

OBSERVATIONS...

Amid the credit crunch comes a Hogarth for the 21st century

BY JOSH SPERO

●●● The art world of recent years has been indistinguishable from the financial world: GDP-sized prices paid for things now worthless, complex schemes to entrap passing capital, superstars rising to (and falling from) grace. It's lucky, then, that Adam Dant straddles both of these worlds, using his art to record the folly of the bankers.

A 21st-century Hogarth with a similarly intricate and witty style, Dant's new show – entitled *The Triumph of Debt* – opens this week in St James's, London. The two star turns are his *Debt* illustrations – one is set at a ruined Canary Wharf, with bankers in the stocks and Alistair Darling's eyes watching over the chaos, and the other in front of the Bank of England, which is being ram-raided by desperate financiers and escapees from the (Collateralised) Debtors' Prison. There are countless more punishments to distract the eye.

Dant, who won the Jerwood Prize for Drawing in 2002, made his name with *Donald Parsnips' Daily Journal*, a satirical freesheet filled with scenes from London's business world, which he would distribute outside Tube stations. His sharp eye was honed further by spending six months in private banks and hedge funds, observing the customs of hedgies in their native habitat (Mayfair).

This observation resulted in works such as the diptych *Hedge Heaven and Hell* – and the many heavens and hells he has depicted make Dant a Dante of money, pointing out along the way the angels (too few) and the sinners paying for their crimes (metaphorical payment only, of course). Just like Hogarth, who not only lived through the triumph of money but also its collapse, Dant is an astringent corrective to the pomposity of the banking world, wrapped in the sweetest and sharpest of wit. Adam Dant: *The Triumph of Debt*, Helen Macintyre Art Advisory, 12 Duke Street, London SW1 (020-7930 3303; www.artadvisory.co.uk), to 25 November



Suffering for the sake of art: part of Adam Dant's 'Debt' series (above); Bart Visser gets on his bike (below left) and a Royal Scots Dragoon Guard recording in Iraq (below right) 14