

## 'Happy Birthday Edward Lear' – exhibition at the Poetry Café, London, celebrates 200 years of Edward Lear



*Mr Lear dancing with Foss hiscat*

Image: Peter Bailey

There is more than one defining Victorian writer celebrating his bicentenary this year. Edward Lear, who gave us 'The Owl and the Pussycat' and 'The Dong With a Luminous Nose', developed the limerick into a staple of nonsense verse, and whose drawings are still instantly recognisable, was born 200 years ago on 12 May – a milestone that threatens to pass quietly, overshadowed by his contemporary Dickens.

But illustrator Andrew Baker and animator Linda Hughes (working together as Paper Galaxy) have stepped into the breach, mounting an exhibition at the Poetry Society's Poetry Café in Covent Garden to say, "Thank you, Mr Lear". 'Happy Birthday Edward Lear' will feature work by an astonishing range of over 40 artists and illustrators, including Ceri Amphlett, Glen Baxter, Peter Blegvad, Geoff Grandfield, Jonny Hannah, *Times* cartoonist Morten Mørland, Simon Pemberton, and Vaughan Oliver, who created the artwork for all of the Pixies' albums. The pictures, inspired by Edward Lear's work, encompass all styles and contemporary interpretations.

The artist Phil Shaw, who has contributed to the exhibition, said:

"The remarkable thing for me about Lear is that he manages somehow to combine mirth with melancholy, innocent optimism with sad reality. Even as a child I recognised that 'The Dong With a Luminous Nose' was the story of a real man's lost love... At the age of thirteen I developed epilepsy and Lear, who suffered from the condition all his life, gave me something extra, a sense that despite everything, life was fun. Happy 200th birthday Edward."

As a visual artist, Lear is known for his landscape paintings and natural history illustration, but it is his quirky nonsense drawings, with their unique blend of pathos and unashamed happiness, that inspire so many contemporary illustrators.

The Poetry Society's president, Roger McGough, has said: "Any journey with Lear is a pea-green delight."

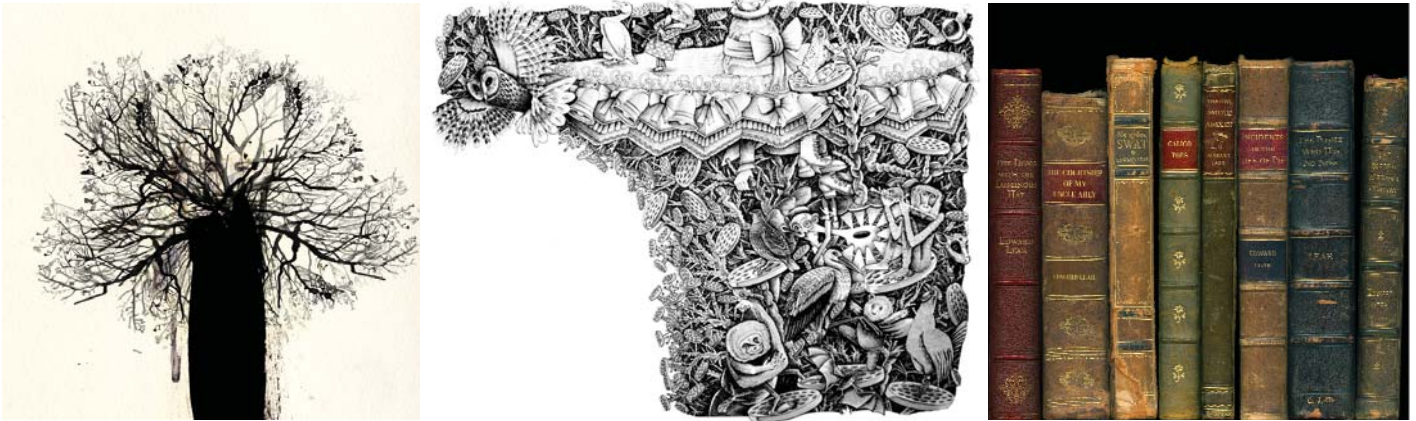
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Images, left to right: Bish, John Vernon Lord, Phil Shaw

The exhibition runs from Monday 7 May to Friday 8 June at the Poetry Society's Poetry Café in Covent Garden, and some of the images will subsequently be on display in The Gallery in Ripon; dates tbc.

**For further information about the 'Happy Birthday Edward Lear' exhibition, please contact Katy Evans-Bush on 020 7420 9880 or email: [marketing@poetrysociety.org.uk](mailto:marketing@poetrysociety.org.uk). High resolution images available**

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## NOTES TO EDITORS

- The Poetry Society was founded in 1909 to promote "a more general recognition and appreciation of poetry". Since then, it has grown into one of Britain's most dynamic arts organisations, representing poetry nationally and internationally, with 4,000 members. It publishes the leading poetry magazine Poetry Review, and has an extensive education programme. It has a long-standing commitment to the commissioning of new work and to collaboration between art forms.
- The Poetry Café is a haven for poets and non-poets in the heart of Covent Garden. As well as several exhibitions a year, it offers vegetarian food, tea and coffee, and a licensed bar, and has a selection of poetry magazines, books, and leaflets available for customers to read. There are live poetry events in the basement most nights. The Café is open 11-11, Mon-Fri, and 7-11 on Saturdays.
- Paper Galaxy is a partnership between award-winning animator Linda Hughes and established illustrator Andrew Baker. 'Happy Birthday Edward Lear' is the third show they have co-curated, after 'The Shed Show' and 'Illustrators East 17'. Paper Galaxy is based in East London.

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