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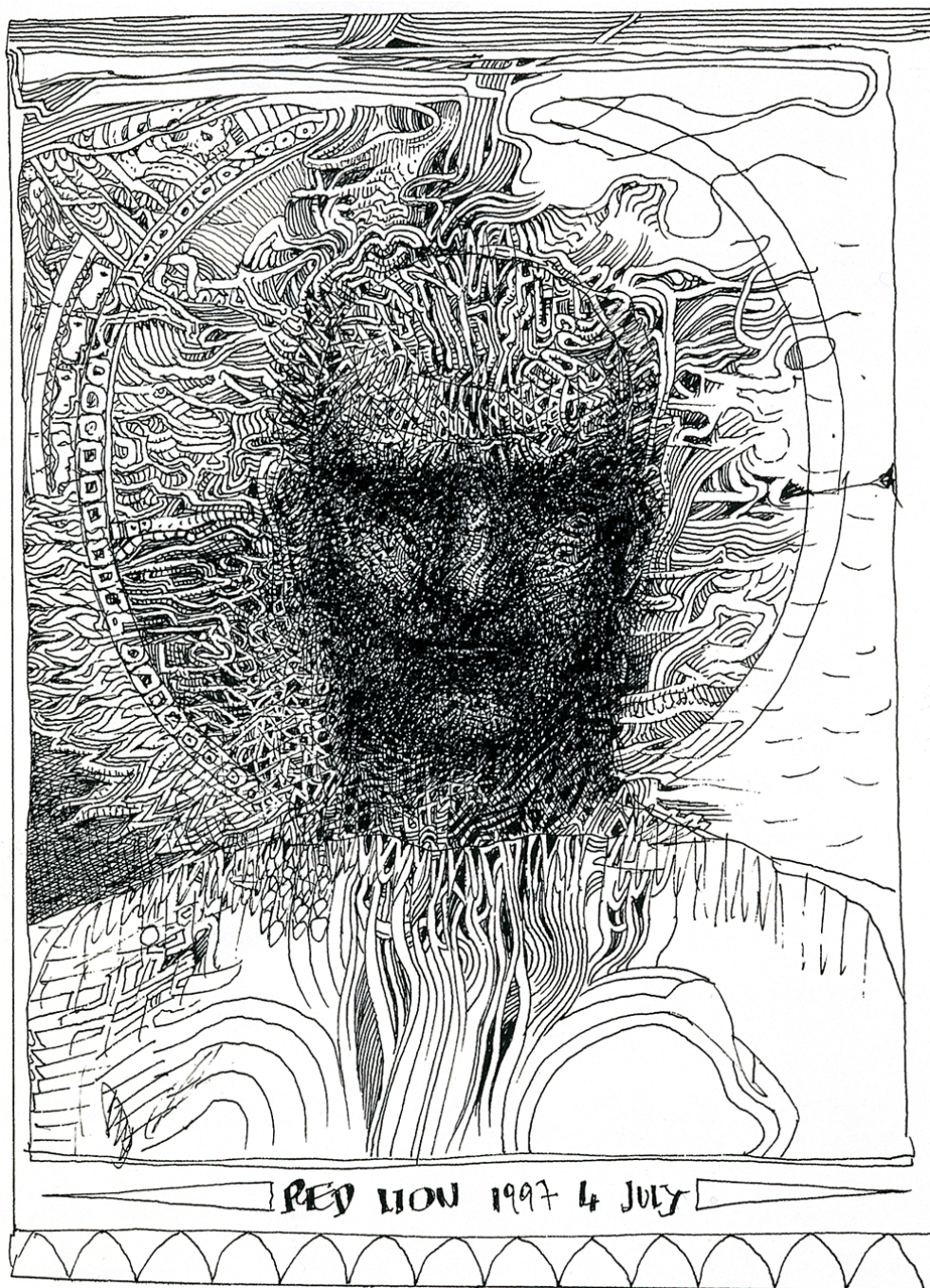


INFLUENCES - 26 APR 2016

## Portfolio: Benjamin Senior

BY BENJAMIN SENIOR

The British artist presents a selection of important images, from a Moebius comic to a Stanley Spencer mural



Moebius, page taken from a notebook, 1999, Indian ink and pencil on paper, 22 x 15 cm.  
 Courtesy: collection of Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris (acq. 1999) © Moebius Productions

### Moebius, 1999

I found my way into art through drawing – which I've done obsessively since I was three years old – and before I took up painting I thought I would go down the route of illustration and comics.

My father-in-law had a great collection of limited edition Moebius publications that I would pore over when I visited my wife's family in York. He is at his best when he creates these mesmerising, immersive sci-fi visions. Even now, I think of painting and drawing as world-building.



