

# ALL THAT MALARKY

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I first became aware of Malarky after seeing the wall he painted for Chrome & Black: a line of mismatched characters all running, or perhaps jogging, or maybe even skipping – only Malarky knows – to an unknown destination. These quirky little people, which ranged from a jazzy-looking box with a light switch nose and rave glasses to a triangle of bricks with hairy legs and fresh trainers, caught not only my attention but that of most of Shoreditch. From that day on, every time I walk to work, or down Brick Lane and its many side streets I can be sure there will be a new character grinning out at me from a shutter.

It's this perfect combination of bright, endearing characters and an unrelenting mission to paint that has thrust Malarky into the forefront of East London's street art scene. However, I'm sure when there are no more walls or shutters to grace in this neck of the woods, he'll head back over to South London or his second home, Barcelona, to continue to paint. Whilst some people may criticise the fact that he has put up so much work in one area, it quickly becomes obvious when you meet this guy that he just fucking loves to paint – and it's as simple as that.

**You've burst onto the streets recently, where have you come from and why haven't we seen much of your work before?**

Well I studied in Newcastle and used to paint up there a little bit but the scene is quite small and I was working full time in an architects' practice so I didn't really have the time. I quickly realised I would much prefer to be out painting than working, so I saved up all my money and moved to Barcelona a couple of years ago – just to chill and paint, mainly. Plus it's always sunny, which is nice.

There's a good vibe with painting out there and I was painting shutters all the time, but obviously even with the internet no-one knows or really cares what's happening over there; they just see what they see here. I was there for eight months and ended up being part of a group show at the Red Bull Studios last December. Then I came back for a month or two and started painting with a girl called Billy. She was on the same vibe as me and wanted to paint all the time, so we started doing shutters in South London, which is where I live.

Every week we'd just go, find a shutter, eat some Nando's, draw up an idea and then go and paint it.

There are not a lot of people painting around there, so everyone noticed it really quickly and then when I moved back to Spain in February, I had a call from High Roller Gallery asking me if I wanted to do a show in the summer, which I came back for in June and have been here ever since. So I was a little bit back and forth for a while, but every time I was back it was like a painting holiday, just painting, painting, painting, and finding new spots.

# “Even I get bored of just seeing my stuff everywhere. It’s good that more people will hopefully start going out again and doing it too.”

**Are you here permanently now or will you be jetting off again?**

Pretty much. Occasionally I go over there for a week or so at a time, but the laws have changed a lot now. Sometimes the police are alright and sometimes they are crazy and throw you in jail or fine you, so for me it’s not really ideal. Over here though I don’t usually get much hassle, I do what I want.

**Do you usually get permission for the shutters you do or are you a covert nighttime operator?**

It depends on what it is that I’m painting. A lot of the time we’ve spoken to the people who own the building and they say it’s cool and are excited to have something on their shutter, although sometimes they can’t give me actual permission but say go ahead and paint it anyway. A few weeks ago I was painting a shutter I hadn’t had permission for and a guy turns up and starts yelling at me, so I tried to blag it and say I had permission, but it turned out he was the owner of the building, so clearly I hadn’t. I tried to reason with him to get him to let me finish as it was already half done, but he wouldn’t see sense and so now his shutter looks shit as it’s half done! On the other hand, you’ve got some ridiculously nice people, like the guy who runs the Walluc fondue restaurant on Redchurch Street; he was happy for me to do his shutter and even gave me a free meal afterwards like a king.

Obviously there are times when you’re painting and inevitably the police come, they then call it in, which means you pretty much have free reign to paint whatever you want for the rest of the night because they aren’t going to come again. It depends who I’m with and how silly they are, a lot of people are easily swayed into painting another shutter though.

**Tell me about your funny little trademark characters; has**

**your work always been like that?**

Sort of. I’ve always painted characters, but they used to be a bit more detailed. However, painting on shutters has meant that I’ve adapted them to fit the space, whilst also meaning I’ve had to simplify them a lot as the surface is bumpy and it doesn’t look as nice if you start trying to do little details on them. So I started trying to make them stand out and be nice and bold instead. I never studied art or illustration or anything, so all my influences come from my own experiences of painting and drawing. For example, I’ve learnt to do a pattern in the fill, as if I just did a big block one colour fill then anyone can come along and put a tag over it, which is going to be really visible. But if you’ve got a complicated fill with cheques and wobbly lines then you can’t see the tag, so no-one will bother. Loads of little techniques like that have just come from practice and learning how to get things to stay as long as possible; I don’t really like the idea of having to go back to fix something.

