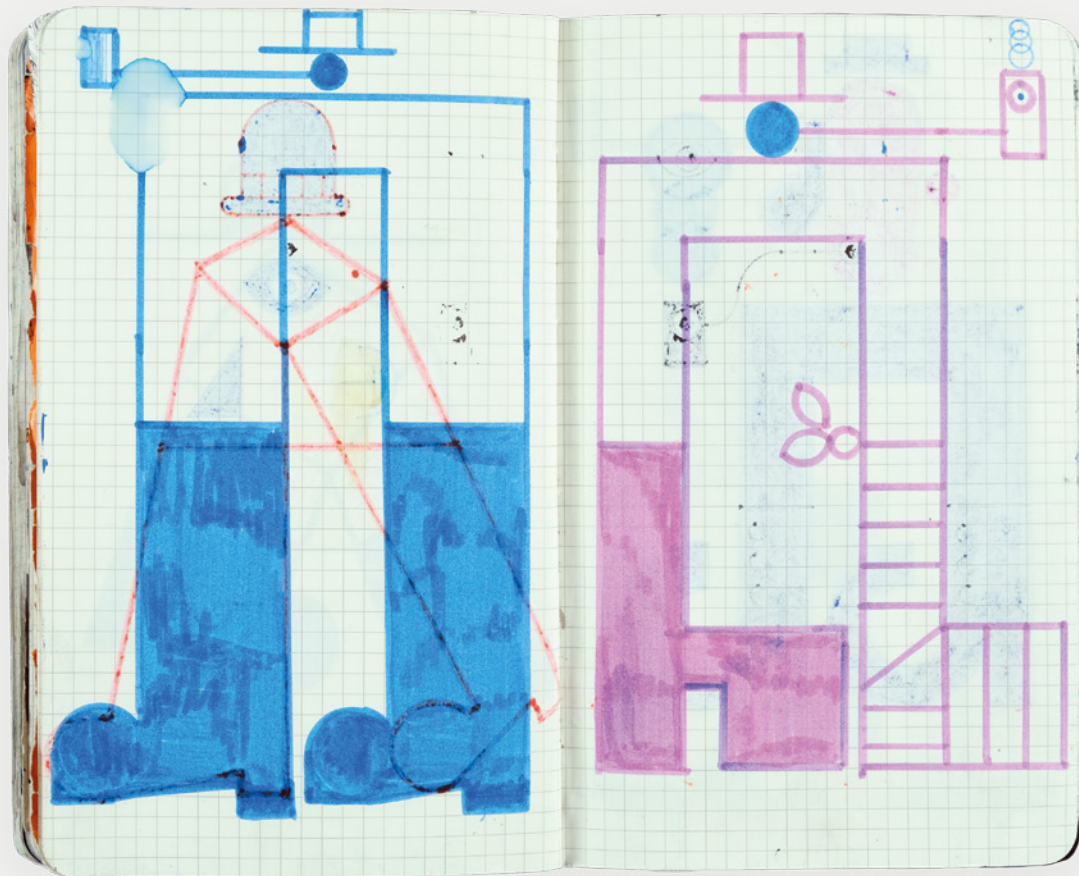
**“Downtown, everything’s  
waiting for you...”**

## Cityscapes





## Block Men



**“I wanna be tall, tall, tall, as big as a wall, wall, wall...”**

Unyielding, awkward, closed minded, probably easily outraged.

The Block Men are often seen wearing inappropriate clothes (especially big high heeled boots), which is probably deliberately contradictory.

Maybe we all have an inner desire to be freer and more outlandish?

There was going to be brick man built in Leeds at some point.

I don't know any of the details.

Whilst i'm here on the block thing – Lego should be basic blocks.

Not Yellow Submarine or Star Wars space ship friendly shapes.

The whole point with Lego was that you made stuff out of the blocks you had.

It looked blocky because it was.

There is no creativity in slavishly recreating somebody else's plan.

The top hat.

The industrial revolution crops up sometimes. For no apparent reason.

I like how small men are given height by a stovepipe hat – makes them more important.

A stovepipe – like a chimney – there is a nice connection to Brunel etc.

They were expensive, so your average person couldn't afford one.

A visible status symbol.

The big boot.

Elements of 70s Glam Rock – Sweet, Slade, Marc Bolan, David Bowie, The New York Dolls etc.

A few of these were average men who might be builders if they couldn't play guitars.

Obviously Bowie and Bolan were as far from the average man as you can get.

It's odd to think of your average man in the street ever wearing high heel boots again for some reason.

Like they did in the early 70s.

Even your dad.

They are clumpy, and signify clumsiness, or precariousness.

And, contradictorily – glamour or camp.

There is that added height thing again too.

A man in a top hat and high heel boots can elevate himself by at least two feet

**“One of these days these boots are gonna walk all over you.”**

The Block Man sporting a top hat, smoking a pipe, attired in big boots is generally an overwhelming and dangerous presence.

A metaphor for toxic masculinity, in all its guises.

**“I wanna be your maaaaaan...”**

**"The boy looked at Johnny..."**

Horses were a real challenge to draw as a child.

"looks like they still are" I hear you cry.

George Stubbs.

Eadweard Muybridge.

Eadweard, not Edward.

Dogon horse and riders.

Horace Horsecollar.

Horace has a girlfriend called Clarabelle Cow.

