

# East End fantasists

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**One of the greatest joys that art has to offer the artist is the chance to retreat into an invented world, far from humdrum normality. For the past eight years, Paul Noble, now 41, has effectively lived in Nobson Newton, an amusingly dystopic universe depicted in wonderfully obsessive detail, in a series of epically scaled drawings, some of which are on display in the Whitechapel's upstairs galleries.**

In the ruined city, an odd mix of ancient and modern, Noble obliquely satirises the inanities and cruelties of man. In his fantasy world, a race of sadistic humanoids has run riot, torturing animals and each other.

In one especially moving image, he has drawn a tiny version of Michelangelo's Pieta, in which the dead Christ, equipped with elephant trunklike phallus, is cradled not by Mary but by one of the humanoids. It's a scene not presumably meant as virulent blasphemy but as an enthusiastic extension of Noble's mild take on greedy, selfish man.

Downstairs at the Whitechapel, fashionably eclectic German artist Tobias Rehberger, 38, has created a fantasy environment of a very different type. Utterly contemporary, it provides a playful aesthetic experience while referring to the decline of the individual in the age of globalisation.

In the first room hangs a vast, bright yellow pod into which you can climb, one by one, to find yourself in a dark room where a futuristic-looking lamp is suspended.

This light is apparently synchronised with the one in the Berlin bedroom of the artist's 15-year-old namesake, Tobias Rehberger, whom he found listed in the telephone book.

His aim is lightly to subvert the ideal of the self-contained, "genius" artist in a world where so much human activity is interconnected.

Elsewhere, however, Rehberger presents play with less point but just as much visual amusement: brightly coloured, plastic wall-based sculptures and, in the foyer, wallpaper adorned with an image of his gut. Good, clean fun as long as you like intestines.

*Until 14 November. Information: 020 7522 7888.*