

DID YOU JUST MAKE THAT UP? AN AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHIC INVESTIGATION INTO  
THE EMERGENCE OF IMAGES IN PAINTING, AS SITUATED WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK  
OF C20TH and C21ST BRITISH ART.

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## Declaration

I declare that:

The work presented in this thesis is my own and embodies the results of my research during my period of registration.

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### Abstract

I am a painter. My paintings depict figures in groups or alone, enacting narrative in illusionistic space. The paintings are produced without much explicit preparation in terms of their content, relying on improvisation in the studio for their realisation. I do not have a clear idea of when they are finished, either, and I often alter paintings long after their first conclusion. I set out to examine where the images and spaces I depict come from, how their form develops and how they might continue to emerge; how I make things up, in other words. In doing this, I hope to make the paintings better by increasing the complexity of my understanding of them, to shed light on creative practice in general, and to offer insight to other painters like me, and to researchers into creative practice.

I have subjected the emergent and shifting nature of my paintings to academic study by combining a close attention to the work and its processes with a self-reflective journal of the activity and ongoing theoretical writing. This process generates a virtuous spiral of activity in the studio, as writing about the painting produces insight, which is fed into the painting, making it better, and producing more insight, which is fed into the painting and so on.

In subjecting my studio practice to study, I hope to open it up in a way that might be useful to others. The analysis of reflections on my own painting - developing the concept of the *intersubjective object* - is an attempt to make sense of interrelationships between the material, social and theoretical territories of painting. This is where the originality of my study lies. In presenting it, I offer insights into my creative practice that will be useful for other creative practitioners, and for academic study of creative practice.

I address questions about improvisation and narrative development in my paintings. First, I introduce the thesis and lay out its terms. In chapter 1 I set out the literature which informs the thesis, and in chapter 2 I set out the methodologies I have approached in working out my own method. In chapter 3 self-reflection and reflexivity are discussed in relation to improvisation and narrative, in chapter 4 which I examine how meaning is realised in relation to the surface of the painting, in chapter 5 which the positioning of my studio practice in terms of its wider contexts is examined in relation to painting as an intersubjective object and in chapter 6 which I look at continuity in my studio practice. I propose cloth as a metaphor for the work, as an articulation of development within individual paintings and within the practice. In chapter 7 I discuss the problem of finishing paintings.

This research has brought my painting into sharper focus, examining the relationship of painting to the improvisation of content. It has allowed me to re-examine elements of my practice that I have either taken for granted or overlooked, revealing historical parallels that would have remained invisible otherwise. It develops an understanding of the significance of narrative and improvisation in any creative practice, elucidating ideas about the self in creativity. In differentiating painting from other fine art practices and creative forms it produces a powerful sense of the significance of the painting in making meaning. The research leads me to the identification of a painting as an intersubjective object, in that my own subjectivity and those of others meet and operate there to generate and develop meaning. This theoretical construction can be employed in discussion of other art works, as well as my own.

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## Introduction

### 0.0 Introduction

I define myself as an artist and a painter and have done since 1992 when I left the Royal Academy Schools' postgraduate certificate course in painting (RA Schools). In this thesis I attempt to understand my studio practice in a more complex way than I have before. I offer aspects of my approach to other artists and creative practitioners wishing to understand their own work in a more complex way.

In this discussion my primary interest is my own painting. I have worked as a painter consistently since 1992 and have presented solo exhibitions on at least a bi-annual basis. There has been no appreciable break in my production, nor a time without a studio. Economically speaking, a high proportion of my income has come from making paintings, although I had a ten-year period of teaching fine art in Higher Education on fractional contracts. Painting is the focus of my interests, as a career and vocation. I have association with several recognized art institutions, including Stuckism<sup>1</sup>, the New English Art Club<sup>2</sup> and the Royal Watercolour Society<sup>3</sup>. For this reason, my studio practice carries great significance for me.

This thesis' claim to originality is in its examination of an extant studio practice, with an established position in its field. This is practice-based research in that new knowledge, which will develop new insights into how a creative practice that concerns itself with painting works, comes partly from the outcomes of the practice. All the data which I use is grounded in the practice. As a painter with an established reputation within the British art scene, the paradigm of research I employ must leave the studio practice intact, as much as possible within the bounds of academic possibility, otherwise the study would become a study of a different kind of practice. I develop this idea further in chapter 1, Methodology, and in the body of the thesis, particularly chapter 5.

In this introduction I will first describe the thesis and define its scope through discussion of three research questions. In the second section I will define its terms and in the third, look at the findings. Working in the studio between 2017 and 2022, I produced paintings which I use as data (see Appendix 1 catalogue of paintings), and I undertook a journal of my studio practice as I did so - that is to say, I kept a detailed Practice Log. My aim was to learn how to understand my studio practice more profoundly and critically, and so how to make that practice more effective. By extension, I also sought, through analysis of both paintings and

Practice Log, to develop a nuanced appreciation of painting as a contemporary fine art practice in relation to the Western historic canon of painting, and of the creative process in relation to it.

The thesis is an autoethnographic investigation which has the purpose of answering certain research questions. These concern the context and emergence of the images in my work, which consists largely of oil paintings, depicting narrative scenarios. I use specific paintings in comparative analysis with an analysis of my Practice Log to elucidate this and reflect on the larger body of paintings from which these paintings are drawn. I believe this represents an original approach to creative research. In doing this I hope to elucidate fresh insight into creative processes and into the impulses and factors that propel similar practices.

#### 0.1 Research Questions

Research question one; how has improvisation and narrative development informed artists historically, in relation to my paintings?

My paintings are made up in the studio, without much explicit reference or systematic planning, in an improvised way. My painting depicts subjective experience, with images juxtaposed to suggest narratives. I explore this, in part, by enlisting an historical case study of a painting from the 16<sup>th</sup> century. By doing this I find commonalities across temporal boundaries which elucidate aspects of the nature of narrative and improvisation and the development of images in painting. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 deal with this specifically.

Research question two; what is involved in the generation and realization of imagery and narrative in my painting and how are the images realized?

My paintings consist of depictions of narrative scenarios, expressing human and animal forms in a defined illusion of space, on a flat surface. They hold this in common with the historical case studies that I employ in the thesis, one of which is, for example, from the early Baroque period. However, I try to re-invigorate the activity through a contemporary engagement in painting. In this sense, the thesis has a relevance to other contemporary artists using painting as a means of expression. Chapters 4, and 5 deal with this question specifically.

Research question three; what is the significance of the surface in my painting?

The paintings I focus on primarily in the Practice Log are made of oil paint on flat canvas. In theorizing the process of realizing form in painting, I am led to an apprehension of the surface as an arena of open, provisional, and contingent activity of depicting forms. The deployment of different modes of depiction is addressed as a developing field of intersubjectivity, creating an intersubjective object. I detail this further in the next section, in which I will define key terms, to elucidate the nature of the relationships between them.

It is important to me that the thesis centres on my studio practice. I want to develop useful theory that emerges from looking at the paintings and other work in the studio practice, and the processes involved. Theory grounded in the data of the studio practice and the Practice Log provides authentic usefulness in understanding and developing the studio practice. Chapters 5 and 7 deal with this specifically.

The studio practice is affected by many different things, and its focus can change dramatically. Autoethnography ensures a personal, subjective view of the studio practice and revealing its processes and outcomes. I take the position from the outset that 'I', the artist, am not an isolated, romantic figure, bent on a simple mission to communicate my feelings through paint, but rather, like everyone else, a complex subjectivity in a complex economic, social, and cultural web. As Menand<sup>4</sup> says 'Cultures get transformed not deliberately or programmatically but by the unpredictable effects of social, political and technological change, and by random acts of cross-pollination'. Similarly, individuals like me, engaged in the cultural act of painting.

In the next section I will define core terms.

## 0.2 Definitions of Key Terms

### 0.2.1 Depicting

I use the verb 'to depict' in this thesis to denote the activity of making an image, a representation of something, a recognizable object, idea and/or feeling, outside the painting, in the painting, and the noun 'depiction' to mean its results.

### 0.2.2 Content

I use the word content in this thesis to mean that which is depicted in the paintings.

### 0.2.3 Subject and Subjectivity

The PhD is entitled 'Did You Just Make That Up?' In making up paintings I am putting my subjective experience and understanding in the primary position. The scenarios in my paintings are derived largely from my subjective understanding of the world, my imagination and recollection. In this context I take the *subject* to indicate the individual conscious mind and *subjectivity* the quality of being the individual conscious mind. My subjectivity, itself a construct in that it is composed of a multiplicity of things, determines the content of my paintings. I argue that it is determined by my subject position i.e., where 'I' am in relation to the outer world.

My feelings about my paintings alter: the position of my subjectivity in relation to them is contingent. The impulses that control the studio practice do not remain constant, either in the ordinary run of things or in the context of this thesis. Economic constraints may determine limitations, I may read a monograph on a painter I admire, or I may have a conversation about my painting that disturbs me. The focus of my interests shifts both regarding form and to content and I develop fictions and narratives to understand this fluidity. While the content belongs to the internal world in that the images come from me, the external world still effects it as the self is located, in the psychological terms employed by Bruner<sup>5</sup>, 'not in the fastness of immediate private consciousness but in a cultural-historical situation as well' Painting may be, according to Graw<sup>6</sup> who writes in explanation of what she sees as its supremacy as an expression, a medium in which subjectivity plays the largest part in making meaning, but for me that subjectivity is a fluid and mobile construct, especially when discussed in the context of art and creativity.

### 0.2.4 Improvisation

I describe my studio practice as 'making things up'. I use the term improvisation to describe the way I make up visual form in my painting. This has significance in relation to narrative in my painting in that these forms manifest the *dramatis personae* and other elements of the narrative scenario. The invention of forms in my studio practice proceeds in an improvisatory fashion; I engage my imagination and recollection, in concert with the physical equipment of the studio, to develop the forms in process on the surface. Forms are often invented in the studio without planning, unexpectedly, without conscious or systematic thought; this reflexive activity characterizes my painting. In a way though, any painting or drawing is an improvisation; even a tracing involves the hand, the pencil, the tracing paper, and the

projected image in a precarious event that could 'succeed', 'fail' or produce something entirely unexpected. This precarity raises the stakes and enables the search for interest, surprise, and excitement in my painting.

#### 0.2.5 Narrative

Narrative is an account of connected events and developments in a story, a term derived from writing and the spoken word. Narrative is not limited to textual concerns. Narrative painting is associated with Victorian visual art in which 'acts of heroism throughout the Empire were especially popular'. (ex. Walker Gallery, Liverpool<sup>7</sup>). 'History Painting', a genre of visual art in which events of general cultural significance are depicted, is an exemplar of narrative in painting and discussed at length by Reynolds<sup>8</sup> in his *Discourses*, arguably the founding document of the RA Schools. I discuss this at greater length in chapter 6. I suggest that the term carries the implication that it derives from a particular subject position – for example, 'that's my story, anyway' - and in the process of my painting narrative is closely linked with improvisation. I argue that narrative and improvisation operate hand in hand.

The depictions of people in my paintings enact narrative scenarios, either as single figures, or in groups. The people or characters I depict in paint are in this context a means to explore subjective emotions and impulses. The narratives I engage with in my paintings often connect one painting with another. In this sense an ongoing narrative permits me to revisit particular painted personalities that act as *dramatis personae* of my subjective and emotional status. These *dramatis personae* expound emotional and subjective scenarios. They are referenced in my painting log. A subjective narrative is created and then shared, propelled into a broader cultural narrative through the way that art operates. My paintings are shared social objects in that sense. I discuss the intersubjective object, a key reference point for my thesis, below.

#### 0.2.6 The Intersubjective Object

In this thesis I propose that a painting exists as an *intersubjective object* by sharing different potential meanings between more than one subjectivity. The intersubjective object is a theoretical object that emerges from the data of my Practice Log and the paintings to which the Practice Log refers. This idea is exemplified in chapter 8, in which I discuss the process by which a friend determines the finishing point of a painting, and in chapter 6 where I explore the role of the community in which the painting exists in determining its form. I argue that my painting is not just an expression of an inner self but is an emergent and contingent

process; I see my painting, as Bryson<sup>9</sup> claims 'as a body of techniques that lies emphatically outside the self'. In addition, the viewer brings their own narratives of meaning to a painting. I propose that my painting provides an object in which different subjects interact, both in terms of myself as artist, as I view the work from different, sometimes even opposed subject positions ('does it convey emotionality?', 'does it look resolved?' for example, two questions which might ask different things of an image), and in the viewer or viewers. The viewer and the artist may hold multiple positions in relation to the territories of painting, and therefore to each other. Other people's readings of my studio practice change it, both for me and for them. This means that the image depicted on the surface of my painting emerges from my Self and from the other selves that engage with it, in a community that intersects on the intersubjective object that is the painting.

#### 0.2.7 Practice-based Research

The intersubjective object is key to the discussion of my painting and enables me to argue that my painting constitutes practice-based research. The outcomes of the studio practice – the paintings - are reflected on in the Practice Log, which drives the text-based research. I draw data from the Practice Log about the whole body of paintings made from 2017 to 2022, (see Appendix 1 catalogue of paintings) and use it to reflect on specific case-studies in the text of the thesis. This leads to development in the studio practice, producing more outcomes that are determined by or informed by the text-based research (see Appendix 1 catalogue of paintings). These outcomes are again reflected on, forming a virtuous spiral, and fulfilling criteria identified by Liggett<sup>10</sup>, for example, in describing the work as practice-based research in the visual arts. I detail this further below in Chapter 3 Methodology. The way knowledge is manifested as material outcome is discussed in chapter 4.

#### 0.2.8 Surface

My paintings are objects with paint on and in their surface. Marks of paint coalesce to make shapes in the surface of the painting. An individual painting may also comprise several surfaces, hung together, linked by proximity – this applies to the multiple mode of the diptych or triptych, as well as to the montage, in which discrete images are juxtaposed (see chapter 7). The substrate of my paintings is typically constructed, in the traditional manner, of a wooden, expandable frame over which is stretched a piece of linen, stapled, and held taut. The linen is sized to make it less absorbent, and then primed to make a consistent and still less absorbent surface. The primer is white. I then make marks on the primed surface in oil paint. This makes a membrane of paint across the primer. Where the oil paint does not cover

the primer, the primer is visible as a white variation in the total membrane or field of marks made by paint. The white variation is therefore part of the surface of the painting. The visual phenomenon available to me and to the viewer is the total field of marks, or rather one side of the total field, the other side being the one facing the substrate. The surface of the painting is made up of the marks of paint visible to the artist and viewer, carrying the meaning of the work.

There is no material depth in my painting other than the miniscule depth of the marks themselves. Painting does not manifest as layers but as a single surface made up of marks in different colours. The painting is made of layers of paint – as I say in Practice Log 10 'oil paint has the property of drying slowly and allowing each layer to combine with the next' - but the primer and any previous paint layers are either no longer visible or have become part of the unitary visible surface of the painting. The material of paint forms a layer of which the viewer and the artist can only see one side, and one iteration i.e., the surface that faces the exterior world. *Pentimenti*, the still visible evidence of marks covered up by more recent marks, are co-opted into the visible surface and, while they suggest previous work, they are not available as such. *Pentimenti* can also be counterfeited, or suggested, as in certain work by Arturo di Stefano<sup>11</sup>. The indication of depth is not the same as the presence of depth.

Apparent depth does not equate to actual depth. Even the layering of different images across a single surface (examples in the work of Francis Picabia<sup>12</sup> or Sigmar Polke<sup>13</sup>), creating so-called 'palimpsests', nevertheless results in a unitary surface. In both these cases a visual confusion is caused by the difficulty in perceiving the image. The eye cannot know what happens under the visible layer of paint, but it is a fair assumption that it is made of several independent images. The layers are only suggested or inferred though.

#### 0.2.9 Linear and Tone/Colour

Form in my painting is created by means of marks on the surface. Erasing marks exposes what is beneath them, and therefore adding that to the form, rather than exposing a void. In my work form is expressed in linear and tone/colour terms. The expression of form in linear terms (a line indicating a change in the form or forms depicted) may be seen as in opposition to its expression in tone/colour terms, where form is described by making a plausible resemblance to the way light falls in the physical world. Textural mark-making also acts as tone/colour because it is not defined by a contour.

There are no subject contours visible in nature, and so the action of depiction is more apparent in using a linear mode. Where form is solely expressed in linear terms, a conceptual gap is more evident between the work of depiction and that being depicted than when it is expressed in tone/colour. I argue though that linear expression is a choice in making an image: rather than emerging from and being determined using specific materials (pencil, pen, brush), expression of form is possible on a continuum between the purely linear and the purely tone/colour. The width of the gap is a choice made by the painter in relation to the content of the painting.

#### 0.2.10 Self-reflection and Reflexivity

In this discussion I use the term reflexivity to describe the process that occurs while involved directly in the activity of making the paintings. Self-reflection occurs while stepping back or out and reflecting on the result. I explore this relationship in chapter 4. See summary of chapters below.

In the following section I discuss the significance of the thesis.

#### 0.3 Significance and Limitations

I believe many of my conclusions may be relevant to other artists and creative practitioners. Intense, self-reflective study of the way I make the paintings, while in the process of making them, leads me to a richer appreciation of the studio practice and my place in relation to it. I hope that it provides interest and use to others, as a document of another life, and as a comparator. The paintings themselves, as intersubjective objects, provide a space for shared meaning and might be seen as autobiographical. As Barnes<sup>14</sup> points out, 'autobiography also involves the biographies of others and meanings created and approximately shared between us'. I exist in a particular social context and other artists who exist in a similar one might be interested in my findings. Someone who went to art college in the 1980s and 90s and chose the RA Schools for postgraduate study would clearly find a resonance, but anyone interested in contemporary art or creative practice might also.

I offer it as an historical record of a particular set of interests at a particular time. Appendix 1 includes a detailed record, in roughly chronological order, of the work of the studio practice from 2017 to 2022, including a majority of the paintings and including record of three exhibitions of the work. I include publications made within the time considered, which



comment on, explain, or accompany the exhibitions. I offer this partly as a demonstration of the activity. I also offer it as an illustration of the way that elements discussed in chapters 3 to 8 are present across the studio practice and apply to other works as well as the ones taken as examples.

The Practice Log is a document that has a lot in common with other artists' biographies and autobiographies, artists' journals and collected letters. However, it differs from them in its academic context, and in its ambition of a rigour in its self-analysis. My thoughts, plans and reflections as I move through years in the studio are subject to systematic scrutiny, toward theorization. I examine the nature of the activity of making paintings through considering the research questions and hope that a general usefulness emerges.

#### 0.4 Outline of the PhD

*Chapter 1:* The review of literature sets out the areas of literature with which the thesis is concerned. I use sources of narrative enquiry and anthropology, art history and the work of specific artists and art educators to answer the research questions. The literature review chapter differs from the established model of presenting an exhaustive survey of literature in the field. Instead, I have selected sources that emerged as the research progressed. The field is complex in that it is grounded in the data of the studio practice and therefore emerged fully only in progress. A review of literature undertaken before the research began would have been inappropriate.

*Chapter 2:* The methodology chapter examines the research methods deployed and explores its sources. The methodologies I draw on are autoethnography, grounded theory and practice-based research.

The discussion chapters are set out below and I include appendices.

#### *Chapter 3. Self-reflection and Reflexivity*

Thinking about my studio practice occurs away from the studio, in self-reflection, and in the studio in reflexive action. I have a body of knowledge, training, education, and there is also a canon of knowledge and an emergent social context for the work, and these things merge in producing the paintings. I use self-reflective and reflexive modes of thinking to understand and progress in this complex. The chapter examines the relationship between the modes,

and how the tension between them drives the work. This addresses the research question of what is involved in the generation and realization of imagery and narrative in my painting and how the images are realized. The painting's intersubjective nature as a nexus of different imperatives and ideas is developed, into the idea of the painting as an intersubjective object. I use work by various painters for comparison and to explore their effect on my own work, and I use two of my paintings, *The Solid Model of Time*, and *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad* as exemplars.

#### *Chapter 4. Modes of Depiction in Improvisation*

My paintings are surfaces, first and foremost, on which marks are assembled to make shapes, which resemble things outside the picture, and are then named as form. In addressing the research question of the significance of the surface in my painting, I look at how these marks are assembled through what I define for the purposes of this discussion as a binary of drawing and painting. I go on to address the object-ness of my painting, in relation to the depictive activity, looking at the materiality of marks in the improvisation of the studio practice. I argue that the flatness of the surface is a more important element than either. I go on to discuss the idea of depth and the notional space 'behind' a painting, arguing that lack of depth is a value, specific to my painting, which enables improvisation and is part of its nature as an intersubjective object. Here I address the research questions about how improvisation and narrative work in my painting and the significance of the surface. I argue that rather than depth, time is the dimension in which meaning develops. I discuss the unfolding process of meaning in paintings, across the flat surface, in relation to both the process of its making and the process of viewing, leading to an apprehension of the painting as an intersubjective object. I identify the uncertain nature of depicted meaning in my paintings, arguing that it opens a space for intersubjectivity.

#### *Chapter 5. The intersubjective object and the community in which the paintings exist.*

My painting exists as an intersubjective object in social contexts. In addressing how improvisation and narrative have informed artists historically in relation to my painting, I introduce the idea of community to refer to these different social contexts as a whole. I then define parts of the community in relation to a specific painting. First, I look at my education in art as a particular social context, addressing the presence of History Painting in the work, and discuss the use of Railway Modelling figures as a strategy to subvert it, specifically in *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad*, demonstrating a self-criticality in the paintings. I then look at the academic context in which the thesis is written as another social context,

citing different PbR theorists to examine its effects. *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad* is examined as an intersubjective object, referring to and effected by these two specific social contexts, and opened up to others.

#### *Chapter 6. The Unfolding Cloth of Continuity*

The studio practice develops in an improvisatory way, moving from surface to surface without complex planning; meaning emerges in self-reflection, and guides the studio practice, but the practice is done in reflexive activity. Looking at each painting and at the studio practice as a continuum, like a single piece of unfolding cloth, grants an insight into the way the studio practice develops. I compare the use of cloth in my own painting to Carracci's *The Butcher's Shop* to establish commonalities between the two, and to develop analogies between the surface of the painting and cloth. This explores how improvisation and narrative have informed artists historically in relation to my painting and goes toward answering the question of what is involved in the generation and realization of imagery and narrative in my painting and how the images are realized. Juxtaposition is established as the driving force of the studio practice; I use examples of unitary paintings, and of multiple panel paintings in my practice to demonstrate how themes and ideas move from one surface to another.

#### *Chapter 7. Finishing a Painting*

I argue that, because of the specific qualities of oil paint on canvas, and the way my paintings work visually, finishing a painting is not dictated by a material condition. It is more a matter of decision. Having established my paintings' nature as intersubjective objects I suggest that agency involved in deciding when a painting is finished lies not just with me but with other people also. I examine what is involved in the generation and realization of imagery and narrative in my painting and how the images are realized by exploring the mechanisms by which this happens. While I may not have come to a resolved position, another narrative may be provided that is persuasive enough to finish the work on the painting. I cite one specific incident in the studio practice to show how my own agency in finishing a painting was overwhelmed by another. This provides a further argument for the painting as an intersubjective object.

#### *Chapter 8: Conclusion.*

## 0.5 Conclusion

This thesis is an auto-ethnographic investigation into the context and emergence of the images in my work which consists largely of oil paintings, depicting narrative scenarios. The progress of their development, individually and as a body of work is the focus of the work; the reflexive activity of the studio is manifested in the material presence of the paintings (see *Appendix 1 catalogue of paintings*), which itself continues to change, as I attempt to understand the meaning that the practice offers me. The Practice Log is a self-reflective record of the changes and a plan for further development. Theory grounded in this data addresses questions to do with improvisation and narrative development, extending my study to historical exemplars to examine values that may cross temporal boundaries and so cast light on contemporary practice in general. In this way I hope to provide a study that encompasses the subjective in discussing the meaning of my own paintings, and so give a model for the discussion of other creative practice that does the same. The work offers an approach to research itself, which includes image as data, as well as improvisation, intersubjectivity, and surface as concept that suggests original contributions for others to develop.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.stuckism.com>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.newenglishartclub.co.uk>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.royalwatercoloursociety.co.uk>

<sup>4</sup> Menand, Louis (2021) *The Free World: Art and thought in the cold war* Harper Collins UK

<sup>5</sup> Bruner, J (1990) *Autobiography and the Self in Acts of Meaning* Harvard University Press USA

<sup>6</sup> Graw (2012) *The Value of Painting* in Graw, I, Geimer, P, Birnbaum, D, Hirsch N (2012) *Thinking Through Painting: Reflexivity and Agency beyond the canvas* Sternberg Press, Germany

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/walker-art-gallery/room-guide/victorian-narrative-painting>

<sup>8</sup> Reynolds, J (1992) *Discourses* Penguin Classics UK

<sup>9</sup> Bryson, N (2003) *A Walk For A Walk's Sake* in De Zegher, C., Newman, A. (2003) *The Stage Of Drawing: Gesture And Act* Tate, UK

<sup>10</sup> Liggett, S. (2020). *Positioning the Arts in the Research Process: Perspectives from Higher Education*. In: Earnshaw, R., Liggett, S., Excell, P., Thalmann, D. (eds) *Technology, Design and the Arts - Opportunities and Challenges*. Springer Series on Cultural Computing. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42097-0\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42097-0_2)

<sup>11</sup> Prendeville, B (2008) *Hope* in di Stefano, A (2008) *Pentimenti* Purdy Hicks Gallery, London

<sup>12</sup> Umland, A., Hug, C. (Eds) (2016) *Francis Picabia: Our Heads Are Round So Our Thoughts Can Change Direction* MOMA New York

<sup>13</sup> Halbreich, K. (Ed) (2014) *Alibis: Sigmar Polke 1963 2010* MOMA New York

<sup>14</sup> Barnes, J. (2014) *Interdisciplinary, praxis-focused autoethnography: using autobiography and the values discussion to build capacity*. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 1 (5). pp. 160-182. ISSN 2055-0286.