Sometimes Clarabelle Cow has been paired with Goofy.

They all look similar.

I'm not sure any of this is healthy.

Quick Draw McGraw.

An equine sheriff.

I don't think he had a partner of a different species.

Guernica.

Toy horses.

Rocking horses.

Hobby horses.

The Godfather.

Race horses.

Hunters.

Dressage.

Dancing horses.

**"Bring on the dancing horses..."**

War horses.

Medieval horses in those heraldic blankets.

Trojan horses.

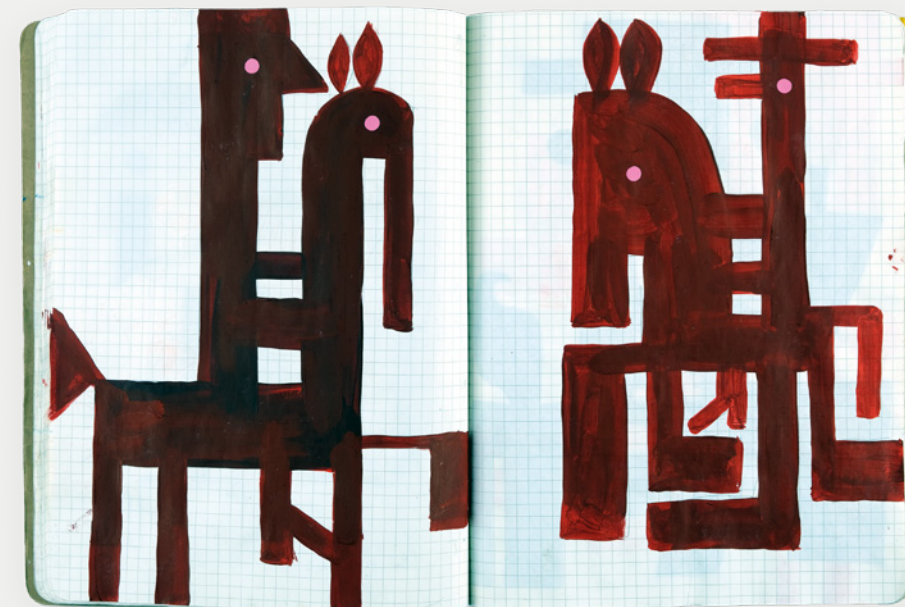
Horse/human hybrids.

Mythical horses.

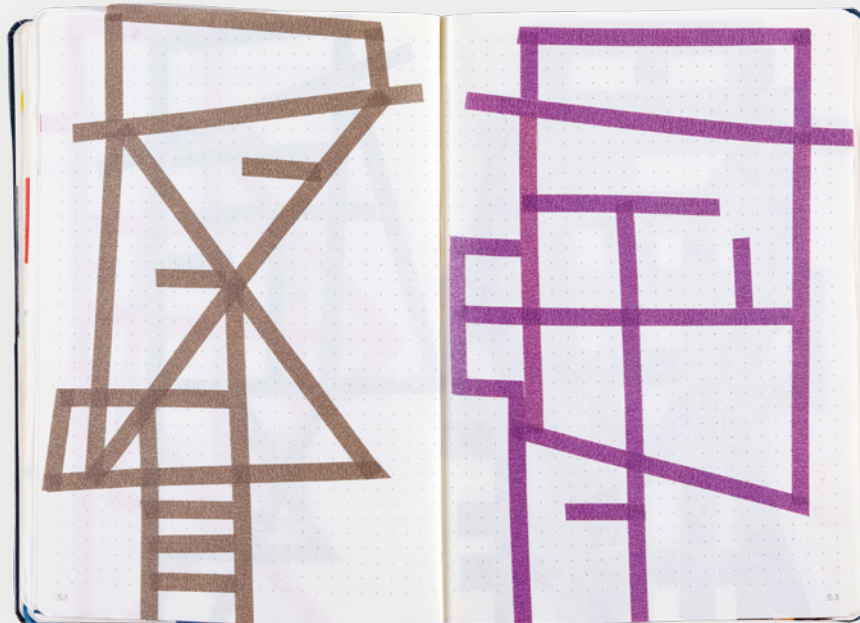
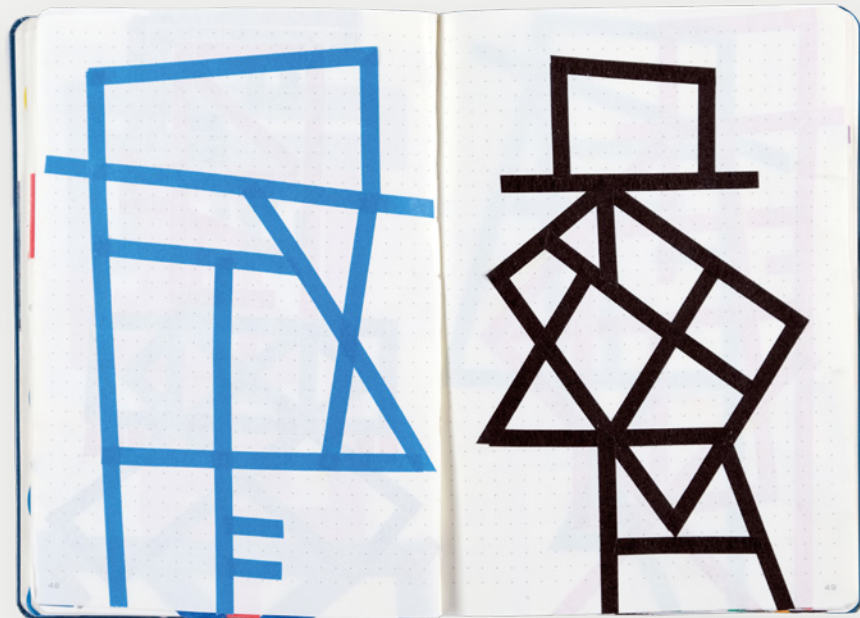
Like Pegasus – or was he/she/they a unicorn?

