Bill O'Brien

Until a couple of years back, those exploring the tiny village of Devoran in Cornwall would sometimes come across a wild-eyed and long-haired gentleman with his garage door wide open, painting big canvasses covered in mystical symbols and images. Later the same gent, in a more dapper outfit than his paint-spattered work clothes, might be seen quaffing Guinness in a nearby pub (he liked to joke it was 'fluid dynamics' he was working on] nearby, and discussing other artists, string theory, past civilizations, or the mystical order of things, with his friends and acquaintances, in fact anyone who would talk and listen.

Bill O'Brien spent over a decade in this Cornish village. Born 'up North', he'd previously been a miner, a plumber, a builder, a squatter in London, a college lecturer, and friends with Joe Strummer before he formed the Clash. He'd done time, had met the Dalai Lama, helped out in a couple of disaster zones, got friendly with a bunch of Manchester Hells Angels and all sorts of other things, evidenced by a number of battered photographs from the time. But most of all he had been an artist, for around 50 years. Influenced by and drawing inspiration from Francis Bacon, William Blake, and a host of spiritual writers and artists, Bill constantly drew, painted, and wrote about his own work in sketchbooks and handmade 'folios'.

I met him in said pub, when I commuted to Cornwall for a few months before we organised moving house. For some reason I started chatting to Bill at the bar, and we bonded over a painting tutor who had taught both of us. Bill told good stories, but under the bad jokes and tall stories was an inquisitive and agile mind, who wanted to understand the mysteries of the universe in whatever way he could. If that meant trying to apply Kabbalah to quantum physics, then so be it. He was fascinated by Ted Hughes' *Crow* poems, by William Blake, and each week he would read *New Scientist* from cover to cover, in search of new ideas and information.

Bill was my friend for 10 years, but he died a couple of years ago. An exhibition of his selected art is happening in Devoran Village Hall, Cornwall, as a final farewell to this maverick painter and artistic magician who had met and knew so many people. It will be a chance to see work previously stacked up in his studio, unseen for decades, as well as later paintings, and some of the large canvasses he was working on before his untimely death. Most *International Times* readers won't be able to get to Cornwall (though if you can you'll be welcome) so here are some examples of his work.

Bill's artwork is being exhibited on Saturday 27th October, 2018, from 5.30-8.30pm, at Devoran Village Hall. All are welcome.