

For immediate release

JACK BILBO

4 September – 3 October 2014

Private view: Wednesday 3 September, 6 – 8 PM

Press preview with Rodolphe von Hofmannsthal: 10 AM



I Don't Like Private Capitalism..., c. 1948

Ink and gouache on paper

16 ¾ x 11 ½ inches (42.5 x 29 cm)

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of works by Jack Bilbo (1907–1967) in the London gallery, organised in collaboration with The Estate of Jack Bilbo and England & Co.

Spanning four decades of artistic production, the exhibition will focus on Bilbo's ink drawings from the 1940s, highlighting his unique pairing of imagery with text that is exemplified by *I Don't Like Private Capitalism*.... Depicting the artist with his characteristic dark beard and pipe, dressed like a vagabond in tattered clothing and drooping top hat, the work is inscribed with "I Don't Like Private Capitalism, I Don't Like State Capitalism—I Do Like My Own Capitalism".

A self-taught artist, and during his lifetime a legendary bohemian, Bilbo was known for his larger-than-life persona, which he actively cultivated through autobiographical texts that included, for example, accounts of being Al Capone's bodyguard in the 1930s. In his 1948 autobiography, he described himself as "an Artist, Author, Sculptor, Art Dealer, Philosopher, Psychologist, Traveller, and a Modernist Fighter for Humanity".

Through his inherent individualism, artistic drive, and eccentricities, Bilbo's work evokes and references both his childhood history from Berlin as well as the atrocities he faced as a German Jewish refugee during the twentieth century. A surreal middle ground is achieved within his work, using political satire and dark humour to create an overture which connects outsider to insider, reality to fiction.

Jane England, Director of England & Co. and foremost scholar on the artist's work, notes: "Many of Bilbo's drawings reflect the Socialist outlook and anti-Capitalist views he shared with other German artists such as George Grosz and John Heartfield. Bilbo's satiric drawings with their ironic captions convey his deeply felt political ideas—he

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took the role of an outsider in his life and work, and was a passionate and irreverent social critic. Other drawings depict his bizarre, sometime sexual, and often violent fantasies: they emerged from doodles and improvisations and reflect his obsessions. The titles he inscribed on them are as idiosyncratic as the drawings: surreal, absurdist, crude, often humorous”.

Born as Hugo Baruch in Berlin in 1907, the artist adopted the name “Jack Bilbo” in 1922. He fled Germany in 1933 after campaigning against the Nazis, who confiscated his family’s business, a world-renowned theatre outfitting company. He ran a bar for a few years in Spain, before settling in London in 1936, the same year he began to sculpt and paint and exhibit his works. After being interned in 1939 on the Isle of Man, Bilbo returned to London and founded the Modern Art Gallery in 1941, where he showed works by Pablo Picasso and Kurt Schwitters alongside unknown artists, and held evening readings of Dadaist poetry and his own fantastical stories. In 1946, he moved to Weybridge and created monumental figurative sculptures in cement in the gardens of his home, until relocating to the south of France in the early 1950s. Bilbo was reinstated as a German citizen in 1956 and returned to live in his native Berlin, where he continued to paint and exhibit until his death in 1967.

Bilbo is survived by his daughter, Merry, and his grandson, the artist Ben Woodeson.

For all press enquiries and to RSVP to the 3 September press preview, contact

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