In 1974, forsaking the wisdom of my art college tutors in favour of long afternoons in the library, I stumbled upon the works of Eduardo Paolozzi, Constructivism, Krazy Kat, and a strange volume by Charles Jenks, Adhocism – The Case for Improvisation. Within a couple of years I noticed a similar admix of ideas appearing in the work of one man, but due to his reluctance to credit his artworks, time would have to pass before the author’s identity became known to me. This blend of near-Stalinist reduction, DIY aesthetics and keen sense of F.U.N. became so infectious as to cause an epidemic of impersonation. His name? Barney Bubbles. Now the truth can be told. I’m a Bubbloholic.

Paul Gorman’s excellent book Reasons to Be Cheerful – The Life and Work of Barney Bubbles, begins with some stunning mid to late 1960s graphic work for Oz and the burgeoning underground scene. His work for the band Hawkwind shows the early ‘hippy opulence’ giving way to a mix of Teutonic bombast, Art Nouveau and futuristic fantasy, all executed with finesse and melon twisting packaging concepts. And for me, there lies Barney Bubbles’ secret, namely his ability to look backwards and forwards at the same time, whilst always managing to arrive at The Very Point of Now-ness.

As it progresses, the book gives us epoch-defining glimpses of a shuddering cultural landscape, clouds of patchouli oil fade and a new world forms, accompanied by the distinct whiff of cheap sulphate. But it is the periods covered by the chapters 1977-78, 1979-81 and 1982-83 that really hold the riches. Barney Bubbles’ stylistic breadth, and the proficiency with which he approached his projects, makes one wonder if this guy ever slept? And unless you’ve been in a coma for the past 30-odd years you won’t fail to recognise the signature pieces, largely for Stiff Records: album covers for The Damned; a logo and a range of cheesy wallpaper album covers for Ian Dury and The Blockheads; Elvis Costello record sleeves; even the NME logo.

This long awaited volume reconstructs the idea of Barney as a person and an artist. Friends and acquaintances recall their dealings with the man, sometimes with great poignancy, such as ex-Stiff Records’ staffer Susan Spiro recalling Bubbles’ ability to see the beauty in everyday objects. There is ample evidence also that alongside his own image-making he was no slouch when it came to art direction, drawing on the talents of some of the most forward thinking photographers of the era, Brian Griffin and Chris Gabrin amongst them. His sharply conceived photographic set-ups captured the Bright New Tomorrow of the New Wave, a welcome antidote to the nihilist No Future nonsense of early punk.

Reasons To Be Cheerful: The Life and Work of Barney Bubbles

By Paul Gorman. Adelita, £24.99

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If there’s one small criticism of the book it would be that in the rush to canonisation we may be glossing over the fact that there were others operating at the time, NTA Studios for example, and in the interior design field, people like Tommy Roberts were forcing incongruous ideas and materials into new settings. But what Bubbles did was to show the way ahead to a luckily placed generation who immediately understood and responded to his mix of styles and choice of materials. Many of those early ‘impersonators’ (some of whom ‘fess up’ in the book) went on to define the subsequent cultural period, and all of them (me included) owe this man a huge debt.

This book is a treasure trove for image-makers across all media, and a reminder that the graphic bombs Barney Bubbles dropped are still reverberating. In the words of the late great Ian Dury: there ain’t half been some clever bastards.

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When the first edition of Reasons to Be Cheerful was released in 2009, reviewers pronounced it “joyous, playful and rich in meaning” and Mojo named this marvelous compendium its Book of the Year. This first edition quickly sold out, making this reissue a welcome opportunity to see Bubbles' work anew. More than a quarter century after his death, graphic design genius Barney Bubbles remains a powerful influence on contemporary artists. Bubbles is perhaps best known for the legendary record album covers and posters he created for Hawkwind, in styles ranging from Art Deco to Constructivist to black light/acid trip. It traces Barney Bubbles’ career as a graphic designer, mainly focusing on his brilliant record sleeves produced during the 1970s and early 80s. It’s rich with stories and anecdotes about that hugely exciting time in British music history, when the power of the record sleeve was emerging as an art form, and when the imagery on a cover could mean as much as the music itself and often became emotionally tied to you and your experience of that music. I was first introduced to Barney Bubbles and a lot of the records that were adorned with his art by Pat Duffy when we were working together as partners.
I was first introduced to Barney Bubbles and a lot of the records that were adorned with his art by Pat Duffy when we were working together as partners of No Days Off studio. It’s fair to say that I became fairly enamoured and you can certainly see his influence in the work we produced at the studio. When looking through this book, what amazes me most is how fresh it all looks. Adorned with bright and cheerful colours, this London-based illustrator’s work comes strewed with characters and scenes that depict the beautiful madness of everyday life. Ayla Angelos – 17 September 2019. Regulars / Double Click Satellite photography, drawing tools and interactive logotypes feature in Double Click September. Reasons to Be Cheerful book. Read 4 reviews from the world's largest community for readers. Described by The New York Times as a hero to young designers...Â Paul Gorman has lovingly and meticulously gathered an impressive monograph of the works of graphic artist Barney Bubbles (Colin Fulcher). Bubbles’ prolific work for Stiff Records and related labels are how I know him best, but the book spans from his early art school days, to meticulous work for British band Hawkwind (whose musical style ranged from space and prog rock to proto-punk) to genre-defining works for Stiff punk and new wave founders like Ian Dury, The Damned, Elvis Costello, and. A biography, Reasons to be Cheerful: The Life & Work Of Barney Bubbles by Paul Gorman, was published in 2008. The book was welcomed as a long-overdue recognition of Bubbles' achievements[1][12] and selected by British music magazine Mojo as its “Book of the Year”.[13].Â In January 2012, BBC Radio 4 broadcast a documentary, In Search Of Barney Bubbles, written and produced by Mark Hodkinson.[7]. In summer 2012 Gorman curated “The Past The Present & The Possible”, which presented 250 examples of Bubbles' finished artworks as part of the exhibition White Noise at the 23rd International Poster & Graphic Design Festival in Chaumont, France.[16].