





John Dilnot puts down his scalpel and looks over the rim of his glasses. 'I like the idea that these are self-contained worlds, removed from ours by just a sheet of glass.' On his desk is what looks like a Victorian specimen case, one of the 'self-contained worlds' he is referring to. What's inside it is quite magical: a flutter of 80 butterflies in a jarring spectrum of colours hang mid-swarm. 'They're moths, actually,' Dilnot says. They are, in fact paper, and each one has been drawn, cut out and mounted by hand.

Dilnot is first and foremost a printmaker, having studied the skill (plus fine art and graphic design) at Camberwell College of Art in the 1980s. It is only recently, though, that he has been able to dedicate his full attention to his otherworldly creations. Dilnot met his wife, the ceramicist Belen Gomez, while at Camberwell. As Gomez's work took off soon after graduating (she supplied galleries and high-end stores, including Liberty), Dilnot put his own designs on hold in order to help her successful production. After the arrival of their son Joseph in 1997, they upped sticks to live in Brighton. Once installed on a quiet terraced street some way from the hubbub of the city, Dilnot resumed his own work, creating the printed cases as well as greetings cards and illustrated notebooks.

Involving tweezers, scalpels and drills at various stages of the process, the work is, Dilnot admits, 'fiddly'. Each box is a one-off and a testament

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to his love of detail and skill at printing. And of multiples; by its nature printmaking is about repetition, and there is a frenetic energy that drives much of Dilnot's work. There is also a dark beauty to the vignettes that he creates. In the box called Nightingale, for example, a sole bird perched on a branch calls into an eerie, clouded twilight night.

The images are hand-drawn and screen-printed, which allows for strong, bold colours. When the sheets bearing dozens of repetitive images are dried, he sets about cutting out each moth or bird. Every element is then pasted or fixed to the box with dowels. Even the boxes themselves are printed from inside to out. Although they look remarkably like wood, the ply and cardboard carcasses are covered in printed paper, the 'grain' of which is from a rubbing Dilnot made from the wood floors in his studio.

More affordable than the boxes (which start at £120) are the greeting cards (£2.30 each), framed screen prints (from £70) and notebooks (from £7.50) that Dilnot also makes by hand. They are equally charming pieces featuring elements from nature including beetles and cows, potatoes and apples. They are also among his best sellers when he exhibits his work. His break came in 2002 when he took part in the Brighton Festival, joining the city's creative people who open their homes, studios and workshops to the public for a month. Last year he was one of the hits of the Chelsea Crafts Fair, and he will return to the show under its new name, Origin The London Craft Fair, at Somerset House. *John Dilnot (johndilnot.com) will be on stand L5 in the second week of Origin The London Craft Fair (October 3-8 and 10-15; 020-7278 7700; craftsonline.org.uk). His work is also available at the Rebecca Hossack Gallery, 28 Charlotte Street, London W1 (020 7255 2828; r.h.g.arts.co.uk).*



Precision engineer

Printmaker John Dilnot has an eye for detail that takes his subjects into their own small worlds. By **David Nicholls**. Photographs by **Philip Sinden**

Left and above John Dilnot's painstaking work in his studio produces intricate 'specimen' boxes, pictures, cards and notebooks