The characters themselves just come from doodling and doodling, which eventually produces some little character which will be loosely based on an animal or a robot, whatever is in my head at the time. Sometimes I’ll look at a wall with a box against it which looks like a face and I think ‘cool that’s a nice little character.’ It’s a little world that I’ve created with these weird people that just run about. I quite like how it interacts with the actual world; you’ll see people walk past a crazy running wolf head with little legs and they don’t know what’s going on so it makes me chuckle.

**You’re known for doing quite a lot of collaborations, you’ve mentioned Billy and I heard you might do something with Ghostpatrol?**

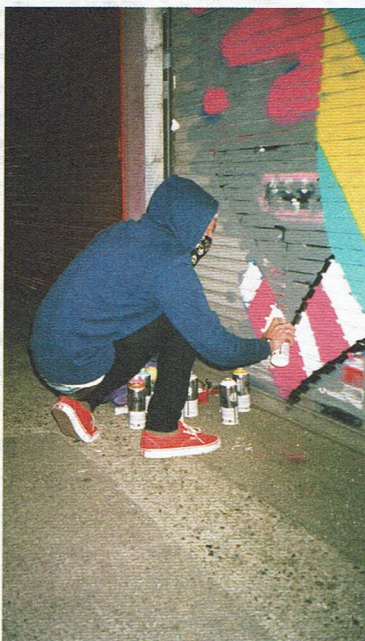
Yeah, well I did paint with him quite recently on a shutter on Brick Lane. He is super nice and was saying about

going over to Melbourne to do some painting. Any opportunity to travel I always want to take advantage of. I did a big thing in Madrid last year, which loads of artists went to; we must have painted about 50 shutters in seven days, which was super crazy. It’s nice doing collaborations as it gets boring painting by yourself. I paint because it’s fun and I love doing it, so if I can make it more fun by having someone else there, then that works for me! For instance in Madrid I met 45RPM and Richt from What, so I went down to Bristol a few weeks ago and painted for five days straight, walls, silly stuff – just having a laugh.

As far as painting with other people, there are probably too many to list as I’m always doing it. A lot of the time around here when something is getting painted I’m probably involved or doing a collaboration with that person.

**You’ve got a lot of pieces up that have been there for a while now, do you think people are putting up less work on the streets than they used to?**

I mean, people get lazy until they see that someone else is doing it loads. In Barcelona when I started painting trucks no-one was really doing it, but I used to know the security guy where the trucks parked overnight and he’d let us come in and spend the night covering them. People used to get angry because I had so many trucks running at one point, so that made them start. Now other people have found ways to get permission and you’re seeing a lot more full pieces on them, but that was never happening before. It’s the same with the shutters here. I don’t want to sound like I’m the Pied Piper of painting and everyone is doing it because of me, but if someone is bang on it then people get motivated to paint. Even I get bored of just seeing my stuff everywhere. It’s good that more people will hopefully start going out again and doing it too.



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**What’s next for you?**

I want to go to Melbourne and see Ghostpatrol; I always love to paint in other countries. I’d probably like to do a couple of other little shows. I’m doing a residency at the moment at Tony’s Gallery and will probably do some sort of solo show at the end of that. I’ll just keep painting and take it as it comes. I don’t really plan, just paint. I might do some more down in South London as I’m getting a bit bored of it up here and there are loads of shutters just begging to be painted.

**So you think it was a good decision to leave the 9-5 and pursue this?**

I didn’t really take it as a conscious

decision, it just kind of happened after I did so much in Barcelona. I’ve always been like that with everything, get a bit too into it and just do it and do it and do it. I was just painting a lot, then little galleries started asking to sell my work. Then it got to the point where I realised I didn’t really need to be working, I could just do what I wanted all day. I don’t know how many people there are who work in a job they don’t like, which takes up most of their time, when if they just had some fucking balls they could go out and do what they actually want to do. Maybe it will work, maybe it won’t but at least you’ve tried. I’d feel stupid if I hadn’t done it. It’s working alright for me at the moment anyway.

A few weeks after this interview Malarky got involved in two major projects, the first was painting a shutter for the New Era ‘Introducing’ campaign. The second, a massive accolade, was the Foot Locker x Converse x Malarky TV advert, which sees his characters brought to life, racing through the city at night. It definitely is ‘working alright’ for him at the moment, and I’m sure we can expect to see a whole lot more of Malarky and his little world of crazy creations.

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