

'An Impossible Project'

Imagine, Observe, Remember, Peter Blegvad (250pp, £18, Uniform Books/Amateur Enterprises)

I *imagined* that this book was called *Imagined, Observed, Remembered*, a document of work that had previously happened, something in the past. I thought that it would be a catalogue of Peter Blegvad's drawings neatly arranged in grids, a gathering-up and tidying-up of his illustration, drawing and fine art work.

Book to hand, I *observe* that it is more than I have imagined. The title is in fact a directive, a statement of intent, a brief manifesto; the book is far more than I had supposed. There is explication, discussion and explanation, some autobiography; the author suggests on the back cover that '[i]t's a kind of phenomenology project, a way to look at different ways of looking'. Fair enough.

I had forgotten how beautifully designed and printed Uniform Books are, how quirky and original the subjects of their book is. Blegvad fits right in, if 'fitting in' is a term that can be applied such work unclassifiable. Blegvad is a self-confessed pataphysicist, that surrealist take on the philosophy of science, and here that critical stance is put to good use, with its discussion of psychonauts, mnemonic drawings, memory theatres and discussion of 'how to be a seer'.

But there is a serious thread running through this witty and engaging book, an informed and clever consideration of how memory, observation and thought differ, yet combine to produce an often compromised or unreal version of the world. 'This is an art project, but I think of it as a kind of outsider science. By drawing the things I see in my mind's eye I like to imagine I'm making the invisible visible', writes Blegvad, but for me the essential component is not the artistic journey into self-expression and the imaginary but that the imagined subjects are then considered in relation to the subject in the real world. This *frisson* or comparison, the abuttal of imaginary and actual, helps us consider how we see the world, as is the third image produced (the *remembered*), where the artist chooses and adapts visual information from the earlier two works.

I do not know what I will *remember* of this book but I know it will engage me for several more weeks this first time through, and that it will be a book I return to. It is eminently informative, entertaining and questioning, sometimes provocatively so. It is physically pleasing to hold, it is visually pleasing to the eye, it is challenging to the mind; I will perhaps off the word *wondrous* as a condensed summative response.

I already have other memories or rememberings of Peter Blegvad. His music, both solo and as part of Slapp Happy and Henry Cow, all now available on CD; his *Leviathan* cartoons, which were gathered up and published as *The Book of Leviathan* by Sort Of Books; and *Kew Rhone*, a previous and very different volume published by Uniform Books. There are more personal moments too: being part of a small audience for a solo concert at The Mean Fiddler in the West London wastelands; some longwinded and hilarious conversations when we

both taught at Warwick University; and a more recent writing workshop where Peter got my bemused creative writing students to design 'angel traps' to facilitate the capture of song lyrics from the air around them.

'Imagination, observation and memory act together to provide the subjective and objective data we need to navigate our various worlds', declares Blegvad. And now we have a manual to not only help us gather that data but also to understand why we should.

Rupert Loydell

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