**"On white horses, snowy white horses, let me ride awaaaaay..."**

**Horses**



## Heads and Faces



### **“Do you wanna know what happens inside my happy head?”**

Whenever in doubt, draw a stupid head.

I can't really explain why I draw so many faces and heads.

I've done it for years – since before I went to school.

They are not portraits – although some accidentally are.

They often morph into other things.

Especially buildings.

And objects.

Anthropomorphism and all that.

Disembodied heads, piled on top of each other.

Totem poles.

Disembodied heads in boxes, like windows.

Mostly male heads.

Usually ugly heads.

Distorted,  
angry,  
troubled,  
menacing,  
manic,  
stressed,  
ill,  
unhappy.

Ken Reid.

Jim Nutt.

Karl Wirsum.

Philip Guston

17<sup>th</sup> Century portraiture.

Quakers and Puritans.

Tudors and Victorians, and blokes from the 1970s, and contemporary vagabonds.

Heads wearing hats.

Heads wearing heads.

Hats wearing heads.

Cigarette butts become eyes.

And ears.

A mouth is also someone else's eye.

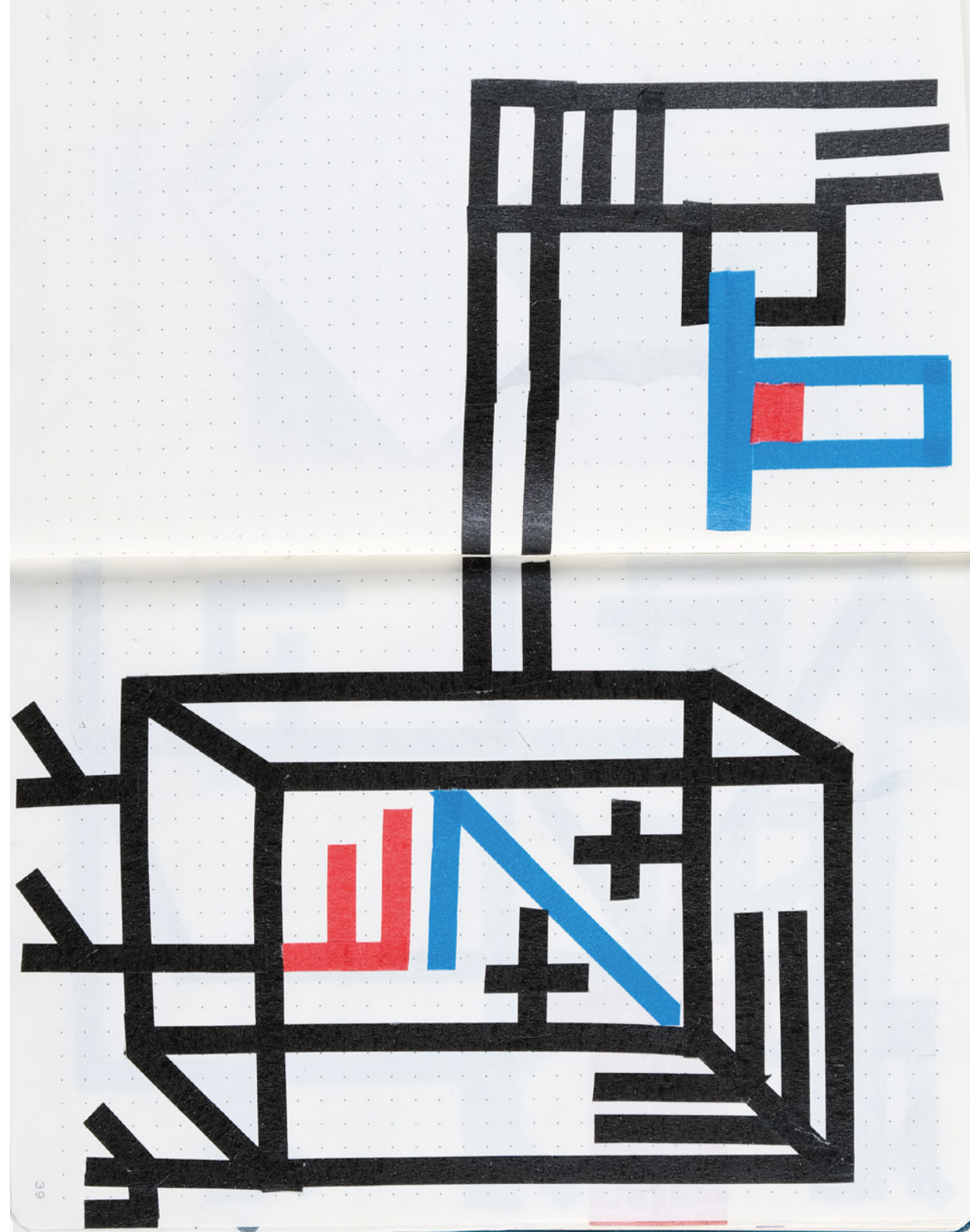
And someone else's eye is someone else's eye too.

