

# ALG

## Return of the Moon Dogs;

### Recent works by Stephen Spurrier

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Over the last 10 years, watching Stephen Spurrier's work evolve provides an insight into the developments of his mind and outlines the ideas that define him. Spurrier's ideas stay relatively constant, through watching, one can see where his head and heart are, depending on the nature of the work, and the overall atmosphere whether calm or turbulent.

Further observations of Spurrier's practice reveal how he has made works which comments on the human condition, on our relationship to the universe, and to each other. This approach references forces and energies that are perhaps not at the forefront of our thinking, but are at play continuously in our lives.

The exhibition 'Return of the Moon Dogs' comments on the nature of the dog as an instinctive animal that is known to be able to sense the human intention. The dog has been present in Spurrier's work over the past 20 years, although not so dominantly as in this body of work. Spurrier regards the dog as energetically aware, sensitive to personalities, innocent, trusting, loyal, giving, and unconditional. Spurrier also considers the dog as a witness to the

sometimes strange behaviour of humans - the dog's perception, sight, hearing and sensitivity being greater than our own.

This body of work has many ideas at play, with a focus on the dog who is located in what appears to be a multi dimensional universe. The location of the images floating in a sky become a metaphor for 'the bigger picture', where often perspective is disregarded with the moon and clouds set in a unique space. The clouds are an instantaneous comment on the ever changing sky, referencing story telling, mythology, and our place as a tiny fragment of the human race in this world. Despite each of us being the centre of our own universe – Spurrier's work reminds us that we are part of something much larger.

The floating images, referencing a sense of freedom are consistent themes within Spurrier's work since his student days. This series of work presents the often flying 'sky dog', which is seemingly comfortable anywhere, in many places, even approaching the moon. The presence of the moon image in the works references our place in the universe – and Spurriers comment on the fact that although we might think we're in charge, we are not really at all.

The presence of the various pale or skeletal creatures is a reference to ghosts, which Spurrier never really believed in, until a stay on Magnetic Island where, when he was looking out to sea one night he believed he saw ghostlike human creatures in the water. The presence of ghosts in the work reference an unresolved mystery, but also serves to challenge his own levels of perception; where he constantly questions his own understanding of the world, never taking anything for granted – there are always new levels of understanding for him. Spurrier's interest in unresolved issues, and the

presence of such commentary in the work links back to Spurrier's fascination with the human condition as a whole.

The depicted environments in this series of work showing dusk and dawn for example, exist as a metaphor for natural cycles and consequently contrast with the often chaotic character of our lives. Other elements such as the Milky Way, moon phases and clouds in combination with the idealised human figure also relate to an amalgamation of allegories referencing Renaissance painting. This metaphorical imagery is a sub-plot which Spurrier finds intriguing.

The symbolised dog, for Spurrier hold a particular wisdom which is different from that of humans, as he sees the dog as the epitome of another view of reality. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century German Romantic artist Casper David Friedrich depicted people looking out to sea, and often gazing at the moon; similarly Spurrier wishes to evoke a sense of wonder in many of these works through the images of dogs serenely looking into a landscape.

In the chaos of our world, dogs suggest a beautiful silence.