Gertrude Hermes, *Fathomless Sounding*, 1932, wood engraving, 38 x 27 cm). Courtesy: the Arts Council Collection © The Gertrude Hermes Estate

### Gertrude Hermes, *Fathomless Sounding*, 1932

Attracted to near-obsolete techniques, I once took Sarah van Niekerk's residential course in wood engraving at West Dean College. The course was immersive, and it introduced me to the work of a group of English wood engravers: Gertrude Hermes, Blair Hughes-Stanton and Lettice Sandford. Their connection with craft distanced from Modernism, and perhaps it was this that allowed them to develop such an idiosyncratic and playful visual language that's both parochial and witchcrafty. The challenge of rendering in relief printmaking leads to complex transitions from light to dark: black line and white line; positive spaces and negative. It's more serendipitous than you would expect, and Gertrude Hermes rolls with the inner logic of wood engraving to create elaborate abstract spaces.



Carl Dreyer, *Vampyr*, 1932, film still

### Carl Dreyer, *Vampyr*, 1932

The eeriness of this movie comes from its otherworldly light, and it was never clear to me whether the action took place in the day or the night. The scenes are light-drenched nocturnes – shadows dance and move by themselves – and it got me interested in the role of light in my own paintings. Later, I found a Paul Nash painting called *Nocturnal Landscape* (1938-46) that seemed lit by a citrus light, casting cobalt blue shadows. I've used a similar coloured light several times since.



Andrea Mantegna, *The Triumphs of Caesar: Trumpeters and Standard-Bearer*, c.1484-92, tempera on canvas, 2.7 x 2.8 m

**Andrea Mantegna, *The Triumphs of Caesar: Trumpeters and Standard-Bearer*, 1484-92**

As an undergraduate student my tutor told me that I, more than anyone else in the world, needed to see Mantegna's 'Triumphs of Caesar' (1484-92) at Hampton Court Palace on the outskirts of London.

I've made several trips to see this work over the years. They're incredible abstract paintings – spears and trumpets structure the whole scene while red cascading banners bring painterly expressiveness, crisply rendered in tempera to appear like gestural strokes that have been frozen solid. I've recently taken an interest in his 'worm's-eye view' perspective, in which the figures walk along the bottom edge of the picture: it gives the painting a particular kind of edge-awareness.



Andre Derain, *The Surprise*, oil on canvas, 3.1 x 1.4 m. Public access

### Andre Derain, *The Surprise*, 1938

In 2008, as a first year student at London's Royal College of Art, copies of the painting magazine *Turps Banana* were passed around between the students. An essay by Merlin James opened up André Derain's later work for me and set me on a path I would continue to follow to the present day.

After his involvement with Fauvism and Cubism, Derain set about recovering traditional figural art piece by piece. I think figurative painters today have to *recover* the figure: after the journey painting has made, you have to figure out a way back into it.



Stanley Spencer, *The Resurrection of the Soldiers*, 1923-32, Sandham Memorial Chapel, Hampshire. Courtesy: © National Trust Images/A C Cooper

### Stanley Spencer, Sandham Memorial Chapel, 1923-32

Sometimes I find Spencer's work hard to look at, as he never subtracts, he only adds. However, there are only a few artists who can match his ability to make magic out of everyday things.

In 2010, as I was preparing for my final degree show, I visited his murals at the Sandham Memorial chapel in Burghclere, Hampshire. They are paintings of camaraderie and community, yet the characters are alienated, reluctant to touch, interacting instead through the objects they carry. In Spencer's paintings, these objects have more visual weight than the people themselves. Unfolded maps, piles of toast, brass buckets, wooden crosses: they are strong geometric forms that set the rhythm of the painting.



Jean Hélon, *Luxembourg Allegory*, 1965, acrylic on canvas, 45 x 77 in. Courtesy: the family of Jean Hélon and the Taubman Museum of Art, Roadnoke © 2013 Jeff Hofmann

### Jean Hélon, *Luxembourg Allegory*, 1965

For me, the heroes of Modernism haven't ever been the canonical artists whose work led to abstraction, but rather the idiosyncratic lineage of neoclassical and tradition-aware painters such as Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Derain and Jean Hélon. Hélon's representations are un-straightforward. Drawing can be a frank response to natural effects, or a sign that can be moulded, or a hieroglyph. With Helion, you can sense that he drifts between these things as he tries to draw out the inner symbol of objects.

PORTFOLIO

BENJAMIN SENIOR

MOEBIUS

GERTRUDE HERMES

CARL DREYER

ANDREA MANTEGNA

STANLEY SPENCER

ANDRE DRAIN

JEAN HÉLION



MONICA DE CARDENAS

BOLTELANG

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**BENJAMIN SENIOR**

Benjamin Senior (b.1982 Southampton, UK) lives and works in London, UK. His recent exhibitions include solo shows at Monica de Cardenas, Milan, Italy (2015), BolteLang, Zurich, Switzerland (2015), Grey Noise, Dubai, UAE (2015), and Studio Voltaire, London (2013). This year, he will be the subject of solo exhibitions at Bruce Haines Mayfair, London, and James Fuentes, New York.

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