## Chapter 1. Review of Literature

### 1.0 Introduction

In examining my studio practice, I aim to understand it in a way that makes an inclusive account of what drives it. I want to acknowledge and understand the contribution my own personal feelings, experience and history make to my studio practice. I experience my painting, and the writing I do concerning it, in my own way and I put this forward as the primary concern of the PhD. The literature I have referred to has therefore occupied a place between theories about the self in relation to the culture in which it exists, and about the interaction of culture and the self in making paintings.

A key question in Practice-based Research is how creative work, in this case paintings and thinking about how the paintings are being made, can be validated as academic research. Significant criticism of the possibility exists, for example in Scrivener<sup>15</sup>, whose statement that visual art is not 'primarily part of knowledge communication', or 'a servant of the knowledge acquisition enterprise' seems to deny it entirely. However, I argue that approaching creative practice as an action performed by me as an integral part of a social context, examining its relation to me and to the community in which I and it exists, makes a useful sense of it, and one that can be shared. Anthropology, ethnography and auto-ethnography, disciplines which focus on the relationship of individual to society, are therefore appropriate in this discussion, alongside art history and the specific artists and artefacts that have influenced my creative practice.

I discuss the literature concerned with the methods I use in the thesis in the following chapter, on methodology.

### 1.1 Narrative and anthropology

The work of philosopher Gilbert Ryle<sup>16</sup> (1900 -1976) on Cartesian dualism in thinking about how we perform actions led to his definition of *intelligent* as opposed to *habitual* practice. Ryle uses the example of a clown performing and asks whether they do it by rote (habitual) or are they aware and guiding the process while in the process (intelligent). By defining it as intelligent practice, Ryle's ideas help me to frame how my painting works as practice-based research. The process of the painting seen as its performance, I argue, constitutes the research. I employ the duality that Ryle establishes when discussing the contrasting aspects

of creative practice in the studio, that engages both reflexive and self-reflective modes. I discuss how and why this duality helps my argument in chapter 3.

Clifford Geertz<sup>17</sup> (1926 – 2006) was an anthropologist credited with developing Ryle's concept of thick description for the discipline. His interpretive stance claims that the meaning of a cultural phenomenon is emergent and contingent on the web of meaning that surrounds it, rather than essential or definitive. His work refuses a central or defining theory, insisting that each culture speak for itself and be interpreted by the anthropologist in its own right. This is important for my thesis in that I develop my discussion of contrasting narratives, between the artist, the artwork, and the viewer. This informs my discussion of the painting as an intersubjective object in chapter 4 and more specifically in chapter 5, where I discuss the social context in which the paintings exist.

Jerome Bruner<sup>18</sup> (1915 - 2016) is recognised for his contribution in cognitive psychology. He developed a theory of narrative psychology in the 1980s, proposing there are two forms of thinking: the paradigmatic and the narrative. He argues that the former is formal and categorical, while the latter is a way of interpreting the world in a storied, narrated form. Bruner argues that these narratives originate in a fusion of the self and the social, operating through a 'distributed self'. I discuss the notion of the 'distributed self' when I argue that my paintings are intersubjective objects that act as a bridge between the self and the social, for myself, and to a different extent, the spectator, in chapter 4. Bruner's sense of making meaning through narrative is also present in chapters 5, 6 and 7, in which different narratives are played out against each other.

Tim Ingold (1948 - ) is an anthropologist with interests in art, archaeology, and architecture. His work on the line, which draws on Heidegger, Deleuze and von Uexküll, emphasises process and becoming, and being within spaces, places, and cultural contexts. In his recent work on the surface Ingold<sup>19</sup> addresses the written page, arguing that the surface of the page is not experienced as a thing separate from the letters on it, but as a part of the whole. I use this to think about the surface of the painting as a thing made up of marks of paint, in which shapes are recognised as form, in chapters 4 and 5. I also employ it in chapter 6 to think about the continuity in my studio practice. Working with Elizabeth Hallam, Ingold addresses improvisation as a cultural phenomenon, distinguishing it from innovation as an open-ended process that acknowledges and carries on from its past rather than attempts a break from it. This is useful in thinking about the process of my painting in chapter 4 and I refer to their sense of improvisation as a relational, entangled, and responsive activity in chapter 8. I employ Ingold's conception of the screen as a woven fabric in developing a

notion of the surface of the painting as made up of an interlocking mesh of marks in chapter 6, where I also employ Arante's<sup>20</sup> work on knitting as a surface, found in the same volume. I cite Ingold's<sup>21</sup> sense of being-in-movement in concluding my conception of relational and contingent sense of finish in chapter 8.

Alfred Gell (1945 – 1997) was an anthropologist with a particular interest in the anthropology of art, developing arguments about the agency of art objects on the viewer. Gell<sup>22</sup> argues that certain artefacts in Polynesian craft are designed as 'snares' in which bad spirits can be caught. This idea is extended in other work to snares made to catch animals in the wild, which he describes as sculptural substitutes of the animals they are designed for. He goes on to look at art galleries as snares for the attention. I use this idea to develop the sense of duration in looking for meaning in my own and others' paintings in chapter 4.

Psychologist James Gibson's<sup>23</sup> (1904 – 1979) work on visual perception focuses on environmental stimuli, developing the idea of affordance, which posits an interactive relationship between perceiver and perceived; we look at things in terms of how they affect us and how we can affect them. This helps to define the idea of a surface in visual terms, as I discuss in chapter 6. Using Gibson's ideas, I develop the implications of the duality involved in representation, in which we see the thing represented and the representation of the thing.

## 1.2 Art History

Joshua Reynolds<sup>24</sup> (1723 – 1792), a painter, was a major influence on the Royal Academy Schools when they were founded in 1768 and delivered a series of lectures to the students which have come to be seen as the founding documents of the institution. While his ideas about the role of artists in society are now anachronistic, they remain significant to my thesis in two ways. One is that the training in drawing that I took on at the RA Schools in the early 1990s has its roots in the hierarchy of painting that Reynolds promoted. This hierarchy is therefore implicit in the way in which I might approach making a painting. The other is that Reynolds' ideal of History Painting, while not appropriate to my ambition as a painter, still contains some things that are of interest. I discuss this in chapter 5, in relation to Nochlin<sup>25</sup> and to Phillips<sup>26</sup> *et al* whose work on History Painting locates it as an expression of a cultural hegemony in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. I cite in particular Roman's<sup>27</sup> work on the painting of Benjamin West (1738 – 1820) in developing my own response to History Painting in the studio.

Charles Baudelaire (1821 – 67) was a writer and critic, intimately connected with artists Edouard Manet and Paul Cezanne, both key figures in the history of early Modernist painting. His work was of great influence in the apprehension of the significant painters of nineteenth century France. I employ his discussion of finish or completion in relation to the work of Corot<sup>28</sup> as a model to begin addressing finish in my own painting, in chapter 7. John Berger (1926 – 2017) was an artist, writer, and critic, concerned with the relation of art to society. In his essay on drawing, Berger<sup>29</sup> develops an idea of drawing as a preliminary stage of painting and bases his conception of it on this. I use this as an example of an approach to drawing, in chapter 4, to examine the distinction between drawing and painting.

Walter Benjamin (1892 – 1940) was a philosopher and writer associated with the Frankfurt School of political, economic, and social thinking. Among his influential work, the essay *Painting; Signs and Marks* is particularly relevant to my thesis. In this essay, Benjamin<sup>30</sup> argues that the nature of painting is that it is a collection of marks, firstly, which the viewer (including the artist) makes sense of by assembling them into shapes, form and so on. I use this to look at the idea of the surface in chapter 4, and in chapter 6 in developing the notion of the painting's surface as a cloth-like material.

Norman Bryson<sup>31</sup> (1949 - ) is an art historian whose work argues for an emphasis on the material and physical processes in discussing visual art. Bryson's idea of the 'vast corpus' of education, tradition, precedent, and accepted practice as a force that acts on the artist is also important in defining the intersubjective object, and I address it in chapter 3. In his discussion of drawing, he argues for a specific way of dealing with the surface, which facilitates improvisation. His conception of painting, in contrast with drawing, gives it an 'all-over' order, where all marks must relate to the whole. I relate this to the combination of tone, colour, and line as modes of expression in my painting, in chapter 4 and in chapter 5, questioning the constraint that Bryson places on painting as an improvisatory medium, and the way he separates painting and drawing, arguing that the sense of the four edges of the painting and its flat surface facilitate improvisation rather than discourage it.

In his recent work Ivan Gaskell<sup>32</sup>, a historian of material culture, argues that meaning in painting in the Western canon, is fugitive and resistant to definitive states. He proposes that rather than asking what things are, the question should be about its use. Use is a value that can change. In this argument he blurs dualities in defining painting as against drawing. I discuss his attempt to distinguish usefully between them in chapter 4. His work on meaning in painting is discussed in chapter 7 in terms of its fugitive and many-faceted nature, in relation to achieving a level of finish in my paintings, and what that level might be. In



Gaskell's terms, finishing a painting and defining its meaning is not the sole privilege of the artist, but an emergent phenomenon, contingent on a social complexity.

Art historian and critic Isabelle Graw<sup>33</sup> (1960 - ) is recognised for her conception of painting as a 'success medium' with its own specific values. She describes a special relationship for painting, linked to its commodity status. She links this concept with the subjectivity of the artist. I use this idea to develop my concept of the intersubjective object in chapter 3. Graw's acknowledgment of painting as a category that is difficult to define in contemporary art terms, as different practitioners have extended it into multiple areas of activity and away from the pictorial sphere is significant in chapter 6, in which I develop a heuristic definition of my own painting and the concerns that it deals with.

Michael Ranta<sup>34</sup> (1959 - ) is an art historian concerned with narrative. In the essay which I cite in chapters 4 and 5, he locates the way paintings communicate stories with the recipients as much as with the artist, noting painting's dependence on the cultural milieu in which they exist for its meaning. I expand on this idea in thinking about the community in which my paintings exist. Janet Wolff's<sup>35</sup> (1948 - ) sociology of art also seeks an understanding of the visual arts within a web made of the culture in which it exists, and in chapter 5 I employ these ideas to develop the sense of the web around my own paintings, enlisting Hoptmann<sup>36</sup> who writes about the 'community' around the contemporary artist Elizabeth Peyton, composed of real, imaginary, and historical figures.

Tom Palin (1974 - ) is a contemporary painter and academic. His work is concerned with the formal conditions of painting, in that he concentrates on the construction of a painting rather than on its nature as an image. In his PhD thesis<sup>37</sup> he addresses Clement Greenberg's (1909 – 1994) theoretical concept of Medium Specificity, developed in Greenberg's argument for a reductive, abstraction-led position on painting, in which the idea of representation of objects outside the painting is rejected based on a Modernist, progressive idea of the canon of Western Art. In his work on the painter Francis Bacon, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze<sup>38</sup> (1925 – 1995) addresses Bacon's ambivalence toward representation and rejection of narrative in his work. I discuss this in relation to the way form is recognized in my paintings in chapter 3. In concluding the thesis, in chapter 8 I employ Palin's work as an exemplar of a set of concerns positioned in an impersonal and academic cultural context, which I define as part of a hierarchy of ideas that excludes the personal and refuses to acknowledge other social contexts.

Beverley Simmons and Allyson Holbrook<sup>39</sup>, contemporary academics in Fine Art in Australia, explore the academic environment as a cultural context in which to practice visual art. They develop a model of the process that considers the threat to the practitioner's sense of identity posed by intense study. This is expressed as a process moving from a rupture from previously held conceptions which moves toward a position where new insights and practices emerge. I use this model as a cultural context itself, as my studio practice exists within the academic context, and explore the implications of this in chapter 5.

### 1.3 Artist References

Karl Ove Knausgaard<sup>40</sup> (1968 - ) is a writer whose major work comprises six volumes. It is an explicitly autobiographical series, which attempts to represent his life. The work has attracted criticism on the grounds of its portrayal of people in Knausgaard's circle of friends as characters. I discuss his work in relation to mine in chapter 6, employing his sense of narrative as a continual unfolding rather than a set of discrete outcomes to elucidate the process of development in my studio practice. This idea has echoes in Haraway's<sup>41</sup> conception of the self as an imperfectly and continually re-constructed and re-connecting entity, as I also discuss in chapter 6. The difficulty this presents in terms of making or presenting a painting as finished is explored in chapter 7.

Annibale Carracci (1560 – 1609) was a painter from Bologna associated with the Baroque movement in the visual arts. His painting *The Butcher's Shop* (1583), oil on canvas 190 x 272 cm in Christ Church Picture Gallery, Oxford is of particular significance to me in the thesis for the following reasons: the particular, anomalous space, and certain objects depicted; the ambiguous narrative that it depicts; its mysterious commissioning process and the fact that it was hung in the kitchens of Christ Church for two hundred years; the comedic and sacred elements of the painting, the facial expressions and the reference to other work; Reynolds' references to Carracci and his associates in his *Discourses*; the fact that there is a smaller, less complex version of the painting in existence; the fact that I have referred to Annibale Carracci's work, without realising it, in my Practice Log and because of Carracci's melancholy career, which ended in death after his disappointment in not being acknowledged for his work on the Farnese Palace in Rome. I refer particularly to *The Butcher's Shop* in chapter 6.

Jean Baptiste-Simeon Chardin (1699 -1799) was a genre painter. His works involve visual anomalies, games, references to the surface and the act of the painting itself. These

qualities operate within the authoritative and apparently clear statement of space and form he describes. In chapter 4 I discuss his painting *Boy Blowing Soap Bubbles* (1733) in relation to my painting *The Solid Model of Time*. Chardin's work addresses the capacity of painting to depict a transient moment. I reference Chardin's playfulness in my painting of a scale model of a woman blowing bubble gum. This comparison exemplifies practice-based research, where I draw on the canon of art to develop my own practice.

Edvard Munch (1861 - 1944) was a painter whose work's content deals with a highly personal and self-narrating set of images. Its apparent simplicity might be seen as a rejection of an academic or 'finished' aesthetic and a reference to the Expressionist movement in Germany, and to imply a directness in its use of formal means to express the content. I discuss Munch's 1945 painting *Between The Clock and the Bed* (Munch Museum, Oslo, Norway) in relation to my painting *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad* 2019 in chapters 3 and 4, comparing his depiction of the process and subjective knowledge of aging with my depiction of a sense of self.

Phil King<sup>42</sup> (1965 - ) is an artist and writer. He is currently editor of *Turps* magazine, a quarterly journal dedicated to painting, founded by Marcus Harvey, with a wide readership. As a contemporary of mine, and one whose interests correlate with some of mine, he is a useful comparator. King's apprehension of the artwork as a co-product of artist and collector is important to me in developing the idea of the painting as an intersubjective object.

#### 1.4 Conclusion

In expanding my understanding of my studio practice, which I argue is a reflexive as well as a self-reflective process, I enlisted philosophers and anthropologists who theorise about how thinking takes place in the process of making things. These crucial sources emerged during the course of the study, as a result of reading suggested by readings of the Practice Log. The field was developed, or 'made up', as the research progressed. I have examined the implications of the 'vast corpus' of the practice of others on my own creative practice, through education and in a social context, and through example. I have also addressed the way the studio practice exists and has existed in its status as an academic phenomenon, as well as its more usual social contexts, my circle of friends, the market, and others. The range of sources I reference informs the drive of my argument; the intersubjective object, the crucial nature of the surface, the duality of reflexivity and self-reflection have emerged as theoretical constructs from the reading. When I have identified contrasting concepts in the

literature, I cement my argument by drawing theory forward that is grounded in the data of my Practice Log and the paintings.

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<sup>15</sup> Scrivener, S. (2002) *The Art Object Does Not Embody A Form Of Knowledge*. Working Papers in Art and Design 2 [https://www.herts.ac.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/12311/WPIAAD\\_vol2\\_scrivener.pdf](https://www.herts.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/12311/WPIAAD_vol2_scrivener.pdf) accessed 24.3.23.

<sup>16</sup> Ryle, G (1949, this edition 2009) *The Concept of the Mind* Hutchinson, Routledge, London

<sup>17</sup> Geertz, C (1973) *The Interpretation Of Cultures* Basic Books, USA

<sup>18</sup> Bruner, J (1990) *Acts of Meaning* Harvard University Press USA

<sup>19</sup> Ingold T (2020) *On Opening The Book of Surfaces* in Anusas, M., Simonetti, C (eds) (2020), *Surfaces*, Routledge

<sup>20</sup> Arante, L.(2020) *On Knitted Surfaces In-The-Making* in Anusas and Simonetti (2020) *Surfaces*, Routledge

<sup>21</sup> Ingold, T (2018) *Anthropology: Why It Matters* Polity Press UK

<sup>22</sup> Gell, A (1998) *Art and Agency: an anthropological theory* Clarendon, Oxford

<sup>23</sup> Gibson, J.J (1986) *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New York, USA <https://archive.org/details/ecologicalapproa0000gibs> accessed 4.7.22

<sup>24</sup> Reynolds, J (1771) *Seven Discourses on Art*, Apple

<sup>25</sup> Nochlin, L (1971) *Realism* Penguin, London

<sup>26</sup> Phillips, M.S. (2019) *Introduction* in Phillips, M.S., and Bear, J (Eds.) (2019) *What Was History Painting and What Is It Now?* McGill/Queen's, Canada

<sup>27</sup> Roman, C,E (2019) *James Gillray's The Death of the Great Wolf and the Satiric Alternative to History Painting* in Phillips, M.S., and Bear, J (Eds.) (2019) *What Was History Painting and What Is It Now?* McGill/Queen's, Canada

<sup>28</sup> Baudelaire, C., Trans. and Ed. Mayne, J. (1956) *The Mirror of Art: Critical studies by Charles Baudelaire* Doubleday USA, digitized Internet Archive 2011 <https://archive.org/details/mirrorofartcriti00baud/page/n5/mode/2up> accessed 15.7.22

<sup>29</sup> Berger, J (2016) *The Basis Of All Painting And Sculpture Is Drawing* p27- 32 of *Landscapes* Verso, London

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin, W. (1917) *Painting or Signs and Marks* in Benjamin, W.,(Eds) Bullock, M., Jennings, M (1996) *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writing Volume 1 1913 – 1926* Harvard University Press, USA

<sup>31</sup> Bryson, N., (2003) *A Walk For A Walk's Sake* in Newman, A and De Zegher, C.(2003) *The Stage of Drawing* Tate Gallery, UK

<sup>32</sup> Gaskell, I. (2019) *Paintings And The Past: Philosophy, History, Art* Routledge UK

<sup>33</sup> Graw, I, Geimer, P, Birnbaum, D, Hirsch N (2012) *Thinking Through Painting: Reflexivity and Agency beyond the canvas* Sternberg Press, Germany

<sup>34</sup> Ranta, M. (2014) *Iconography, Narrativity and Tellability in Pictures* in Klimke H (Ed) (2014) *Art Theory as Visual Epistemology* Cambridge Scholars UK

<sup>35</sup> Wolff, J (1981) *The Social Production Of Art* Macmillan, UK

<sup>36</sup> Hoptman, L (2008) *Fin de Siecle* in Hoptman, L (ed.) (2008) *Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton* (p225) Phaidon, London

<sup>37</sup> Palin, T. (2018) *The Condition of Painting: Reconsidering Medium Specificity* RCA PhD Thesis

<sup>38</sup> Deleuze, G, Smith, D (trans) (2003) *The Logic of Sensation* Continuum

<sup>39</sup> Simmons, B, Holbrook A (2012) *From Rupture To Resonance: Uncertainty And Development In Fine Art Research Degrees* Arts And Humanities In Higher Education 12(2-3) p204-221 Sage

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1474022212465687> accessed 18.11.21

<sup>40</sup> Knausgaard, KO (2013-19) *My Struggle (comprising 6 volumes)* Vintage, UK

<sup>41</sup> Haraway, D (1991) *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The reinvention of Nature* Free Association Books, London

<sup>42</sup> Phil King Interview July to August 2019 See appendix 1

## Chapter 2. Methodology

### 2.0 Introduction

I approach my studio practice to gain insight that encompasses the broad range of elements that drive it. I use my own self-reflective writing in comparative analysis of the paintings that I have myself made. I accept that employing an experimentalist paradigm, in which limits are set and the outcome of a prescribed project assessed, might make a simpler task. However, I believe that a larger and more useful understanding will come from this inductive research. The studio practice already exists in its specific set of social contexts and my aim is to understand it in a state as close to what it is as possible. I am going to my studio practice as a Participant Observer, making an ethnographic study of the artist in relation to their social context or contexts. The artist is me. As Hamera<sup>43</sup> says, while 'ethnography asks, "How and why do my research interlocutors express what they do?"', autoethnography asks the same question of me. It involves, again according to Hamera<sup>44</sup>, 'examining expression about the site as well as within it' and in autoethnography my self, in my studio practice, is the site. I want to know more about how I make up the paintings.

I employ aspects of grounded theory to theorise from the data, which is my Practice Log and my paintings. The Practice Log allowed me to establish themes and elaborate further sub-themes. I did this through a series of readings of the Practice Log.

#### 2.0.1 Identifying Themes in the Practice Log.

In the first reading I identified themes which I grouped together, in the form of collections of excerpts. Themes emerged in the reading by their recurrence and correspondence. For example, repeated mention of the surface throughout the Practice Log led me to the recognition that the surface of the painting was a crucial theme. Frequent mention of the content of the paintings, which appears in various ways in the Practice Log as I describe what I was painting about, led me to the recognition that content was another crucial theme.

I made a separate document for each theme. I then read the documents with a view to differentiating the themes into sub-themes. I then re-read the Practice Log, adding to, and developing the sub-themes. I then further re-read the sub-theme documents and theorised from them, synthesising this analysis into the themes. I used an approach developed from autoethnography to further examine and analyse this data, examining my own subjective

responses to the paintings and using those responses in approaching specific paintings as well as the body of work itself (see Appendix 1 catalogue of paintings). The major themes are

*Self*, addressed primarily in chapters 3 and 7.

*Content*, addressed primarily in chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6.

*Process*, addressed primarily in chapters 4, 6 and 7.

*Community*, addressed primarily in chapters 5 and 7.

*Surface*, addressed primarily in chapters 4 and 6.

This analysis of the Practice Log allowed me to re-order the narrative and see it in a more objective way. Themes emerged through reading the Practice Log, but it is difficult to make a definitive claim that the themes did not emerge because I was looking for them. However, the re-reading process and the analysis of the themes and sub-themes provides a level of objectivity. They address the elements of the work of the studio practice convincingly. After their analysis, I was then able to bring the emergent theory to a comparative analysis of the paintings in chapters 3 – 7 of the thesis.

The chapters themselves reflect the process of painting, in that chapter 3 deals with thinking in painting, 4 with the way form is realised in the painting, 5 with the context in which the painting exists, 6 with continuity and how one painting follows another, and 7 with how a painting is finished. Within this structure, the research questions are examined from different angles. Throughout the thesis, I refer to both analysed and 'raw' extracts from the Practice Log, which are available in Appendix 2 as single pages. I will discuss further the different aspects of the method I employ in the sections below.

## 2.1 Grounded theory

Sociologists Barney Glaser (1930 – 2022) and Anselm Strauss (1916 – 1996) developed grounded theory in their research on the awareness of dying in the terminally ill in a sample of hospitals in the USA<sup>45</sup>, published in 1965, and formalised in their later work<sup>46</sup> in 1967. They describe a method of analysing qualitative written, transcribed, or recorded data to develop theory that will emerge from the data. They say of their theory that it 'arose from scrutiny of the data and should illuminate the data far more than a comparative analysis of the medical services.' By grounding theory in the data, theory that is useful and related directly to the data itself is produced. The method involves working line by line through

interviews and other data to discover what they refer to as codes, which are discrete groups of words, sentences or paragraphs that contain, represent, or embody specific information on a specific subject. Stages of coding filter the data further, mediating and differentiating the information. The excerpts are first grouped into codes, a process described as open coding. The codes are then grouped into categories, in which properties shared by codes are established; this is axial coding. Selective coding then establishes theory by selecting and developing a central category. Theory is developed from this re-ordering and analysis of the data. Grounded theory research methodology is inductive, rather than deductive, making theory from data rather than testing a theory with data. In chapter 4, for example, I discuss the validity of proceeding in ignorance and hope, a position that emerges through repeated variations on the subject in my Practice Log. The aim of this thesis is to make theory from the work, rather than taking an extant theory to the work.

Kathy Charmaz<sup>47</sup> (1939 – 2020) was a sociologist who developed constructivist grounded theory after studying with Glaser and Strauss. She is recognised for her authoritative textbooks on grounded theory, in which she details the methodology and its variants. I draw in particular on her description of the relationship between extant and elicited text to validate the Practice Log and the paintings I make in my studio practice as equally important data. The former can be seen as elicited and the latter extant; ‘researchers treat extant texts as data to address their research question although these texts were produced for other, often very different purposes.’ In chapter 6 I cite her aim for grounding theory in the data to develop an abstract, theoretical understanding, which can therefore reflect on the experiences of others.

