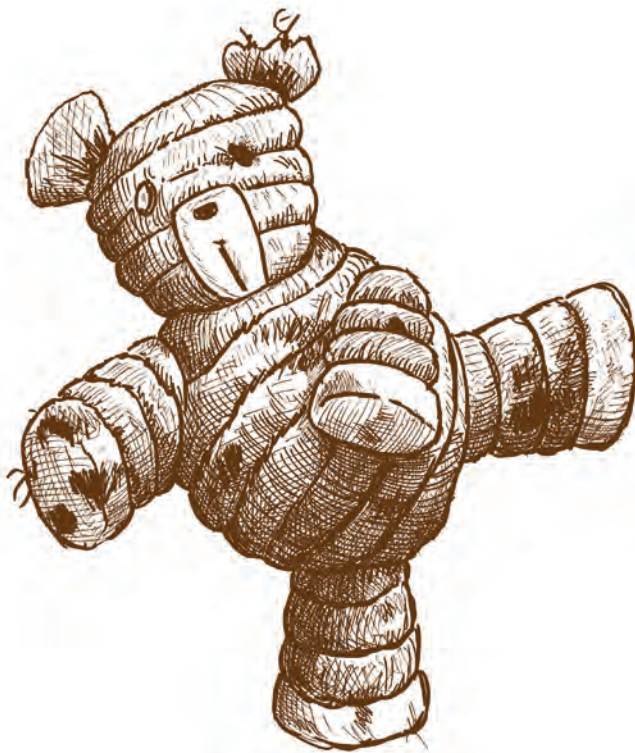


PROSPECTUS
for a limited-edition artist book

Pooh

Stories by
A. A. MILNE

Artwork by
SANDOW BIRK



THE ARION PRESS

San Francisco

2024

WELL INTO ADULTHOOD, Christopher Robin Milne (1920-1996) believed the tremendous success of his father's *Winnie-the-Pooh* children's book series rendered him invisible, that in the eyes of the world, he was forever a six-year-old boy trailed by a stuffed bear named Pooh. By the 1928 publication of A. A. Milne's final installment, *The House at Pooh Corner*, the whimsical children's books starring a precocious boy and his imaginary animal friends were global hits and Christopher Robin a bona fide celebrity. However, the living, breathing namesake for the fictional character had mixed feelings: The younger Milne writes in his autobiography he came to dislike his fictional namesake and rued that the *Pooh* series had denied him an opportunity to navigate a life on his own terms.

Christopher Robin experiences an altogether different adulthood in the Arion Press edition of *Pooh*, with artwork by the visual storyteller Sandow Birk. And no "happily ever after" is guaranteed here, either: the exuberant child protagonist is transformed into a homeless old man, wheelchair-bound, living on the streets of a nameless American city. The bucolic Hundred Acre Wood where Christopher Robin played out his imaginary adventures is now an urban streetscape blighted by neglect. Birk's pen-and-ink renderings—at once a nod and an alternative to the original art by E. H. Shepard—provide a visual counterpoint to Milne's complete original text, which was defined by its whimsical tone, as well as its intentional misspellings and childlike patter. The evocative artwork in the Arion Press edition tacks between scenes of the present and the past, while the protagonist uses his wiles to survive the streets, blessed with companions, both human and animal, who echo the imaginary friends of his childhood.

This radical reimagining of *The House at Pooh Corner* enters a publishing juggernaut where Pooh and his pals have been elevated to near-sacred status: The *Winnie-the-Pooh* books have never been out of print and have been translated into more than fifty languages. A Latin translation published in 1958 appeared on the *New York Times* Best Seller List, the only foreign language book ever to do so. Disney's purchase of the rights to *Winnie-the-Pooh* in 1961 created a roughly \$5 billion merchandising franchise. Pooh even



has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame—one of only 19 fictional characters that can make that claim—and January 18th is Pooh Day in England. All this to say that Pooh as a cuddly child’s plaything is also big business.

