

## Stephen Spurrier: *Return of the Moon Dogs*

Alexandra Lawson Gallery, Railway Street, Toowoomba

17 March -15 April 2017

I love the many layers of Stephen's imagery. He sets fragments of art, science, parlour games, and the cosmos in cloud filled spaces. Precise detail is gentled by abstract forms in frameworks that allude to philosophy, belief systems, humanity, humour, symbolic mysticism, and a sense of mystery.

Stephen is also something of a dog whisperer and it is a joy to see canines cavorting in his pictures.

Now Stephen is a man of tangents....and being a tangent person myself I couldn't help making a Moon Dog detour

Did you know that a **moon dog** is a bright circular spot that can appear as part of a halo outside the Moon?

**Moondog** was the name taken by **Louis Thomas Hardin** (May 26, 1916–September 8, 1999), an American composer, musician, poet and inventor of musical instruments. He had long hair and a flowing beard and in the 1940s could be seen on 6th Avenue, New York wearing a cloak and a Viking-style helmet with horns. Sometimes he busked and sold music and booklets of his poetry. Sometimes he just stood there silent and still.

He invented several triangular shaped musical instruments, wrote ballet music for Martha Graham, dedicated pieces to Charlie Parker and Benny Goodman and was said to have been an influence on early minimalist composers such as Philip Glass and Steve Reich

**Moondogs** was also a professional wrestling group in the World Wrestling Federation. They wrestled in frayed blue jeans and sported shaggy hair and beards. They carried animal bones which they chewed on, and they were notorious for their wild and bloody brawls.

**Moon Dog** is also a brewery that makes boutique beer. Violin playing brothers Josh and Jake Uljans and their mate Karl van Buuren set up their micro brewery between the Carlton United Breweries headquarters and the Duchess brothel in Melbourne

They put their brewery together from bits that included trays used for seaweed-based cosmetics. They hung chandeliers from the ceiling of their factory. Their beers and ales feature unusual ingredients such as pineapple, coconut, watermelon, truffle, chilli, pumpkin and wild yeast. They make a Gingerbread Stout and an ale that includes rose and chrysanthemum water among its ingredients

**The Moon Dog Series** of books was developed to combat adult illiteracy

**The Moondog Squadron** was a group of US marines who jammed communications and enemy radar during combat missions over Afghanistan.

But for me, the **Moon dog** that perhaps has the greatest resonance with Stephen's work is the colourful little dog that appears in Miro's delightful painting "Dog Barking at the Moon".

Like Stephen's work it is both perplexing and engaging. The elements that are so appealing in the work of Miro such as the wit and whimsy, the playfulness, as well as a sense of longing and isolation are very much a part of Stephen's own poetic sensibility.

On a lighter note, **Barking at the Moon** is a brand of dog food made from beef, cranberries, flaxseed, and no preservatives.

Thank you Stephen for your story pictures that take us on marvellous, magical journeys.

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