

# PAUL BLOW

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The Dorset (UK) illustrator believes in concept over style - the only way to overcome boredom and bleeding eyes.

Could you tell us about yourself and your background (qualifications, experience etc).

My name is Paul Blow and no I'm not related to either the abstract British painter Sandra Blow or the fashion editor Isabella Blow both of whom unfortunately died earlier this year. As a kid the name Blow was a curse but now because it's so different it stands out from the crowd - it works really well graphically which helps create a kind of brand.

I live and work in Dorset near the coast but went to college in Maidstone, Kent and then Brighton in Sussex gaining a BA (hons) and then an MA. As a teenager I vowed never to come back to Dorset as I saw it a stifling and provincial place to be and not a place to grow - however the beauty and the people are the best in the world so it seems the only place to live at the moment and raise my family.

When did your interest in illustrating begin? Is it something you always wanted to do?

To be honest at school back in the mid eighties the careers advice given was useless, illustration was not even mentioned, I had no idea what I wanted to do. I enjoyed art and technical drawing - now obviously no careers advisor would suggest go and become an artist I mean what kind of career is that? And to take my interest in technical drawing on would mean becoming a Draughtsman, which would mean getting an "A" Level in math's which was just simply not going to happen. So I just went to Art College and discovered it there through a great tutor Neil Breedon, suddenly illustrators who made a living out of what they did were teaching us and they were cool.

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**How would you describe your style?**

I always hate this question – I guess my style is an extension of my personality the way I draw or paint a line will only ever be unique to me – Students in their third year always worry that they don't have a style – I always say in perhaps a more polite way but fuck the style – what is it YOU want to say? And then a way of working or "style" will come.

**What influences and inspires your work?**

Simply living a rich and varied life. The world around feeds my soul and an interest in new and challenging ways of living and thinking will always be at the core of what I do.

**What has been the most exciting job you've worked on to date?**

I did some work for a design company who were putting

together a whole branding; packaging advertising campaign for a small ethical bike and skate clothing company based in Wales called Howies. They had no money but because I liked the company and believed in what they were trying to achieve I agreed to work with them – and then to my complete surprise some of my favourite illustrators were also working on it - Paul Davis, Jeff Fisher, Marion Deuchars, Billie Jean, Graham Carter, Richard May.

Illustration



We were asked to customize old beaten up wardrobes each to a theme either Toxic cotton or fish farming etc. We took over this design studio filled it with these wardrobes and just had great fun getting messy with paint – all being filmed for the web and drinking plenty of beer. A gallery wanted to exhibit all the wardrobes and then suddenly Paul Smith wanted them in his shop in London as did Selfridges and they've been featured in magazines and so the

wardrobes have now travelled around the country having a great time. I have no idea where it is now – but I'm sure it's being looked after and not being made into firewood.

**What challenges have you faced in your career?**

Probably the challenge that all illustrators face each week – waiting for that damn phone to ring with a commission. Thankfully I'm to be booked up most of the

time. However, about half way through my career I did go down a creative black hole. I had given up doing any figurative work and was only interested in objects – realistic paintings of simple minimalist objects sitting within large colour fields very chic. This was such a narrow specialist area the only work I was getting was from Food magazines and I was competing with photographers to capture the delights of high class cuisine – I soon became very bored but did



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put on a pleasing amount of weight - I mean I couldn't let it go to waste once I'd painted it could I?

Anyway I was so bored I somehow regained my belief in some aspect of working figuratively and found that I didn't need to rely on photographic reference I could just make it up. This was a revelation to me, I'd never had the confidence to do this but found that whilst it was a challenge it opened up my way of thinking and presented me with all sorts of possibilities, I could create my own Paul Blow illustration world.

**What advice would you give to someone starting out?**

If you get bored or frustrated with what you're creating - challenge yourself and make the change.

**How do you begin the creative process?**

I take a deep breath and stare at the blank page until I force the ideas out or my eyes start bleeding - whichever comes first. I sometimes write down lots of words a sort of word association game. But to be honest I just draw. It's what I'm best at and I find that doing one thumbnail after another leads to that all important creative idea. The idea is King in illustration, content over style is the only way to create longevity in this business. Perceived "styles" and fashions by their very nature will come and go but the creative idea is timeless

**Do you ever have creative slumps? How do you break out of them?**

It's that whole eyes bleeding thing that's the wake up call - I take a break from the studio and go grow some vegetables or ride my bike cross country and get covered in cow shit or go and sit on the beach with friends and take a good long hard look at the bigger picture and then a new challenge usually takes form.



sculpture 1



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**What do you enjoy about being an art lecturer?**

I teach both at degree level and what's called Foundation a single year where students are introduced to all the aspects of the creative world be it sculpture photography or printmaking. I'm often that first point of contact for students leaving school and wondering what the hell they can do - they don't want to be a fine artist and they don't have the maths to be a draughtsman - but I doubt I'm cool. But it is that belief that I'm giving back to a system that changed my life and hopefully I can inspire students to believe that they too can make a career in a creative industry.

**How important is the recognition that winning an award brings?**

Kind of a loaded question - like I need to massage my ego once in a while? Well no I say the same to all my students that entering awards is healthy simply because it heightens the profile and the brand, it can only be a good thing when it comes to creating more chances of work being generated. There is no such thing as luck - you and only you can create that all important cascade effect - work generates work - it can take time or it can happen overnight but it still takes hard work.

**You've exhibited extensively in Britain and New York. Do you find much difference between audiences in different countries and how they react and interpret your work?**

No I think that what I do is a purely visual craft so anyone from any culture has the ability to decipher my work - but I'm always amazed at what other people bring to my work, levels of understanding which were not my intention but then add another viewpoint to the work. It's at that point that I lose ownership of the work and it takes on a life of its own - which is simply amazing to me.

**Do you travel often with your work?**

Unfortunately no not enough - I would love to do more. Time is never on my side.

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