

# ‘I THINK I HAVE HAD QUITE AN EXCITING JOURNEY’

Artist Adrian Barron is featured in this month's Chase magazine. AMY FORDE, marketing and communications assistant at Rotherham Open Arts Renaissance (ROAR), met him and found out more about his work.



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**F**OR this month's art feature I spoke to artist Adrian Barron, who is running a Laser Engraving print workshop at ROAR on September 21 (full details via link at the bottom of the article).

He brings to Rotherham a great portfolio of experience in the art world, and has already been involved with some projects within the local area including a solo exhibition at The Coterie Gallery (May-June 2016), the River Banksy project at Riverside Library, and two workshops at ROAR.

I have always associated printmaking with Adrian, and there is no wonder as to why; he studied at Norwich School of Art where he was awarded the Noel Spencer Prize for Printmaking, later going on to gain a postgraduate degree in Fine Art Printmaking at The Slade School of Art.

He has taught printmaking for many years, most recently at the Working Men's College in London.

His passion for this practice is apparent when you speak to him, but what was interesting for our conversation was learning more about his other work, and importantly how the two thread together.

After completing his MA, Adrian made a connection which would shape the next decade of his life: "I met this guy who was

from Belize, which is where my mum's from, and I was able to get the Duveen scholarship through Slade to go and study Maya ruins."

Whilst he was there studying Adrian made another important link as he met a local architect who owned his own farm which had "returned back to nature".



Depicting Mimetic Rivalry which leads to violence.

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From a young age it was clear that Adrian had a connection with nature. In fact "connection" doesn't seem to do it justice. He tells me he spent his childhood "drawing animals and insects from books" and finding his own patches of land to garden on in the wasteland.

The meeting in Belize led to Adrian living in the country for ten years, working as a co-ordinator on a sculpture park. Adrian explains "it fulfilled my dreams of being in nature", as he lived without electricity or running water and was surrounded by insects and birds.

Part of this work was creating what he described as "a cathedral made of trees", a collaborative project which he worked on with a fellow co-ordinator and the local people. The cathedral was made up of 15 different types of tree, with over 200 planted. It started with a lot of research, looking at popular rain forest trees, analysing how they grew and then mapping out where they should be planted on the plan. The cathedral was the same size as Westminster Abbey and although never seeing it in the flesh, Adrian does tell me he has seen many photographs of the piece as it has grown. He says "the time to really see it will be in 250 years' time".

Alongside this Belizean heritage, his father was British and described himself as a "Wear Valley man". He also took occupation in the Army which meant that Adrian moved around a lot as a child. These factors impacted on his sense of identity which was something he explored once he was in the art world: "As an artist you are meant to be working with things which revolve around you and I realise that begged the question am I British? Am I a coloniser, colonised or a slave?"

I wonder then how this work connects with printmaking and he explains: "Nature throws up multiples without symmetry, there is a sort of asymmetry to it."

Adrian goes on to say that as humans what we try and do is create order and symmetry, but built into printmaking is the process of multiples: "In historic terms Chinese print actually builds into it nature and that idea of asymmetry; you may have a print of irises but there is no order to the irises."

This South Eastern Asian tradition, which is also seen in Japanese printmaking, contrasts the British idea of



Part of the series *The Hunt for Apollo*, Apollo being the name of a rare butterfly.

wanting to create a structure so a pattern can be easily repeated. He explains that this is where the search for his identity comes into it again: "Although I feel very British 99 per cent of the time, I think that's why I collect South East Asian prints and study Maya ruins, that search for that alternative viewpoint I get."

As an established artist, although Adrian humbly rejects this term, I wonder what

has changed in his outlook on his art now: "I think I have got less worried about what people think now (...). When you're in your 20s you're hoping for success because all you want to do is make the artwork. So you know the success will give you the ability to carry on making work."

Adrian has always gone his own way, something he thinks has been very beneficial to his practice: "People who I know who made it when they were 25 when they came out of their MA, I don't know if they're ever happy because their work never changes after that point. It becomes craft." He elaborates: "I think I have had quite an exciting journey. I've made prints, I have made formal prints, I've made multiples, I have made prints to raise money to make sculptures, I have made sculptures, I have travelled a lot for my art, an exciting thing in its own right. I have seen things many people will never see."

His most recent creative endeavour has been filming, recently showcasing a piece to positive reviews in London. His attitude towards creating work he neatly summarises: "It's in me to make things so I do."

As a member of ROAR Adrian has enjoyed working in the town: "I wanted to give something to Rotherham. It's a place which I feel has been neglected and I feel I am giving to a worthy cause. It's got so much potential and people forget it."

After travelling all his life and struggling with his sense of place, he has recently made South Yorkshire his home, making permanent roots in Rotherham's twin Sheffield. I get a sense this firmly marks an ending and a beginning, and definitely the start of another important phase in his artistic journey. After all Sheffield is the City of Sanctuary.

You can come to Adrian's Laser Engraving workshop at ROAR on September 21 from 10am to 4pm. Buy your tickets via eventbrite at <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/laser-engraving-workshop-with-adrian-barron-tickets-67035816933?aff=ebdshpsearchautocomplete> or via the office at [team@rotherhamroar.org](mailto:team@rotherhamroar.org) or 01709 835747.



Cha Cha Cha - work shown in the Museum of Fine Art in Taiwan. A dance of different motives and rhizome.