



**Ben Browton;
The TOXIC project.**

2008 to present

INTRODUCTION

The artist Ben Browton has made it his *raison d'être* to confound expectations, both his own and that of his audience. His practice has spanned over thirty years, much of it away from the spotlight. From punk to the present.

He recently archived a selection of this body of work online at www.cacaphonique.com. The word eclectic could have been coined for this artist, yet common themes abound like threads that irrigate the output; the use of colour-coding, heart forms, questioning of personal identity, a positive nihilism and dark humour. As Siegmar Gassert described Ben Browton's work "Empyramid" in 1995; *"Partly survival camp, partly a derision of lifeless existence. In a simple negative dialectic an exhortation for more light, more pleasure, more awareness"*¹.

The current body of work, "the **TOXIC** project", that had its genesis in 2008 expresses all these elements. Always a critically self-referential artist, Ben Browton followed a clue (a set of orange overalls in a charity shop) that appeared one day in the wake of a series of personal crises, that would eventually lead to a return of his creativity and his own personal stability. These clues or coincidences were written about in "SynchroDestiny" by Deepak Chopra and relate to the notion of synchronicity that has fascinated Ben Browton for many years.

It was also at this time that he re-entered education, studying simultaneously Counselling and Indian Head massage at Hastings College. Both these courses, one Western, the other Eastern, provided fresh inspiration to feed the nascent **TOXIC** notion, with their emphasis on healing and health. Again, the study of healing, alternative medicine and metaphysics has long fascinated the artist.

At this time, Ben Browton came across the book 'Agent Orange' "Collateral Damage" in Vietnam' by Philip Jones Griffiths, which records the mutational effects of the horrific use of defoliants by US forces in Vietnam in the late 1960's.

As is often the case, time tends to reveal the workings of the "zeitgeist". This is visibly manifest in the project and is a result in part

of the self-fulfilling prophecy of the enquiring gaze. Since Ben Browton started working on the theme of toxicity, it is a word that has found currency in contemporary life, whether referring to the foundering financial system that has led to the current recessionary uncertainty “*toxic debt*”, to the toxicity that afflicts the natural environment due to industrial pollution “*a toxic orange dust cloud in Hunter, Western Australia giving children asthma and respiratory problems²*” or even the toxicity that seems to pervade our human relationships and leads to neurosis and paranoia. “*...the boys grew up, in the words of a barrister, amid routine aggression, violence and chaos*”. It was, he said, a “*toxic family life³*”.

In this publication, Ben Browton will reveal a selection of works from his recent output, works that will attempt to unravel the rebus that is the **TOXIC** project.



Miss Straight decals 2009

Portraits



TOXIC (Visionary Smoke) 2009-2010



TOXIC (Miss Straight) 2010

Collages



TOXIC (skull*chakra*coffin)



TOXIC lovers (2009/2010)



TOXIC cross (heart*skull*chakra)



TOXIC cross (coffin*skull*foetus)

Objects



TOXIC clock
digital print, recycled clock, pigments
36 x 36 x 4 cms



TOXIC logo (plaque)
digital print, mdf, wood, pigments
38 x 38 x 8 cms



TOXIC calendula officianalis box (closed) 2010

Found wooden box, photoprint, foamboard, wooden balls, pigments
19 x 15 x 13 cms



TOXIC calendula box (open) 2010

Dried organic Calendula officianalis flowers, found box, glass, beading, plastic skull & crossbones, Calendula seeds, pigments



TOXIC mask 2009
fibreglass, pigments
life-size



TOXIC (Visionary Smoke Company) moisturiser 2009
Almond oil, beeswax, Basil essential oil, Calendula flowers
6 x 5 x 5 cms

Drawings



TOXIC “found pushchair” drawing 2010
digital print, pigments
21 x 34 cms

BEN BROWTON - ARTS CURRICULUM VITAE

1958 Born Isle Of Wight 1985 Graduated from Goldsmiths' College, London (BA Hons Fine Art)

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2007 IDENTITY PARADE, Electric Palace Cinema, Hastings/**2004** CAMERANTICS, Indo Bar, Whitechapel, London (as part of Alternative Arts East End Photo Month)/**1993** Installation of PARATYPES at Hales Gallery, Deptford, London **1992**/FUNDAMENT-FIRMAMENT, Soho, London (for Alternative Arts)/**1991** RetroSpecTive, Carpenters Road Open Studios, Stratford, London

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2001 PASSION, Gasworks Gallery, London/**1995** TRAVELLING LIGHT, Ausstellungsraum Klingental, Basel, Switzerland (supported by British Council)/**1990** Contemporary Arts Society Market, London/**1989** ANGELS ON THE FLYPAPER, Diorama Gallery, London/**1988** FRAGMENTS OF FALSE HOUSES, Pomery Purdy Gallery, London/**HOMAGE TO THE SQUARE**, Flaxman Gallery, London/**1987** THE SHELF SHOW, Kettles' Yard, Cambridge/Kunstlerhaus Klenzestrasse, Munich, Germany (supported by British Council)/'X' SHOW, Barbican Arts Centre, London/**1986** Riverside Open, Riverside Studios, Hammersmith, London/**ART IN RUINS**, Bloomsbury, London.

Ben Browton lives and works in Hastings, East Sussex.

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References;

¹ "Travelling Light", published by Hales Gallery, London 1995

² BBC Radio 4 'Today' programme, broadcast May 18th 2010

³ Guardian Saturday, April 2010

With grateful thanks to;

Adam Piggott (photography)/Kevin Carias (post-production)/Charlotte St. Aubyn (photography)/Alice Turner (plaster)/Penny Panagi (fibreglass)/Jayne Freeman (make up)/Jo Coriat (model)/Mark Noode (web)/Paul at Martel Colour Print, Hastings



Endcovers; TOXIC "Poison to the People" 2010