Arion Press enters the arena with a decidedly different message, one that lays bare the psychological underpinnings of Milne’s work while considering the homeless crisis in America. Scenes from the beloved children’s book are rendered as flashbacks or perhaps even fever dreams of an earlier, more innocent time, yet it is worth noting that this edition is very much not intended for children, but for the discerning collectors of Sandow Birk and of Arion Press.

Close readers of Milne’s work will see new shades in what is most often considered a charming children’s tale. Birk offers a means of exploring Milne’s concerns about life, death, war, peace, and innocence.

Critic and historian Paula Connolly argues in her analysis of *The House at Pooh Corner* that it represents a double attempt to reconcile the horrors Milne witnessed during World War I and to return to “an idealized, preindustrial, rural England.” Milne served at the ferocious Battle of the Somme in 1916, where roughly one million men died, many ingloriously, and the Pooh series reveals the author’s yearning for an opportunity to heal from the traumas enduring in battle via a return to an imagined idyll. Though the fantasy ultimately deflates on paper when Christopher Robin grows up and leaves his friends in the Hundred Acre Wood, Milne’s experience of writing the book (ostensibly for his son) provided him with a more hopeful world outlook.

The House at Pooh Corner is the fourth and final volume in the series featuring Christopher Robin, his companion Pooh, and pals Eeyore, Piglet, and other inhabitants of a make-believe forest inspired by the woods near Milne’s country home in Sussex, England. In the ten stories that comprise the book, Tigger is introduced to readers for the first time; other characters go about their lives eating breakfast, building houses, confronting the dreaded Heffalump; and most notably, Christopher Robin prepares for life among grownups and turns away from his childhood playthings. Among contemporary reviewers, the finality of the series hit hard: “Let us hear no more of

this nonsense of saying goodbye, Mr. ‘Blue,’” writes critic Elizabeth Dutton in the October 21, 1928 edition of the *St. Joseph Gazette*. Readers wanted the stories to continue, but ever the consummate storyteller, Milne structured this book as a farewell to innocence, an acknowledgment that no one can halt the inexorable march of time. Still, Milne ends on a hopeful note, that the power of a child’s imagination can endure whatever life brings: “Wherever they go, and whatever happens to them on the way, in that enchanted place on the top of the forest, a little boy and his Bear will always be playing.”

As an artist recognized for his critiques on inner-city violence, urban blight, political strife, war, and the reality of prison life, Sandow Birk has crafted an alternative but parallel story by taking a charming tale and setting it in contemporary urban America—a move that will no doubt shock Milne purists, but one that allows Birk to create a new visual narrative. By rendering Christopher Robin (or someone who believes himself to be Christopher Robin) homeless—inspired, in part, by the men and women living in Birk’s Long Beach, California, neighborhood—the artist offers a searing commentary on how society treats the unhoused while simultaneously making an appeal to humanize them.

Birk approached the commission with a self-directed mandate to create something new and thought-provoking—something that speaks to our current generation and how we live. Previous undertakings of his include Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and, also for Arion Press, *The Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde*, where Birk captured the timelessness of those stories by presenting them in modern-day settings.

Milne resented that his literary fame rested on the shoulders of his work for children—he had been an editor for *Punch* magazine and the author of several well-received plays and novels before the Pooh books. In his 1939 autobiography *It’s Too Late Now*, he wrote that he wanted to escape from children’s books. Here, Birk has provided a kind of escape, rendering Milne’s most celebrated characters in a fresh light, creating images that encourage ruminations on what it means to be an American today, and on the compassion we might accord our fellow citizens, whoever they are, and however they live.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

“I always start projects by thinking about what it means to be an artist in Los Angeles in the 21st century,” Birk said in a 2011 interview with PBS, adding that his inspiration usually includes “something that really bothers me.” While he doesn’t shy from blunt critique, Birk is a champion for humanity in all its intelligence, humor and subtlety.

A graduate of the Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design, Los Angeles-based Sandow Birk is a torch bearer for social realism, an artistic movement with especially deep roots in California, expressed vividly in his urban depictions for *Pooh* and Dante’s *Inferno*. He is the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Fulbright Fellowship, a Getty Fellowship, and an Artist Research Fellowship at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., among many other awards.