Dr Stefan Timmermans, a sociologist dealing with similar areas, addresses Glaser and Strauss’s work directly in his 1994 paper<sup>48</sup>, adapting the methodology to, as he put it, ‘insert my own experience as a relative of a terminally ill patient in the process of theory construction and extend the theory of awareness contexts’. Using introspective ethnography, he argues ‘for the comprehension of the other by the detour of the self’, introducing elements of emotionality that he felt were not sufficiently present in Glaser and Strauss’ original study. This counters Lal *et al.*’s<sup>49</sup> idea that ‘the reporting style of grounded theory studies has also been critiqued for de-contextualizing how data are constructed’. On the contrary, Timmermans claims that his adaptation of Glaser and Strauss’ grounded theory research method works well in eliciting complex subjectivity in context. Timmermans suggests using grounded theory methods in the inclusion of the self. This gives precedent for my own approach to the data. My own subjectivity is a subject to which I have privileged and unique access and contextualises the study strongly.

## 2.2 Autoethnography

Dr Heewon Chang<sup>50</sup> is Professor of Education at Eastern University in the USA and recognised for her authoritative employment of autoethnography in researching intercultural experience. Her writing provides a methodical overview, arguing that 'autoethnography should be ethnographical in its methodological orientation, cultural in its interpretive orientation, and autobiographical in its content orientation.' She describes a methodology that focuses on the subjective experience to 'excavate rich details...(and)...sort, label, interconnect and contextualise them in the sociocultural environment'. Through comparing the text of the Practice Log with the paintings the intersubjective nature of my paintings emerges. I argue that my paintings are intersubjective objects, providing bridges between my own subjectivity and others' and Chang's sociocultural view of autoethnography is an apt way to understand them and the processes of their making. I cite Chang in discussing self-reflection and reflexivity in chapter 3, and in dealing with memory in chapter 6.

Dr Leon Anderson (1950 - ), an American sociologist with interests in the study of social inequality, is known for his articulation of analytic autoethnography. By this he 'refers to ethnographic work in which the researcher is (1) a full member in the research group or setting, (2) visible as such a member in the researcher's published texts, and (3) committed to an analytic research agenda focused on improving theoretical understandings of broader social phenomena.'<sup>51</sup> This maps on to my requirements. I want to find ways of understanding my own studio practice from the inside of the experience, through self-reflection. By systematic analysis of my Practice Log I develop 'understandings, both as a member and as a researcher, (that) emerge not from detached discovery but from engaged dialogue'<sup>52</sup>. I use the insight gained from self-reflection in comparison with the paintings themselves, to develop ideas about the paintings, which increases the complexity of my understanding and through that, makes the paintings better. I refer to Anderson in chapter 4 in relation to the virtuous spiral of studio practice, Practice Log, and theoretical writing. I am, as he describes it, 'involved in the construction of meaning and values in the social worlds they investigate.'<sup>53</sup> However, as Anderson points out 'the definitive feature of analytic autoethnography is this value-added quality of not only truthfully rendering the social world under investigation but also transcending that world through broader generalization.'<sup>54</sup> This relates directly to the benefit that I identify in the thesis for the wider readership, in that insight gained into my studio practice might be useful for other creative practice.



### 2.3 Practice-based research

Professor Robin Nelson is a contemporary academic and theatre practitioner, recognised for his interest in the relationship between creative practice and research. In his work he articulates the positioning of creative practice within the academy, claiming ‘...it is now widely recognised that we ‘do’ knowledge, we don’t just think it’.<sup>55</sup> He cites Ryle<sup>56</sup> to establish the concept of ‘intelligent practice’, drawing a distinction between habitual practice and intelligent practice where intelligent practice is performance modified by and through praxis, and habitual is learned and performed by rote. Intelligent practice ‘does’ knowledge more effectively than habitual. In formulating a credible position for creative research in the academy, he distinguishes ‘artistic research’ from ‘practice as research’<sup>57</sup> by stressing the systematic in the academic process of ‘practice as research’. I cite Nelson in chapter 3 in discussing self-reflective and reflexive modes of thinking, and chapter 4 in thinking about the process of realising form. However, in her paper Liggett<sup>58</sup> makes more specific the idea that ‘the subjective strength of their work has grown out of the positioning of the researchers in their studies by a self-scrutinizing process’ and offers a definition of practice-based that ‘includes creative works that arise from the research process as part of the submission’<sup>59</sup>; this prescription offers a more accessible formula, foregrounding the process as much as the outcome. However, the danger of solipsism or of lack of rigour remains. In my thesis, the work of the Practice Log can be shared regardless of the quality of the paintings because it is verbally articulated and analysed. I frequently admit to not knowing, to proceeding without thought and to not understanding in the text of the Practice Log. I cite Nelson frequently in relation to the academic requirement to share new knowledge.

Dr Liza McCosh is an academic and a visual arts practitioner working in Australia. Her complex engagement with her painting practice is articulated through her conception of the *Material Sublime*<sup>60</sup>, by which she describes moments in the process of painting that transcend articulated, verbal explanation and are carried out without preconception. These moments produce unexpected outcomes, linked to Bolt’s statement that ‘decisions are made not according to logical thought but as a direct and felt response to handling elements’<sup>61</sup> which have extra significance or value in the process. McCosh describes them as moments generating ‘feelings of awe and wonder within a person, as initially the subject cannot fully comprehend the object or experience. I particularly cite McCosh in chapter 4, in which the

realisation of form is discussed. The faculty of reason is challenged, causing an indeterminate relationship between subject and object perceived'. She goes on to claim that

'Creative processes implicate matter in the formation of new knowledge which for the artist may comprise hitherto unfamiliar creative effects which provide fresh insights into the production and development of their work'.<sup>62</sup>

The written work articulates these moments of formation of new knowledge to develop theory useful in directing the studio practice toward more of them. The theory is tested by the studio practice, becoming knowledge that is available to other practitioners and researchers. Arguably there is a solipsism implicit in her claims that her painting has made knowledge about her painting in her statement that her 'painting practice has assisted in revealing the connection between me, my environment and my creative practice'<sup>63</sup>. However, in his ongoing work to reconcile art history and creative practice, art historian James Elkins<sup>64</sup> (1955 - ) describes what he refers to as 'non-semantic mark making' which I employ to develop my position on McCosh's idea of the Material Sublime, differentiating the modes of reflexive and self-reflective thinking in my painting in chapter 3. In her guide to practice-based research in the visual arts, Candy cautions that 'this kind of research is, for the most part, directed towards the individual's particular goals at the time rather than seeking to add to our shared store of knowledge in a more general sense'<sup>65</sup>. I argue that the methodology I have adopted allows the knowledge to be shared; practice-based research, in which the studio practice is verbally articulated in the Practice Log, offers not only the paintings but the self-reflection on the paintings, and the theory derived from both to the reader.

## 2.4 Conclusion

This hybrid approach borrows from grounded theory and autoethnography to examine a creative studio practice. It employs an inclusive, inductive method by grounding theory in the self-reflective text of the Practice Log, which is then used in comparative analysis with the paintings. This comparative analysis improves the paintings by developing theory about them which can be put into practice. The next entry in the Practice Log reflects this improvement, and a virtuous spiral commences.

There is a complexity within grounded theory methodology which might make it too constrictive to be useful. I prefer to use its principles in a simplified adaptation, to

concentrate on the practice-based research and the theory, accepting the fact that the theory was constructed on the platform of my own subjective responses, in the Practice Log. Autoethnography is also open to charges of solipsism, in that it is an interrogation of the self by the self. The difference between inductive and deductive methods is relative not absolute, although I argue that a high level of inductive reasoning is present in my method. Autoethnography is also open to charges of solipsism, in that it is an interrogation of the self by the self. I have attempted to answer this by the kind of analysis placed on the Practice Log, which I believe adds a level of objectivity to my findings. But in a self-constructed argument, there is an inevitable if unconscious bias. I may well find what I want to find. However, the discomfort of feeling my studio practice ruptured from my sense of identity by its academic study proved all too real. I suggest therefore that these approaches do offer useful theory and can be profitably applied to a range of creative investigations.

<sup>43</sup> Hamera (2018) *Performance Ethnography* in Denzin, N, Lincoln Y (2018) *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* Ed 5, Sage

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

<sup>45</sup> Glaser, B., and Strauss, A. (1965) *Awareness of Dying* Transaction USA

<sup>46</sup> Glaser, B., Strauss, A (1967) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* Aldine, NY

<sup>47</sup> Charmaz, K (2006) *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical guide through Qualitative Analysis* Sage

<sup>48</sup> Timmermans, S. (1994) *Dying of awareness: the theory of awareness contexts revisited* *Sociology of Health & Illness* Vol. 16 No. 3 1994 ISSN 0141-9889

[https://www.academia.edu/22003237/Dying\\_of\\_awareness\\_the\\_theory\\_of\\_awareness\\_contexts\\_revisited](https://www.academia.edu/22003237/Dying_of_awareness_the_theory_of_awareness_contexts_revisited) accessed 4.9.22

<sup>49</sup> Lal, S., Suto, M., & Ungar, M. (2012). Examining the Potential of Combining the Methods of Grounded Theory and Narrative Inquiry: A Comparative Analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 17(21), 1-22. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2012.1767>

<sup>50</sup> Chang H (2008) *Autoethnography As Method* Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press

<sup>51</sup> Anderson, L. 2006. *Analytic Autoethnography*. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. Volume 35, no. 4. Pp. 373-395.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

<sup>55</sup> Nelson, R (2013) *Practice As Research In The Arts* UK, Palgrave Macmillan

<sup>56</sup> Ryle, G (1949, this edition 2009) *The Concept of the Mind* Hutchinson, Routledge, London

<sup>57</sup> Nelson, R (2019) *Artistic research/Practice as Research: when, and how, does an arts process become a PhD?* University of London, RCSSD <https://www.artisticdoctorates.com/2019/07/29/artistic-research-practice-as-research-when-and-how-does-an-arts-process-become-a-phd-robin-nelson-university-of-london-royal-central-school-of-speech-and-drama/> accessed 9.12.22

<sup>58</sup> Liggett, S (2020) *Positioning the Arts in the Research Process: Perspectives from Higher Education* in Earnshaw, R., et al. (eds.), *Technology, Design and the Arts—Opportunities and Challenges* Springer Series on Cultural Computing, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42097-0\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-42097-0_2)

<sup>59</sup> Ibid

<sup>60</sup> McCosh 92013) *The Sublime: Process and Mediation* in Barrett, B, and Bolt, B (eds) *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a New Materialism in the Arts* London IB Tauris p127

<sup>61</sup> Bolt, B (2004) *Art Beyond representation: The performative power of the Image* IB Tauris London

<sup>62</sup> McCosh 92013) *The Sublime: Process and Mediation* in Barrett, B, and Bolt, B (eds) *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a New Materialism in the Arts* London IB Tauris p127

<sup>63</sup> Ibid

<sup>64</sup> Elkins, J. (ongoing) *Why Art Historians Should Learn To Paint: The Case For Studio Experience* [https://www.academia.edu/163426/Why\\_Art\\_Historians\\_Should\\_Learn\\_to\\_Paint\\_The\\_Case\\_for\\_Studio\\_Experience?email\\_work\\_card=interaction-paper](https://www.academia.edu/163426/Why_Art_Historians_Should_Learn_to_Paint_The_Case_for_Studio_Experience?email_work_card=interaction-paper) accessed 18.1.21

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<sup>65</sup>Candy, L. (2006) Practice based Research: A Guide CCS Report, Sydney  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257944497\\_Practice\\_Based\\_Research\\_A\\_Guide](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257944497_Practice_Based_Research_A_Guide) accessed 31.8.22

## Chapter 3 Using Self-reflection and Reflexivity

### 3.0 Introduction

In this chapter I will address the research question concerning what is involved in the generation and realization of imagery and narrative in my painting and how the images are realized. In articulating a useful understanding of my studio practice, I address the process of making paintings as well as two of the paintings in a finished state, although what constitutes 'finished' is questionable itself (see chapter 7). I propose a model for making up my paintings which involves two different modes of knowing about the studio practice, which for the purposes of my discussion I refer to as *reflexive*, occurring while in the process of the studio practice and *self-reflective*, which occurs when I step back from the painting or out of the studio. I argue that the physical practice of making paintings is a mode of knowing itself, involving immediate, often unarticulated, and reflexive decision-making about the developing paintings.

In thinking through the distinction between self-reflective and reflexive data I articulate the process of painting two case studies - *The Solid Model of Time* and *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad*. By grounding analysis of the studio practice in the data of the Practice Log, primarily the themes of *Self* and *Content*, and the paintings themselves, time emerges as content in both paintings. This reflects on the main body of paintings (see Appendix 1 catalogue of paintings), and I discuss how and in what form that happens, utilising both Ryle's<sup>66</sup> theory of intelligent and habitual practice and Bruner's<sup>67</sup> theories related to meaning.

### 3.1 Intelligent and Habitual Practice

Reflexive action in the studio practice is followed by self-reflection in the Practice Log which feeds back into the studio practice, in a developmental process that initiates a virtuous spiral. However, this distinction pushes self-reflection out of the studio and risks relegating reflexivity to the mechanical. I propose a more nuanced idea of the operation of the knowledge in making up the paintings. In developing this distinction, I hope to elucidate something applicable to similar creative processes in which knowledge is articulated both in and away from the studio activity.

Self-reflection in the Practice Log requires a gap between act and reflection – note 18 in *PLAnalysis.Self-conscious* reads for example

'I resent this bloody log. I resent having to stop and write it down. The pull back to the computer with its attendant time-wasting mechanisms. The stopping for just a moment while I try to recollect my thoughts. They're always so messy and incomplete anyway' (Extract1. See appendix 2)

I am complaining about having to stop and think in a different way. But without self-reflection the activity of my painting would be without conscious agency. This might suggest Ryle's<sup>68</sup> distinction between habitual and intelligent practice, but the distinction is less clear than that. Ryle's idea of intelligent practice is one in which improvisation and development may occur through thinking while in practice. As Nelson<sup>69</sup> suggests, the presence of 'doing-thinking' identifies a creative practice as research. In my case the activity of improvising one form reflects a previous form and anticipates the next, and conscious, verbally articulated thought may or may not play a part. By examining this I seek to demonstrate that knowledge is contained and expressed in the paintings, and in the process of making them, as well as in the exegesis of the Practice Log and theoretical writing that is derived from it.

### 3.2 Case Study 1 - *The Solid Model of Time* (35 x 30 cm oil on linen)



1. *The Solid Model of Time* (35 x 30 cm oil on linen)

Time is embedded and embodied in this painting. The image in *The Solid Model of Time* is of a woman in a green dress blowing a pink bubble in her gum, in an unidentified, dark space. It is a medium dark-toned, smallish canvas, not quite square. The source image was a 2cm high Preiser railway modeler's figure of a woman blowing a bubble-gum bubble. Preiser is a German company that makes accessories for railway modelers to use in their railway tableaux at an extremely small scale. The figures have a specific 'look' as well as being so small that they seem to almost dissolve in your view. The figure is pictured below with the drawing I made. I refer to the painting in PL35 as an idea for 'an homage to Roland Hicks' photorealist paintings'. In this sense, the painting is already an intersubjective object, in that it responds to a fellow artist. Roland Hicks is a contemporary artist of my generation who made a series of paintings using photographs of soap bubbles as content, referring to time in the title of the example illustrated.



2. Roland Hicks | *Really Think We're Going To Make It This Time* 2003 102x102cm, oil on canvas<sup>70</sup>

The image of a person blowing bubbles, exemplified in Chardin's *Soap Bubbles* (1733-34 New York Metropolitan Museum) and later in Manet's *Boy Blowing Bubbles* (1867, Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon) is a standard trope in the Western canon as in the Latin aphorism *homo bulla*, man is a bubble<sup>71</sup>. It has been said of the Chardin painting that 'while it is not certain that he intended the picture to carry a message, soap bubbles were then understood to allude to the transience of life.'<sup>72</sup> Blowing bubbles in bubble gum is a contemporary equivalent; the image denotes the fleeting nature of existence. The tiny Preiser figure itself might serve as a *vanitas*, part of the genre of still life painting that emerges in C15th Netherlands, in which objects are depicted as *memento mori* (reminders of death) and the vanity of human experience.



3. J S Chardin *Soap Bubbles* 1734 Oil on canvas 61 x 63 cm, oil on canvas<sup>73</sup>



4. Preiser model 28168 *Bubble Gum* 2cm high (author's photo)



5. Sketchbook drawing 12 x 9 cm, pencil.

### 3.3. Self-reflection and Reflexivity

Self-reflection, which occurs in my Practice Log in relation to this case study, produces a narrative with complexities and simplifications. However, it necessarily relies on memory, which may be unreliable. As Chang<sup>74</sup> points out in discussing autoethnography, 'memory can censor past experiences. When data is collected from a single tool, without other measures for checks and balances, the validity of data can be questioned.' PL 35 records a sequence of events in relation to the painting *The Solid Model of Time*:



- ‘1. Thinking about these elements: we could say there’s an idea I get in my head as I’m walking or something.
2. Then I paint it, having selected a canvas, and maybe looked at the source image or index. The painting doesn’t satisfy me. It’s not specific enough, the shapes are too generalised, the colours seem too arbitrary,
3. I draw it separately, carefully, and tonally. Shapes become more specific.
4. I return to the painting process and this time the problems are more specific. I finish the painting.’ (PL35 25.4.20 p5. Extract2. See appendix 2)

This self-reflection describes a sequence in the process of painting that unfolds in time but it is a simplification. Stage 1, where I ‘get an idea in my head’, is far more than that. I experience it as a combination of emotional, economic, and historical interests that meets a formal curiosity about the nature of presence in the tiny model, itself linked to vague ideas related to other readings. For example, while painting this, I remember thinking of a passage from Freedberg<sup>75</sup> which I can no longer even locate and now think I may have imagined or read elsewhere. It was in connection with archaic Greek worship objects, naturally shaped rocks which were taken to be heads of deities; if the head was too representational, its power as a divinity was reduced. It had to suggest a head, but not ‘be’ a head. This seemed to relate to the tiny railway modelling figures, so small that detail is impossible. But I was also thinking about the ludicrousness of the railway modelling figures of balloon sellers and children with balloons. For example, earlier in the same log

‘on my walk on Friday it occurred to me to make an homage to Roland Hicks’ photorealist paintings by using the Preiser figure of the girl blowing a bubble in her gum. They do balloon figures, too, and I was actually thinking about those first.’ (PL35 25.4.20 p3. Extract3. See appendix 2)

Within the claim ‘there’s an idea I get in my head as I’m walking or something’ lies a mass of different, sometimes conflicting impulses, all of which influence the process of painting. These examples are only the ones that sprang to mind at the time. The act of recall, even when quite immediate as it was here, is subject to simplification, rationalisation or even justification as I try to summarise or just to get it done quickly so that I can get back to the studio.

However, I contend that this simplification produces a narrative useful as a model for the process of making the painting. The narrative is developed in understanding the studio practice *after the fact* and used to inform the next part of the process. It reveals for example

that the process of its making is a series of translations; for example, in one, material sense, from the Preiser model railway figure to a painting, then to a drawing, back to the painting. The painting itself may then form the prototype for another painting. In this sense the self-reflection is a useful autoethnographic process. As Geertz<sup>76</sup> points out, 'anthropological writings are themselves interpretations.' Whether it is a complete or incomplete interpretation, self-reflection is a crucial method in autoethnography – according to Chang<sup>77</sup>, 'self is a subject to look into and a lens to look through to gain an understanding' - it is a prime source of data and knowledge. Using the case study of *The Solid Model of Time* I look at how self-reflection and reflexivity work together in unfolding the meaning in the process of making the painting, which I would argue addresses the question of time in several different, linked ways.

### 3.4 Painting *The Solid Model of Time*

Self-reflection requires a gap between thought and action in which to create a narrative. I stop painting, leave the studio, and write, or I decide to write before going into the studio. It might also take place in a rest period, in the studio, because I do spend a lot of time just looking at the paintings. The gap narrows in the physical process of painting, when reflexive response takes place, although again, it's more complicated than that. Reflexive activity contains and produces problematizing factors which push the painting out of habitual practice. For example, in *PLAnalysis Process (small)*, note 53, I describe thinking of a Cezanne painting as I work, saying that 'as I scrubbed into the canvas, I remembered the heavily painted background of the Alexis and Zola painting meeting the open, unpainted area of Zola's figure'. (Extract 4. See appendix 2) The action of painting doesn't preclude conscious thought in response to the broader aspiration of content, although each mark is made in response to the last. The performative activity provides a visual embodiment of the content of the work – what the image refers to, the meaning of the image, unfolds itself in reflexive movement, in time.

The process occurs in time, in the sense of developing the content and the material. In reference to the tonal drawing technique used to make the sketchbook drawing, I assert in *PLAnalysis Process (Small)* note 53 that the 'use of this technique gives me time to observe the forms in front of me, and I can make mistakes in the drawing without having to 'live with them'' (Extract5. See appendix 2) This describes a process of defining the form in which it is realised over a period of time. In this case, the painting's content also itself refers explicitly to time, discussed in the Practice Log in relation to the studio practice as 'the contradiction

between the phenomenological experience of time as a constant and the representation of a series of moments, like a reel of film' (PL35 p6 Extract 6. See appendix 2). This contradiction is evident in the Preiser figure, in which

'Meaning is folded back in on itself. The bubble she blows is a metaphor for the passing of time and the brevity of life, but it is frozen in time, a permanent fixture like Bentham at UCL, as an image is, but it goes further because it isn't actually a bubble, it's a blob of the same material as the head and body which pretends to be filling it with air. The passing of time is frozen and solidified. Time is made absurdly solid.' (PL35 p8. Extract 7. See appendix 2)

The *Vanitas* theme is rendered absurd by the source image. Life is frozen in the railway modeller's tableau. The train runs past and she is forever sitting on her white chair, a purple balloon like a monstrous grape hanging on her lips, in a brightly coloured uni-cultural 1970s of the euro-imagination. But then my own translation of the image, from three dimensions into the two-dimensional tonal language of painting adds another meaning, turning it in on itself again. Time is embodied through the creative process as it translates image (contemporary version of *homo bulla*) to model (Preiser figure) to oil painting depicting an apparently live person (*The Solid Model of Time*). In other words, the Preiser model, which itself denies the thing it represents, is translated from the hobbyist's to the fine art context and then translated again; the model is depicted as if it were a living being in ironic reversal of the idea of 'painting from life', where a living being is translated into an image. Time is implicit in the process of the painting, both in its availability for material change and for its interpretation.

*The Solid Model of Time* itself comments on the theme of time in relation to my painting, in that my painting apparently 'freezes' time by representing a single moment. This process reflects upon itself; by painting the model, I am making the translation from static model to what appears to be a painting of a living being. The knowledge is contained in the unfolding process of painting, and in the periods of self-reflection, outside the physical activity of painting, in the narratives of the Practice Log.

In the next section of the chapter, I extend my examination of the distinction between self-reflection and reflexivity by using *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad* (2020) as a case study. While the previous painting dealt with time as a theme, referring to the canon of Western art in the use of the bubble as an image of the fragility of life, this painting focuses on time in relation to the self in painting.

3.5 Case Study 2 - *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad* 100 x 75 cm, oil on canvas



6. *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad* 100 x 75 cm, oil on canvas



7. Preiser figure 28161 Hosenanprobe

8. Sketchbook drawing 12 x 9 cm, pencil.

The source image in this section is, again, a Preiser railway modelling figure, 2816 Hosenanprobe ('*Trying on Trousers*'), approximately 2cm tall, supplied with a 'full-length mirror'. I bought it as a light-hearted self-portrait, as a gift for my wife, referring to my interest in fashion. Again, I drew several versions of the figure in pencil before beginning the painting and used the drawings as my main visual source. In PL35 I describe the drawing process that preceded the painting of *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad*. Within this drawing process there is no conscious reference to any specific narrative, just a deliberate and open exploration of the visual qualities. I depict a male Caucasian figure, standing before a mirror. The figure is shown three times, once as a back view, once as a reflection in the mirror and once as a shadow to the right of the picture plane. The dominant colours are tertiaries, the figure is clothed in blues and there is a pink background to the mirror (behind the viewer). Under the bare feet of the figure is a green carpet and a strip of white canvas, slightly marked with thin, brownish paint. The title refers to two current styles of jeans, the so-called *Carpenter* and *Dad*.

### 3.6 Blurring Self-Reflection and Reflexivity

In this section, in addressing the distinction between self-reflection and reflexivity in articulating the process of painting, I identify references in *New Jeans: Between Carpenter And Dad* to Munch's late painting, *Between The Clock and the Bed*, 1943<sup>78</sup>, (Illustration 8) connecting my painting with ideas about time and mortality. I have also co-opted the railway modelling world to de-stabilize the grandiosity involved in the activity; while Reynolds might use a classical figure as a model for his portrait of Colonel Tarleton<sup>79</sup> to exalt his subject, I have used a 2cm high railway modelling figure as a self-portrait. The railway modelling source imagery exists alongside this high-art reference structure.



9. Edvard Munch *Between The Clock and the Bed*, 1940-43<sup>80</sup>. 150 x 120 cm, oil on canvas

Self-reflection and reflexivity are resistant to distinction. In considering both case studies, the implicit and explicit sets of knowledge embodied in the practice of painting can be reached and articulated through self-reflection and reflexivity. But the ambiguity in the relationship between self-reflection and reflexivity in painting is noted by Geimer<sup>81</sup> who asks, 'How does one recognise reflexivity?...who is actually the subject or actor of this reflexivity?'. In this case study the resemblance to the Munch painting – the size of the figure relative to the rest of the painting, the colour scheme, the intimate, interior space, the stiff pose of the figure, the anonymous, simply-painted, standing self-portrait figure - only occurred to me after I had gone some way through the process of the painting. Self-reflection allowed me to articulate it, but the connection between my painting of my drawing of the Preiser figure and the Munch painting may have drawn itself to my attention before this self-reflection on some level, unconsciously or not. The definitions of self-reflection and reflexivity in the study are therefore blurred.

