

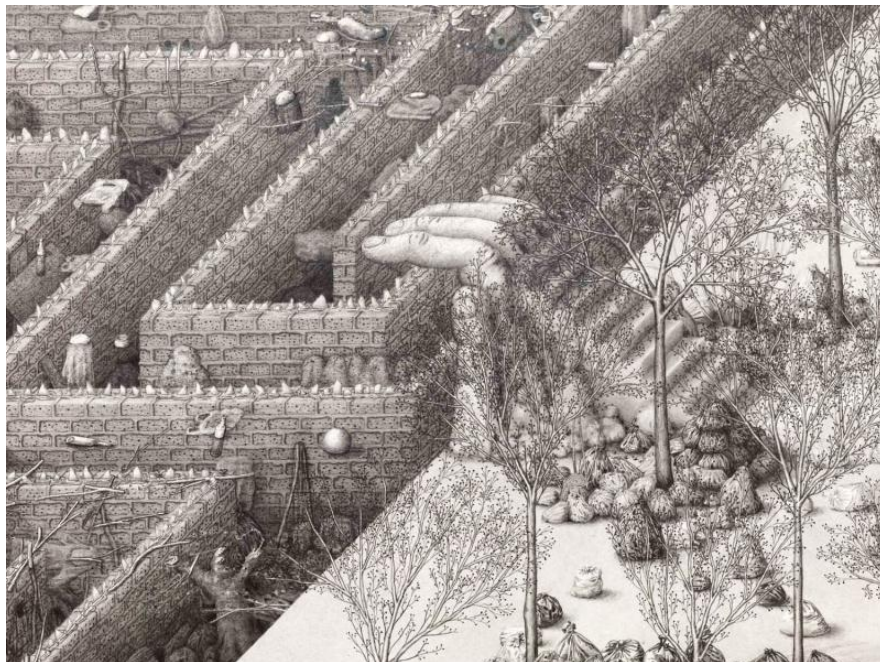
GAGOSIAN GALLERY

the arts desk

Paul Noble: Welcome to Nobson, Gagosian Gallery

Obsessive-compulsive art is compulsively viewable

by Judith Flanders

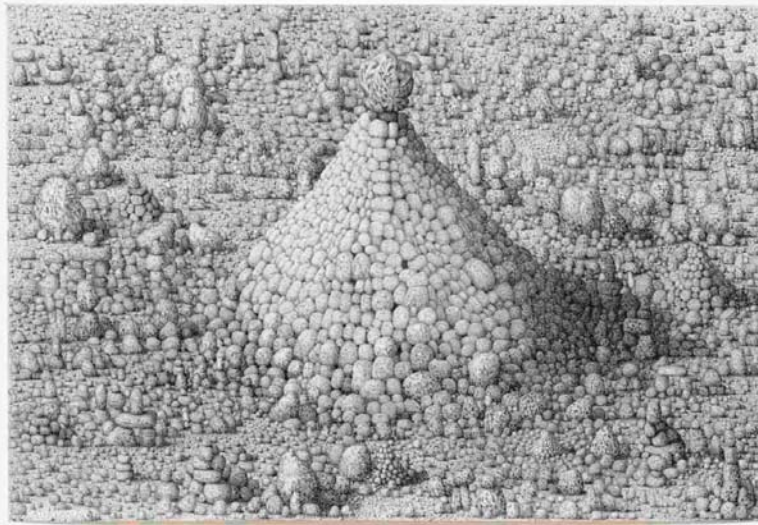


Paul Noble's 'Welcome to Nobson' (detail) Photos by Mike Bruce

Fifteen years ago Paul Noble began to create an imaginary city, Nobson Newtown, with preparatory sketches and drawings in his meticulous pencilled style. Now we have a Noble-ian paradox: in this penultimate contribution to his Nobson Newtown series, the visitor is greeted at the door with a "Welcome to Nobson" sign, and 15 small drawings of the "Genesis" of Nobson Newtown.

Genesis it truly is, for the drawings take the words from the Bible, and illustrate them with Noble's characteristic little turd-shaped men, producing a Newtown creation-myth as they form their world. The last drawing of the series urges us (them?) to "be fruitful and multiply", and with that we pass through a beaded curtain, the physical manifestation of the beads that appear in so many of Noble's drawings, into the main gallery, to be faced with two huge pink marble turd sculptures set on plinths, which both guard and announce the show's focal point, a seven-metre-wide drawing of Nobson's park.

Noble's style is Obsessive-Compulsive Deluxe, via *Viz* and R Crumb. In the final room there is an earlier drawing, a sort of composite that shows more clearly how cartooning was the conduit through which Noble was led into art. There is also more than a little of the Outsider Art element in his work, recalling artists such as Achilles Rizzoli, the 1920s architectural draughtsman who spent decades creating imaginary worlds.



It is Noble's concentration on our cityscapes, and what used to be called "garden suburbs", his delving into the themes of how our cities are created – what we want them to be, contrasted to what they truly are – that takes his work further than that of these more insular artists, whose work is, ultimately, only ever about itself. His turd men, his focus on rubbish, on parkland versus dying shrubbery, on monuments admired, and monuments

ignored or desecrated, make Nobson more than simply a charming cartoon-like world.

Noble takes a high, cartographic-like viewpoint, similar to those used in medieval maps which promised that dragons lurked at the ends of the known universe. From this vantage point, the omniscient artist looks down on his creation, and finds it, un-biblically, not good, but instead filled with waste, both obvious (his little turd men) and more occluded - in this case, in the main image, endless rubbish sacks.

The lamp posts and park benches all end in sad phallic droops, dripping more waste

The central square here is fenced off, enclosing a double stone monument which echoes the monument in his *Public Toilet* (1999) which hangs nearby. In that drawing, a decade ago, the monument appeared plainly behind a mountain of, we must assume, shit, and at its base lurked a labyrinth of cubicles, with showers, drains, sinks, towels, mirrors and the other accoutrements of lavatoria. In the most recent Nobson square, the excretory functions surround the square in different guises, whether among lacy filigree trees on one side, or stunted pathetic bushes on another. The lamp posts and park benches all end in sad phallic droops, dripping more waste. Among this, Noble's careful, obsessive line dances and flits, creating minor little epiphanies along the way.

Further images line the walls concentrating on single aspects of Nobson (pictured above, *Cathedral*), but they lack the obsessive focus and concentration of the main piece, and can only seem minor in comparison. Next door, a floorpiece of marble "stones", in vague outline resembling a body, has more

aura, and more interest. It is obsession that seems to me to be the key to Noble's work, and the key to our own cities in the sky.