

London artist's compelling Corona diary compared to the work of Samuel Pepys goes global

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A stunningly sketched graphic diary of the UK's pandemic experience has gone global after taking social media by storm and providing 25,000 meals for people in need.

Vic Lee's Corona Diary raised £5,000 for the food charity FareShare when it was self-published in the first months of the pandemic last year.

Among hundreds of stories in the unique book, which chronicles a whole 12 months in black and white, Vic mentions Marcus Rashford's work with FareShare and was inspired to donate himself.

Now, a year on, a second book has gone global thanks to it being picked up by a publisher and a new Artist Edition has also been added.

Vic's first Artist Edition, which covered the six months from January 2020 to June 2020, was self-funded and self-published. It sold all 2,500 copies within just eight weeks to buyers around the world thanks to word of mouth and social media buzz.

He said: "The original post of the first few pages I shared on LinkedIn especially, sort of blew up – it was viewed 250,000 times, with over 12,000 likes and thousands of comments telling me to publish it as a book."

Publishers Frances Lincoln quickly saw the diary's importance and Vic signed a book deal within five weeks of getting in touch.

The 88-page hand-crafted book, packed with evocative images from the first six months of the pandemic, headed worldwide.

From Sir Captain Tom Moore's legacy, to lockdown hair, Eat Out To Help Out, UK government decisions and Trump, and moments that have quickly been forgotten, Vic's books have been likened to those of Samuel Pepys, as a modern-day chronicler of a year like no other.

The book has also gone on to win a flurry of awards and been lauded as extra special and rare to cover a complete year in our lifetime.

Vic, of South London, added: "The Corona Diary is an important book to a lot of people. It records a lot of what happened and also personal experiences and thoughts.

"I didn't realise when I made the first book just how important it was. The people buying it, from hairdressers to designers, builders, mums and dads and students, came from all walks of life. The comments they posted on their platforms made me realise that this was more than just another book that will be bought and left on a shelf. It's something to cherish, keep and look back on in one, two, or five years' time."

Reviews of the Corona Diary have drawn parallels with Pepys' iconic 17th century works detailing the plague and great fire of London.

Vic said: "It records what has affected everyone. This is not a personal story as such, but an overall, this is what happened to all of us and what we went through together globally.

"It is a book for everyone. It will not be forgotten, I've received messages that tell me the book has helped people have a better understanding of what happened, as they blanked out much of the year they missed, and to look back on and smile, laugh and cry.

"The diary isn't just a book to buy, but a book to own and keep for generations to come. I have had new parents buy these books for their children born in 2020, to keep and have as a memento. For their children that experienced 2020 to look back on.

"A highlight was when lockdown happened globally, it felt like nature made a comeback. Pollution levels dropped beyond expectations, way beyond. At one point oil companies were selling barrels of oil at minus \$34! They were actually paying people to take the barrels as they had nowhere to store them and no one was driving anywhere.

"There are parts about the NHS, of doctors and nurses in every country going above and beyond. This was very emotional to illustrate and write about."

The Frances Lincoln published first edition has sold just under 10,000 copies in its first two months of release.

Vic has just launched the second Artist's Edition, a timely follow up chronicling a second six months -- from June 2020 to January 2021.

Selling 1,000 copies in its first week, this latest edition is also gaining worldwide attention.

Vic added: "The £5,000 FareShare was not planned. I had no income, no work, and no help. All my projects stopped abruptly. I didn't know where my money would come from. After the final books of the Artist Edition sold. I took a step back and remembered my background, my Mum passed from cancer when I was three, leaving my Dad, who never remarried, to raise two kids, aged three and four.

"We lived on a council estate. I was a shy, skinny ginger kid with Sellotaped National Health glasses who was bullied at school.

“But I always drew and I had a good sense of humour, and that’s what got me through. We had child allowance to help out, no fancy goods and my Dad drove a car older than me!

“I included a piece about Marcus Rashford in the first book, and now the second. An important character for me.

“When the book did so well, I felt like I needed to give back a little. I donated £5,000 of my own money to FareShare. I am now keeping an eye on things and hope I will be able to offer the same if the second artist edition sells out.

“My books are now used in some schools as part of the curriculum in art, in the UK. And many schools and universities use them in research and as inspirational books for art students, both in the UK and overseas.

“To be able to make, self-fund and publish something that inspires children and adults alike is amazing.

“It has been incredible. I wasn’t going to make a second book, but I realised that the situation after June wasn’t getting any better.

“So, I spent the next six months on the second volume. This has only just been released. I also wanted to keep this edition a little special as a signed Artist Edition only.

“Being a published author has taken me by surprise, I haven’t really stopped to think about it to be honest as I am keeping busy on other projects as things are slowly having some semblance to normality again.

“Being compared to Samuel Pepys is great – a complete honour.”

Vic Lee’s second volume, limited and signed, Artist Edition is available through www.coronadiary2020.com . It costs £50 plus postage and packaging.

The first edition, published by Frances Lincoln, is available globally in most book stores and online.

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