



[David Jacques: The Irlam House Bequest](#)
[Walker Art Gallery](#) , Liverpool
Reviewed by [Denis Joe](#) February 2011

Another year, another Liverpool celebration!

If any city in the world thrives on it's past, it is Liverpool. Whether atoning for the slave trade ("Psst! Wanna buy a guilt trip?) or Ringo ("don't call me 'Ringo'") Starr making a prat of himself when "kick-starting" the year of Capital of Culture in 2008, nothing seems too tacky to present to the outside world.

But there seems to be a move to shrug off the nostalgiaopolis image of Liverpool. Following a

relatively successful visit to the Shanghai World Expo 2010, the council, with the support of local business, opened a business embassy in London. With a recession kicking in and everybody, seemingly, seeing the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse on the horizon, this move seemed to suggest an optimism, bordering on revolution: Liverpool city council seemed to suggest that one way out of a recession was investment.

Over the past few years, Liverpool's dockland has been reshaped. One of the most stunning architectural developments is Mann Island. It's as if the architects have drawn on Liverpool's shipbuilding past, to create structures that, confidently, point towards the future.

And it is this element of mining the past in order to suggest a way forwards that informs the work of David Jacques. Winner of the Liverpool Art Prize 2010 and nominated for this year's Northern Art Prize, David has been fascinated by time and the movement, and movements, of people. In a previous work, Por Convención Ferrer (selected for inclusion in the prestigious EAST International 09 Exhibition) Jacques offered a world to us through a work that played with our idea of time, presenting it, not as a linear path, but as a potpourri of images and concepts from the 'Scotland Road Free School', to 'the zonal mapping of 'sleeping sickness' in the Belgian Congo', Thomas De Quincey's residing at Everton, and a Critical Mass bike ride through Manchester City Centre.

Central to much of Jacques work is the banner. The banner is the object that carries the symbols and slogans of movements. In The Irlam House Bequest David has created a new type of banner.

The Irlam House Bequest launches Liverpool City Of Radicals 2011. Inspired by the history of trade union banners and the entrepreneur George Tutill, whose workshop dominated banner production in the nineteenth century, The Irlam House Bequest is a fictional subversive banner workshop “discovered” in an abandoned flat in Irlam House, an actual tower block in Bootle.



What we have is the typeset for these banners as a central piece surrounded by smaller works which bear no resemblance to our idea of ‘the banner’, but have the same impact. Type 6 Phantom Limb, for example, shows a clenched hand. But it is not a fist there is something half-hearted about it. The folded fingers seem to represent a symbol for the deaf rather than the confidence of the fist we normally see on political banners.

And yet, when we look closer at what is behind this symbol we see people congregating; preparing to take action. It is as if the symbol is meaningless; it is action that is the thing that pushes the movement of time and people who make history.

And it is not only symbols, but their meaning. Type 1 and Type 2 show us the images of garlands. Perhaps redolent of the role of the left, as cheerleaders for the class struggle. Whilst Type 3 has the image of a wreath, inference of the more contemporary, liberal, idea of the class-struggle having died. Yet these works suggest otherwise. We see action taking place beneath the images. One gets a sense of zeitgeist, looking at these pieces, and considering the uprising of people in North Africa and the Middle East.

There is also a bit of playfulness going on. Jacques resorts to that good old British institution, the double entendre, in order to make a point. Type 3: Japanese Knotweed presents us with a garland image whilst underneath we see a scene of a demonstration and the slogan “Smash The White Paper”.



Jacques is one of the most original artists around. His work challenges us to see beyond the superficial and the hype and even the propaganda. Once those veils are removed we can see the very human struggle for life going on. If Jacques were simply a left-wing artist we would

probably be bombarded with caricatured proletkult: empty imagery presenting us with a crude workers idyll. Jacques shows a great deal of respect for his audience and recognises our ability to see beyond the bullshit. There is a softness to much of the imagery in The Irlam House Bequest, which, perhaps, is to do with the light tones of the work. It was on the bus home that the overall impact of the exhibition hit me.

The Irlam House Bequest is one of the most powerful works of art that I have seen in a long while. I have been familiar with David's work for the past four years. It seems as if the only movement he makes is going forward. This is, to date, his best work.

Just one last comment. One of the ironies of the The Irlam House Bequest that came to my mind was the use of typesets. It was a strike by printers in Moscow, demanding payment for loading punctuation onto the typeset in presses, that led to the Russian revolution of 1905.

Photographs by Adrian Bailey. Free admission until 3 April 2011.