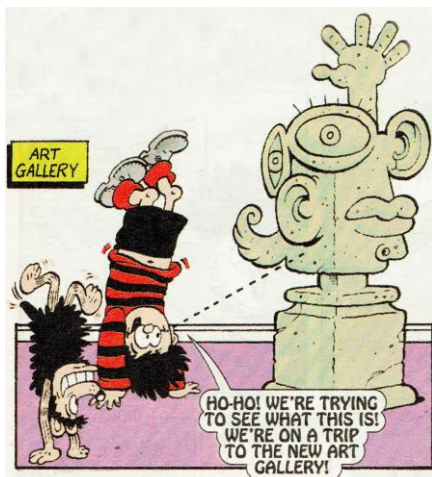


**SOMERSET  
HOUSE**

# BEANO: THE ART OF BREAKING THE RULES

21 October 2021 – 6 March 2022

A major exhibition at Somerset House



## EXHIBITION OVERVIEW:

- **Over 100 comic artworks** from the Beano archive exhibited, including **original drawings** never previously seen in public, charting the comic's 83-year history of mayhem-making
- **Over 50 contemporary artists** feature, brought together as some of **today's greatest creative rule-breakers**
- All contributing artists share a rebellious sensibility, often mixing comedy with subtly coded social commentary, such as artist duo **Gilbert & George**, sculptor **Phyllida Barlow** and artist **Sarah Lucas**
- Some artists also express a very personal appreciation of Beano through their works, acknowledging the influence of comics on their artistic practice, including writer **Alex Wheatle**, Oscar-winning animator **Nick Park** and artist **Nicola Lane** who reimagines Dennis as he turns 70 this year
- Audacious contemporary artworks hang on the walls of **larger-than-life recreations of Beano's most iconic settings**, as if stepping inside the pages of the comic
- Interactive installations for all the family include: **Peter Liversidge's** patchwork of protest signs, giving visitors the chance to do away with the old world order and choose a new rule for life, painted live in the exhibition; jukebox filled with music influenced by Beano's rebellious streak – curated by **Bob Stanley of indie dance band Saint Etienne** – inviting visitors to choose the soundtrack to the show, and a **new catapult game** allowing audiences to take (virtual) aim at the world's great works of art

**Tickets now on sale, priced at £16 (concessions, child and family tickets also available) via [www.somersethouse.org.uk](http://www.somersethouse.org.uk).**

This October, Somerset House presents *Beano: The Art of Breaking the Rules*, a major exhibition celebrating the **world's longest-running weekly comic's mix of mischief, mayhem and fun.**

First released in 1938 and still crafted weekly from its home in Dundee, **Beano has always applied one simple rule - rules should be broken.** Set to be a show like no other, this landmark exhibition explores both Beano's and contemporary art's unruliness and irreverence, through the eyes of extraordinary artists who embody the Beano spirit of rebellion.

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Contributors include young fiction writer and recent subject of Small Axe film **Alex Wheatle**, sculptor **Phyllida Barlow**, artist duo **Gilbert & George**, Turner Prize-winning artist **Martin Creed**, Oscar-winning animator **Nick Park**, artist **Sarah Lucas**, Fourth Plinth artist **Heather Phillipson**, comedian and pop star **Chris Sievey** (otherwise known by his alter-ego **Frank Sidebottom**), **Bob Stanley** of indie dance band **Saint Etienne**, **Horace Panter** of ska band **The Specials**, one of the few female artists involved in the original Pop Art movement **Jann Haworth**, painter **Beryl Cook**, Scottish multi-media artist **Rachel Maclean**, French artist **Philippe Parreno**, Swiss artist duo **Fischli/Weiss**, rising star **Rene Matić**, typography artist **Babak Ganjei**, video artist **Ed Atkins** and artists **Ryan Gander**, **Bedwyr Williams** and **Hardeep Pandhal**. Inspired by the antics of Beano's mischievous heroes, they have all been brought together by their own spirit of rebellion and sense of playfulness, and their audacious artworks will be shown alongside original artwork from Beano's archive, in an **exhibition that is just as unconventional as its content**.

Curated by artist and lifelong Beano fan **Andy Holden**, *Beano: The Art of Breaking the Rules* opens with a large selection of **original comic drawings**, never previously seen in public, chosen across its 4,000-plus editions (to date) and rare archive artefacts relating to Beano's 83 years of irreverence. As well as Beano's beloved band of characters - **Dennis and Gnasher**, **Bananaman** and **Bash Street Kids** to name just a few - it also introduces their maverick artists from **Leo Baxendale**, who brought **Minnie the Minx** to life, to **Laura Howell**, who draws the all-round rebel today.