Birk imbues classic texts with fresh insight and wit meant to engage with contemporary audiences: the hand-lettered calligraphy he created for *American Qur’an* stands in for urban graffiti; strip malls and concrete highway overpasses snake through his interpretation of Dante’s *Inferno*; and Milne’s hundred Acre Wood is, by turns, an abandoned cityscape and an arboreal oasis that may only exist in the mind of the protagonist. Each work is different in tone and scope, yet all retain an underlying style and humor that is distinctly Birk’s and unmistakably an ode to his beloved City of Angels.

Birk characterized his *Pooh* art as visual meditations that “react off, or play against, or add to” the text at hand while ensuring that the end result “says something that I want to say,” whether that’s contemplating the homeless crisis, the treatment of veterans, or the enduring power of the imagination.



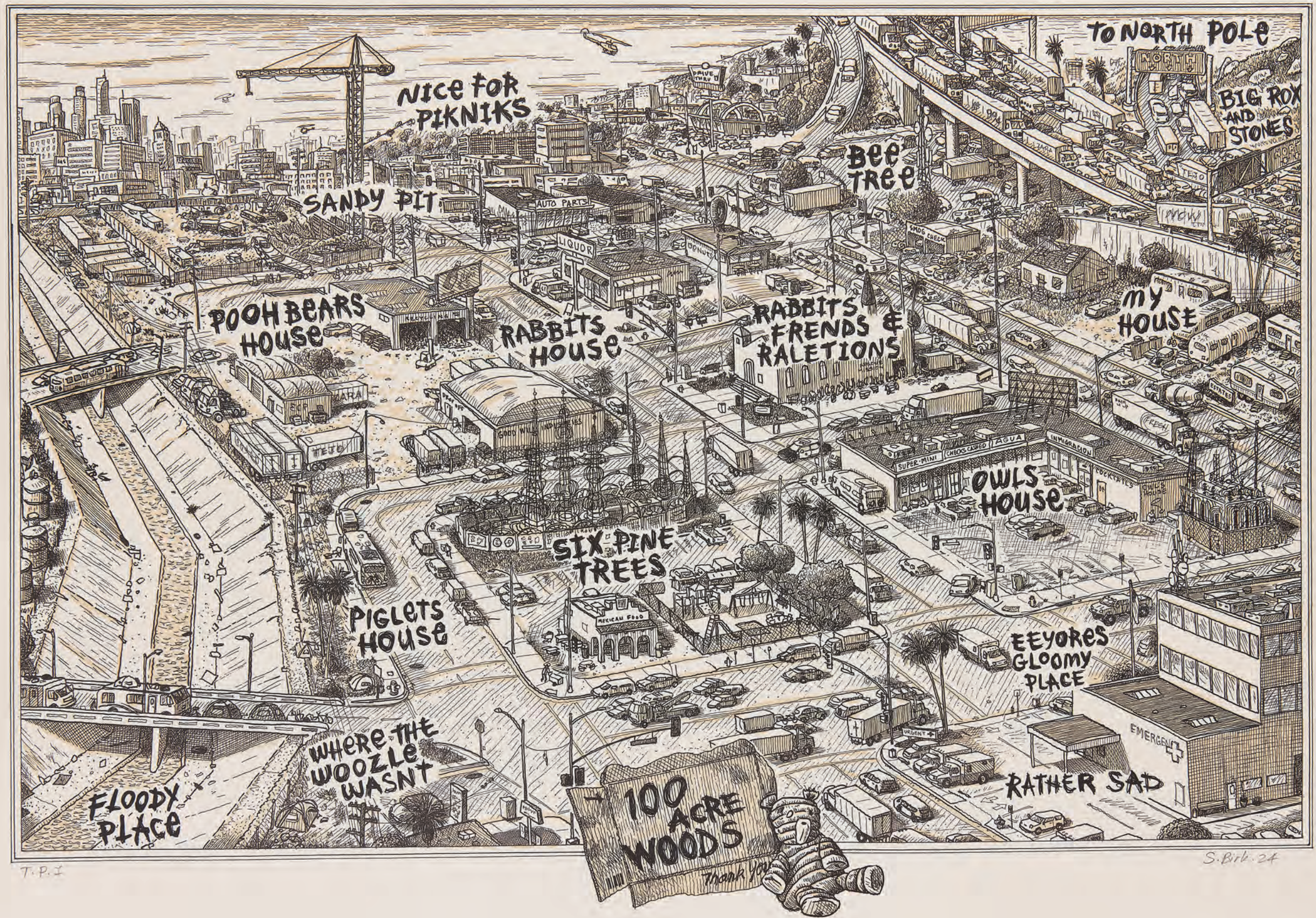
THE BOOK

Pooh is one of the most lavishly visualized books in the Arion catalog, with more than 50 pen-and-ink drawings created for the project. While many of Sandow Birk’s choices pay homage to E. H. Shepard’s illustrations for the 1928 edition, others weave an entirely original narrative. The drawings range from smaller, incidental details embedded in and around the text to elaborate, full-page tableaux and include hand-drawn banners for each of the 10 chapter heads and the title page. In addition, Birk’s map of the Hundred Acre Wood, reimagined and transposed to an urban landscape, appears as a double-page spread on the front and rear endsheets. All images are printed in warm-brown ink.

Appropriately, *Pooh* is presented in a generous, large-quarto storybook format, 12 ¾ x 9 ⅜ inches. Its 136 pages are printed by letterpress on white 150 gsm mould-made Hahnemühle Ingres from metal type cast onsite expressly for the project. The typeface is Monotype Imprint in 14 point, with Cartoon used for chapter openings and display.

Carrying forward the great social realism tradition, Birk’s unflinching imagery embraces the humanity, humility, and intelligence of the everyday. For the cover, his drawing incorporates the titling and credits into a streetscape—complete with graffitied moving van, billboard, and discarded mattress—which has been dynamically rendered in four colors: rust, beige, black, and silver. Fine Press edition copies are bound with playful pink cloth spines, while Deluxe edition copies have goatskin spines of a similarly exuberant hue.

