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# PICTURES

## The Elephant Parade - Benjamin Shine

14th June 2010, Loma-Ann Marks

**Benjamin Shine studied fashion design at Central St Martins in London before setting up his own studio in 2003. Notable for in-house design of concepts, installations, public sculpture and exclusive artworks, Benjamin's work explores the boundaries of creativity, constructional ideas and craftsmanship. He created the iconic Obama portrait, used during much of the Presidential campaign and the Taxi Elephant, currently in the Royal Exchange, London as part of the 260 strong Elephant Parade.**



**Your practice covers lots of different genres - from fashion to products and sculpture. Do these different outlets ever inform each other?**

Yes, quite often they do. I've always been interested in one-piece construction – this started during my fashion studies and has developed through my artworks and products to date too. Another example is 'Doodleez', which is a children's product I invented. It's developed directly from the idea of 'painting with fabric', which is a technique I've used to create portraits and artworks over the years. Doodleez allows kids to create pictures by applying coloured cords onto a reusable Velcro-like board, so they have that tactile experience in building and remodeling their pictures.

**What does it mean, do you think, to be an artist now? It doesn't seem to be just putting paint to canvas or having an exhibition in a gallery any more!**

Artists have traditionally produced works that provoke thought, invite questions or simply entertain through their ideas, techniques and skills. I don't think much has changed really, but I do think that artists, through their work provide a raw connection to human creativity - something that perhaps we increasingly feel a need to experience and appreciate in the world we're living in.

**Where do you get your ideas and inspiration?**

My work is quite often inspired by the object or subject to hand - it becomes a process of questioning what form 'the thing' can take or how it can be made. Challenging perceptions and exploring associations often leads to new ideas and sometimes new techniques, but reaching a satisfying result is always the objective - if a piece of work provokes the reaction 'How?' or 'Wow!', then I'm pretty satisfied!

**Is there a difference between 'art' and 'design'?**

My generalised view is that the traditional principles of design are rooted in an agenda for mass appeal, whilst Art is more likely to be based on the artist's personal interest, with less intent for mass appeal. Certainly the boundaries between these approaches have become increasingly blurred which makes it much more interesting – particularly as this also highlights how the consumer or viewer's desires and expectations have shifted.

**How did you get involved with the Elephant Parade?**

I was asked to submit my ideas last year.

**How did you come up with the idea for the Taxi Elephant?**

I really approached this like a design brief. When I spoke to the Elephant Family Charity they said they were keen for the elephants to have a quintessentially British quality – to celebrate Elephant Parade in London. I liked the idea of the elephants disguising themselves to fit in to the London scenery - so as not to draw any attention! The prevalent London taxi seemed a suitable and humorous disguise – and certainly iconic to London. The important thing was to create a design that satisfied the brief which was ultimately to grab the attention of passers by and press to help highlight the cause - and to ensure the piece was desirable enough for someone to make a generous bid at the charity auction. Certainly the first part has been achieved –and we'll have to see how the second part goes at the end of June!

**How long did it take to create?**

The adjustments to the original form and the construction of the solar-powered taxi sign were made over a few months.

**Will you be at the auction?**

Yes.

**Which other Elephants do you like the most?**

There are quite a few but I do like Ampersand, which is the metal one.

**What is next for you?**

I'm currently working on several projects - some artworks and installation commissions, a couple of new products and a new children's creative activity, which is based on my tulle portrait technique. I've also just designed the new Train Managers Bag for Eurostar - enlisted by Worn Again to fulfill the brief. The bag is made from decommissioned staff uniforms and waste textiles and has proved a first as an upcycled corporate buy-back product. It's currently on show at The Sustainable Futures exhibition at the Design Museum in London.

**Each elephant in the Elephant Parade has been sponsored and on 30th June will be auctioned at Sotheby's, with funds going to the Elephant Family charity. For more information visit : [www.elephantparadelondon.org](http://www.elephantparadelondon.org)**

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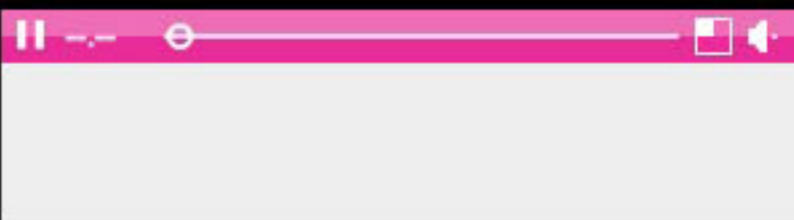


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