Both modes of thinking occur as part of painting and of writing about it. Self-reflection occurs in the studio, although it may not be verbally articulated there. Reflexivity exists in the Practice Log, as the form of the narrative overpowers the self-reflection, for example in PL5 14.2.18, (Extract 9 See Appendix 2) in which I move from describing a painting to inventing a story about the characters in it. Both types of knowledge are intensely involved but it is difficult, even through systematic analysis, to extricate one from the other. Rather than

producing confusion, I argue that this difficulty in distinction provides a dynamic that propels the studio practice.

However blurred, articulating the distinction remains useful in developing theory about the work. Self-reflection, away from the studio, carries difficulties, as I note –

‘It isn’t adequate to the experience of either making or looking at (experiencing) the piece of work. Is description enough? Physical description that is, exact size, colours, shapes, textures. Procedural description, I did this and then that or guesses about it made from the physical description? The object remains mute. Symbolic exegesis doesn’t touch the procedural, procedural doesn’t touch the symbolic. Also the symbolic especially, if detached from intentionality, changes with each viewer, changes for the painter as well...’ (PL35.25.4.20 p8 Extract 10 See Appendix 2)

The studio practice, subjective action which become embodied as intersubjective objects, is a reflexive, interpretive activity in that narratives are unfolded within it. In this case study, in referring to the Munch painting I make my identification with the figure in *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad* clearer. I say in note 44, PLAnalysis.Subject.Content that ‘what is it to be an artist...is actually my theme.’ (Extract 11 See Appendix 2) Rather than making a claim to an essence (‘what do I really want in my paintings?’) or to a clear systematic programme of development, my paintings emerge from a process that acknowledges the fluidity and constructed nature of identity. The figure, taken from a real source image, gazes at its reflection, with which it is slightly at odds – the hands and arms don’t seem quite right – in an image of self-reflection. The apparent anomalies in the placement of the arms recall the mirror in Manet’s *A Bar at the Folie Bergeres* (1882) and painting myself (albeit in the 2cm high person of a railway modeler’s figure) as a back view, recalls Vermeer’s *The Painter In His Studio* (1668), but Munch’s painting, reflecting on his old age, was the most present in my studio, according to my Practice Log. My painting might be seen as a reflection of my Self, and as Bruner<sup>82</sup> puts it, it is a construction ‘that... proceeds from the outside in as well as from the inside out, from culture to mind as well as from mind to culture’. In this painting, the reflexive activity of painting followed unarticulated trains of thought and feeling, responding in the studio to marks previously made, influenced by weather, mood, the physical and material being of the studio space, the tools of paint and the canvas. I try to make sense of it through the Practice Log, through connecting it with Munch’s painting and through the painting itself.

The act of studying the studio practice is itself an interpretive, creative act. It is an activity of creating meaning. The virtuous spiral of Practice Log, research and theory leading back to the studio practice, reflected on in the Practice Log and then developed in the studio practice, is also articulated as reflexive action followed by self-reflection, followed by reflexive action. The written narratives are partial though. Bruner's<sup>83</sup> statement on the self-narrative of analysands that 'its form will be as revealing as its substance' reflects back on the Practice Log and the studio practice; narratives that are taken up, worked through, and then put down in favour of others reveal, in his terms, the subjectivity of the content. They do this through what Bruner later describes as 'our capacity to turn around on the past and alter the present in its light, or to alter the past in the light of the present. Neither the past nor the present stays fixed'. The reflexive work of the studio practice drives the study, and the self-reflective work of the Practice Log interprets it, leading to a further construction in theory, which in turn leads to further reflexive work in the studio practice.

### 3.7 Conclusion

In answering my research question about the way improvisation and narrative operate in realising form in my painting, I have looked at the dynamic created by the relationship of two different modes of knowing, self-reflective and reflexive. I articulate its operation in creative practice; I paint in the studio, and then reflect on the activity in the Practice Log, which I later analyse for themes and theorise on before returning to the studio. The theory is therefore grounded in the data. This thesis makes explicit both the detail of self-reflection and its boundaries – it can provide narratives of meaning about work done in the studio and influence the process, but it is not the sole source of knowledge in the process. The techniques of realising form in the paintings *The Solid Model Of Time* and *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad* are not the result of either self-reflection or reflexivity alone. This relationship serves as a general model for creative practice, in which the activity itself serves to articulate knowledge, as much as if not more than in exegesis. Development of creative practice occurs between self-reflection and reflexivity, the action of translation from one form to another, ideas re-articulated as words or drawings or paintings, providing a dynamic movement.

The paintings themselves can be said to be an embodiment of the research questions involved in the thesis. The painting *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad* embodies self-reflection, in being a depiction of my Self reflecting on my Self. I have addressed my first research question through including reference to the Munch painting, asking how improvisation and narrative development may have informed artists historically, and at what



its implications have been for my own paintings. I have also addressed my second research question, regarding what is involved in generating narrative and imagery in painting, and how they are realised, by interrogating the development of both the case studies.

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## Chapter 4. Modes of Depiction in Improvisation

### 4.0 Introduction

In chapter 3 I discussed the relationship of self-reflection and reflexivity in making up my paintings. These are modes of thinking in making up the paintings. This chapter is a meditation on the question of how the form is expressed in them. I address the research questions about how improvisation and narrative work in my painting and about the significance of the surface. I will use the painting *Selection Panel V5* as a case study to examine the way I express illusionistic form, in terms of improvisation, narrative and the flat surface of the painting.

I develop the binary relationship of drawing and painting to determine whether a useful distinction might be made between the two in terms of creative expression. Claims about linear drawing as a primary or primal form of creativity have been made but I argue that in my own work, the flatness of the surface and the specific nature of the material outweigh any distinction between drawing and painting, juxtaposition of emergent shapes within the boundaries of the painting is the crucial element of improvisation of narrative in my painting. In doing this I hope to suggest an exemplar for ways of thinking about painting that resist these binaries.

The primary sources of data in this chapter are my Practice Log, mainly the themes of *Content, Process* and *Surface*, and my painting *Selection Panel V5*. In defining drawing and painting, I refer to Berger<sup>84</sup> and Bryson<sup>85</sup> to establish and develop their ideas of the linear. To expand on this, I use Ingold's<sup>86</sup> conception of the surface and Walter Benjamin's<sup>87</sup> idea of painting as marks, to develop the sense of the surface my painting. In the latter section of the chapter, I use Gell<sup>88</sup> and Bruner's<sup>89</sup> ideas about process and narrative to discuss juxtaposition as a means of expressing content, in terms of the painting as an intersubjective object. Analysing my Practice Log for comparative analysis of my painting is a method that I hope, in Anderson's words, <sup>90</sup> 'does contribute to a spiralling refinement, elaboration, extension, and revision of theoretical understanding'. The virtuous spiral of reflexive, self-reflection, theorising and return to the reflexive work of the studio is evident in the development of the painting and in subsequent paintings.

#### 4.1 Case Study: *Selection Panel V5*

Analysis of my Practice Log suggests that this painting contains several different narratives. It depicts the selection panel of an imaginary art competition. For convenience in discussing the painting I will assign names to the figures: from the left, *Poor Girl* (based on Melissa Reid, one of the pair of young British women convicted of smuggling drugs in Peru in 2013), self-portrait, Distinguished Sculptor (sitting), *Bernardine Evaristo* (standing), *Alex* (formerly Aleksandr Litvenenko), *Joe Skipping*, *Mungo* (standing). My Practice Log emphasises the social environment that influences my work; I say of the series that

'I am aware that there are many influences and pressures at work on my Studio Practice; other peoples' opinions, teachers, friends, my wife, things I have read or heard, all play a part on what I make. Which of my paintings have been selected by panels, as well, has a bearing on the studio practice. In painting the Selection Panel, I am personifying the people or ideas that drive the Studio Practice.' (Practice Log43.16.11.20 Extract 1 See Appendix 2)

In this I acknowledge the intersubjective nature of my painting. There are multiple narratives running through this painting, some of which do not originate from me.



10. *Selection Panel V5* 100x120cm, oil on canvas 14.1.21

The surface of the painting is the location of the forms that depict its content. The forms and the relationships between them suggest narrative. The narratives suggested are the product not just of my own agency but of others, and in this way, the painting's nature as an intersubjective object becomes clear. In my discussion I use the term form as distinct from content, arguing, with Benjamin<sup>91</sup>, that shapes become forms, which are then identified or named as content. A depicted person may be anonymous to one viewer but resemble someone known to another. A depicted object may make one sense to one person and another to another.

I propose the following model to describe the way content is delivered in my painting. A mark describes what is produced by the action of brush or other tool applying paint to the flat surface of the painting. A shape describes a discrete group of marks. Flat shapes resemble things outside the painting, through their colour, contour, and relationship with other shapes. In my discussion, this resemblance is form, which is expressed as an image. Content is produced by form when the form is interpreted, i.e., identified or named. The content is assembled into narrative by the artist and the viewer.

In my studio practice, painting is an arena of improvisation. I argue that the flat surface of the painting, and the materials I use are most conducive to this. Oil paint's physical qualities allow it to be manipulated freely and almost indefinitely across a flat surface. Emphasis was placed in late 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarship on drawing as opposed to painting in terms of its improvisational and immediate qualities. For example, in a catalogue of the 1991- 92 exhibition *The Primacy of Drawing* Deanna Petherbridge<sup>92</sup> describes a 'primal nature of drawing'. But I argue that the important thing in improvising is just the action of depicting on a flat surface, rather than the medium. Paint may be used in a linear fashion, pencil in a tonal.

Line and tone/colour modes play equal part in my paintings. In my studio practice, the painting makes a surface in which form appears, in order to depict experience from outside the painting. Data from the self-reflective journals elicits this, as well as the paintings themselves. The action of depicting is done by the surface both in its entirety and by its different elements. The form is in the surface and differentiated from it at the same time. This differentiation gives rise to the illusion of depth or space in the painting. It suggests depth but simultaneously is flat. This common phenomenon is expressed and adapted in the visual arts by Torreano<sup>93</sup>, among many others, for example, as a means of teaching drawing; assessing the whole shapes of figures against their background, emphasizing 'the idea of

going from the general to the specific'. In this method the surface is seen in its entirety but composed of different elements, juxtaposed. The elements can be differentiated and expressed by line, tone, and colour.

The juxtaposing of different shapes is the engine that drives the development of the narratives in the painting, in whichever mode they are expressed. In making sense of the activity of painting for myself its immediate material presence is the primary focus. The relationship between their forms and the surface of the painting is crucial in distinguishing the characters in my painting *Selection Panel V5*. In looking for tools to articulate this relationship, I am dealing with formal values. In describing ways of engagement with visual art, Charman's<sup>94</sup> guide for visitors to the Tate gallery helpfully divides up the process of engagement with visual art; asking the question 'Looking at the Object: what can I see?' , she lists the formal qualities of colour, shape, mark, surface, scale, space, materials, composition. These elements are listed non-hierarchically. This allows an open reading of the work; composition is not privileged over colour, for example. However, the particular relationship between shape and surface interests me in this chapter, given the content of the work as characters in a defined space.

#### 4.2 Drawing Or Painting

The surface of the painting is an arena for improvising pictorial narrative. For me, the activity of painting is a discovery in the sense that I do not have a clear idea of what the painting will look like when I start it. The movement of time, as discussed in chapter 3, is crucial in realizing meaning in the painting. It has been a convincing position that for 'the artist, drawing is discovery', as Berger<sup>95</sup> claims in the opening phrase of his essay on drawing, implying that painting is not. Berger describes painting as a more complex task, requiring planning. His apprehension of painting includes its different historical social positions relative to drawing, and the extra weight of technical difficulties, the canvas, the use of colour, and so on. But in my painting each mark is made not, as Berger<sup>96</sup> describes the painting process, 'a stone to be fitted into a planned edifice' but rather as he describes drawing, 'a stepping-stone' toward a realization of form through flat shapes disposed across the flat surface. I argue that painting can also be discovery. Rather than leaning such a binary definition on historically inappropriate models, I argue that a painting's surface is available to reflect whatever emerges, within limits of sensibility and technical and financial capacity. The linear and the tonal operate together in my process.

The reason I use oil paint on canvas is so that I can improvise. My painting method employs oil paint on canvas and is technically well-suited to an unplanned and developing approach. I can change my mind and rub things out, paint over things, move things around. Oil paint on canvas can reflect shifts in emphasis and changes in ideas because of its slow drying time and because the canvas or linen support is durable enough to withstand repeated scraping or rubbing to remove paint. The Practice Log reflects this; it reaches an extreme in PL18 (p5) where I discuss 're-purposing' paintings (Extract 2 See Appendix 2), in which an apparently finished painting is taken up and worked over to make another statement, related but separate. Painting is necessarily more complex than linear drawing in that I use more materials of a more material weight, but that does not preclude discovery and improvisation in its process.

I argue that suggestiveness of tone and colour are where improvisation in my painting is located. Drawing and painting are synonymous in these terms. In addressing the distinction, even Gaskell<sup>97</sup>, writing as a historian of material culture, proposes 'painting as a subset of drawing' and cannot find any useful distinction between them. The distinction between drawing and painting that Berger makes is not valid in the terms that my painting sets. Petherbridge<sup>98</sup> similarly distinguishes drawing as linear and painting as the use of tone/colour in her positioning of drawing over painting as an improvisational method, and further refers to paint as 'a transformative medium – the artist can make of it what he or she will', while drawing 'asserts its linearity...however it is used.' She thereby positions the linear as a clarifying quality of drawing opposed to the 'suggestive' tonality of painting. But there is no useful distinction to be made between painting and drawing in the process of my studio practice. It doesn't matter whether the shapes are described with an outline or with indistinct edges. I draw sometimes as preparation for a painting, but equally, I might make small paintings in preparation (see chapter 7). Shapes are deployed on the flat surface and form emerges as the shapes are juxtaposed with other shapes.

*Selection Panel V5* is an object and a picture at the same time. The object, which is one surface of linen stretched across a frame, is present in the depiction in the painting. The relationships of the shapes to the surface are such that, while the depictions are recognisable, the style is not transparent; the content does not pretend to a photographic mimesis. In comparing painting to drawing, Berger's<sup>99</sup> model is that painting tries to 'compete with nature', to 'seduce the visible, to solicit the scene painted' with 'their colours, their tonalities, their extensive light and shade' while drawing remains 'diagrammatic' but in *Selection Panel V5*, the depictions remain diagrammatic in that they indicate something outside the painting rather than offer a mimetic description. While some passages are

rendered in a tonal way, others refer to linear drawing to depict form. Like Berger's description of drawing as remaining 'a sheet of paper with lines drawn upon it', my painting remains a stretched piece of linen with marks upon it. It is visibly an object with marks on it rather than a window to another, similar world.

The surface determines the nature of the improvisation in painting. The four edges provide an arena within which the capacity of painting can be explored. In addressing the binary of liner and tone/colour means of expression, Bryson's<sup>100</sup> characterisation of painting as subject to an 'all-over order' is useful, and his observation that 'every mark that is made must bear some kind of relation to the four sides of the frame' is borne out by my own experience. However, I suggest that his proposal that each 'detail is planned to take its position within an image predicated on a law of totality' implies a technique for painting that ignores its capacity for reflexive improvisation. Oil painting need not be planned. If it need not be planned, the 'all-over order' of painting allows improvisation to take place freely within the arena it provides.

Even though it is evidently flat the surface depicts a recognizable arena in which characters act. Their depiction is made by marks of paint assembled into shapes. Shapes make sense in relation to other shapes, resembling visual relationships outside the painting. The shapes are made up of marks of paint, smears, strokes, dabs and so on, organized in relation, toward realizing resemblances. The simplest element of this is the marks and in Note 10 of *PLAnalysis.Surface* I write 'the painting starts when I stretch the linen over the frame; from then on, it's all mark-making.' (Extract 3 See Appendix 2). This conception has echoes in Benjamin<sup>101</sup> who says that 'the medium of painting is that of the mark in the narrower sense; for painting is a medium, a mark'. He goes on to say that a painting cannot claim either a background or a graphic line, because

'the picture, insofar as it is a set of marks, is only a set of marks in the picture.

But on the other hand, the picture may be connected with something that it is not - that is to say, something that is not a set of marks - and this happens by naming the picture.'

Those things that operate as graphic lines and backgrounds within a painting are simply modulations in the sets of marks – the shapes - that depict lines and backgrounds and could therefore be described as such. They are shapes that look like things outside the painting, which Benjamin calls naming. Naming, or identifying, establishes a hierarchy, in my painting,

which evidently depicts things outside the painting. That is when they become form, and then content.

Rather than drawing and painting, a more crucial relationship in making the paintings up is between flatness and time. I make it up as I go along. I don't know beforehand exactly what the shapes will resemble. Making up the painting is a process of identifying and distinguishing a hierarchy of shapes, rather than fulfilling a plan – it is what Nelson<sup>102</sup> refers to as 'doing-thinking'. The collection of marks arranged in lines and shapes in the illustrations of process below show (illustrations 10 – 13) that forms are undefined, absent, or unformed and develop over time. In the Practice Log I refer to a 'sudden vision of this painting' which, when I started painting it, 'didn't look much like the painting in my mind, but that wasn't a very clear image' (Extract 4 See Appendix 2) Experience and imagination are brought to bear on the surface, in the process. Marks are deployed in what I experienced as an exploratory, tentative fashion (see *Illustrations 10 - 13*). These photographs were taken over several periods of activity, in process of feeling my way to the picture. The process of depiction, for me, is of discovery in the reflexive activity of painting.

The flat surface across which marks are deployed is a space for imagery to emerge in time, during the process of painting or of viewing the painting. This idea emerges from the Practice Log and from comparative analysis of the paintings, from an analysis of my own work, in progress and as a finished object. It has been generated in close connection with the work itself, illustrating that, as Glaser and Strauss<sup>103</sup> put it, 'one canon for judging the usefulness of a theory is how it was generated'. The improvisation that produces content is allowed and encouraged by the flatness of the surface. It is irrelevant, in terms of improvisation, whether it is on paper or canvas or organized in linear or tone and colour relationships, or a mixture of the two. The provisional quality of oil paint applied to a flat surface means that the marks assembled in one way can be turned quickly in another, as much as a line can swerve across the white paper. The work is made in the reflexive mode of the studio, in a state of not knowing and discovery but as Nelson<sup>104</sup> points out, 'it is illuminating to try to discern the principles of action or composition'. I expand below on the process of improvisation, to look at how the shapes become forms that can be distinguished in the surface and identified as resembling things outside the painting, addressing the research questions relating to improvisation and narrative in my paintings and in the historical context, as well as the significance of the surface.



#### 4.3 Depth and What's Behind It

*Selection Panel V5* is a surface that is only seen or dealt with from one side. The painting shares this characteristic with a written page. As Ingold<sup>105</sup> points out, we experience the written page not as a white surface with a layer of letters on it, but as a 'dressed surface' in which the marks do not cover but are a part of the surface. In comparing the computer screen with the written page, he suggests that 'the resemblance of this ghostly page to the picture plane of perspective drawing is not accidental' referring to the illusionistic nature of both. The computer screen is an interface between machine and subject, whereas the page is a surface with nothing behind it. In depicting and indicating things outside the painting, the painting, like the written page, has nothing behind it.

In a material sense, all there is in my painting *Selection Panel V5* is a surface. Although the surface of the painting can be seen in its entirety, immediately, by me and the viewer, its modulations are only visible in time. There may be layers of work beneath the surface, but the viewer can only guess at them. I can't see them either; they are only in my memory or in photographs. The depictions of form are therefore only in the modulations on the surface, expressed as the juxtaposition of flat shapes which are recognisable as form by their resemblance to things outside the painting. The shapes that combine to make form remain in the surface and flat, however convincing the illusion they make.

*Selection Panel V5* presents itself as a flat, unitary surface with modulations. One flat thing composed of many flat things. The rectangular surface remains present, and the marks made on it remain evident, at the same time as the resemblance to a compressed space with human figures becomes present. In a similar way, some of Howard Hodgkin's paintings have significance to me in that the language of blobs, bars, dots, and brush marks that he employs to make forms is very evident. In describing Hodgkin's paintings, Murry<sup>106</sup> claims that the 'transformation is made visible to us as we perceive simultaneously with every mark how literal gesture and material incident...release figurative meaning.' Reference to transformation reflects an awareness of this double nature. The flat surface releases the figurative meaning, part of which is a spatial illusion. At the same time, the marks remain evident. It is a depicted, illusory space, and a flat surface.

The figurative meaning is understood through a hierarchy. A small area of face in *Selection Panel V5* has a different significance to the same area of background, for example. To make up a painting with some meaning, the juxtaposed shapes must be organised according to a hierarchy. However, in the same paragraph on Hodgkin's work, Murry goes on to say that

'we want to...penetrate the essence that lies beneath and beyond the surface'. He describes the dual condition of Hodgkin's paintings as '...discrete visual particulars on the one hand and as metaphors that embody encounters with individuals on the other' and locates these metaphors somewhere below or beneath the surface of the painting. But the hierarchy is expressed through modulations in the shapes on the flat surface of the painting. It is only on the surface that these encounters are embodied because there is only surface in painting.

Hierarchy is not immediately apparent in the process of my painting. It emerges for me in time as I develop the painting. It emerges for the viewer as they look at it. This kind of emergence has been conceptualized as coming from a hidden source or seen as a process of bringing something out from an inner self. In describing the process of his own painting, Damien Hirst's<sup>107</sup> forthright statement that there is 'something fucking enormous underneath it, which is about alchemy and magic and belief. People want the artist to be sort of magical in this sense of taking stuff and creating magic' seems appropriate in describing a common view of the creative process. I argue that this view disregards the material reality of painting. The action of depicting happens on the surface.

My painting exists in the surface, in time. Whatever ideas or plans I might have had outside the painting are subjugated to the material reality of the surface in process. This is demonstrated in the photographs of the process of painting *Selection Panel V5* below. Lines and shapes have been deployed in what I experienced as an exploratory, tentative fashion. The process of depiction is of discovery. Discovery implies a temporal relationship. In my painting, depiction is always open to improvisation and is open-ended in the sense that the surface of the painting is available for change, unless a definite finish has occurred (see chapter 7). Over the time of making the painting, I attempt to define one shape against another, and find that its edges become uncertain, or its identity shifts. The shape and the surface are indistinct in the process of realising the form. This is common to finished work and work in progress. In Gell's<sup>108</sup> discussion of patterning in Polynesian art he says they 'generate relationships *over time* between persons and things, because what they present to the mind is, cognitively speaking, always 'unfinished business' '. He is referring to looking at extant works, but my contention is that the focus also shifts and the shapes blur in making a painting. The process of depiction involves time. There is a continuing process of realising the juxtaposition of shapes in both the painting and readings of the painting, which remains inconclusive and available for development over time.

Form is readable but narrative is not straightforward. The images on the surface of the painting may be clear but their significance is not. Form's expression relies on my

apprehension of its resemblances, but I cannot rely on the viewer's. In his discussion of the communicative value of painting, Ranta<sup>109</sup> says that

'...the production as well as the reception of stories in general are based on numerous unstated general 'lifeworld' assumptions, shared by both storyteller and recipient, including epistemic, normative, and ontological beliefs, as well as acquaintance with various forms of story construction, genres etc.'

Ranta's view aligns with mine in that I see my paintings as intersubjective objects. But he also points out that 'pictorial media require recipients, which are more cognitively active in the reconstruction of narratives compared to verbal texts. For example, pictorial media seem to lack narrative precision compared to verbal ones...' When I posted the *Selection Panel* paintings on Instagram to my following, which is primarily visual arts-interested people, I got a lot of response that assumed a passive position in the viewer – "bloody judging panels, grrr!" (see Appendix 2 Chap 4 Extracts) whereas I explicitly stated that I was putting myself in the painting as a judge, that I judged my own painting as part of the process, that I had actually sat on panels myself, and that a main narrative driver of the painting was the idea that an artist goes from being an outsider to an insider as part of the experience of being an artist. My narrative was not the viewers' narrative.

The narrative of the painting is neither fixed nor stable for me, the painter. In Practice Log43.16.11.20 I describe the process leading up to *Selection Panel V5* which includes four previous versions of the painting and at least four other, related works. The fact that one of the characters, Alexandr Litvinenko, changes from male to female in *Selection Panel V5* and that Larry David, another, becomes progressively less identifiable, indicates the shifting process. I cannot consciously articulate the process of realising form fully - as Rose<sup>110</sup> points out in addressing the question of intentionality and meaning in painting, 'it is a mixture of conscious and unconscious aspects, formed in and during the creation of the work.' The narrative is formed of a continually evolving set of other narratives, as seen in this extract from *Practice Log43.16.11.20* (See Appendix 2 Extract 6)

Each character carries a story into the narrative of the painting. Larry David, for example, is freighted with stories, (as the character he plays in *Curb Your Enthusiasm*) and he is also the hero of the Adam Kotsko book *Awkwardness*. Bernardine Evaristo has been mentioned already. Litvinenko was famously assassinated by the Russian secret service, although they have never admitted this. He became a sort of Christ figure, dying gradually in his green hospital

sheets, his hair falling out and his wife becoming more vocal in her denunciations. The British government were seen to be rather venal and lacking in moral fibre; 'we' protested but that was sort of it. Litvinenko died, and 'we' did very little about it. It's a whole story of international relations. Joe Skipping is an invention of mine and his story is available too, and the unknown French murderess (sic) lurks in the background. The only story-less person is the one in the conical hat; he seems to wear his personality on the outside, though, being an accumulation of descriptors – he is fat, he wears a funny hat, his glasses conceal his eyes, his tee-shirt bears text, he has long lank hair (and a beard in version 3) – he might not have an existence under those things.

