

# Doodling dandy

INTERVIEW: Sexton Ming talks about how best to view his art and which song he'd most like to have written.

ARTIST, poet, musician, record label supremo, Sexton Ming's work rate shows no sign of abating.

A new solo art exhibition showcasing Knacker's Yard, his latest book of "doodleish drawings," opens simultaneously with the release of his latest album, A Taste Of Wood - a collaboration with The Tiger Lillies' Adrian Stout.

The exhibition is taking place at the Aquarium Gallery close to London's Euston station at the suggestion of gallery owner Stephen Lowe.

Although the doodling aspect of Ming's art was touched upon in previous exhibitions, Lowe wanted this area come to the fore.

Subjects include babies - Crappy Nappies - Kurt Cobain hurting himself, Frank Zappa hurting someone else, plus the preaching dog Wise Mutt.

"A character I've developed who tells you useless pieces of information," declares Ming.

He also presents his own version of a gay sex manual, featuring fisting, boiled eggs, carrots and red hot pokers. Not only is it erotic, it's also nutritious.

Ming's ongoing battles with mental illness become constant hurdles which he attempts to overcome with his art.

"I'm trying to exorcise my demons in a humorous way.

"Some people see the humour and just view it as throwaway, but the most intelligent look beyond that and see that I'm making serious comments.

"If people want to see the work purely as being funny, fine, but I'm trying to say something with my humour," he says.

When questioned if Knacker's Yard summarises life, he noncommittally replies: "Can be."

Alongside the book and exhibition is A Taste Of Wood, one of the most accomplished albums Ming has released in his career of over 25 years.

A great admirer of the vaudeville noir of The Tiger Lillies, his collaboration with their double-bassist Adrian Stout is an inspired combination.

After swapping Tiger Lillies CDs with releases from Ming's own Rim Records label, Stout approached Ming to record together "as an experiment."

Ming took this mindset further by employing Johnny Dance and Nigel Burch for respective lead vocals on Chick Career and This Will Be Over - a bold step, as Ming's own distinctive, earthy tones are a major factor in his recorded output.

"With Chick Career, my original vocal was too harsh," Ming says.

"I thought: 'What we need for this song is a smug, smooth-bollocked type of character.' Johnny Dance's voice was ideal for the song.

"On This Will Be Over, I wrote the song in the wrong key for me. I was trying to sound like Tim Buckley when I attempted it.

"When I used to see Frank Zappa live, he would just dump his band and smoke 40 cigarettes in one show and then, occasionally, do a guitar solo.

"I like the idea of being a puppet master. The next band I play in, I'd just like to play bass. I don't like being in the front much."

It's an astonishing admission from a compelling and arresting vocalist.

This Will Be Over and the majestic Hippo's Paddling Pool both vividly portray Ming's changing attitude towards the environment, primarily swayed by the arrival of daughter Lucy in 2004.

"Before Lucy was born, I thought: 'We're all going to die and we deserve it.'

"But, now, I feel we have to preserve it, for it'll be like, 'Daddy what did your generation leave for me? Your generation lived in excess and I'm living this hard life'."

I Wish I Was Eno arose from Ming and Stout musing about which song they would have written to bring them financial security.

"At first, we suggested Cornershop's Brimful Of Asha because the singer Tjinder Singh bought two houses purely on the strength of that, but, then, we figured Brian Eno's Another Green World is on every fucking documentary.

"The song is basically about a guy who's down on his luck, sleeps rough, and wishes he was Eno."

Dance Off The Building twists accepted forms of human emotions.

"The song is about a happy suicide. He's got his favourite food, his favourite music and he wants to die.

"He doesn't want to throw himself off the building, he wants to dance off."

Future plans include a follow-up to his poetry anthology Failed Intellectual, further releases on Rim Records and possible live dates with Adrian Stout.

His ambition is to "record a double CD concept album with a band called Tonka. We'll do one gig and split up - then reform in 20 years."

Knacker's Yard runs at the Aquarium Gallery from May 27 to June 17 and A Taste Of Wood is currently available through new label Crapping Clown.