That ear is his mouth.

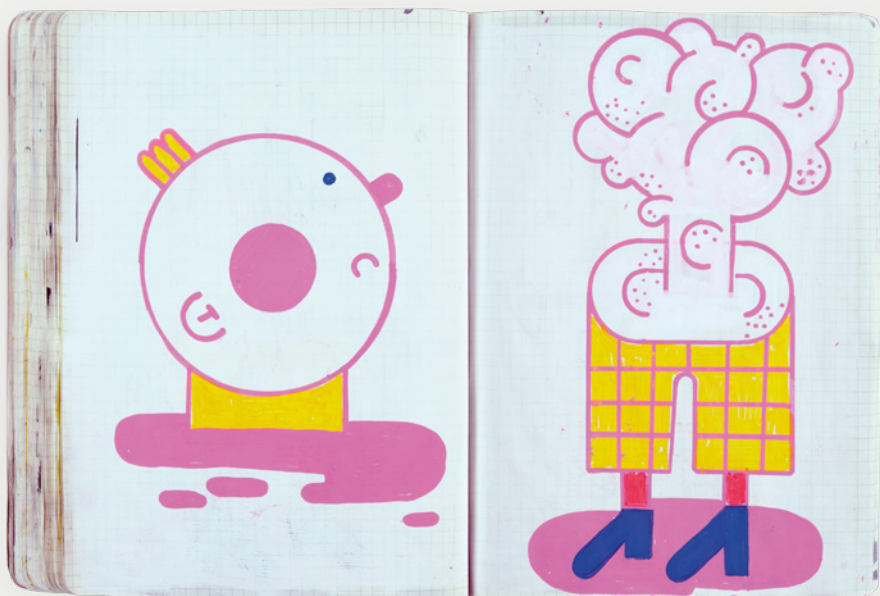
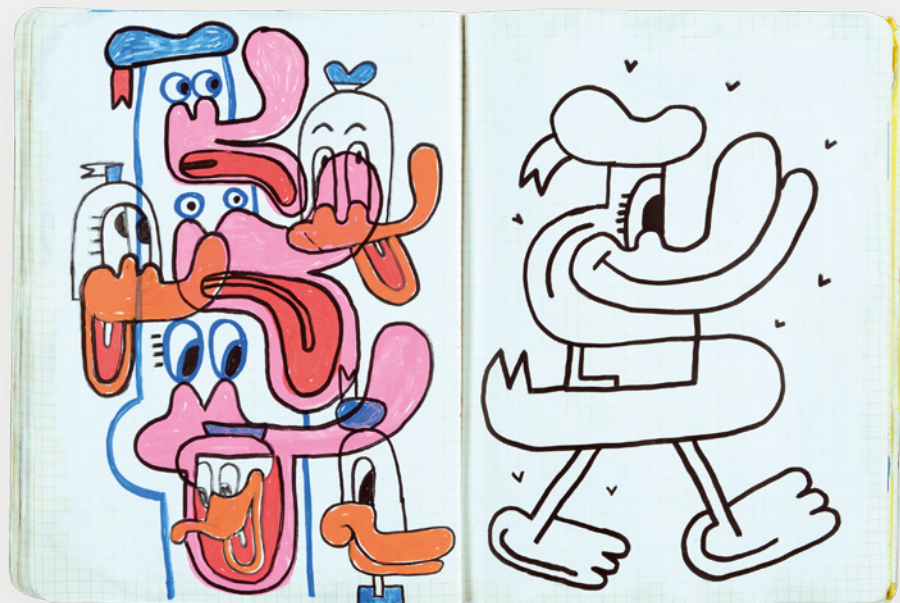
And that nose his is other mouth.

And that breath is his quiff.

Heads within heads.  
Heads that think about stuff.  
Heads on tables.  
Heads coming out of orifices.  
Heads coming out of pipes.  
Heads constructed from other heads.  
Heads driving cars.  
Heads on horseback.  
Heads that don't look like heads.  
Heads that explode.  
Heads that get kicked.  
Heads that get punched.  
Heads that get pecked.  
Heads that expel air and fluid.  
Heads that speak and sing.  
Heads with extra features.  
Heads with growths.  
Heads on wheels.  
Heads that smoke.  
Geometric heads.  
Insides of heads.  
Silhouettes.  
Fish heads,  
shit heads,  
knob heads,  
big heads,  
crack heads,  
dead heads.  
And then skulls.  
**"There was this man who smashed  
his brain in little pieces and then they  
drilled holes and put 'em back in there"**



## Cartoon Characters



### “Oh Mickey you’re so fine...”

Popeye & Olive Oyl.

Goofy.

Betty Boop.

The Bash St Kids.

Mickey & Minnie.

Donald Duck.

Nancy.

Penelope Pitstop.

Off brand Disney characters  
on ice cream vans.

Roy Lichtenstein – ‘Look Mickey’

Michael Sandle – ‘Mickey Mouse  
Head With Spikes’.