The total edition for sale is 250 copies: 210 in the Fine Press edition and 40 in the Deluxe. Both are presented in handmade slipcases of slightly different designs, but all feature cloth-wrapped edges with imprinted paper side panels and a large rendition of a Pooh bear, dancing, pirouetting, or perhaps tossed asunder. Slipcases for Fine Press copies are printed in four colors on concrete-gray paper; slipcases for Deluxe copies feature the Bear of Very Little Brain foil-stamped in an electric metallic blue over a dramatic enlarged “Pooh” graffito. Deluxe copies are handsewn with linen thread and are distinguished by handsewn silk headbands—honey-colored, of course!



THE EXTRA PRINT
100 Acre Woods
Two-color relief print
Edition: 60 copies for sale

THE EXTRA PRINT

Deluxe edition copies are accompanied by an original, full-scale, two-color relief print, *100 Acre Woods*, printed black over half-toned light beige highlights. Birk's map references Milne's beloved, hand-drawn original, borrowing its place names ("Bee Tree," "Sandy Pit," "Where the Woozle Wasnt") and transposing them to a modern-day city map, reminiscent of various Los Angeles landmarks. The prints measure 18 x 24 inches on 250 gsm cream Stonehenge and are limited to 60 copies for sale, each signed by the artist: 40 accompany the Deluxe edition, and an additional 20 are offered for individual sale.

HOW TO ORDER

We reserve a copy of the Fine Press edition for each of our current Annual Subscribers who are offered the first opportunity to order an ultra-limited Deluxe edition instead, at an additional charge. Pricing varies depending on the type of subscription and is generally 20-30 percent below the retail price. A supplementary fee of \$2,160 will be charged to Annual Subscribers who elect to purchase a Deluxe copy of *Pooh* with the signed limited-edition print. All other subscription prices are as follows:

Fine Press Edition

210 copies

\$1,120 with Subscription (\$1,600 retail)

Deluxe Edition, with signed relief print

40 copies

\$3,280 with Subscription (\$4,100 retail)

Individual signed relief print

20 copies

\$1,280 with Subscription (\$1,600 retail)



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