

**Mondo Scripto, Lyrics and Drawings, Bob Dylan. Halcyon Gallery, London, UK, October 9, 2018 – December 23, 2018.**

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Situated in the heart of one of the poshest spots in Europe, the foundation of the most important American song catalog of the twentieth century hangs uniformly among fifty similarly created and framed pieces. The contrast between Bond Street elegance, and the collection of the most *American* of American songs is striking, and the contrast proliferates throughout the exhibit. The juxtaposition of simplicity and complexity, of the temporary and the permanent, and of the ordinary life and the posh life are just a few examples.

Dylan quotes are painted on the deep red gallery walls. His view of the nature of art and its defining purpose in life expressed in the 1978 interviews with *Rolling Stone* and *Playboy* magazine, an excerpt from the Nobel speech regarding the nature and purpose of songs, and a quote from his autobiography *Chronicles* regarding his experience of looking for the singers he heard on records, illustrate the depth of some of his ideas. Indeed, the feeling of rich depth is exactly what is captured by the lighting and color inside the gallery. One feels ready to think. And Dylan helps us with our considerations by the uniformity of presentation. Each piece is presented on cream colored paper. Dylan's handwritten song lyrics are on the left, and on the right, an illustration in pencil. One is immediately drawn to get up close and focus. What's revealed in doing so is nothing short of astounding.

The exhibit is organized on two floors. Upon entering the ground floor of the gallery, two center columns, one on the left, and one on the right, display seven and nine pieces respectively. These center columns feature masterpieces such as "Subterranean Homesick Blues", "Love Minus Zero - No Limit", "Don't Think Twice, (It's All Right)", "Masters Of War", "Song To Woody", "Blowin' In The Wind", "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall", "It's All Over Now, Baby Blue", "Like A Rolling Stone", "Mr. Tambourine Man", "It Ain't Me Babe", and others. Seven works are hung on the left outer wall

and five pieces are hung on the right outer wall. "Leopard-Skin Pillbox Hat", "Stuck Inside Of Mobile With The Memphis Blues Again", "Visions Of Johanna", "Just Like A Woman", "The Times They Are A-Changin'", "Positively 4th Street", "Ballad Of A Thin Man", "It's Alright Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)" and "Rainy Day Woman #13 & 35" are some of the featured works. Twenty-three pieces are displayed on the lower ground floor, all hung along the perimeter, including "Hurricane", "Every Grain Of Sand", "Highway 61 Revisited", "Jokerman", "Gotta Serve Somebody", "Tangled Up In Blue", "Simple Twist Of Fate", "Knockin' On Heaven's Door", "I Shall Be Released", and "Forever Young". The "Knockin' On Heaven's Door" series and "Isis" are hung toward the back of the gallery. Some viewers might prefer having those pieces hung closer to the other masterpieces.

Although the pieces are displayed according to a consistent theme, the interpretation is anything but. And we should expect that --it is Dylan's art after all. Twenty-nine of the pieces have at least two illustrations, one in the catalog and a different one on display. Some of the songs with multiple illustrations reflect a consistent interpretation. The two illustrations of "Blowin' In The Wind", for example, are consistent with the lyrics. The catalog illustration depicts a man on the side of a road staring at a signpost with signs pointing to Wyoming, Iowa, Kansas, Nevada and Montana. The illustration hanging in the gallery depicts a man sitting near a window, covering his ears with his hands, staring straight ahead. Both illustrations make sense. The illustrations for "Hurricane", on the other hand, are more challenging. The catalog illustration is of a right hand holding a smoking gun with the first finger on the trigger. The illustration on the gallery wall is of a baseball pitcher having just released a pitch. He is in perfect form and the ball is coming directly at us. Baseball and guns, both as American as apple pie. The invitation to dig into the depictions, scratching the surface of the sketches to reveal powerful ideas relating to the interpretation of the songs is compelling.

*Mondo Scripto* provides an opportunity to explore a new aesthetic of song. As one of the most influential twentieth century philosophers of language, Ludwig

Wittgenstein, wrote in his seminal work, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* , "A gramophone record, the musical idea, the written notes, and the sound – waves, all stand to one another in the same internal relation of depicting that holds between language and the world (4.014)." Through *Mondo Scripto*, Dylan offers us a translation of his experience of that internal relation, where powerful modes of thought, music, and art are realized into a language that is uniquely his, but one that forcefully relates to our individual worlds. The variations in the *Mondo Scripto* drawings underscore how Dylan's art straddles permanence and challenges us to recognize the kind of "waves" Wittgenstein describes. The labile nature of the *Mondo Scripto* project seems to be Dylan's reflection on how art functions in giving meaning to human life.