Figures emerge and fade back; this narrative seems to ripple with the possibilities of other narratives emerging (like the Litvinenko character becoming a woman, as she has in this version). Each narrative has its own interest and value, and one might relate to another. The figures do not seem to communicate with each other but stare out across the diagrammatic table at the whatever it is they are selecting. They might be rejecting the viewer, as my correspondent thought. They might be wondering what brought them to this position. The painting as a unitary statement resists any singular narrative.

I don't necessarily set out to narrate a specific event. In reference to Bacon's painting, Deleuze<sup>111</sup> claims that the medium of painting has no 'story to narrate' but also goes on to admit that 'a story always slips into, or tends to slip into, the space between two figures in order to animate the illustrated whole'. In *Selection Panel V5* stories do slip into the spaces. A group of ideas and associations emerges in the surface over time, which itself opens the painting to new readings, by the viewer or the painter. The narrative is in the relationships between the shapes that make up the painting. Their juxtaposition on the surface is what drives the narrative.

The painting itself can also be seen as part of multiple narratives. This painting is the latest in a line of variations and work on a similar theme (see Appendix 1 catalogue of paintings). As it currently stands, *Selection Panel V5* is a relatively stable outcome of improvisation. In moving from one version to another, in series, the set of ideas and solutions to formal problems (how to represent individual personae, for example) develops and changes. In discussing improvisation, Ingold and Hallam<sup>112</sup> point out that 'far from attempting to bring closure to the world or tie up loose ends, improvisation makes the most of the multiple possibilities they afford for keeping life going'. Paintings remain open for more work not only

in juxtaposition of shapes within the unitary painting but also in relationships between other paintings. I discuss this further in the next two chapters.



11. *Selection Panel V5* 100 x 120cm, oil on canvas, at 11.1.21



12. *Selection Panel V5* 100 x 120cm, oil on canvas, at 13.1.12



13. *Selection Panel V5* 100 x 120cm, oil on canvas, at 14.1.21 (morning)



14. *Selection Panel V5* 100 x 120cm, oil on canvas, at 14.1.21 (evening)

#### 4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined making up the painting *Selection Panel V5*. I have suggested that the binary of drawing as 'primary' improvisational medium and painting as consolidation and elaboration of visual ideas from drawing is more or less redundant as

regards my own painting, and therefore, perhaps for others. Furthermore, by questioning something given in the creative process – a categorical hierarchy of types of picture-making into drawing and painting – I hope to articulate a different relationship between them. Through this investigation the crucial place of the surface in painting has emerged. Like a written page, it is made up of marks that relate to each other. The marks remain marks but also indicate by their resemblance to it the three-dimensional world outside the painting.

In this chapter I have addressed the research questions that concern the way improvisation and narrative work in my painting and the significance of the surface. In the analytic autoethnographic examination of my studio practice in relation to the relationship between form and surface, I go to my Practice Log, the analysis of the Practice Log and the painting *Selection Panel V5*, which I compare with other paintings (see Appendix 1 catalogue of paintings). This data is derived from self-reflection and from reflexive action, as discussed in chapter 3. By grounding my theory in this data my research seeks to offer insights into painting practice more broadly.

The significance of juxtaposition as an engine for developing narrative emerges in this chapter. Shapes are realized in relation to other shapes. The process of painting opens the shapes to blurring, translation and re-positioning. As the identification of content comes after form, the content is open to development. A large green area might be a painted wall, or a sweatshirt worn by a character, dependent on the positioning of a small area of marks that resembles a clothing company's logo. A character might shift in gender. I have demonstrated the open condition of the surface itself, unfixd and available for further work. The depictions in it cannot be said to be stable, either in the material sense or in how they are interpreted for meaning. Form and therefore content in my painting is shown to be contingent on juxtaposition and relations, allowing further improvisation. I argue that this applies to similar practices and is a useful insight in their development. In the next chapter I will look more closely at the intersubjective nature of the paintings.

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<sup>84</sup> Berger, J (2016) *The Basis Of All Painting And Sculpture Is Drawing* p27- 32 of *Landscapes*, Verso, London

<sup>85</sup> Bryson, N (2003) *A Walk For A Walk's Sake* in Newman, A and De Zegher, C.(2003) *The Stage of Drawing* Tate Gallery, UK

<sup>86</sup> Ingold (2020) *On Opening The Book of Surfaces* in Anusas, M., Simonetti, C (eds) (2020), *Surfaces*, Routledge

<sup>87</sup> Benjamin, W. (1917) *Painting or Signs and Marks* in Benjamin, W.,(Eds) Bullock, M., Jennings, M (1996) *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writing Volume 1 1913 – 1926* Harvard University Press, USA

<sup>88</sup> Gell, A (1998) *Art and Agency: an anthropological theory* Clarendon, Oxford

<sup>89</sup> Bruner, J (1990) *Autobiography and the Self* in *Acts of Meaning* Harvard University Press USA

<sup>90</sup> Anderson, L. 2006. *Analytic Autoethnography*. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. Volume 35, no. 4. Pp. 373-395.

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<sup>91</sup> Benjamin, W. (1917) *Painting or Signs and Marks* in Benjamin, W.,(Eds) Bullock, M., Jennings, M (1996) *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writing Volume 1 1913 – 1926* Harvard University Press, USA

<sup>92</sup> Petherbridge, D (1991) *The Primacy of Drawing* South Bank Centre, London

<sup>93</sup> Torrealano, J. (2007) *Drawing by Seeing* Abrams, New York

<sup>94</sup> Charman, H. <https://www.tate.org.uk/file/ways-looking> accessed 12.11.21

<sup>95</sup> Berger, J (2016) *The Basis Of All Painting And Sculpture Is Drawing* p27- 32 of *Landscapes*, Verso, London

<sup>96</sup> Bryson, N (2003) *A Walk For A Walk's Sake* in Newman, A and De Zegher, C.(2003) *The Stage of Drawing* Tate Gallery, UK

<sup>97</sup> Gaskell, I. (2019) *Paintings And The Past: Philosophy, History, Art* Routledge UK

<sup>98</sup> Petherbridge, D (1991) *The Primacy of Drawing* South Bank Centre, London

<sup>99</sup> Berger, J (2016) *The Basis Of All Painting And Sculpture Is Drawing* p27- 32 of *Landscapes*, Verso, London

<sup>100</sup> Bryson, N (2003) *A Walk For A Walk's Sake* in Newman, A and De Zegher, C.(2003) *The Stage of Drawing* Tate Gallery, UK

<sup>101</sup> Benjamin, W. (1917) *Painting or Signs and Marks* in Benjamin, W.,(Eds) Bullock, M., Jennings, M (1996) *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writing Volume 1 1913 – 1926* Harvard University Press, USA

<sup>102</sup> Nelson, R (2013) *Practice As Research In The Arts* UK, Palgrave Macmillan

<sup>103</sup> ibid

<sup>104</sup> Nelson, R (2013) *Practice As Research In The Arts* UK, Palgrave Macmillan

<sup>105</sup> Ingold (2020) *On Opening The Book of Surfaces* in Anusas, M., Simonetti, C (eds) (2020), *Surfaces*, Routledge

<sup>106</sup> Murry, J., (Ed.) Earnest, J (2021) *Painting Is A Supreme Fiction* Sobercove Press, USA

<sup>107</sup> *Danger and Emergency: turps banana in conversation with Damien Hirst.*

Turps Banana Issue 25 March 2022

<sup>108</sup> Gell, A (1998) *Art and Agency: an anthropological theory* Clarendon, Oxford

<sup>109</sup> Ranta, M. (2014) *Iconography, Narrativity and Tellability in Pictures* in Klimke H (Ed) (2014) *Art Theory as Visual Epistemology* Cambridge Scholars UK

<sup>110</sup> Rose, S (2017) *On Close Looking and Conviction* DOI: 10.1111/1467-8365.12259 Art History | ISSN 0141-6790 40 | 1 | February 2017 | pages 156-177

<sup>111</sup> Deleuze, G, Smith, D (trans) (2003) *The Logic of Sensation* Continuum USA

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## Chapter 5. The intersubjective object and the community in which the paintings exist.

### 5.0 Introduction

My paintings are objects that exist in the material world. They indicate the world outside themselves by resemblance in the depictions made in their surface. I have addressed the way my painting *Selection Panel V5* did that formally in the previous chapter. I argued that the emergence of different shapes relative to each other was where the form in my painting was realised. I argued that time, rather than depth, was the dimension in which their meaning was released. In this chapter, I look at the emergent forms in relation to their social context, to develop further the idea that my paintings are intersubjective objects, bridges between my subjectivity and others'. I focus in this chapter on the research question that concerns the way improvisation and narrative inform artists historically, in relation to my own painting.

Approaching the paintings within their social contexts develops insights into the painting as an intersubjective object, mediating between artist and viewer. Furthermore, the Self of the artist is a construct: I am an amalgam of inherited traits, personal history, and social influences. To shed light on one element of this, in this chapter I examine the relationship of my studio practice to the genre of history painting, with its connection to the specific means of tonal drawing and painting, which I associate with the part of my education that was at the RA Schools.

Grounding my theory in the data of the Practice Log, I developed the theme of *Community*. I extracted notes that referred to things that affected my work from outside the studio, and to an extent, outside of me. This theme was divided into smaller, specific sub-themes; entering competitions, making sales of paintings, appearing on television, reference to my education, to my own teaching and otherwise making a living, to artists whose work I had seen, people I had spoken to about my paintings. In the context of this thesis, data on the community is necessarily concerned with how it effects the subject, i.e. me.

I contend that my Self is a product of the culture I operate in and through. In my role as an artist, this is more complex than simply my position in an art market. It is more urgently constructed of the joint knowledge between my subjectivity and the social contexts, or community, in which I and the paintings exist. The relationship goes both ways, as expressed by Ranta<sup>113</sup>, who says

‘the production of visual works of art or pictures in general is influenced by the demands and needs of a certain public. The producer responds to these demands and offers opportunities for the beholder to bring his or her background experience (including familiarity with artistic conventions) to bear on the work.’

I refer to these different social contexts as a community to emphasise its sense of human organisation, and to infer its positive nature: as Wolff<sup>114</sup> puts it, ‘the existence of structures and institutions actually enables people to act’. My paintings and the writing I do in association with them act as a conduit through which my subjectivity is constructed. They are also a conduit through which the community acts on my subjectivity.

The community includes the market in which the paintings are sold or commissioned, as well as personalities, friends and admired artists, writers of fiction and non-fiction, my parents, teachers, art, and educational institutions to which I belong or have belonged. I draw an analogy with contemporary artist Elizabeth Peyton. In her paintings she takes the pantheon of celebrities that fascinates sections of contemporary media and makes what appear to be intimate, close portraits. Peyton’s work uses a glamorous, celebrity world of models, singers, writers, and gallerists as its content, mainly contemporary but with some reference to history (for example, *Ludwig of Bavaria* 1994 35 x 28 cm oil on board). Hoptman<sup>115</sup> writes that ‘community... for Peyton is a rich and complicated notion. Although many are people she has never met, by painting them she brings them into her orbit, even consummates a dialogue – imaginary or not - with them’. Hoptman says of Peyton that ‘she has endeavoured to position her work in such a way that it remains accessible to a large and not necessarily art-oriented constituency’, and while for Peyton the fact that the community is partly imaginary does not occlude the necessity to communicate with it and within it. The word *community* expresses the nature of the social contexts in which my studio practice exists.



15. Elizabeth Peyton *Ludwig II of Bavaria* 1994 35 x 28 cm, oil on board<sup>116</sup>

My paintings exist in an overlap between multiple social contexts, which comprises its community. The academic is one such context. The work is put into an academic context, with its concomitant aims. In his research on creative practice in an academic context, Hockey<sup>117</sup> defines the aim as developing an 'internal understanding of a fully reflexive self... (which is) ...simultaneously then a product of social interaction'. This acknowledges the intersubjective nature of creative practice but places its social being within the academic context. But its academic context is just one social context. Arguably, my previous education is also a major force in determining the means in which the content of my studio practice is expressed. These two social contexts are part of the community of the studio practice. I address both this current academic context and my previous education in both sections of this chapter.

The community therefore also includes the context in which this thesis is written. I am acting within an academic institution, using research questions that address narrative, improvisation, and the surface in my own work and in relation to historical examples. In understanding my own painting, I hope to provide insights useful to other creative practitioners, which also exist in their own community. Self-reflective, autoethnographic writing details my relationship with the thesis and reflexive work in the studio practice reflects and embodies its effect in the paintings.

Academic study of creative practice influences the creative practice. Simmons and Holbrook<sup>118</sup> describe a process of coming to terms with the imposition of academic necessities on creative practice. This leads 'to questioning the very core of one's knowledge and skills' through verifiable and rigorous methods of study. My own experience is often recorded as one of discomfort in the Practice Log, which correlates with the feeling of rupture they describe. The discomfort is a result of subjecting my studio practice, described frequently in terms of emotionality, sensuality, and consolation, to systematic study.

I use my Practice Log to throw light on my paintings. I also use the paintings themselves. In the example I use in this and previous chapters, *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad (2020)*, I employ a detailed examination of to argue that its realisation involves a complex set of imperatives. While Chang<sup>119</sup> says 'autoethnographers use their personal experiences as primary data', I propose that it is the recordings of personal experience that is the primary data. Nevertheless, I still follow Charmaz<sup>120</sup> and Strauss and Glaser's<sup>121</sup> methods; I hope that the 'work culminates in a 'grounded theory,' or an abstract theoretical understanding of the studied experience' that emerges from study of my studio practice, that is my paintings. In this case, then, the painting itself becomes an argument for its nature as an intersubjective object.

### 5.1 History painting and my art education

I went to art college to find out what it means to be an artist. I didn't know any artists socially and had little experience of the visual arts, so I had to make a choice between disciplines from the selection offered by my Foundation Course, and subsequent graduate and postgraduate degrees. In these I met a variety of people, teachers, and fellow students, and was exposed to different artists and art forms. In this way, an artist-self was constructed; I wasn't born an artist but decided, through a combination of influences, to study Fine Art, specifically painting. I wanted to continue to be an artist after my studies. I can't be more precise without entering psychological realms which this research does not encompass, but I felt strongly that it was a fulfilling and interesting business and that it would make a sense of my life.

One of the building blocks of my artist-self is using the tonal method of depicting form to improvise pictorial narrative that I learned at the RA Schools. Learning it involved a regime of drawing from nude models, in the 'life-drawing room', in a specific way. As Newall<sup>122</sup> describes it, life-drawing was a standard part of art college curriculums and 'working directly

and accurately from life, a tradition which continued to develop...into the twentieth century' was a feature of British art training which he ascribes to Legros, as head of the Slade school of art. However, RA Schools training was ultimately derived from Sir Joshua Reynolds' curriculum, as laid down in his Discourses<sup>123</sup>. Directness and accuracy were not aims in themselves. Life drawing was undertaken to develop a particular skill in tonally improvising depicted figures in history painting. History painting is therefore part of my artist self.

History painting, in Reynolds' terms, is associated with some things I am uncomfortable with. It was a medium used to promote and mythologise the activity of the nation state, or, as Nochlin puts it in her discussion of Realism in eighteenth and nineteenth century painting, it is a 'pictorial assertion of permanent values and eternal ideals centred around the nexus of heroic antiquity'<sup>124</sup>. By dealing with current events, history painting validated the activities of the state, according to Phillips<sup>125</sup> who uses Benjamin West's *The Death of General Wolfe* (1770) as an example of Reynoldsian history painting. In it, the battle between two colonial powers contesting over territory neither of which has any claim to is elevated to mythic status. He points out that its status as such rests on 'the great symbolic strokes that connect the drama of the battle to the cycle of time', among which he describes as the figure of a Native American warrior 'observing the passage of empires' and a 'grouping of disciples giving witness to the noble sacrifice'. Human existence elevated to the level of gods, as Roman puts it<sup>126</sup>, furnishing 'a justification of social and political privilege'. History painting as Reynolds understood it deals with society in a way that I do not agree with.

Using tonal means to depict form connects my painting to history painting. I have not questioned this given until this academic context has pushed me into it. The academic necessity is to question things felt, thought, or taken to be givens. I argue that detailed analysis of my Practice Log and my studio practice form an approach to practice-based research that will test these claims (see section 6.2 below). I challenged my use of tone to depict form by using a linear method.

Using tonal means to depict form feels convincing to me, partly because it is the way I have been trained. I have invested time developing, researching, and teaching it, both as a means of pictorial improvisation and as a tool for observational drawing, and it feels 'natural'. Anderson's<sup>127</sup> anthropological study of artists in the contemporary United States cites an artist's view that her abilities are 'built in' and this is how it feels to me. But it may feel natural because I have thoroughly assimilated its ideology. As Bryson<sup>128</sup> puts it in his discussion of how artists are trained to draw, 'full competence is achieved when the artist's hand and mind are exhaustively colonized by the sanctioned corpus of schemata'. I may feel comfortable

because I no longer recognize the possibility of an alternative, as the culture of the RA Schools, history painting and Reynolds' discourses operates through me, a colonized being. In the second part of the chapter, I rely largely on Bryson's essay in examining my exploration of line and tone in practice to test the matter. In the case study below, I show how I attempt to subvert this colonisation.

## 5.2 Subverting History Painting with Railway Modelling

In addressing the presence of history painting in my studio practice, with its uncomfortable relationship to power and its authoritative overtones, I co-opted another set of references by enlisting the railway modelling milieu in *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad* and other paintings made at a similar time (see Appendix 1 catalogue of paintings) This decision was based on several assumptions as well as an unexamined fascination with the tiny objects. I assume that the practices of railway modelling have some similarities with my own studio practice.

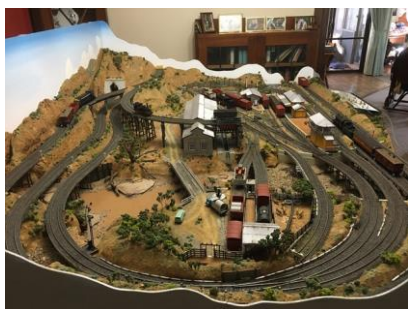
1. Their work is assembling tableaux; I assume the tableaux must also be in some state of flux to maintain interest. This is analogous to the emergent state of my paintings.
2. I assume that the interest in the tableaux might be in the different conditions and states of railway stock, terrain and staffage, the trains themselves and the space through which the model trains travel. This is analogous to the differentiation between forms in my paintings and the calibration of the depicted space in which they exist.
3. I assume that this interest might be in creating an inner or bounded world that indicates the external, unbounded one by its resemblance. This corresponds with the way my paintings also resemble the world outside the paintings.

There are other correspondences, including the use of figures composed in a compressed space; Richard Bratby<sup>129</sup> describing the 2019 Warley National Model Railway Exhibition says

'a small country station is often all that will fit in a spare room or garage. With imagination and craftsmanship, though, you can use that space to evoke a world.' (Bratby 2019)

Railway modelling does not, as far as I am aware, claim entitlement 'to the name of a Liberal Art'<sup>130</sup> or rank itself with poetry. It is rarely mentioned alongside literature, music, the visual

arts, and the theatre. It is a small art, in more ways than one. I problematise history painting by using its reference structure.



16. *Karrawidgee* by 'David', 6' x 4' railway model, HO scale<sup>131</sup> 17. *The Death of General Wolfe* Benjamin West 1770 Oil 151 x 213 cm, National Gallery of Canada<sup>132</sup>

### 5.3 Case Study: *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad*

I used the Preiser model 28161 *Hosenanprobe* as the source image for the painting *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad*. These figures are so small that they seem to almost dissolve in your view. Other work with similar methods includes *The Solid Model Of Time* 35x30cm Oil *If I Were A Sculptor* 45x30cm Oil, *Large Parrhasios At The Beach* 100x 75cm Oil, *Model Artist* 45x30cm Oil and *Woman Watering Plant* 35x25cm Oil (see Appendix 1 catalogue of paintings)

By using these source images, I make the history painting element of the work ironic, making the grandiose comic. The paintings and the drawings contain evident and hidden contradictions which resist the elevation to the mythic or heroic that history painting in Reynolds' sense demands. Rather than dealing with the human experience as if we were gods, I deal with it as if we were toys. If the viewer is aware of the origins of the figure, they bring their own ideas of railway modelling, toys, miniaturisation, to their reading of the image, as well as any reference to the canon of Western art.

In the next section I develop the sense of the painting as an intersubjective object further, examining some of the ways in which its form is determined by different drivers.

#### 5.4 Intersubjectivity in *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad*

The painting suggests more narratives and references than I can consciously manage. *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad* is an intersubjective object in that each viewer, including me, will interpret it in their own way. As Ranta<sup>133</sup> points out in his discussion of intersubjectivity in painting, paintings 'may trigger the emergence of narrative interpretations. These may be idiosyncratic, but they may also be intersubjectively shared or created.' I do not have full control over all of them. I add nuance to my own reading of Edvard Munch's *Between The Clock and the Bed*, 1940-43 in dealing with the narrative of ageing, as detailed in Chapter 4; the correspondence only occurred to me while I was painting the picture. All these readings developed as part of the process. However, in PL52 I note an exchange on Facebook in which another artist points out the likeness between my painting and Millet's *Angelus* (1857-59)



18. Millet *Angelus* 1857–1859, 55.5cm x 66cm, oil on canvas<sup>134</sup>

There is

'a correspondence, not only in the stance of the figure on the left, but between the shape of the shadow in my painting and the figure on the right. There's also something in the quality of light.' (Practice Log 52, 16.8.21 p4)

Millet's work has only tangential relevance to history painting in British Art. This exchange provides another frame of reference with which to view the painting, and to consider the next painting, and paintings made before. My subjective experience has been mediated by another experience, outside my own.



### 5.5 Academic Context in *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad*

The intersubjective object that is my painting can be seen as a nexus of different drivers. It exists in a community of different social contexts that determine its content, form, and its structures of reference. The thesis entails examining my studio practice to make a more complex understanding of it. The academic context includes being of use to other creative practitioners, particularly painters, because it is an example of self-questioning through practice. Before I started it, I accepted without question that I made up my paintings using a tonal technique. I might even have claimed it as 'my style'. I challenged this in my studio practice in the period exemplified by the three paintings *Uneasy Relationship V1* (see chapter 7), *Remembering My Visits To Nagasaki Chen* and *I Saw Will Self Riding a Brompton Down John Islip Street*, (see Appendix 1 catalogue of paintings). I accepted this challenge as part of what, in his discussion of creative practice in academic contexts, Hockey<sup>135</sup> refers to as the 'distancing of the earlier, relatively spontaneous, uninhibited self from the constrained, pragmatic self' of the academic researcher. I had to assume this distancing as part of the academic context in which I made the work. The different self that is produced by the academic context changes the work.



19. *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad* 6.5.20 100 x 75 cm, oil on canvas

## 5.6 Conclusion

My paintings are the material product of my agency, which is itself the product of the social contexts in which I exist. I refer to the overlapping of these social contexts as a community. Each discrete social context nevertheless relates to and affects the rest. One such social context is the academic one; this thesis is part of that. The contexts in which I make and sell my paintings are discrete from the academic one, and yet affected by it, as it is affected by them.

The academic study of my studio practice requires me to examine its givens, to understand and articulate the things that I do while in the reflexive activity of painting. Recognising the presence of history painting, which can be seen as a colonising force in my studio practice, determining the content and form in the paintings without my conscious control, I try to debunk it by the ironic content and its techniques turned to the depiction of personal meditation in *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad*. I use tonal techniques derived from history painting with the railway modelling figure to make the content of my painting ironic; the figure is a comic representation of my vanity (and perhaps other men's) appropriated from a milieu in which detail and a particular level of mimesis are valued. The painting is shown to be an intersubjective object in which cultural artefacts and milieux are deployed with a variety of references.

My paintings exist in complex, overlapping contexts of ideas and personalities. As well as the series of works with similar methods in which it was painted, I have shown how reference to the Munch painting *Between The Clock And The Bed* emerged for me during process of painting *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad*. Through looking at this, I have focussed on the research question that pertains to the historical implications of narrative and improvisation in painting. It invites comparison between the respective narratives of both paintings and assumes or encourages a shared knowledge of the Munch painting. I have shown how discrete milieux, one associated with railway modelling, another with the historic canon of early twentieth century visual art, have intersected across the surface of my painting in ways which create and develop its narrative content. I offer this as an original insight, as an answer to the research question of how improvisation and narrative have informed artists historically. Within and outside this frame of reference, the content of the painting stands between my own experience and the experience of others, allowing an overlapping, which I illustrate through the unexpected connection made with the Millet painting *The Angelus*.

How I make up the images in my work is the titular question of the thesis and the examination of the formal means of depiction has been of crucial interest in this chapter. In developing the theme of the community and the intersubjective object, I have explored how the academic context itself becomes part of the community in which the work exists and is applicable to other creative practice in an academic context. In the next chapter I address the question of the continuity of the studio practice.

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- <sup>113</sup> Ranta, M. (2014) *Iconography, Narrativity and Tellability in Pictures* in Klimke H (Ed) (2014) *Art Theory as Visual Epistemology* Cambridge Scholars UK
- <sup>114</sup> Wolff, J (1981) *The Social Production Of Art* Macmillan, UK
- <sup>115</sup> Hoptman, L (2008) *Fin de Siecle* in Hoptman, L (ed.) (2008) *Live Forever: Elizabeth Peyton* (p225) Phaidon, London
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## Chapter 6. The Unfolding Cloth of Continuity

### 6.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the community in which the paintings exist, addressing the research question about how improvisation and narrative have informed artists historically, in terms of my own painting. I return in this chapter to the theme of juxtaposition in realising form, to look further into the continuity of the studio practice. I address my research question on the significance of the surface in this chapter, as well as the question that concerns historical manifestations of improvisation and narrative development. This elucidates a link between surface, the painting as an intersubjective object, the self-reflective and reflexive modes of thinking about painting, and the continuity of the studio practice.