Peter Saul – ‘Donald Duck  
Descending a Staircase’.

Drawing other peoples drawings can break  
up a tendency to rely on a series of repetitive  
actions – the same old shapes and tricks will  
always surface if allowed to stagnate.

I find that automatic drawing becomes  
limited by your own visual vocabulary –  
almost like it is impossible to store up  
more than a set few gestures, shapes,  
patterns and motifs at one time.

It brings home the importance of looking.

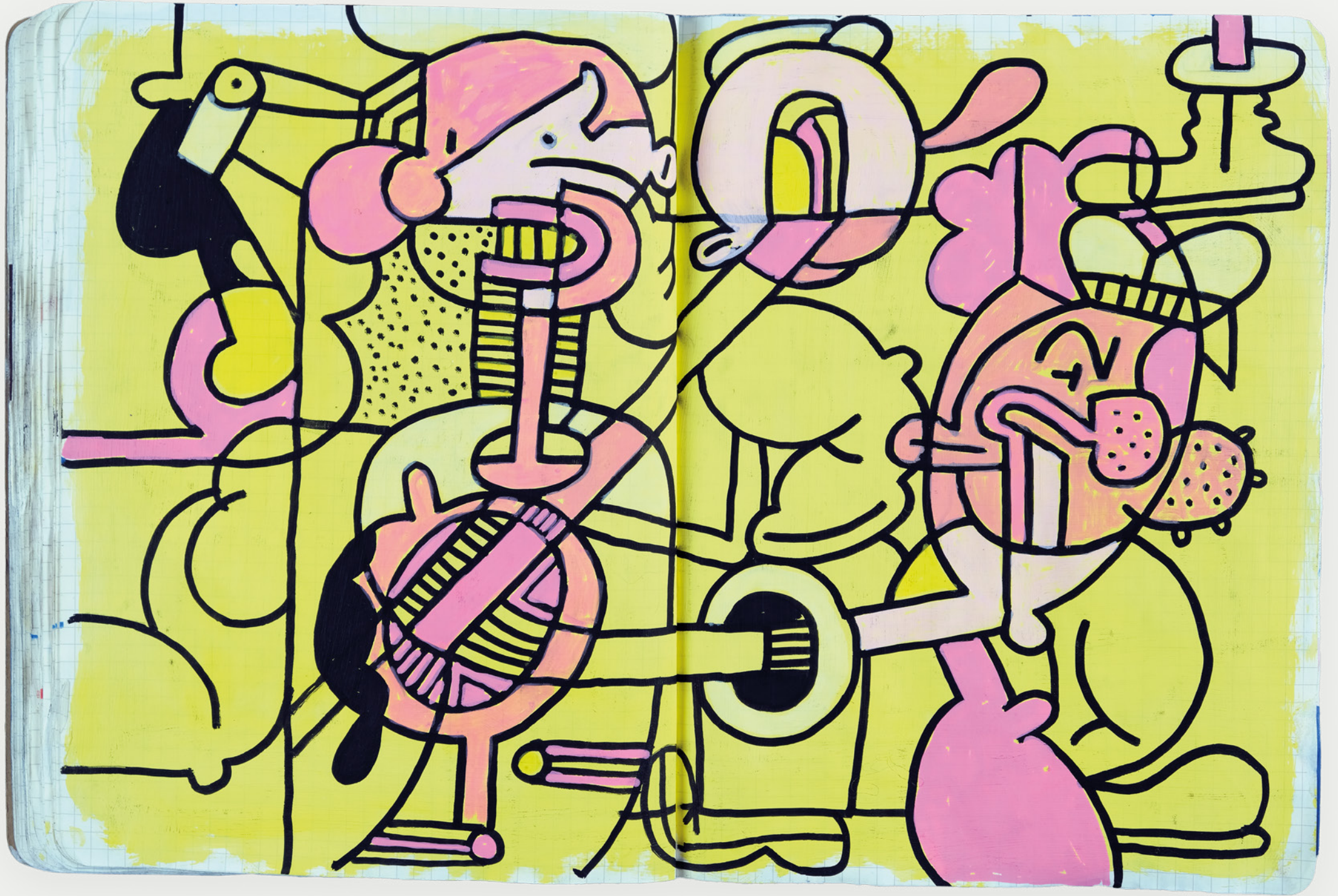
I look at Popeye and can’t fathom  
how E.C. Segar came up with it?

To draw it enables you to understand it better.

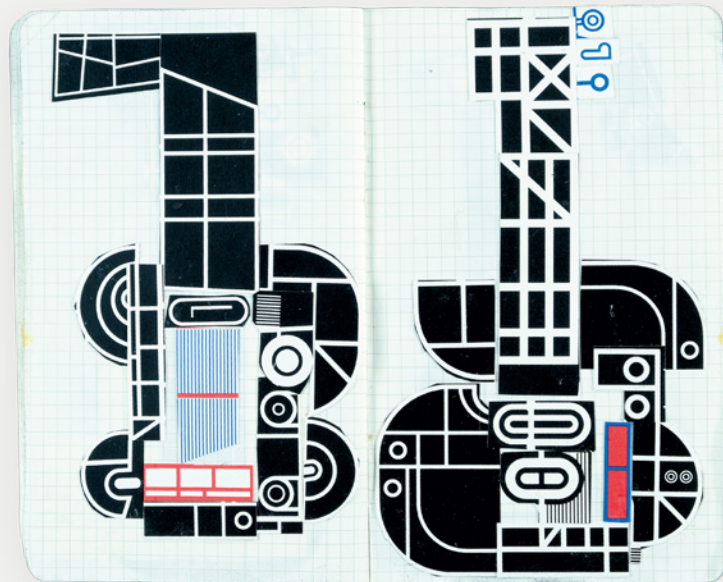
The process then develops into a question  
of “how far can I get away from E.C. Segar’s  
Popeye, whilst still being Popeye?”

