

THE TIMES

Display lets visitors judge books by their covers

Jennifer O'Brien

December 18 2017, 12:01am,
The Times

Books



Penguin's Essentials series invited artists to reimagine the covers of modern classics. The *Dubliners* cover was designed by Roman Bittner

A selection of iconic book covers, including one for James Joyce's *Dubliners* and another produced by Banksy, will go on display in a British museum next year.

The exhibition, by Penguin Random House, consists of book covers from the publisher's Essentials series of modern classics with unconventional cover designs, launched in 1998. Artists including Banksy and the graphic designer Chris Ashworth were invited by the company to rethink the covers of modern classic novels.

Banksy, a little-known graffiti artist at the time, reimagined the cover for Nick Cave's *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. His work features an ass dressed in clothing similar to that of the Virgin Mary.

The *Dubliners* cover was designed by Roman Bittner, a renowned German illustrator from the Apfel Zet graphic design company in Berlin. It is made up of intricate designs and shapes, thought to symbolise the many layers of life in Dublin covered by Joyce in the collection of short stories. It also quotes a review by *The Sunday Times*, which states: "Joyce's early stories remain undimmed in their brilliance."

The artists were encouraged by John Hamilton, Penguin's art director, to ignore publishing conventions and create what is widely regarded as one of the most creative book series of the past 50 years. Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* and Esther Freud's *Hideous Kinky* are among the other novels featured.

"The launch of Penguin Essentials in 1998 was a watershed moment in book cover design, bold and daring reinventions of modern classics from artists and designers worldwide," Mr Hamilton said. "I'm excited that we are finally able to bring together the fantastic work of so many of the talented individuals who have worked with us over the years to create this iconic series."

The collection of 100 covers will be displayed at the Ditchling Museum of Art & Craft in East Sussex from January 6.