The process of painting depends on many factors: feelings and inclinations, available materials, the amount of time I may have, and on things outside the studio, like deadlines for exhibitions, the need to earn money, commissions. As discussed in chapter 3, self-reflective and reflexive modes operate, and these modes are often blurred. They operate as part of the community in which the studio practice exists, as discussed in chapter 5. I may stop working on a painting, thinking it is finished, and start on it again after painting another. There is a continuity in the studio practice simply in that I continue to make paintings.

In this chapter I draw mainly on three themes from analysis of the Practice Log – *Content*, *Process* and *Surface*. Analysis of the Practice Log elicits few direct references to continuity in self-reflective writing, although there are the sub-themes *Start* (20 notes) and *Finish* (52 notes) within the theme *Process*. Part of the reason for this absence may be due to the mechanism of the process itself. I rarely sit down to write an entry directly after or before a studio session, so that the concentration is on the work that I have made, rather than on what is next. However, the paintings do not exist in isolation. I often make paintings in series.

My paintings can be described as 'easel paintings'. I make paintings in oil paint on canvas stretched over frames, like Carracci's *The Butcher's Shop*. That is an easel painting and is brought into my discussion as an historical case study of particular interest to me. My studio practice consists mainly of easel paintings like this, defined as '...painting done on a portable support in one of the standard techniques, such as oils, watercolour or tempera, as distinguished from other kinds of painting, as mural painting, decorative work...'136. I can examine my studio practice in the light of painting from the category of Baroque painting, into

which *The Butcher's Shop* falls as well as contemporary practice because of this commonality.

In addressing the question of continuity in my studio practice, I look first at a commentary between Practice Logs 18 and 16, which details the relationship of a pair of paintings over the space of a year. I argue that this relationship shows continuity lodged in the material, improvised process of the painting, on the surface, rather than in a consciously planned programme. However, the writing is dependent on memory, and as I demonstrate below, memory is not absolute. As Chang<sup>137</sup> puts it in relation to autoethnographic data, 'memory can censor past experiences. When data are collected from a single tool without other measures for checks and balances, the validity of data can be questioned.' The paintings themselves serve as data that validates the theory, as I show below.

The next section uses Carracci's *The Butcher's Shop*, among other examples from the historical canon, to look at ways in which cloth, clothing, and the idea of cloth as a surface might be used in a painting, along with examples from my own work. I argue that as cloth is present as an analogy and as a depiction, its values and attributes are also present in thinking about the continuity of the practice.

The final section examines a series of multiple panel paintings that I made in 2017/18, to explore the possibilities in relationship between the discrete, bordered rectangles of the individual canvas. In this way, I establish the usefulness of the analogy between cloth and painting, in drawing attention to the significance of the surface in my painting, and in others'.

I just make my paintings up. It is an improvised response to my being at any given time. My studio practice itself also proceeds on a largely *ad hoc* basis. The body of work that I made between 2017 and 2022 shows this. As I discuss in Practice Log 54 (see Appendix 1 PL 54), the sequence in which I made the work is confused and obscure in my own mind. The lack of planning or a consciously applied, wider imperative in the studio practice is also evident in the comparison I make in *Commentary on PLs 18 and 16, 27.4.22*, (See Appendix 1) in which I repeat statements like 'I can't really remember' and 'it's as if I don't want to talk about them, as if words might obstruct their development'. In the example below, I describe an event in which I painted two small paintings, at a certain time of the year, with a particular, conscious intention. I then painted over these two paintings, at the same time the next year, with the same intention. However, I had completely forgotten about how I had painted the previous paintings over which I was now painting. I only remembered in a later period of self-

reflection. This demonstrates a hidden, unconscious, and unplanned element of intention. Conscious, self-aware activity is located solely in the surface.

...the two large 'red-dress' paintings were developments of two smaller ones, mentioned in the text ('...*painted two little paintings over the androgyne studies, as detailed in 12.2.19*') These two smaller paintings were themselves painted over two extant paintings. The extant paintings had been made in January/February 2018. I had written about them in PL5, in relation to the Christmas card that I had made that year, which was particularly saleable, I thought. I didn't mention this in the PL but hid behind observations about colour use and fine detail instead... Bearing in mind the annual dearth of ready cash in January/February, it is interesting that '*I set off painting what I think are more charming paintings for the New English Art Club Annual Open this year*' (PL17) at the same time of year, the next year. But I don't mention that I am painting over work made with a similar aim in mind in PL17, nor do I think that it actually occurred to me that I was doing so at the time. (*Commentary on PLs 18 and 16, 27.4.22 See Appendix 2*)

As illustrated below, *Andro 1* and *2* became *Jay In A Red Dress 1* and *2*. The studio practice moved from one painting to another without conscious planning. The reflexive activity of painting determines what happens, exemplifying Palin's<sup>138</sup> statement in relation to Bois that 'the desire to paint is painting's strength.' The common ideas and themes only appear on the surface. Psychological or other impulses that drive my desire to paint are beyond the remit of the thesis. There is nothing, at least that I am aware of, articulated behind the surfaces. My painting, the reflexive action of making marks on a flat surface, leads its possible meanings.



20. *Andro* 30x8cm, oil on canvas



21. *Andro* 30x8cm, oil on canvas



22. *Jay In A Red Dress 1* 30x8cm, oil on canvas



23. *Jay In A Red Dress 2* 30x8cm, oil on canvas

## 6.1 Painting and Cloth

My paintings are surfaces like cloth. In describing the painted surface as a cloth, I am referring to the surface that is available to see. The stretched canvas under the surface is not available. The surface that can be seen is made up of many small marks which interweave, as in a piece of textile or cloth. In defining painting, Benjamin<sup>139</sup> says, the 'medium of painting is that of the mark', so, as a cloth is made of many interlocking threads, a painting is made of many interlocking marks. The painting continues from one edge to another, in its all-over order. In this way a painting can be thought of as a cloth.

My painting does not follow a consciously planned pattern. An existing surface is not manipulated towards a known goal, like a blanket might be woven into a tartan. Instead, the whole is improvised until a surface is arrived at. In her autoethnographic work on knitting, Arante's<sup>140</sup> claim that it 'is about the creation of a surface instead of its manipulation' supports my analogy between woven or knitted cloth and the surface of the painting. Marks are made in relation to other marks to create shapes which become recognizable as discrete forms which remain in the surface. They remain marks made in relation to each other.

As I have detailed in chapters 3, 4 and 5, I argue that the painting is an intersubjective object. I make a material screen of marks, each related to the next, and ask the viewer to look at it. We both share a physical position in relation to it. Unlike the screen that a film director uses, for example, the thing I see is the same as the thing the viewer sees, even in the process of making it. There is nothing behind it. As Ingold<sup>141</sup> remarks in developing his ideas about surface, 'once upon a time, the screen was a woven fabric' and I and the viewer both see this woven fabric from the same physical position. The position is the same, but the way different people experience and share the painting differs.

In my painting the depiction of cloth covers, conceals, and describes the human form. The cloth that is depicted depicts the form beneath it. In this section I will address two examples from the historical canon (Carracci's *The Butcher Shop* (1585) and Ensor's *Intrigue* (1911)) for manifestations of these ideas, to demonstrate how the depiction of cloth expresses narrative.

Paint is material. Figures in my paintings, like figures in the everyday world I paint, are mostly clothed. People wrap themselves in cloth. Depicting cloth and clothing is explored in



Practice Log 18, in reference to Carracci's *The Butcher's Shop*. I describe depicted cloth as a 'describer' and a 'coverer', and

'Cloth is used by painters to wrap things, so that, intent on the description of cloth over things, we accept the presence of the thing beneath the cloth.'  
(PLAnalysis.Cloth note 30 Extract 4 See Appendix 2)

Carracci's *The Butcher's Shop* is a piece of cloth - linen stretched across a frame - on which is deployed a series of depictions of other pieces of cloth or material, skins artificial and grown; some are pulled back but only reveal other skins and some are pulled over to conceal what the skins contain.

'The butcher's shop is full of flesh, full of revealed depicted life, from the raw meat and skinned bones of the produce, through the half-covered butchers to the fully clothed customer, whose every part, save hands and face is covered, but also revealed – the cloth-bunched codpiece hides and reveals at the same time.'  
(PLAnalysis.Cloth note 30 Extract 5 See Appendix 2)

The codpiece tells its story. The codpiece of the Swiss Guard (figure on the left of the painting) conceals but also reveals; in the same way that we do not see actual blood, we do not need to see what is beneath the slashed cloth. We only see the surface. What is underneath is inferred. We think we know it is there, as Zeuxis thought that Parrhasios's<sup>142</sup> painting was behind the curtain. But it was not. Under the cloth or surface of paint there is nothing. Narrative is made when one area of cloth or paint is placed next to another, not when what is beneath the cloth is revealed.



24. Annibale Carracci *The Butcher's Shop* 1582 185 x 266cm, oil on canvas<sup>143</sup>

I paint with a double consciousness. My painting's artifice depends on a simultaneous apprehension of resemblance to the world outside the painting and the knowledge of its flatness. Cornea<sup>144</sup> refers to this in his discussion of Ribera's *St Bartholomew* (1644) when he says, 'the presentation of Bartholomew's upper body as stretched skin/canvas calls attention to the depth of his body as being merely skin deep.' The painting has a double nature; it resembles things outside of itself and it is an object, as described in chapter 4. Both are present while I paint and while the viewer looks.

The painting is necessarily a double thing. Depicted clothing describes another form, which we infer is beneath the cloth. As Gibson<sup>145</sup> says in defining a picture, things 'are not perceived and yet they are perceived.' In Practice Log 16 I refer to the painting *Intrigue* by James Ensor (1911)

'The confusion and ambiguities involved in the depiction of cloth, mask, body-part, puppet, and prop overloads my capacity to register different values, and the material descends into an undifferentiated mass. They could be people, or they could be puppets. What holds my gaze as 'real', as 'living' are the glances back at me; they're not all mimetically convincing, and some look more like holes or sewn on patches, others like flat schema, but enough have the appearance of my experience of seeing eyes in the real world, or eyes behind masks in the real

world, to give me an uncanny feeling of being regarded from behind a surface.'  
(Practice Log 16 20.2.19 p4 Extract 6 See Appendix 2)

The juxtaposition of shapes and the gaps between them suggest form and therefore the third dimension. The stitching together of flat shapes is where the doubleness occurs.

Painting is a covering procedure. The process of painting has been conceived as one of discovery and revealing, the reverse of covering up. If the surface is the 'incarnation of imagined scenes, the projection of dreams outward' as Merleau Ponty<sup>146</sup> says of Cezanne, in describing the interface between the artist and viewer the sense of being allowed glimpses into depths of being seems appropriate. However, the painting's surface offers the same phenomenon to its viewer as to its maker. It does not allow a view 'beneath', because there is no beneath. There is only a between, in the sense of the relationship of shapes to other shapes. This juxtaposition is where the covering process of painting is articulated.

## 6.2 Juxtaposition as Articulation of Meaning

In this section I explore some implications for my painting of the idea of meaning being located on the surface, in the juxtaposition of one form and another. Each set of marks makes flat shape on the surface - in the Practice Log I note of the painting *The Road To Emmaus* (1516) by Melone that 'the cloth here acts differently, it's like a collage, huge areas of bright colours and luminous shadows, stuck on an otherwise dull coloured world' (PLAnalysis.Cloth Note 24 Extract 7 See Appendix 2). In considering perception, Gibson<sup>147</sup> says a 'picture is a surface that always specifies something other than what it is.' It does this by juxtaposition; one patch relating to another, producing meaning by their proximity as if separate bits of cloth were stitched together, like a garment.

Below I put forward examples of juxtaposing forms to create meaning. In late 2017 I began painting a series of multiple part paintings.



25. DP Macnally's *Self-portrait* Three parts, approx. 100 x 75 cm in toto., oil on canvas.



26. Top part of above



27. *Alex Paints Danny*, 1977 two parts, 120 x 200 cm, oil on canvas



28. *Danny and The King* 1979 two parts, approx. 250 x 100 cm in toto., oil on canvas

The juxtaposition of one surface with another made a further set of narratives. The improvisational process of making these images is clarified in the Practice Log. After painting the top part of *Danny and The King 1979*, I relate the next stage in the Practice Log;

‘Yesterday I went into the studio and saw a larger canvas lying near this portrait, which was leaning against the plans chest. I wondered how the larger canvas would look, abutted against the lower edge of the portrait, and if I could paint Danny’s lower half on it convincingly.

It was quite a violent move, to break the portrait convention and twist it into a different painting.’ (Practice Log 1 10.3.17 p7 Extract 8 See Appendix 2)

It is also a generative move, in that one image is given more complex meaning by the adding of a further part. In improvisation, one piece is added to another, rather than searching for an essence or a simplified iteration.

The narrative of the paintings grows, finding focus in the continuing nature of the activity rather than in a unitary expression. Seeing the studio practice as a process of juxtaposition gives it a sense of development; not one that culminates, but one that carries on unfolding. This is analogous to KO Knausgaard’s<sup>148</sup> *My Struggle*. Knausgaard’s narrator, in *Dancing in The Dark*<sup>149</sup>, for example, falls in love with several individual young women and has relationships with them which all subsequently collapse. Each one appears to be the focus of the story. He sometimes flags this up –

‘That was all I wanted. She was all I wanted!  
Really.’

– but a few pages later it is evident that the relationship is over, and he isn’t especially concerned. The expected trope of the narrative arc doesn’t materialize. We are shown instead the unfolding of his individual progress; there are no resolutions; he will continue his progress, gaining experience and knowledge, but with no redemptive catastrophe or revelation. Similarly, the content and therefore narrative of the painting and the studio practice grow with juxtaposition. There is no closure. This is evident in catalogue of paintings (see *Appendix 1*) The multi-panel paintings shown above evidence this; even if the painting appears finished, another may be placed beside it and so alter its meaning. In *Commentary*

on *PLs 18 and 16*, it is evident that the impulse to make a particular image continues across paintings and across time, even without conscious intention.

Seeing the studio practice as an unfolding cloth makes it easier to continue and to trust the process than seeing it as a series of unitary statements or projects. In *Alex Paints Danny, 1977* the way the figure on the left (Alex) gazes upwards suggested an added panel. In this adding of one panel to another, and story to story, the paintings in the case studies above reflect Haraway's<sup>150</sup> statement in considering the self that 'the knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another' (author's italics). On its own, the painting of Alex begs the question 'what's he looking at?' and together, the two paintings answer. More questions are begged, though. Why is Alex painting Danny? Who are they?

Improvisation implies surprise. This is exemplified in the extracts from the Practice Log above. The paintings are realized in different and unforeseen ways. The surface of one painting is 'stitched' together and even to another to make a further iteration, in the continuity of the studio practice. As Arante<sup>151</sup> says of 'the knitting process, the trajectory of the thread-becoming-a-surface and the biography of the knitter interweave with and imbue each other in a continuous process of joint growth.' My subjectivity combines with the community in which the paintings and the studio practice exist, creating a series of surfaces that expands, like a cloth unfolding in front of me and the viewer.

### 6.3 Conclusion

In this chapter I explore the idea of continuity in my studio practice, to address my research questions to do with improvisation, narrative, and the surface. The images that emerge in my work exist in context with the world that they resemble and with other pictures; their meanings are determined by the narratives that they suggest.

The autoethnography suggests that there are unconscious imperatives in my painting. *Commentary on PLs 18 and 16* shows that I am capable of painting without an articulated position or programme of activity, even painting over images made with the same impulse. Planning and programming can happen, but they are not essential. The important thing is the activity on the surface. This answers the research question on the significance of the surface, which is the field of practice where the activity of making up my paintings plays out.

Close attention to my self-reflection and to the reflexive work of the studio practice suggests that focusing on the surface helps improvisation to flourish and new meaning to emerge. Conceptualizing the studio practice as an unfolding surface, like a cloth, supports and encourages continuity. Narratives can remain open and produce more narratives, rather than yearn for the false comfort of closure. In the next chapter I examine more closely the idea of finishing each painting.

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## Chapter 7 Finishing a Painting: When the Improvisation of Narrative Stops.

### 7.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter I looked at continuity in my studio practice and in the paintings. Borrowing from Ingold and Arante, I developed the analogy of a piece of cloth unfolding in time before the artist and the viewer. This offers a way of thinking about the paintings that encourages and supports improvisation in making up my painting, which I hope may be applicable to other creative practice. In chapter 3 I looked at modes of thinking, self-reflective and reflexive, within the studio practice, in chapter 4 I looked at how form is expressed, in chapter 5 at the community within which the work exists. This approach to the studio practice makes an inclusive and complex picture of the driving forces within it.

In this chapter I address the research question about what is involved in the generation and realization of imagery and narrative in my painting and how are the images realized. I will establish the point at which the improvisation of narrative that goes along on the surface of my paintings comes to an end, and why. I argue that finishing a painting is part of its process. I hope I have established that a painting is an intersubjective object. This proposes that the viewer is an agent in its meaning, as well as me, the artist. My own idea of the meaning of the painting may be altered by another interpretation. Given that it is materially possible to carry a painting on almost indefinitely, how do I know when to stop? If the work is improvisatory, and there is no specific end in mind, at what point can the work be said to come to an end?

In common with the previous chapters, I use self-reflective writing about my studio practice to try to elicit useful theory from it, with comparative analysis of specific paintings. In this chapter I particularly look at the themes of *Self*, *Process* and *Community*. A potential for solipsism is present in this constructivist approach. However, in doing this, I try to, as Nelson<sup>152</sup> puts it, articulate 'findings in a way which might share insights and infer pedagogy'. Dealing with the question of finish addresses the research questions about improvisation and narrative in the sense of the presentation and reception of these activities to the viewer.

To establish an idea of what a finished painting might be I intend to develop an analysis of Baudelaire's<sup>153</sup> opposition of 'complete' and 'finished'. I will also look at Gaskell's<sup>154</sup> recent work on meaning in painting to help work out how a painting might be considered finished. As I have discussed, this thesis is an attempt to find inclusive ways of finding meaning in my painting. Gaskell admits in his preface that the result of his thinking is 'an amalgam that is

hard to categorize', but offers the idea that a painting 'has a place in the world beyond any meaning with which its maker might have furnished it'. I focus on a painting, *Uneasy Relationship V1* (100 x 120 cm Oil on linen 2018), which features prominently in my Practice Log, to try to elucidate the way in which it achieved a state of finished-ness, reflecting its status as an intersubjective object. Throughout the chapter, I refer to Practice Log 7, in which *Uneasy Relationship V1* is chiefly discussed. I also refer to two different artist contemporaries, Iain Nicholls, and Phil King, the latter proving the most significant in relation to the painting. I will investigate the different ways in which his influence led to my deciding that the painting is finished. I cite Carter<sup>155</sup> and Nelson<sup>156</sup> and Simmons and Holbrook<sup>157</sup> in situating the work as practice-based research.

### 7.1 What is Finished?

Finishing a painting is a stage in the work. Even though being finished is always materially temporary with oil paint on canvas, a painting must reach a conclusion to be presented or sold.

My painting process is one of discovery and improvisation, as I hope I have demonstrated. Forms and narratives that I didn't anticipate emerge on the surface, and I make sense of them through the process, developing a title for example as described in chapters 3 and 5, as the work progresses. Making up a painting includes bringing it to a conclusion, resolving the ideas that have emerged in the process, and working out what they mean to me. Baudelaire<sup>158</sup> took a position that making sense of a painting involves sufficient depiction of their content. Refuting criticism of Corot's painting in 1845 for being unfinished in comparison with the work of contemporary painters, Baudelaire claims that a painting 'in which every element is well seen, well observed, well understood and well imagined, will always be very well executed when it is sufficiently so.' Baudelaire's reading is specific to debates about Realism and Impressionism in France in the nineteenth century, in its focus on a particular idea of finish, but 'sufficient' is a significant term and may be useful to this discussion. Corot's relatively loose handling of paint comes to a point when he makes the things he depicts sufficiently recognizable. My painting is complete when I feel that it is sufficient. Sufficient for me might be when the meaning of a painting becomes clear. However, as I hope I established in chapter 5, because a painting is an intersubjective object the narratives and therefore meaning of the painting continue to develop.

A general guideline for finished-ness in my paintings is difficult to articulate. I may change my mind and restart the painting, as I discussed in the previous chapter in the commentary on Practice Logs 16 and 18 (See Chap 6 Extracts, Appendix 2). However, when it is no longer available to me to alter, as far as I am concerned, it's finished in a material sense. A painting is finished when it's sold. Not all my paintings are sold, and not all my paintings reach this point of finish. But I must stop work on them at some point.



29. *Fucking Monkey* 30 x 40 cm, oil on canvas

There are points in my painting process when I stop work on a painting and leave it, hoping to leave it for good. This I might define as it being finished. In looking for meaning in painting, Gaskell<sup>159</sup> suggests that 'meaning' might be too imprecise a term, putting forward the question 'what is the point of this painting?' instead. As he says, 'the point of an artifact (meaning, interpretation, and use) is constantly liable to change.' He defines meaning here as 'last interpretation', most convincing or likely. In Practice Log 54, I note that my friend Iain Nicholls' impromptu and unasked-for tutorial led to a painting's total revision (see illustration above). It had been a still-life, whose point for me was an exploration of formal values, different ways of applying paint, levels of finish, contour outlines. He was not very complimentary about it, and his comments upset me.

'The next day I painted a monkey into the still life, which became a disrupted and no longer organized composition. It was only later that I realized that I had depicted the experience of having someone come into a settled situation and chuck stuff about. Iain was the monkey who was rearranging the still life. My painting was changed by someone else's ideas.'

In terms of its 'last interpretation' the point of the still life I was painting completely changed after my conversation with Iain Nicholls. It was no longer an exploration of formal values, if that's what it was, but had become something to do with disruption and presence. I left it for good because it felt to me that it did that sufficiently, to be finished. In this case, Iain's opinion outweighed my opinion of the point of the painting. I called the painting *Fucking Monkey*.



30. *Uneasy Relationship V1* 100 x 120 cm, oil on canvas

## 7.2 Case Study: *Uneasy Relationship V1*

A painting must come to some conclusion to leave the studio, to be exhibited and to be sold. Finishing a painting is therefore part of its process. Carter<sup>160</sup>, in discussing Practice as Research methodology, says that 'materials are always in a state of becoming' in creative research. This academic context demands insight into the process of the studio practice. Achieving a resolution, conclusion or completion in a painting is part of that process.

In painting *Uneasy Relationship V1* I challenged the given in my studio practice of using a tonal/colour method in depicting form by using a linear method. This caused me

considerable discomfort. Describing the process of a painting in retrospect can imply an inevitability. However, with *Uneasy Relationship V1* I did not have a clear idea or feeling about how I was going to proceed and therefore, how to finish. In Simmons and Holbrook's<sup>161</sup> terms, I was experiencing a rupture between my previous expectation and set of givens and a new state brought on by challenging these expectations and givens. Practice Log 7 includes several long passages about 'risk' in painting indicating a lack of clear definition in the process.

However it occurred, the painting came to a halt. It remained on the easel, causing a state of discomfort in me, in that I did not know what to make of it. At this point I was concerned about the general implications of changing the way I described form for the rest of my studio practice. Practice Log 7 records that *Mr Oldham and His Mates*, a painting I started soon after *Uneasy Relationship V1*, was made 'in order to test the language, to see how it would fare in a more complex composition.' The quality of the finish of the painting was different from previous paintings. It was nevertheless sufficient, in some way that I could not define. I did not feel able to improve it.

The feeling was reinforced when someone I hold in respect, 'Phil King, who is an artist, writer and the Editor of Turps magazine', endorsed the painting. I had put a photograph of it on social media. I asked him to elaborate, and he sent the following message, which I also record in Practice Log 7

Very interesting. good direct colour, not obviously the most significant aspect of the painting, but creating its power for me so that 'the suspense' is suspended in that economical and assured colour ability... big simple dramatic blocks held down by the blacks with that great pink triangle insisting. There's a real painterly matrix and I'm excited that it is 1m x 1.2m ... big enough to insist and confront on its own terms... It's very exciting to me in purely painterly terms and makes a space for the open ended psychological drama to feel kind of endless and not over determined and jokey. Puts me in mind of Victor Willing a bit... but totally Charles W. too.

Phil King, May 18 (see Practice Log 7, Appendix 2)

This positive critique suggested different ways of thinking about my painting. It reinforced the emotional condition in which I viewed the painting, to the point where I felt unable to alter it. I felt I had achieved something.

The critique had a powerful emotional effect on me. It affected me strongly enough to mention it at length in Practice Log 7. I set out below the main points it made.

1. The way *Uneasy Relationship V1* was resolved suggests a way of developing the linear method of depicting form combined with colour so that both could mesh together; Phil's indication of complexity in the relationship of line and colour ('blocks [of colour] held down by the blacks, with that great pink triangle insisting') implies the possibility of subtlety in the development of the image.
2. The reference to painterliness in discussing a linear image implies a marriage of two binaries, or a questioning of the binary relationship of linear to painterly. This seems significant.
3. The scale of the painting is regarded positively as an element in the communication, insisting and confronting 'on its own terms' as a function of its size.
4. The reference to making a space for the 'open-ended psychological drama' to feel 'endless' implies that the narrative situation depicted has a general relevance to the human condition, as opposed to what he describes as 'over-determined and jokey'. The implication is that the work is serious. It is also that my other work might be described as 'over-determined and jokey', or that I have a tendency to make work in that way.
5. The reference to Victor Willing (artist, 1928 – 1988) is a flattering one, and led me to look at his work in order to develop my own.