Experimental drawing by cutting up and  
rearranging and redrawing can lead to  
interesting compositions where the  
original character becomes abstracted  
but still has an essence of what/who it is.

### “I’m Popeye the sailor man...”



## Guitars



**"And Johnny's upstairs in his bedroom sitting in the dark, annoying the neighbours with his punk rock electric guitar"**

I love guitars.

I just think they are beautiful objects.

I suppose they represent possibility.

A sculpture you can use.

And teenage hero worship.

I've started playing again after a 30 year break.

I always draw what's in my life, hence a plethora of guitars.

These are not very ergonomic.

They are more essence of what a guitar looks like.

Cool guitars such as a Fender Jazzmaster.

Which has far too many switches and knobs.

Or a Burns.

Or something from Eastern Europe where they didn't quite get it right.

But in a good way.

I like Cubist still life painting with guitars in them.

And the ones with vases in them, but they are not as interesting to draw.

In my opinion.

Picasso and Braque if they did electric guitars.

Picasso's cardboard guitars.

Acoustic guitars are nice because of the central hole.

Which often becomes an eye.

Electric guitars are better because of the pick ups, and knobs, and switches.

You can even bend the neck around a corner and it still looks like a guitar.

Pete Townshend would approve.

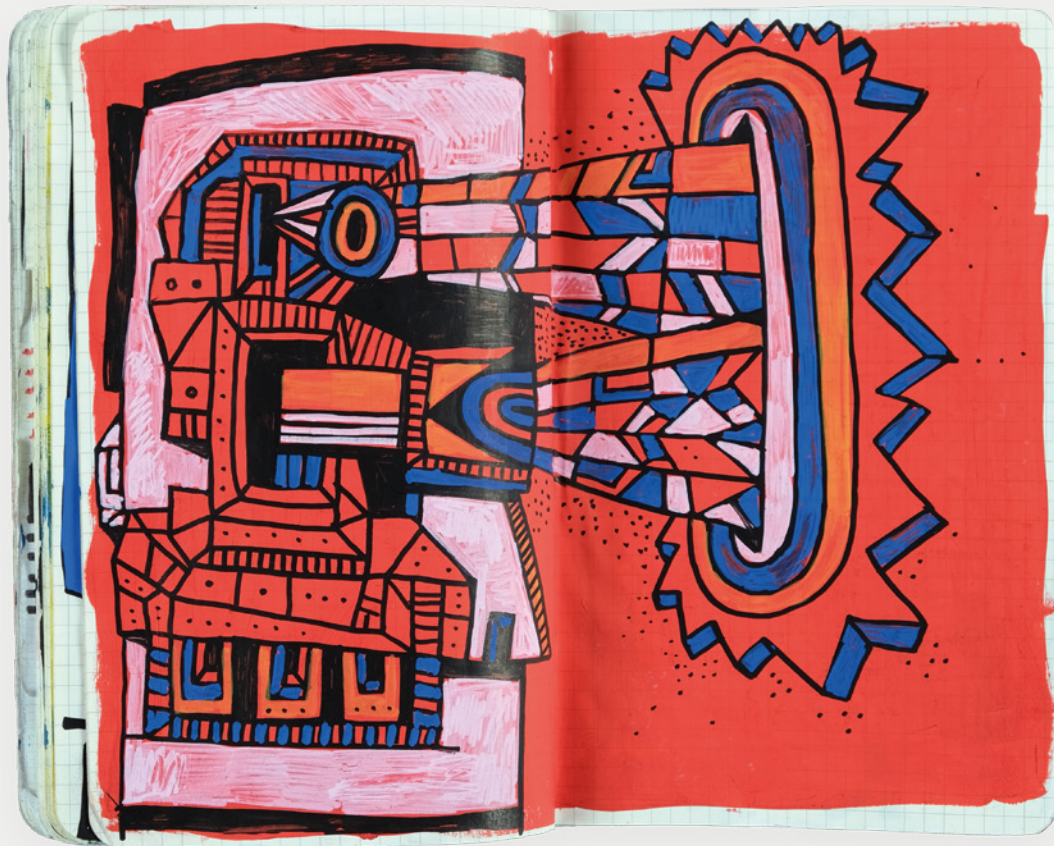
These collaged guitars were previously screen printed cars.

**"Electric guitar gets run over by a car on the highway"**





## War



### **"Louder than tanks on the highway, louder than bombers in flight..."**

I started drawing tanks before the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Prophetic eh?

I started drawing them more often when the war started.

Sometimes they morph into generals.

### **"Generals and majors aha, they're never too far from battlefields glorious..."**

I'm interested in military stuff.

Not for what it is for and what it does though.

The technology of modern warfare.

The spectacle of historical warfare.

Uniforms and medals.

Guns and swords.

