



# Austin Osman Spare: The Occult Life of London's Legendary Artist

*Phil Baker*

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*Austin Osman Spare* is the definitive biography of the controversial occultist and artist, an enfant terrible of the Edwardian art world whose work was both hailed as genius and decried as immoral decadence. As George Bernard Shaw reportedly said, "Spare's medicine is too strong for the average man."

Trained as a draughtsman, Spare enjoyed early acclaim when, at the age of seventeen, his work was shown at the Royal Academy in London. But his star soon declined; Spare went underground, falling out of the gallery system to live in poverty and obscurity. After a brief association with Aleister Crowley, he became absorbed in occultism and sorcery, voyaging into inner dimensions, while developing his own magical philosophy of pleasure, obsession, and the subjective nature of reality. All the while, Spare continued to produce extraordinary art, and held his exhibitions outside of the conventional art world, in London pubs.

Today Spare is both forgotten and famous, a cult figure whose modest life has been much mythologised since his death; the world's largest Spare collection is held by Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin. Biographer Phil Baker separates fact from myth, providing wide-ranging insights into Spare's art and mind, reconnecting him with the art community that ignored him and exploring the rich tapestry of the culture that surrounded him, interweaving the birth of psychoanalysis, the historiography of the occult, and the British class system. This richly readable and illuminating biography, containing 50 black and white and 8 color photographs of Spare's art, takes us deep into the strange inner world of this enigmatic artist.

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