

Press Release - for immediate distribution

Simon Larbalestier

A Pixies Retrospective 1986 to 2009

Snap Galleries, specialists in rare and exclusive music photography, are proud to host a retrospective exhibition for acclaimed photographer Simon Larbalestier in April 2010. This will be the first exhibition in their new Piccadilly premises in central London.

The exhibition brings together, for the first time anywhere in the world, two distinct yet complementary bodies of work by Larbalestier:

- Historic studio based photographs that appeared on Pixies record sleeves from the 1980s and 90's, and;
- New images created in South East Asia in 2008/9 specifically for the lavish Pixies' box set project, *Minotaur*

The entire exhibition, with supporting commentary from Simon Larbalestier, is also being released as an iPhone and iPad app.

The Pixies are one of the most pioneering bands of the late 80s and influenced countless musicians, including Nirvana, Pearl Jam and Radiohead. The covers of their five studio albums, all of which featured the surreal photographs of Simon Larbalestier, with graphic design by Vaughan Oliver, were a vital part of the band's image.

Oliver's graphic design work has already been the subject of a number of exhibitions. The purpose of this retrospective is to focus on Simon Larbalestier's photographs in isolation, stripping away the design element and showing them as a coherent body of work their own right.

"If there were a 'fifth Pixie,' it would have been Simon - his work so suited what they were doing." Vaughan Oliver, Pixies graphic designer

Simon Larbalestier chose to include a macabre photograph in his final degree show at London's Royal College of Art in 1987. Inspired by Gustave Flaubert's haunting work *The Temptation of St Antony*, Larbalestier had created an elaborate and slightly unsettling scene in which a bald headed man with an outrageously hairy back sat with his back to the



Surfer Rosa (1988)

camera, face obscured. Parts of the scene covered by a silk drape, into which a fish had been nailed.



Nimrod's Son (1986)

Pixies graphic designer Vaughan Oliver attended the show, saw the image and knew instantly that it fitted perfectly with the brief he had received from Pixies front man, Charles Thompson (aka Black Francis). That photograph was used on the cover of the 1987 Pixies EP *Come On Pilgrim*.

Larbalestier's photographs subsequently appeared on the covers of the Pixies four studio albums;

- Surfer Rosa*, featuring a beautiful dancer in an elaborately staged set featuring dark drapes, a fish, a crucifix and a smashed Pixies guitar head;

- Doolittle*, with its halo-clad stuffed Monkey on the cover, together with a series of portraits referencing the macabre lyrics and showing textures, decay and desolation in a lavish inner lyric booklet;

- Bossanova*, with its Pixies planet and finally *Trompe Le Monde*, with its surreal bulls' eyes

Decay, isolation and the visual impression of time ravaged objects were key elements in Larbalestier's work, and photographs from this early period were created using what Larbalestier describes as his 'scientific approach'. This was characterised by elaborately staged sets, where images were shot mainly on black and white film on large static cameras, and then sepia toned later in the darkroom to add feeling and atmosphere. Early work such as *Come on Pilgrim* and *Surfer Rosa* were shot on Polaroid type 55 film, which yields both a positive print and a negative image that can be used in an enlarger. The distinctive patterned borders of type 55 film served to heighten the sense of decay and otherworldliness.

"Everything about the Pixies imagery was constructed, often built as a small set as in the Doolittle series or a life size collage set for the Surfer Rosa series. Everything was sourced and built from scratch in front of the camera lens. The vision was a constructed one - not a document of real life." Simon Larbalestier

The exhibition features rare images from these early sessions, and visitors to the gallery exhibition will also be able to see, for the first time, Simon's original type 55 polaroids from *Come on Pilgrim*, and *Surfer Rosa*. These original polaroids have never been exhibited before, and include a number of unpublished outtakes from those important sessions.

Minotaur

On the face of it, the contrast with Larbalestier's recent work on the Minotaur project could not be greater, but in many respects there are strong parallels.

Minotaur is the title of the recently released Pixies' box set: a collaboration between The Pixies, Vaughan Oliver, Simon Larbalestier, and US box set pioneers Artists in Residence.

***"I like that the sheer size of Minotaur moves it into the category of being an art object as opposed to being just a CD box set. It's not necessarily something you'd put next to your stereo, but on your marble coffee table with your other art books."* -- Pixies' Charles Thompson (Black Francis)**



The Minotaur Box Set

Minotaur pushes the boundaries of how the Pixies body of music can be presented as a lavish and coherent whole. Oliver and Larbalestier have used the same music as inspiration, but applied a 21st century perspective to create a completely new body of photography and designs for *Minotaur*. Oliver set out to give *Minotaur* a coherent look and feel, rather than simply putting five album packages, that were designed at different times under varying circumstances, into one box. This was an opportunity to go back through the themes and the ideas covered at the time of the five albums, and treat them in a deeper, more substantial way.



Cuban (2008)

Larbalestier approached Minotaur using very different techniques to those used for the original Pixies' album sessions. For Minotaur, he worked on location in South East Asia, chosen because it was perfect setting for the macabre and surreal images he was looking for. He used a point-and-shoot digital camera, and worked in colour as much as black and white. Working outside the studio setting gave him access to people, places and material that he simply would not have been able to photograph if he had adopted his previous 'scientific approach'.

"Simon shot some amazing images that I think will surpass what we did first time around. His new work is full of power, it carries a very strong visual poetry. Simon has the ability to imbue the inanimate with emotion, with sensibilities." Vaughan Oliver

Despite the differences in approach, there are common threads running between the original images and the new pieces. A neon sign in the form of a bare breasted dancer is very much a 2008 take on Surfer Rosa. Unusual juxtapositions of subject matter, religion, decay, death and texture still play a key part. Hair is a good textural example: the two photographs that bookend the show chronologically (1986's Nimrod's Son - that man with the hairy back used on Come on Pilgrim - and 2009's Minotaur - a close up portrait of a bull, and the last photograph Simon took in Thailand) both feature hair in abundance.

Visitors to the gallery will be able to examine the Minotaur box set, which will be on show throughout the exhibition.

Other information

Simon Larbalestier is available for interview.

A selection of images are available for press use in support of any editorial content.

The exhibition runs from 17 April 2010 until 29 May 2010 at Snap Galleries, Piccadilly Arcade, London W1

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