Visitors will then take a trip through Beanotown itself with **larger-than-life recreations of Beano's most iconic backdrops**, as if stepping inside the pages of the comic. Hanging on the walls of Bash Street School, the homes of Gasworks Road and Bunkerton Castle, and situated outside on the streets of Beanotown, visitors will discover an **eclectic collection of contemporary artworks from today's greatest creative rule-breakers**, who push the boundaries in their own original and wonderful ways. A number of works have been commissioned especially for the show and some – such as popular painter **Beryl Cook's** illustrations for children's book about Rufus the Rat – have never previously been released to the public.

Some of the contemporary artists will express a very personal – and frequently playful – appreciation of Beano, incorporating it directly into **brand-new works**, providing fresh perspectives on the comic masterpiece.

A new recording will feature young fiction writer **Alex Wheatle** telling his own **fascinating story**, focusing on how reading Beano became his safe space growing up in the notorious Shirley Oaks children's home in Surrey. In a recent film about his life as part of the **BBC's Small Axe** series, he is seen clutching a stack of comics as he is driven away from the home as a young adult – his most prized personal possession.

Artist **Nicola Lane** is creating a **brand-new comic strip for the show**, allowing time to enter into the frame by **imagining Dennis as a 70-year-old**. Beano introduced its most famous star in 1951 after the Beano editor, George Moonie, heard a music hall song called 'Dennis the Menace from Venice' – coincidentally in the very same week that the American comic strip of the same name also debuted in US newspapers.

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The exhibition will also showcase award-winning cartoonist **Steve Bell**'s imagined strip of **Bash Street Kids all grown up** with Toots having divorced from Plug and Smiffy being a leading member of a government think-tank.

Recent Central St Martins graduate **Rene Matic**'s new commission for the exhibition **observes the way that Dennis is always perceived as trouble**, often before he has done anything at all, resonating with the experience of many who grow up Black-British. Dennis's disregard for rules often sees him cast as the villain, even though it is the rules themselves that might be unjust.

**Flo Brooks**' paintings depict his own experiences as a queer transperson, identifying with character **Les Pretend**, who was introduced into the comic in 1990. Each week Les becomes a different animal, object or person by adopting its characteristics, suggesting we can become whomever, or whatever, we want to be.

Leeds-based artist **Simeon Barclay** presents a new neon, two-way mirror **inspired by Bash Street Kids character Plug**, who believes he is so good-looking he can smash a mirror by winking at it. The two-way mirror first shows a neon silhouette of Plug, before flipping to another neon sign saying 'ugly' below which the visitor can see their own reflection. Barclay challenges traditional conventions of beauty by taking the charge out of the word 'ugly' and instead owning it, just like Plug.

Inside a set of **Beanos Record Shop** (based on the former real-life store in Croydon, once the largest second-hand record shop in Europe), visitors will find a **fully functioning jukebox curated by Bob Stanley of alternative pop band Saint Etienne**. The jukebox will be filled with a selection of music that has been influenced by Beano's riotous spirit and visitors are encouraged to take control of the sound of the show by playing their favourite tracks from it. Meanwhile, **Horace Panter of two-tone and ska band The Specials** makes a splash with a Beano pop art makeover, as Dennis meets David Hockney in his LA swimming pool.

Whilst not all of the contemporary artworks feature overt references to Beano, they all share a rebellious sensibility, often mixing comedy with subtly coded with social commentary, touching upon Beano's recurring themes of **Class and Identity, Education, Feminism, Art and Food** (in fact Beano is short for 'bean feast', a 19<sup>th</sup> century term for a celebratory meal).

An original model of **Heather Phillipson**'s Fourth Plinth piece, THE END, will sit inside Beano's editor's office. At first glance, an appetising blob of whipped cream topped with a juicy cherry has, in actual fact, a fly squatting on one side and a drone perched on the other, and the cream is melting around the base of the sculpture, almost on the verge of complete collapse. The seemingly mundane subject of food is also used to cultivate such tensions in a new painting from recent RCA graduate **Olivia Sterling**, featuring a slapstick scene from a children's tea party to address identity in modern-day Britain.

An archive of street artist **Mark McGowan**'s (aka Artist Taxi Driver) stunts is displayed for the first time, from pushing a peanut along the floor with his nose across London in protest at student debt, to attempting to cartwheel from Brighton beach to London to highlight the damage caused to British shores by people taking stones home.