Maces,  
halberds,  
lances,  
axes,  
shields  
and helmets.

Napoleonic War.

Red vs Blue.

Horses – that I feel sad for.

Is it wrong to feel sadder about the plight of animals than humans?

'Guernica'.

Medieval battles.

Heraldry.

Armour.

I had a whole arsenal of toy weapons as a child.

And entire battalions of toy soldiers, from all eras and nationalities.

### **"I am a little tin soldier that want's to jump into your fire"**

00H0 scale and 1:32 scale.

You couldn't mix them up, unless it was Lilliput or something.

My generation was brought up on tales of WWII.

### **"Talkin' 'bout my g g generation..."**

No wonder it's there in my head, I've been indoctrinated.

And the Wild West.

Cowboys were the goodies,  
Indians the baddies.

That's terrible.

Tanks,  
Bombs,  
Missiles.  
Explosions.

Depicting nebulous things like explosions and smoke.

Comic book conventions.

Warlord, Battle, Victor.

Roy Lichtenstein.

Camouflage.

Larry Rivers – 'Washington Crossing The Delaware'

Edward Wadsworth – 'Dazzle Ships'.

I love dazzle ships.

Battleships, galleons, submarines.

Embroidered explosions,  
patterns,  
motifs,  
decoration.

The Bayeux Tapestry.

Propoganda.

Abram Games.

Nevinson.

Bomberg.

That throne in the British Museum made out of AK47s.

### **"I can drive (drive) my very own tank..."**

**“In these shoes? I don’t think so...”**

Clumpy ones from the 1970s.  
Platform heels for men.  
In contrasting colours.  
Or hob nail boots.

**“The man in the crowd with the multicoloured mirrors on his hobnail boots...”**

Philip Guston.  
Robert Crumb.  
Claes Oldenberg – ‘Giant Gym Shoe’  
Seymour Chwast.  
Wynsors World of Shoes.  
I’ve never been in.  
Never will.  
Nothing worse than a cheap shoe.  
Brogues.  
Stilettoes.  
Andy Warhols’ shoe drawings.  
Trainers.  
Glass slippers.  
Imagine how long it’d take to wear those in?  
Those slippers that look like animals.

**“Crocodile shoooes...”**

Monkey boots.  
Clarke’s Commandoes with the animal footprints on the sole.  
Shoes for when you get bunions.  
Onions.  
Wide fitting.  
A wide fitting onion.  
Eh?  
Footbinding.  
Flippers.  
Clown shoes.  
Sandals.  
Pumps.  
Shoes made out of blue suede.  
That would be a good song title.

**“And I won’t get any older, now that angels wanna wear my red shoes...”**

**Shoes**



## Smoking



### **“Time takes a cigarette, puts it in your mouth...”**

Cigarettes and vapes don't have the same visual effect as a pipe.

Cigarettes tend to look shifty.

Unless smoked by a Hollywood actor.

With a cigarette holder.

Audrey Hepburn never looked shifty.

And vapes don't look like anything you'd instantly recognise.

Unless you vape.

Sweet cigarettes and pretending to smoke as a child.

On cold days.

Liquorice pipes.

To smoke a pipe probably means you are in this for the long haul, not simply nipping outside for a gasper.

Pipes go well with top hats – both are chimneys.

People point at you accusingly with their pipes, as if that makes them more knowledgeable.

Women tend to not smoke pipes.

I've never seen one anyway.

I'm sure some do though.

The pipe provides an excellent conduit to draw smoke (pun intended).

Smoke is pretty nebulous so can be formed into recognisable shapes or objects.

Like anvils or heads or animals.

I think Tex Avery did that type of thing.

You don't have to limit yourself to smoke either – you can move on to birds, or all manner of liquids, or different types of flora etc.

Cigars are good too.

They are big and add importance.

How does a cigar differ from a cheroot?

Is it the size or is Clint Eastwood involved?

Sometimes people (usually men) gather round after dinner and smoke cigars.

No idea why?

I have never smoked.

**“And he curses himself for the life  
he's led and rolls himself a harry  
rag and puts himself to bed”**

## Cars



### **"Here in my car, I feel safest of all..."**

I'm not a massive fan of cars.

I can see that some cars look nicer than other cars.

I appreciate their convenience and necessity.

I prefer drawing crap cars.

Cars that wouldn't actually work in real life.

With square wheels.

Cars that look as though they have been built from several different cars.

Cut and shut cars.

The cars could be American ones.

They generally look puffed up and awkward.

Muscle cars, like Mustangs.

The Dukes of Hazard.

Starsky & Hutch.

### **"well my baby drove off in a brand new Cadillac..."**

Sometimes the cars have legs.

Or a disembodied head in them.

Head in a metal box swears at another head in a metal box.

And then they drive off to go shopping or to work.

Road rage.

Rush hour.

### **"We're driving in the rush hour, ooh you send me..."**

The car drawings are generally very linear.

Overlapping.

Random to begin with, and then reconfigured.

The lines are indicative of the car body contours, inner workings, the engine, interior, fuel pipes etc.

Upholstery and seat stuffing and airbags.

And then there's the occupants.

They also have body contours and inner workings.

Sometimes they merge – a fuel pipe might become an intestine.

JG Ballard's – 'Crash'.

Haynes Manuals.

Steinberg, Guston and Dubuffet.

