

GAGOSIAN GALLERY

Culture24

Paul Noble: Welcome to Nobson at the Gagosian

By Jennie Gillions



Exhibition: Paul Noble: Welcome to Nobson, Gagosian Gallery, London, until December 17 2011

If you like your art intricately detailed yet unsettling, Paul Noble's latest exhibition will be right up your street.

English artist Noble has spent 15 years working on Welcome to Nobson, a collection of graphite and pencil drawings and sculptures delineating an imaginary geography he has called Nobson Newtown.

Walking into the gallery space it is immediately clear how it has taken so long to complete. The first drawing on the left, entitled Hell, is almost architectural in its precise detail.

Next to it, Heaven is more impressive still – each stone in the brickwork is beautifully rendered and visitors will doubtless be awed at the patience that has gone into creating this exhibition.

Noble has called on diverse influences to create his fictional landscape: Hieronymus Bosch and Henry Moore are evident in the centrepiece of the show, a vast depiction of Nobson Newtown in its entirety.

It is dizzyingly complex. Noble has drawn hundreds of plastic waste sacks, trees with handcuffs hanging from them, thousands of textured rocks, balls and chains, intricately carved gateposts, park benches that drip with waste...you could spend literally hours standing in front of it and still have something new to spot.

The skill and forbearance involved is as incredible as the world Noble has created. There is something disturbingly dystopian about Nobson Newtown. Firstly, there are no living organisms. In Hell there is an open gate, but in Heaven the walls are enclosed.

The work Public Toilet is an imposing mountain of stones, a cloud surrounding it raining huge droplets over drawings of urinals and showers, while effluent floats down the river. It is not an appealing place to live, and clearly it is not supposed to be.

The only signs of life are the Henry Moore-esque sculptures Couple and Three, which sit in plinths in the middle of the gallery. They are, not to put too fine a point on it, explicitly phallic and fecal, a three-dimensional reflection of images in both the centrepiece and Ah, a smaller drawing in the second room.

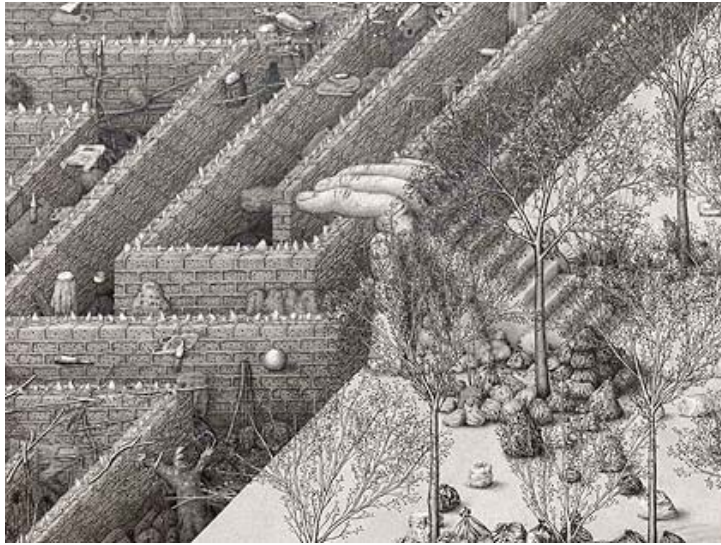
Ah is where Nobson Newtown comes to life. The Bosch influences are apparent in Noble's deliberately perverted, phallic characterisations.

A sign within the drawing suggests that Ah represents a labour camp, and there is certainly a Hellish element to it. To emphasise the point, the sculpture that takes up half the floor space is of a corpse, made out of stone and laid out like a cyst burial.

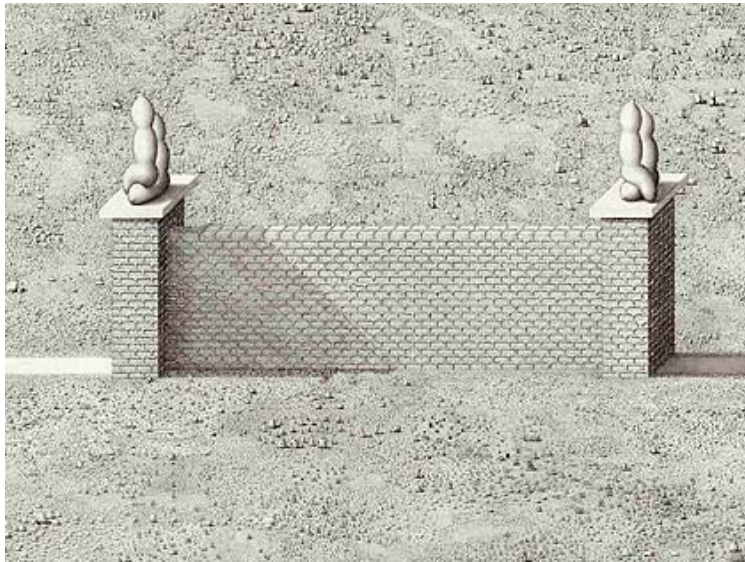
Next to it is what looks like a ritual instrument - a wooden bell with a decoration of hazelnuts, onto which Noble has engraved pictures of fingers.

Through Nobson Newtown's genesis (he is, after all, God in this world) Noble has depicted our modern urban landscapes as he sees them, rather than how we want them to be.

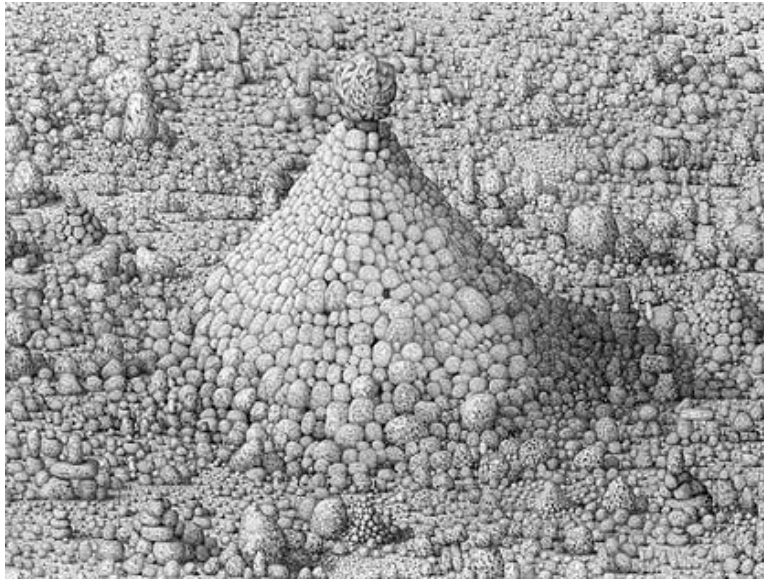
It's impressive and absorbing, but it certainly isn't pretty.



Welcome to Nobson © Mike Bruce



A Wall is a Path © Prudence Cuming Associates



Cathedral © Mike Bruce



Nobson Newtown has a decidedly phallic twist