All five of these responses are loaded with emotionality; the first and second in the sense of the excitement and risk of discovery, the third is a positive response to a specific decision that I have made, the fifth is an identification with a highly regarded artist in relation to my own work. The fourth is more nuanced as it contains a criticism in the implication that my previous work might have been 'over-determined and jokey'. This makes it even more emotionally powerful.

*Uneasy Relationship V1* became finished after this critique. Phil's response ensured that the painting could no longer be developed. It was as if I'd sold it. It almost became Phil King's property. I later altered the other two paintings that I had worked on at the same time,

*Uneasy Relationship V2* and *Mr Oldham and His Mates*, in big ways; one of them was completely painted over. *Uneasy Relationship V1* remained unchanged. It would take a drastic alteration in my thinking about it to change it. It became a touchstone of a certain stage of my painting process. It has done this because of its nature as an intersubjective object. Mine is not the only agency in making the painting; while my emotional condition determines whether the painting is finished, that condition depends on others as well as me.

In the reflexive action of painting, I can't be sure of my motivations for doing things. Subjectivity is associated in the Practice Log with lack of conscious determination. In Practice Log 10 I ask

'Is it thoughtless? Instinctual, perhaps. Did it need to be so rapid? I *did* sort of lose it, in the sense that I lost the clarity that I sought when I started, and I felt that I had to resolve it in this 'expressive' fashion. I was desperate.' (Practice Log 10 8.10.18 p4 Extract 5 See Appendix 2)

Emotionality ('I was desperate') is linked with the process. In Practice Log 7 I ask myself 'about how much or little I actually admit to knowing.' I do question my behaviour, asking whether the resolution I have come to, seemingly as a surprise, instead simply emerges from a different but unacknowledged set of guidelines. I admit in Practice Log 7 that 'the drawing and the methodology resembled the small sketches I make in my sketchbook in the way the form was realised.' (Practice Log 7 20.4.18 p5 Extract 6 See Appendix 2) This demonstrates that I have improvised on a different set of guidelines. However, there is no sense of self-awareness in this. Emotionality, desperation in the case above, outweighs anything else.

Emotion is crucial in deciding whether a painting of mine is finished. My work is guided by things I don't acknowledge or am unconscious of. The Practice Log frequently describes my painting process as a feeling forward, testing how I feel about some thing or another, rather than fulfilling systematic processes toward a specified goal. This freedom in an apparently improvisatory approach may be an illusion and it may be that I have been colonized by ideologies that I no longer recognize, as discussed earlier. I may be proceeding in a programme over which I have no control because I don't acknowledge it. I look particularly at this idea in Chapter 5 where I addressed History Painting as an element of my studio practice. Here I identify a danger in that the validation I feel, the enjoyment, might come from enacting guidelines whose significance I do not recognize.

What my painting means, and so when it is finished, is not determined by me on my own. The guidelines I follow in painting are evidently not all apparent to me. But they may be to others if, as I propose, a painting is an intersubjective object. The idea of a painting as an intersubjective object places its finished-ness out of my agency and into a broader community. In his discussion of the communication of meaning in painting, Gaskell<sup>162</sup> defines a painting as 'not so much a communication device...as an artifact that has a place in the world beyond that which its maker might have furnished it, whether by conduction of a mental state, or encoding or both'. As Phil King<sup>163</sup> says in my later interview with him,

'Artists, rather than being united God-like representative human beings with unshakeable judgements, are temporary, split-up workers playing roles as needed, actors. They create as makers and as viewers and come together in 'art' which is a troubling complex unity up for grabs, but also weirdly giving a good impression of something absolute.... Painting is not passive experience but a shared work.' (See Appendix 2)

In the case of *Uneasy Relationship V1* part of the shared work was his critique of the painting, which effectively finished it by putting it out of reach of material change. I proceed with making up paintings, improvising narrative across the surface, without an articulated or formulated set of guidelines. I rely on emotion to know when they are finished. I don't really know what I am doing, in the sense of being able to articulate it.

It is hard to say whether other artists might find this useful. It may be that I am on my own in my lack of self-knowledge. Texts about practice-based research, like Bolt's<sup>164</sup>, suggest that in creative research 'decisions are made not according to logical thought but as a direct and felt response to handling elements' and further that 'art proliferates possibilities, rather than reducing them'. As an intersubjective object, my painting seems to lead me, while others might be led by their explicitly laid plans.

### 7.3 Conclusion

Finishing a painting is a significant element of the studio practice, so it demands theorization. The process of any painting in my studio practice must reach a point of conclusion. Paintings must be exhibited and sold. This implies a state of being, stable enough to be sufficient. However, the continuity of the studio practice, which unfolds like a single cloth in front of me, one painting suggesting another, resists conclusion. The nature of painting as an



intersubjective object also resists conclusion, because other subjectivity is brought to bear on it. I demonstrate this by the example of my 2015 painting, *Fucking Monkey*.

Finishing a painting is a matter of reaching an emotional state, for me. In theorising the idea of finish, I have looked at my painting, *Uneasy Relationship V1* because it is exemplary in that its process contained a challenge to something given in my studio practice. I saw this as part of the academic context in which it exists. However, in process, its nature as an intersubjective object was made evident by an exchange with another person about it, which had a significant effect on whether I felt the painting was finished. Through an autoethnographic approach I have identified emotionality as a crucial element in determining whether one of my paintings is finished; unacknowledged guidelines about how to improvise, what narrative is depicted and how to organize the surface are in play and emotionality determines how these guidelines are followed. Baudelaire's distinction between completeness and finish has proved unhelpful in articulating when to stop. Rather, finish is a position determined by my emotional condition, which is affected by the painting's nature as an intersubjective object. My emotional response to Phil King's reading of the painting determined its finishing.

The paintings' nature as oil paintings on linen and as intersubjective objects means that they are available for change until they are removed from my agency. Continuity within my studio practice, conceptualized as an unfolding cloth, allows each single painting to be seen as part of a unitary whole. Relatively few of my paintings have been altered so directly by the intervention of others, and I make my own mind up eventually (see *Appendix 1 catalogue of paintings*). My emotional condition determines whether I will carry on with them, sand them down and paint over them, store them or destroy them. Selling a painting removes it from my agency. They are also removed from my agency when, as in the case of *Uneasy Relationship V1*, others' agency overwhelms my own.

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<sup>152</sup> Nelson, R (2013) *Practice As Research In The Arts* Tauris, UK

<sup>153</sup> Baudelaire, C., Trans. and Ed. Mayne, J. (1956) *The Mirror of Art: Critical studies by Charles Baudelaire* Doubleday USA, digitized Internet Archive 2011 <https://archive.org/details/mirrorofartcriti00baud/page/n5/mode/2up> accessed 15.7.22

<sup>154</sup> Gaskell, I (2019) *Paintings And The Past: Philosophy, History, Art* Routledge UK/US

<sup>155</sup> Carter, P (2016) *The Ethics of Invention* in Barrett, E, Bolt B (Eds) (2016) *Practice As Research: Approaches To Creative Arts Enquiry* Tauris, UK

<sup>156</sup> Nelson, R (2013) *Practice As Research In The Arts* Tauris, UK

<sup>157</sup> Simmons, B, Holbrook A (2012) *From Rupture To Resonance: Uncertainty And Development In Fine Art Research Degrees* Arts And Humanities In Higher Education 12(2-3) p204-221 Sage

<sup>158</sup> Baudelaire, C., Trans. and Ed. Mayne, J. (1956) *The Mirror of Art: Critical studies by Charles Baudelaire* Doubleday USA, digitized Internet Archive 2011 <https://archive.org/details/mirrorofartcriti00baud/page/n5/mode/2up> accessed 15.7.22

<sup>159</sup> Gaskell, I (2019) *Paintings And The Past: Philosophy, History, Art* Routledge UK/US

<sup>160</sup> Carter, P (2016) *The Ethics of Invention* in Barrett, E, Bolt B (Eds) (2016) *Practice As Research: Approaches To Creative Arts Enquiry* Tauris, UK

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<sup>161</sup> Simmons, B, Holbrook A (2012) *From Rupture To Resonance: Uncertainty And Development In Fine Art Research Degrees* Arts And Humanities In Higher Education 12(2-3) p204-221 Sage

<sup>162</sup> Gaskell, I. (2019) *Paintings And The Past: Philosophy, History, Art* Routledge UK

<sup>163</sup> Phil King Interview July to August 2019 See Appendix 2

<sup>164</sup> Bolt, B (2004) *Art Beyond Representation: The Performative Power Of The Image* Tauris UK

## Chapter 8 Conclusion

### 8.0 Introduction

This thesis has produced a number of findings, useful to me in developing my paintings, and useful in a wider sense, both in suggesting a method for studying an extant studio practice and in producing insights into the nature of painting as a contemporary art form. I have deployed a methodology which allowed me to preserve my studio practice while putting it under a high level of scrutiny.

By examining my studio practice, looking at the paintings and using a Practice Log, I have reached and demonstrate a more complex understanding of the work. In doing this I have answered my three research questions, which I detail below in section 8.1. I see this thesis as an example of what Candy defines as practice-based research<sup>165</sup>, in that is 'an original investigation undertaken in order to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice'. In this case, I offer the practice itself as part of the argument (see Appendix 1) While it has been posited by Scrivener<sup>166</sup>, for example, who says that artwork cannot be the thesis itself – 'I cannot personally ever recall viewing an artwork as an argument' – I argue that the paintings do in fact constitute an argument, in that they embody different iterations of the arguments that I follow in the thesis.

My studio practice exists already in a web of social contexts and market forces, and has done for a considerable period of time. The method I have deployed allowed me to leave the studio practice as undisturbed as possible, while I acted as a Participant Observer. I might have taken an extant theoretical construction and aimed it at the subject. For example, Palin<sup>167</sup> claims to have 'set out to explore medium specificity with regard to the practice of painting' in his thesis. The concept of medium specificity is an explicit reference to Greenberg's writing, in for example *The Avant Garde and Kitsch* (1939), so it positions his thesis in relation to Greenberg and mid-twentieth century Modernism in painting. This could have been a useful approach, appropriate to my interests in that it would acknowledge an issue that concerns me, namely what it is that makes painting different from other image-making art forms. While I have developed this by thinking about painting as a surface, in relation to drawing and improvisation (see chapter 4), my overriding interest was to develop insights that would include the broader personal and social contexts in which the studio practice exists. The methods I employ, borrowing from grounded theory and autoethnography, represent a hybrid approach to research methods in the creative arts. I

suggest that these approaches could be profitably applied to a range of creative investigations, and in this represent novel thinking.

### 8.1 Research Questions

Research question one; how has improvisation and narrative development informed artists historically, in relation to my paintings?

In chapter 5 I engage with the way I learned to be an artist, exploring the implications of the training I received. This is a partial discussion, in the sense that there were other influences than the RA Schools life-drawing course involved. However, I use this aspect of my training to throw light on how an approach to depicting form, accepted as a given in my practice, carries other implications. I show how I resist and subvert them in the studio practice. This examination of my own training might provide an interesting example for other artists in that it elucidates elements that I have taken as givens in my painting and might suggest the presence of un-examined givens in others' practice.

In chapter 6 I demonstrate commonality with Annibale Carracci's painting from 1585, drawing comparisons between our different ways of approaching the depiction of cloth that led to insights about the surface of the painting. I deploy references to artists in the historical canon throughout the thesis, as well, in a manner analogous to the process I go through in the studio – artists whose work I have been interested in over the years reappear to me as I go along, as much as the voices of teachers, friends and others. Through this process I reach for things that might be trans-historically constant about painting, not directly subject to market forces, fashion, and technological change.

Research question two; what is involved in the generation and realization of imagery and narrative in my painting and how are the images realized?

In chapter 3 I develop an understanding of the relationship between reflexive and self-reflective knowledge in terms of my painting process. This creates insight into the processes of thought involved in the generation and the realization of the depiction. I suggest that this insight might replace or at least add nuance to other ideas about how the creative process works in the mind of the practitioner.

In chapter 4, I look at the material process of depiction, to explore how the shapes developed into nameable forms, and how those forms might be understood through narrative, a question which I pursue in chapters 5 and 6. These chapters offer new insight into an established dichotomy of drawing and painting, and into the idea of painting as the creation of discrete visual statements that stand on their own. In chapter 7 I discuss how a painting's narrative might be realized as an intersubjective object and explore the idea of finishing a painting by looking at the agency involved in the decision to describe a painting as finished. While this is useful for me, in that I have become more aware of the variable and fluid nature of the state of finish in a painting, it might also elucidate the complexity of the process for a general audience.

Research question three; what is the significance of the surface in my painting?

In chapter 4 my focus on the material process of depiction leads me to an apprehension of the specific role played by the surface in my painting, which I develop in differentiating between painting and drawing in terms of improvisation. In chapter 6, I elucidate the relationship of surface to depiction further, when I explore juxtaposition as a driver in making narrative meaning. These insights, while useful and illuminating to me as a long-time practitioner, might also help to clarify the activity of painting images on a flat surface as a contemporary fine art.

I develop these ideas below.

## 8.2 Drawing Together the Strands of Discussion in the Thesis.

Rather than addressing the studio practice with an experimentalist paradigm, I treat it as fieldwork, like an anthropologist. This provides difficulties; as Ingold<sup>168</sup> remarks in his discussion of Anthropology, 'in the field you have to wait for things to happen and accept what is offered when it is offered' whereas in the laboratory 'things are either forced or tricked into revealing their secrets, otherwise known to science as 'data'.' In this field work, the studio practice remains intact, and the thesis reflects it more truly.

The crucial findings of the thesis are detailed below. The research methods I used have been described in chapter 2 (Methodology) and I have included the Practice Log and Practice Log analyses in the appendices.

### 8.2.1 Self-Reflection And Reflexivity

In chapter 3 I set out a model of self-reflection and reflexivity which I find useful in describing ways of thinking about painting. This model helps to resolve a difficulty identified in Bryson<sup>169</sup>, who puts forward a distinction between painting and drawing, similar to Berger's<sup>170</sup>, in which linear drawing is an improvisatory, inventive process, while tonal/colour painting deploys form which is circumscribed by its material necessities. I argue that the notion of two discrete ways of thinking while and about painting makes a more useful way of addressing the question of how I make up a painting than Bryson's because it escapes this material. I argue, elaborating in chapter 5, that the materials do not circumscribe the form but, given Benjamin's<sup>171</sup> idea of painting as an order of marks, the surface makes an arena in which form can emerge, in linear *or* tone/colour terms. A painter can make a painting up in process because oil paint and to a lesser extent watercolour, allows for change. I demonstrate, in chapter 3, that self-reflection and reflexivity are linked and porous and that both ways of thinking are involved in the process and away from the process. This insight is useful, to me and I argue to other painters, in that it turns the attention away from material limitations – it is not necessary to plan a painting, as Berger suggests, using drawing and studies, before making it – to the different thought processes involved.

### 8.2.2 Drawing and painting

The thesis provides insight into their different natures by testing Ingold's ideas relating to drawing as opposed to painting, themselves derived from Bryson's essay<sup>172</sup>, against the reality of my own practice. Ingold's<sup>173</sup> metaphorical structure of 'drawing a line', standing for the unfolding continuousness of consciousness, is returned to its original context, that is a linear-based depiction of form, and tested it against personal, physical experience of depiction in painting. My finding that there is no useful difference in terms of the freedom to improvise shape, form and narrative in painting between the two concurs with Gaskell's<sup>174</sup> (see chapter 7) and removes the focus from the dichotomy of drawing and painting to one on time and the flat arena of the surface.

### 8.2.3 The Painting as an Intersubjective Object

Conceiving my painting as an intersubjective object helps to shed light on the idea of agency in painting. My painting is a surface across which different agencies operate. It is a nexus of

different impulses and concerns, which turn on many different social, cultural, and economic imperatives. It is also apprehended in many ways and as McCosh<sup>175</sup> puts it 'the artwork becomes more than a mere object, it is something that is inter-relational and bound to experience.' Proposing that my painting is an intersubjective object makes sense of how it is made and what happens when it is viewed.

An art object can be seen as an intersubjective object. My paintings are objects that I create from my subjectivity, but their nature allows and encourages different perceptions, influences, and readings. I also change, adopting different emotional and intellectual positions toward and apprehensions of the painting during the process of its making. The intersubjective object makes a bridge between my subjectivity and others'. This insight, gained through analysis of the Practice Log, in particular in chapters 6 and 7, increases my own understanding of the way my painting develops and is resolved. It applies in a wider sense to other painters seeking an understanding of painting as a contemporary visual art form, because of the light it sheds on the creative process involved. It applies in a to practitioners of the wider arts and those seeking an understanding of the evolution of a piece of work, in the light it sheds on the artist as a part of a community of ideas.

#### 8.2.4 Agency in my painting

The question of self and subjectivity is elucidated by conceiving the painting as an intersubjective object. Their being intersubjective objects implies that agency in making the paintings is slippery in definition. This is echoed by Bolt's<sup>176</sup> observation that from the twentieth century 'art, like identity, was no longer a given, but was produced through socially discursive practices.' This also echoes my apprehension, discussed in Practice Log 16 and 18 for example, that I feel I have a hundred voices in my head while painting, old teachers, friends, gallery owners, curators, even my wife, all telling me what to do next. It is an emotional as well as a logical state. In chapter 7 I detail the process of finishing a specific painting in which intersubjectivity is demonstrated quite graphically. This event elucidates the complexities involved in managing the intersubjective object.

My paintings are material manifestations. The voices in my head that I referred to above are combined with the substances I use to make marks on the surface. The materials are not neutral but are things meant for painting. Oil paint is made specifically for this activity and arguably contains the knowledge and experience of the people who make it. When working in my studio practice, as Ingold<sup>177</sup> puts it, I am 'in the business not so much of imposing form

on matter as of bringing together diverse materials and combining or redirecting their flow in the anticipation of what might emerge.' While Ingold makes a distinction between things and objects in his discussion of the kites his students make and fly, I relate to my painting materials as objects, outside my subjectivity. They do not have agency, but they are not a neutral part of the determination of the painting.

#### 8.2.5. The Surface

I argue that the surface in painting is a major part of what makes painting different from other art forms. The surface emerges as the crucial location of improvisation and narrative in my painting. The viewer and the artist share the same position in relation to the painting; the viewer sees what I have placed there. There is nothing obscured. Marks that are hidden, overlaid, or scraped off are no longer available to me or the viewer, except in memory or in photographs, both of which are unreliable. In this way, as Ingold<sup>178</sup> says, 'to view the work is to join the artist as a fellow traveller to look with it as it unfolds in the world, rather than behind it to an originating intention of which it is the full product.' The surface of the painting is all there is.

#### 8.2.6 Relationality in improvisation

The processes of painting are relational. Materials, other people, and my emotionality are all involved. I am not inventing from nothing but improvising with things already present. Creativity is not innovation. My Practice Log details many emotional, unknowing responses to the studio practice, for example

'It is strange how the image resolves itself, the oddness of it. In my mind I have an idea about how to resolve it, how I will make it a box of light and just add the colour in loose shaped blocks, in reality I try to make the shapes legible, connect them the rest of the form, outline and so on, but it is kind of unnecessary.'

(PracticeLog35.25.4.20 p2 Extract 2 Appendix 2)

In chapter 7, I demonstrate how this unknowing is resolved by someone else's opinion, but the resolution is still emotional and not fully verbally articulated. Different elements emerge as the painting is in process, and I respond to them. As Ingold and Hallam<sup>179</sup> describe it, the improvisation 'is relational...because it goes along 'ways of life' that are as entangled and



mutually responsive as are the paths of pedestrians on the street'. I proceed, knowing that but often not knowing much else.

### 8.2.7 Cloth as a Useful Analogy for the Studio Practice

In understanding continuity in painting, I argue against a 'project-based' approach, adopted by art historians in order to discuss, for example, Picasso's Blue Period followed by his Rose Period, followed by Cubism. Instead I offer the analogy of a cloth or series of clothes that, stitched together or folded back on themselves, form a patchwork of different impulses in painting. I put forward the idea that narrative in my painting comes from juxtaposition. One painting's narrative meaning can be extended by its relation to another. The analogy is extended to the whole studio practice, as a single piece of cloth unfolding; one painting follows another.

The surfaces of the paintings are made up of marks of paint that interweave to form a skin, or textile of marks. In chapter 6 I referred to analogies with knitting, woven screens, and tapestry to describe the surface of the painting. I hoped to elucidate the sense of a unitary, flat surface dressed in shapes that resemble forms from outside the painting. One thing and a collection of things at the same time. In describing this double perception, Gibson<sup>180</sup> says 'a picture is both a surface in its own right and a display of information about something else.' A painting in my studio practice is both a flat surface made up of marks, like a piece of cloth, and a depiction that indicates the world outside the surface.

Starting and finishing a painting are emotionally and materially stressful states. Each painting has a separate identity and being, and the process of making it tends toward a finished state as discussed in chapter 7. The process of making it becomes more specific to the individual painting as its narrative meaning emerges. McCosh<sup>181</sup> describes the 'apprehension felt in the developmental stages' when she does not 'always understand where (her) actions will lead or what results will be achieved when particular materials interact'. Finishing the painting brings elation. I refer to wanting to stay in this feeling in chapter 6. Consequently, starting another painting is an emotional effort, involving anxiety and risk. This anxiety is reduced by seeing the studio practice as a continuous cloth, moving across surfaces, rather than as a series of disconnected iterations of separate idea. Thinking of it as cloth supports the continuity of the studio practice, especially in relation to conceiving each painting as a discrete statement.

### 8.3 Conclusion

The thesis presents new knowledge in the form of fresh insights into my own practice and into painting as a creative practice. These insights, the model of self-reflection and reflexivity, the idea of a painting as an intersubjective object, the crucial nature of the surface and the painting and the studio practice itself as cloth, provide new ways of thinking about creative practice. In examining my own studio practice, I have formulated theoretical tools which might help other practices. The research methods I have employed allowed the studio practice to remain in a recognisable form, by imposing on it only in participant observation. I continued to make up paintings and I continue to do so. I have had a consistent career for the past more than thirty years, as a painter and artist operating in the British art scene and elsewhere, exhibiting, publishing, and teaching, including being involved with several different art institutions, like, for example, the Royal Watercolour Society of which I am President at the time of writing. The model I have developed itself forms new knowledge, in that it can be usefully applied by other practitioners in my or similar circumstances – creative practitioners curious to gain insight into their established and ongoing practice, as well as those at the beginning of an academic career. Research was grounded in the data of the studio practice and the Practice Log and progressed without the deformation inherent in more experimentalist approaches to creative art research, that might include limitation and compartmentalisation. By using this research method, I have been able to challenge the givens of my studio practice and reached understandings about my own creative processes, gaining more complex understanding which I argue has made the work itself more complex. In this sense, as well as the insights offered into creative practice and painting, it is a method that recommends itself to other creative practice researchers wishing to foreground practice as much as possible.

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<sup>165</sup> Candy, Linda. (2006). *Practice Based Research: A Guide*. Creativity and Cognition Studios Report. 1.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257944497\\_Practice\\_Based\\_Research\\_A\\_Guide](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/257944497_Practice_Based_Research_A_Guide) accessed 6.8.22

<sup>166</sup> Scrivener, Stephen (2002) *The art object does not embody a form of knowledge*. Working Paper. Working Papers in Art & Design - Volume 2 <https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/783/> accessed 6.8.22

<sup>167</sup> Palin, T (2018) *The Condition of Painting: Reconsidering Medium Specificity* PhD Thesis, RCA London

<sup>168</sup> Ingold, T (2018) *Anthropology: Why It Matters* Polity Press UK

<sup>169</sup> Bryson, N (2003) *A Walk for A Walk's Sake* in De Zegher, C., Newman, A. (2003) *The Stage Of Drawing: Gesture And Act* Tate, UK

<sup>170</sup> Berger, J (2016) *The Basis Of All Painting And Sculpture Is Drawing* p27- 32 of *Landscapes* Verso, London

<sup>171</sup> Benjamin, W. (1917) *Painting or Signs and Marks* in Benjamin, W.,(Eds) Bullock, M., Jennings, M (1996) *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writing Volume 1 1913 – 1926* Harvard University Press, USA

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<sup>172</sup> Bryson, N (2003) *A Walk for A Walk's Sake* in De Zegher, C., Newman, A. (2003) *The Stage Of Drawing: Gesture And Act* Tate, UK

<sup>173</sup> Ingold, T (2016) *Lines: A Brief History* Routledge UK

<sup>174</sup> Gaskell, I (2019) *Paintings And The Past: Philosophy, History, Art* Routledge UK/US

<sup>175</sup> McCosh, L (2013) *The Material Sublime* in Barrett, E., Bolt, B (Eds) (2013) *Carnal Knowledge* Bloomsbury, UK

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<sup>179</sup> Hallam, E and Ingold T (2007) *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation* ASA UK

<sup>180</sup> Gibson, J.J (1986) *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New York, USA <https://archive.org/details/ecologicalapproa0000gibs> accessed 4.7.22

<sup>181</sup> McCosh, L (2013) *The Material Sublime* in Barrett, E., Bolt, B (Eds) (2013) *Carnal Knowledge* Bloomsbury, UK

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## Appendix 1

### Contents

1. Catalogue of paintings and drawings 2017 - 2022	114
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3. Practice Log 54 – Commentary on the body of work.	261

The paintings are not dated but are in an approximate order of creation. This is not a comprehensive record.