Vorticism too – Wyndham Lewis.

Italian Futurism without the sleekness.

I've never seen a car painted or drawn by Picasso.

Just thought of that.

Exhaust fumes are useful sometimes too – like pipes and chimneys and visual emissions.

Cars can be piled up.

This can signify a traffic jam, a multiple car crash, or a breakers yard.

Cars can signify status, or a mindset.

Freedom and imprisonment.

**"I can lock all my doors, it's the only way to live, in cars"**



## Arcs



**“Undereath the arches,  
we dream our dreams away...”**

Archways.

Tunnels.

Magnets.

Letterforms.

Piled up.

I like piled up stuff –  
it’s Philip Guston again.

He’s my favourite.

Making something with one shape.

Deliberate limitations and constraints.

I often imagine some of these  
drawings as large scale sculptures.

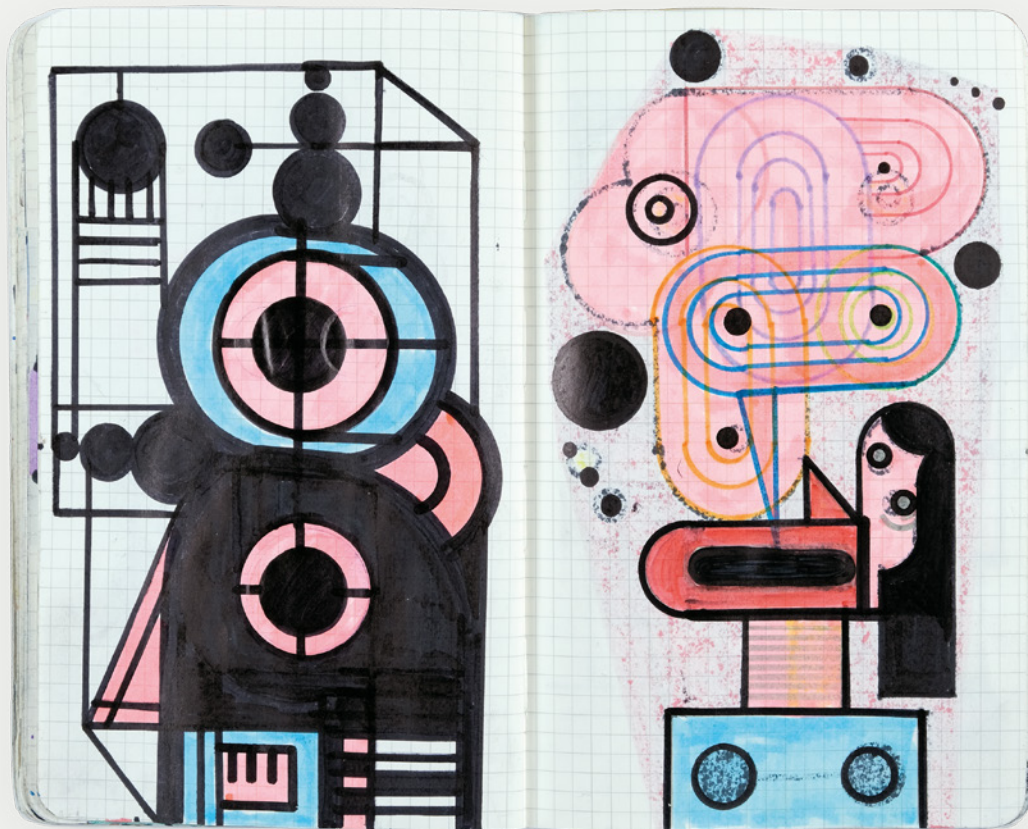
Monumental like Eduardo Chillida’s –  
Elogio del Horizonte.

Robert Indiana’s – Love.

**“The tunnel of love,  
you fall in feet first...”**



## The Songs



- In The City** The Jam
- Step Into Christmas** Elton John
- Downtown** Petula Clark
- Eight Miles High** The Byrds
- Empire State Human** Human League
- These Boots Are Made For Walkin'** Nancy Sinatra
- I Wanna Be Your Man** Rolling Stones (or The Beatles)
- Both Sides Now** Joni Mitchell
- Land:Horses/Land of a Thousand Dances** Patti Smith
- Bring on The Dancing Horses** Echo & The Bunnymen
- White Horses** Jacky (Jackie Lee)
- Happy Head** The Mighty Lemon Drops
- Broken Face** Pixies
- Mickey** Toni Basil
- I'm Popeye The Sailor Man** Popeye (written by Sammy Lerner)
- The Sound of The Suburbs** The Members
- Electric Guitar** Talking Heads
- The Beating of Hearts** XTC
- Generals & Majors** XTC
- Tin Soldier** Small Faces
- My Generation** The Who
- Tank** The Stranglers
- In These Shoes?** Kirsty McColl
- Happiness is a Warm Gun** The Beatles
- Crocodile Shoes** Jimmy Nail
- (The Angels Wanna Wear My) Red Shoes** Elvis Costello
- Rock 'n' Roll Suicide** David Bowie
- Harry Rag** The Kinks
- Cars** Gary Numan
- Brand New Cadillac** Vince Taylor & The Playboys (or The Clash)
- Rush Hour** Jane Wiedlin
- Underneath The Arches** Flanagan & Allen
- The Tunnel of Love** Fun Boy Three





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