



peeks through Baker's *Crucifixion (Some People Might Think You Look Ridiculous)*; the artist with New York dealer *Adjustments*; and with designer Paul Smith

East End show sold out and Fennell became Baker's manager. But it was in 2008, when Baker was asked to join a debate on urban art in LA, that his world really changed. Roger Klein, creative director for Magnarella, flagged up Baker's work and Magnarella flew to London to meet the artist. 'He took me out to dinner and said "What do you want, how can I help?"' He then put his music publicity machine into action and organised a sell-out Shoreditch show. Klein, meanwhile, bumped into a friend of Damien Hirst's at the Groucho club and Hirst got interested too, turning up at Baker's next show, in New York, and buying in bulk. Cohen, Blain and Mugarab also appeared and bought several works apiece: prices had risen from £3,000 to between £12,000 and £16,500. 'That show provided an inkling of what could happen,' says Baker. 'I had to get VAT registered.'

When Fennell called from the London Art Fair in January, to say he'd sold a rabbit painting for £40,000, he says 'my wife and I sat in silence. Now I'm that cliché; I can't afford my own art.' Not that he minds. 'What's great is the idea that I'm not on my own, that somebody gets my work. I don't care who doesn't like it: the fact that someone is spending money is affirming, I can just get on with it.'

Baker certainly takes risks, not only painting 'dogs and boats and rabbits that could be ridiculed,' but with the new darkness that pervades his latest work. 'There's a lot of death in this show,' he admits. Why? 'Because it's looming. I see my parents getting old. Of course death poses the question of whether it's worth doing anything, but the answer is yes, because the moment is intensely important: the present transcends all knowledge of dark stuff.' As the father of a nearly-16-year-old, he's also keenly aware of the mortal danger of youth. In *Not All The Things I Have Are All The Things I Want*, he has painted two dead 'junky lovers' taken from forensic photographs posted online as warnings by bereaved parents. 'Forensic photos have such beauty, clarity, they hide nothing.' Having layered paint onto the canvas, he then scraped most of it off,

leaving no flesh, just clothes, 'the crap they leave behind, the trainers. I must write to the parents...' he trails off.

He and his wife have five children, two each from previous marriages and one between them. His step-daughter is one of his best models, she features in several paintings and allowed herself to be covered in goo to make some of the 18 busts for this month's show, *Every Thing Must Go*. 'The boys aren't as good, they wriggle and fidget,' he says. The child busts wear animal masks, polished to look like bronze. 'The masks are cultural ephemera, cheap tat, but turn them bronze and put them on a plinth and they're something in a Greek temple. I like to show things in different ways.'

It is quite disconcerting to be alone in a room with *Charming* in front of a picture of a dog with the words 'Cunt Struck' gouged into the wood beside it. He laughs. 'I think most men are, don't you?' Actually, he says, it's about the way dogs are humanised, we've bred them to be part of our families, they're seen as adults, and yet 'they'll f*** each other whenever. I think

most men are like dogs, that's why they get henpecked,' why they'll move social group if they get a new partner. I once painted a rook and gouged out the word "f***er" underneath - rooks have a bad rep. I used to have that label but life changes, what fulfils you changes.'

The show will be like walking into a sweetshop, he says. 'I want it to be charming, reminiscent of old fashioned cartoons.' Baker's juxtaposition of nostalgia with sex and death is grown-up and playful, his work hauntingly beautiful and intentionally bothersome. 'There's an impulse to understand, that's what stops me giving up and becoming a plumber,' he says. 'But there's also a simplicity I love about a painting; there it is, so simple and with so much meaning.' **ES** *Every Thing Must Go* is at *Mercer Street Studios, WCI (020 8735 1800) from 7-31 July*

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The who, what and YBAs of tomorrow

BEN RIVERS, 38

Kate MacGarry Gallery

The Somerset-born Londoner can't stop winning prizes, most recently the Baloise Art Prize for his film *Sack Barrow* at Art 42 Basel. Rivers films feral children and presents them as precious things rather than oddities. He uses 16mm film, not video. Can be seen at the Southbank Centre on 4 July.

DOUGLAS WHITE, 32

Paradise Row Gallery

Takes society's detritus - exploded tyres, decaying trees and recycling bins and creates strange, monumental sculptures. Recent work includes passing an electrical current through sheets of MDF to produce lightening-like scarification. A solo show at Paradise Row in October promises a spectacular sculpture reminiscent of the scared remains of an elephant carcass.

ELOISE FORNIELES, 30

Paradise Row Gallery



A multi-disciplinary Anglo-Argentine artist, interested in social politics, ritual and feminism, Fornieles is known for her performance pieces.

These include serving soup to an audience with her mother, and putting herself to sleep with pills for 48 hours while members of the public whispered into her ear. She has performed at the Zabudowicz Collection and is now moving into painting and sculpture.

HAROON MIRZA, 33

Lisson Gallery

Won the Northern Art Prize earlier this year and a Promising Young Artist Silver Lion at the Venice Biennale. He lives in Sheffield and makes installations that blend popular culture with sculpture through sound, electronics, junk and appropriated material. Political, critical of religious dogma and a great DJ.

LAURA BUCKLEY, 34

unrepresented (watch this space)



Projects videos onto moving or reflective objects. The Irish Buckley uses image, sound and film to create installations. Unafraid of the personal, she often films her family life. Her

first solo show was at Mother's Tankstation in Dublin last year and she worked with Mirza (above) for the Zabudowicz Collection.

KARLA BLACK, 38

Mary Mary Gallery, Glasgow

The Glasgow artist represented her country at the Venice Biennale in June and is nominated for this year's Turner Prize. She combines traditional materials such as powder paint, oils and paper with cellophane, medicine and food in her abstract sculptures.