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**Bedwyr Williams'** new series of drawings take a satirical, sideways look at the players of the 'art world' and their affectations, whilst **Cory Arcangel's** re-creation of Arnold Schoenberg's Three Piano Pieces, op. 11, edited from YouTube's sub-culture of piano-playing cats, pokes fun at this cultural fetish.

Winner of the Max Mara Art Prize for Women, **Emma Hart's** surreal speech bubbles put regional accents in our mouths, exploring how our pronunciation of certain words often reveals our position within a class structure and questioning whether we can ever fully escape the position in society into which we are born, while French artist **Philippe Parreno's** mass of speech bubbles suspended in the air are devoid of any words or thoughts, allowing audiences to imagine the conversations themselves.

At the end of the exhibition, artist **Peter Liversidge** – who created a colourful patchwork of signs in east London paying tribute to NHS and key workers, which went viral last year – hosts an interactive workspace. **A new rulebook for life will be created by current Beano readers** in advance of the exhibition, where it will go on view. After seeing this new world order, visitors can choose the rule that they'd also like to live by and get it **painted onto a protest sign live in the exhibition**, to go straight up on display.

Visitors can further unleash their rebellious streak by **slinging rotten tomatoes at the great (virtual) works of art using that iconic Beano weapon, the catapult**, and enjoy the splats and splots of their destruction.

The special exhibition shop will feature an exclusive range of limited-edition Beano x Somerset House items alongside a selection of original and inspired gifts for all ages, from clothing, accessories, collectibles and limited edition prints to homewares, games, books and stationery.

**Radley London** will be the official handbags and accessories partner of the exhibition, presenting a playful limited-edition collection of bags, card holders and purses featuring iconic Beano characters and motifs for the duration of the exhibition. **Walker's Shortbread** will be the official shortbread partner, offering their premium selection of pure butter shortbreads, from traditional hand-rolled Highlanders to Raspberry Swirl Shortbreads, all still made to an original family recipe in the Scottish village of Aberlour.

Many of the new artist commissions have been kindly supported by the **Adonyeva Foundation**.

**The Kusuma Trust's** support is making Peter Liversidge's interactive workspace possible.

**FOR PRESS ENQUIRIES, PLEASE CONTACT:**  
[press@somersetshouse.org.uk](mailto:press@somersetshouse.org.uk)/0207 845 4624

### **NOTES TO EDITORS**

**Tickets now on sale via [www.somersetshouse.org.uk/beano](http://www.somersetshouse.org.uk/beano)**

**Address:** Somerset House, Strand, London, WC2R 1LA

**Transport:** Underground: Temple, Embankment / Rail: Charing Cross, Waterloo, Blackfriars

**Website:** [www.somersetshouse.org.uk](http://www.somersetshouse.org.uk)

**Somerset House Facebook:**

[www.facebook.com/SomersetHouse](http://www.facebook.com/SomersetHouse)

**Somerset House Twitter:** @SomersetHouse

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### **ABOUT SOMERSET HOUSE**

*London's working arts centre*

Somerset House is London's working arts centre and home to the UK's largest creative community. Built on historic foundations, we are situated in the very heart of the capital.

Dedicated to backing progress, championing openness, nurturing creativity and empowering ideas, our cultural programme is ambitious in scope. We insist on relevance, but aren't afraid of irreverence, and are as keen on entertainment as enrichment. We embrace the biggest issues of our times and are committed to oxygenating new work by emerging artists. Where else can you spend an hour ice-skating while listening to a specially commissioned sound piece by a cutting edge artist?

It is this creative tension – the way we harness our heritage, put the too-often overlooked on our central stage and use our neo-classical backdrop to showcase ground-breaking contemporary culture – that inspires our programme. Old and new, history and disruption, art and entertainment, high-tech and homemade, combined with the fact that we are home to a constantly shape-shifting working creative community: this is our point of difference. It is what we are proud of. And it is what makes the experience of visiting or working in Somerset House inspiring and energising, urgent and exciting. [www.somersethouse.org.uk](http://www.somersethouse.org.uk)

### **ABOUT BEANO STUDIOS**

Beano Studios is a rebellious content business, driven by insight and data, which creates, curates and delivers entertainment for kids of all ages worldwide. The Studio produces diverse entertainment across multiple destinations; including TV, digital content, theatrical projects, consumer products, plus the legendary comic and annual.

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