*Some Men In My Town* 40x65cm Oil



*Some Women In My Town* 40x60cm Oil





Small watercolours, @10x10cm



*Legs and Dogs* 15x27cm Water-based media



*Legs and Dog* 15x30cm Water-based media



*Parkaman* 20x15cm Water-based media



*Small Alex Koolman's Self-portrait After Daniel Stringer 40x60cm Oil*





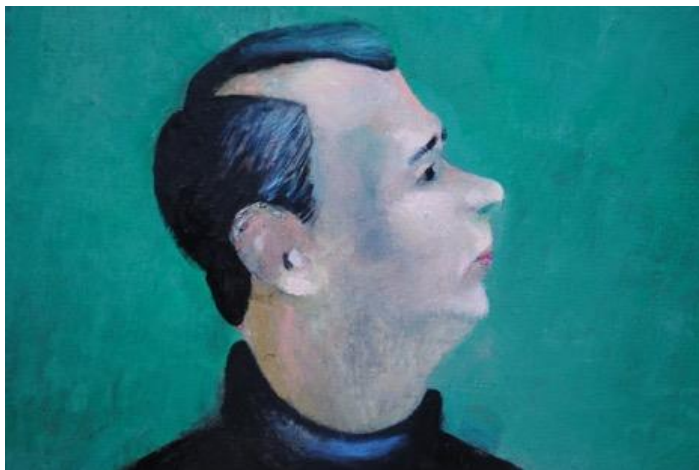
*Alex Koolman's Self-portrait After Daniel Stringer 100x120cm Oil*



Details of Alex Koolman's *Self-portrait After Daniel Stringer*



*Alex Paints Danny* 1977 120x200cm Oil





Details of *Alex Paints Danny* 1977



*Danny & The King* 1979 200x100cm Oil



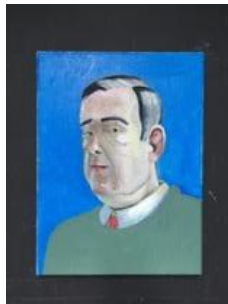
*DP Macnally's Self-portrait 100x50 Oil*



Top section of *DP Macnally's Self-portrait*



*Small The Chairman At The Battle Of Whitstable 1952 60x40cm Oil*



*Study of The Chairman 1952 35x30cm Oil*





*Large The Chairman At The Battle Of Whitstable 1952 150x100cm Oil*



*Mealtime* 56x32cm Water-based media



*Santa Man Bun* 10x10cm Water-based media



*Pinocchio Boy With Monkey* 35x30cm Oil



*Pinocchio Boy With Rat* 40x30cm Oil



*A Taxonomy of Masculinity 75x100cm Oil*



*Andro* 100x75cm Oil



*Andro 30x8cm Oil*



*Andro 30x8cm Oil*



*Jay In A Red Dress 1 30x8cm Oil*



*Jay In A Red Dress 2 30x8cm Oil*



*Jay In A Red Dress 1 110x60cm Oil*



*Jay In A Red Dress 2* 110x60cm Oil





*The Party Convenor* 120x60cm Oil



*Lt. Colonel VI Jones And His Son* 120x100cm Oil



*Large Some Men In My Town* 100x120cm Oil



Details of Alex Koolman's *Self-portrait After Daniel Stringer and Large Some Men In My Town*



*Hurray For The Colghanites!* 120x100cm Oil



*The Chairman Signing the Draft of the 7-Year Plan 1954 100x120cm Oil*



*Boy With A Mouse* 100x50cm Oil



*Camilla* 75x56cm Oil on paper



*Small Uneasy Relationship* 60x50cm Oil





*Stages of Uneasy Relationship V1*



*Uneasy Relationship V1* 100x120cm Oil



*Mr Oldham And His Mates* 100x120cm Oil



*Uneasy Relationship V2* 100x120cm Oil





Studies for *Remembering My Visits To Nagasaki* Chen Water-based Media



First stage of *Remembering My Visits To Nagasaki Chen* 120x100cm Oil



*Remembering My Visits To Nagasaki Chen* 120x100cm Oil



Study for *I Saw Will Self On A Brompton Cycling Down John Islip St* 56 x 32cm Water-based media



*I Saw Will Self On A Brompton Cycling Down John Islip St*. 120x80cm Oil



*Tim Hyman In His Studio 100x65cm Oil*



Studies for *Tim Hyman In His Studio* 56 x 32cm Water-based media





*Charles In London* 56 x 32cm Water-based media



*Charles In London* 100x65cm Oil



*Charles and Joe* 100x120cm Oil



Stages of *Camilla and Minna* 90x45cm Oil



*Minna And Joe* 120x65cm Oil



*Minna* 100x45cm Oil



*Minna And Joe* 50x30cm Oil



*Joe Skipping* 40x30cm Oil



*Joe Skipping* 50x35cm Oil



*Minna And Joe* 30x30cm Water-based media



*Three Figures 1* 30x30cm Water-based



*Three Figures 1* 30x30cm Water-based



*Joe* 30x15cm Oil on paper

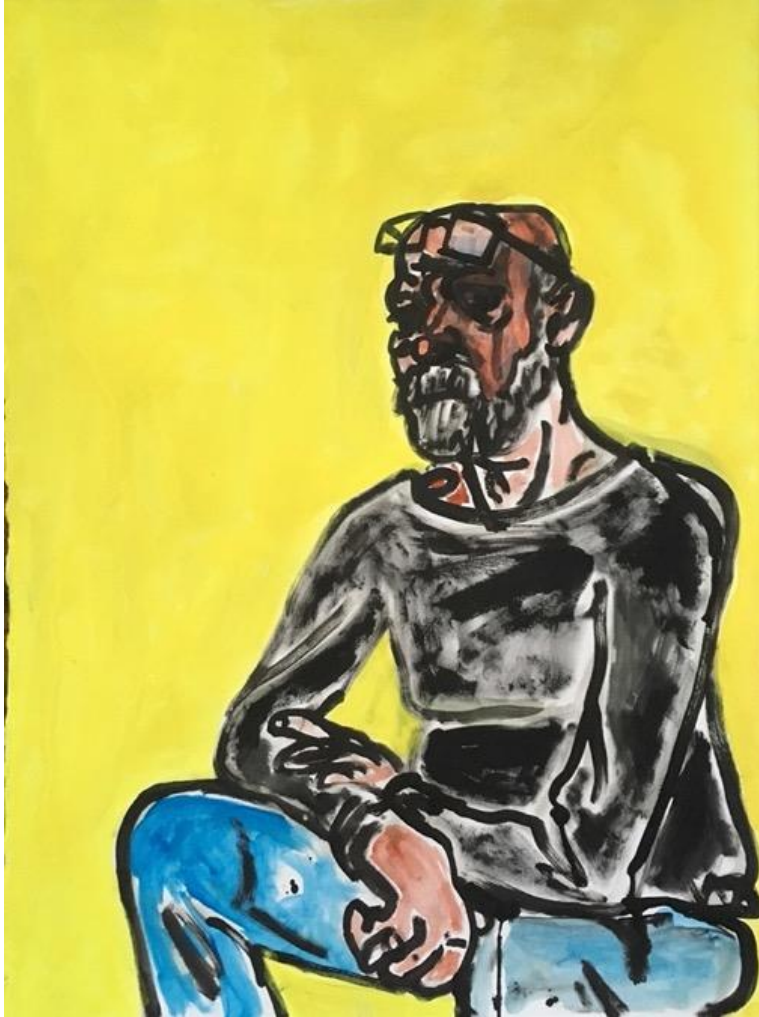


*Joe* 56x30cm Water-based media





Joe 2 56x30cm Water-based media



*Joe Skipping (Yellow background) 75x56cm Water-based media*



*Joe Skipping (Pale background) 75x56cm Oil on paper*



*Large Figure 1 120x100cm Oil*



*Large Figure 2 120x100cm Oil*



First Stage of *Deposition* 120x100cm Oil



Second Stage of *Deposition* 120x100cm Oil



*Deposition* 120x100cm Oil



Nude 120x30cm Oil



Study for *The Painter's Rag* 35x20cm Oil





*The Painter's Rag* 110x30cm Oil



*The Painter's Cloth* 135x40cm Oil

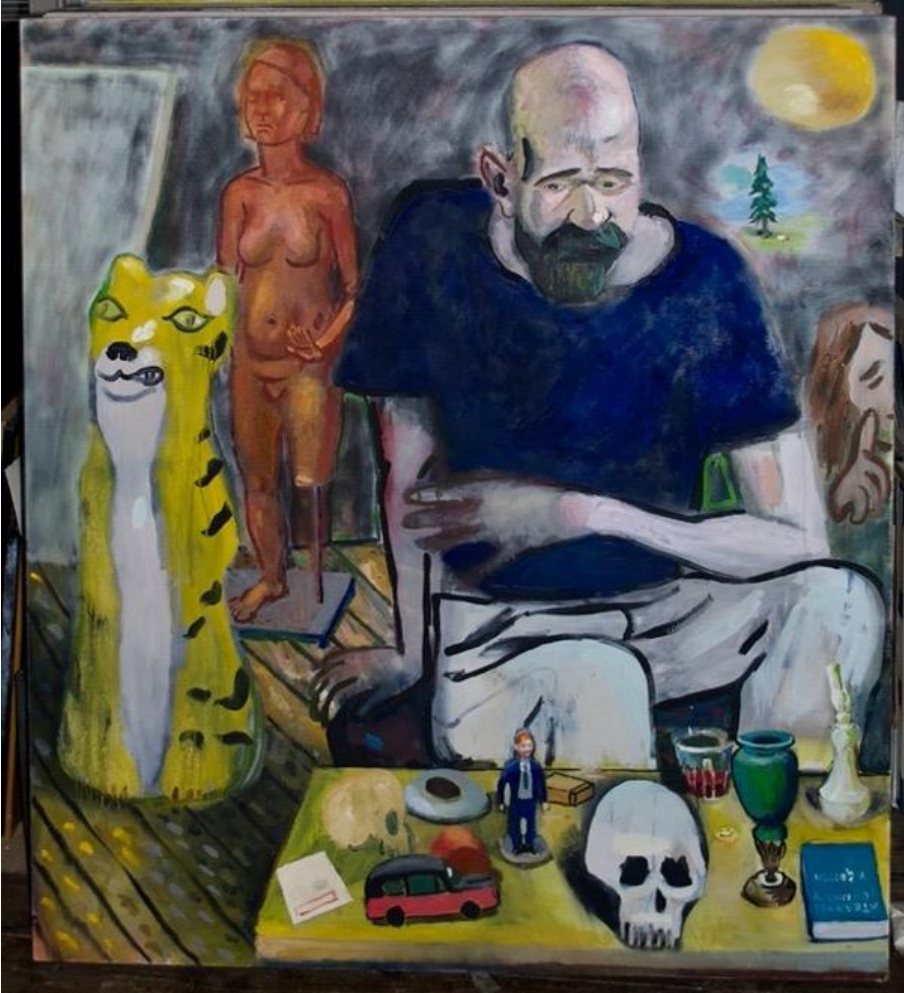


*The Drinker/Minna's Boyfriend* 135x40cm Oil



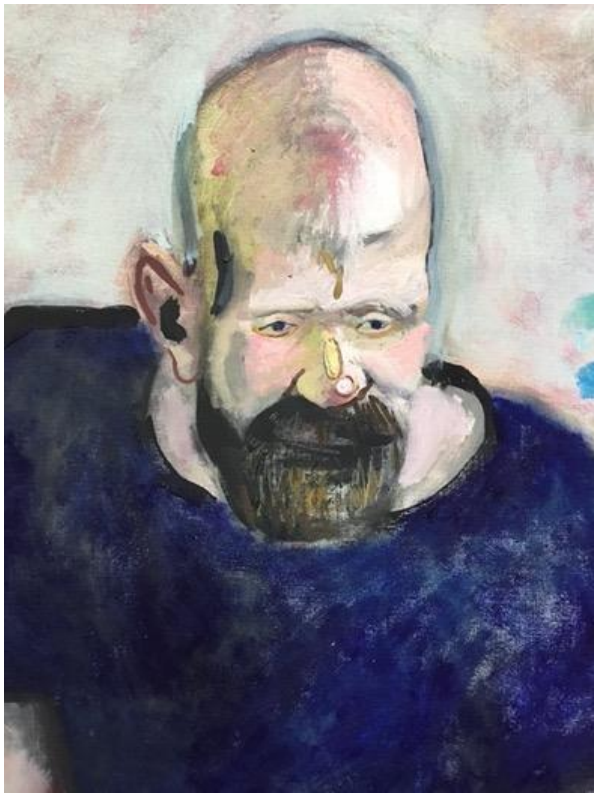
*Camilla* 150x75cm Oil

Photographed January 2019



*Remembering My Visits To Joe Skipping's Flat* 120x100cm Oil

Photographed February 2019

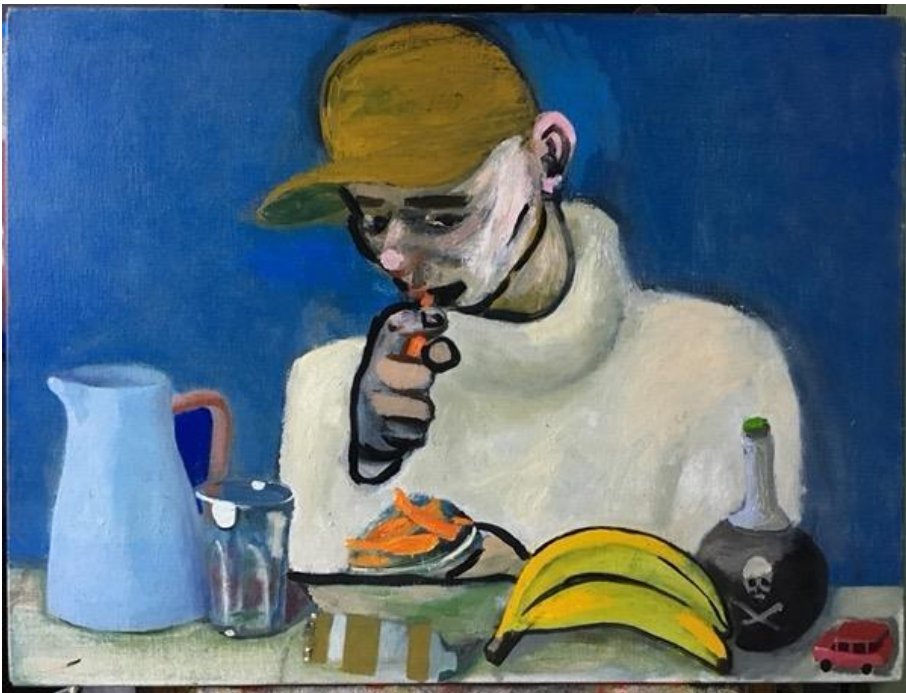


Details from *Remembering My Visits To Joe Skipping's Flat*





Small *Monkey* watercolours @15cm

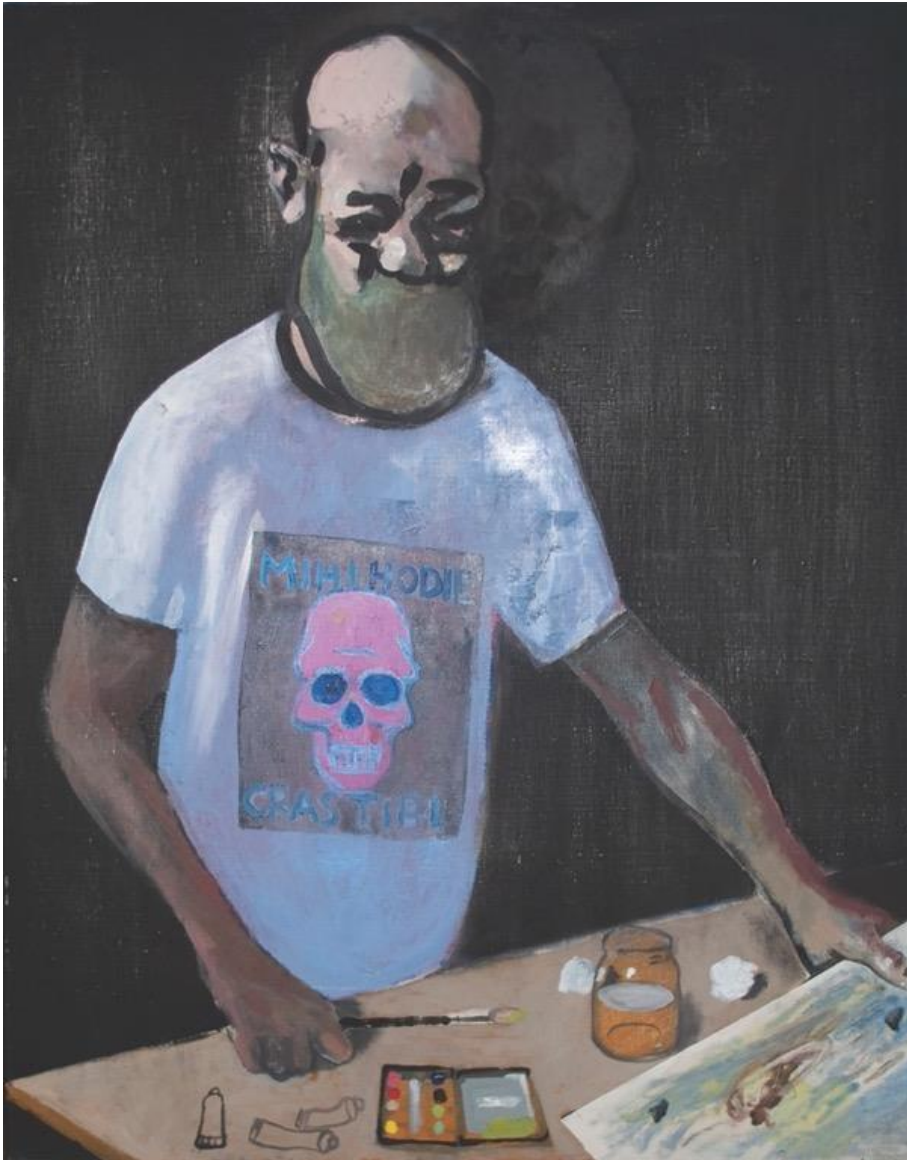


*The Haribo Goldfish Eater* 65x90cm Oil

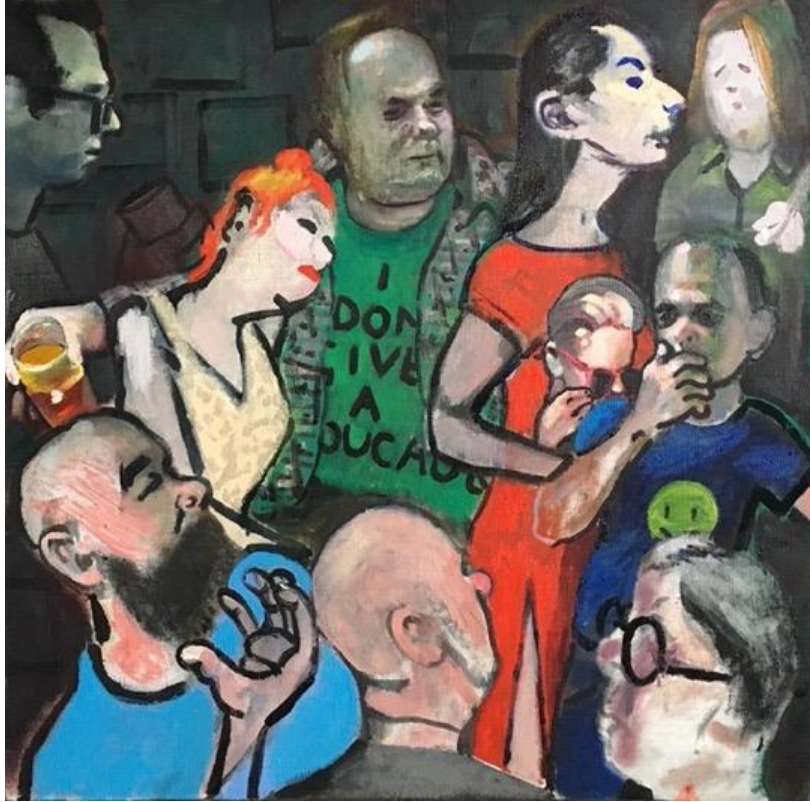




*Asa Butterfield* 100x75cm Oil  
Painted on set of *Sky Arts Portrait Artist Of The Year*, 2019



*The Watercolourist Mask 100x75cm Oil*



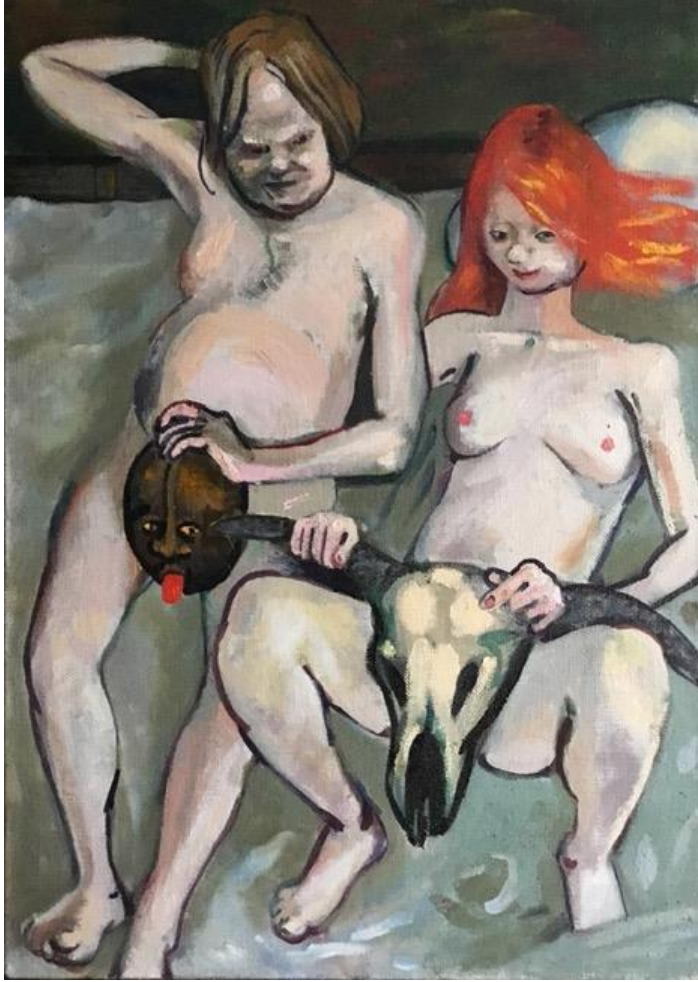
*A Group Of Friends, Probably At The Colony Room Club 75x75cm Oil*

See 'The Lost Paintings of Herzog Dellafiore'  
<https://susakpress.com/spiralbound/category/books/>



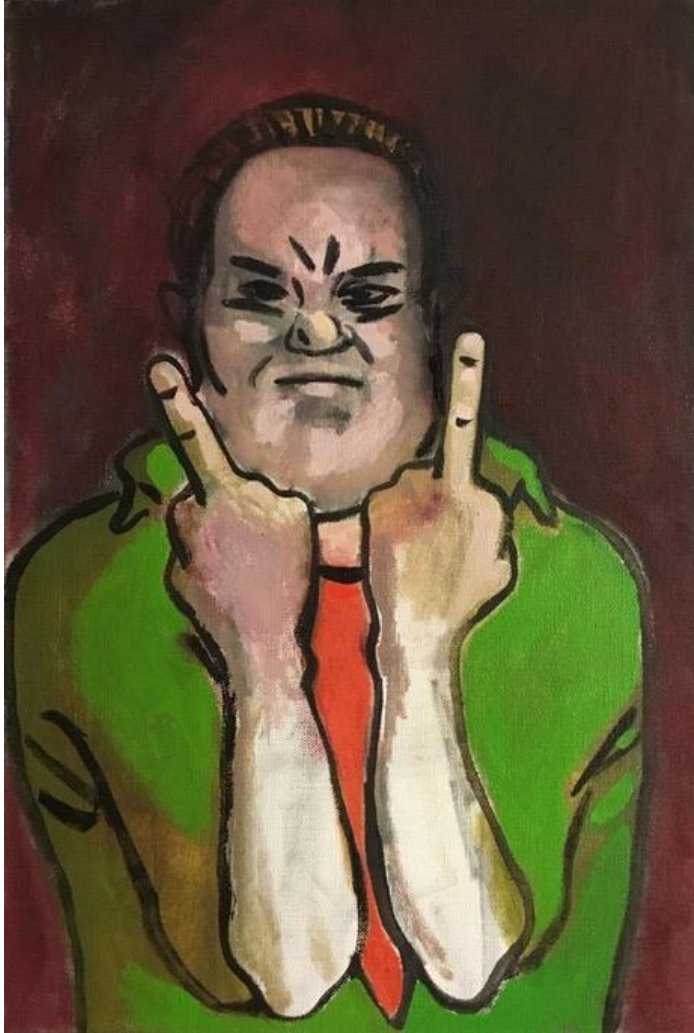
*Portrait Of Daniel Devlin Playing Ping Pong With Alex In The Background Reading A Book*  
75x65cm Oil

See 'The Lost Paintings of Herzog Dellafiore'  
<https://susakpress.com/spiralbound/category/books/>



*Georgina And Herzog In Bed With African Mask And Skull*  
75x60cm Oil

See 'The Lost Paintings of Herzog Dellafiore'  
<https://susakpress.com/spiralbound/category/books/>



*Herzog's Self-portrait 75x50cm Oil*

See 'The Lost Paintings of Herzog Dellafiore'  
<https://susakpress.com/spiralbound/category/books/>



*Keran And Herzog In Herzog's Studio In Earl's Court 75x50cm Oil*

See 'The Lost Paintings of Herzog Dellafiore'



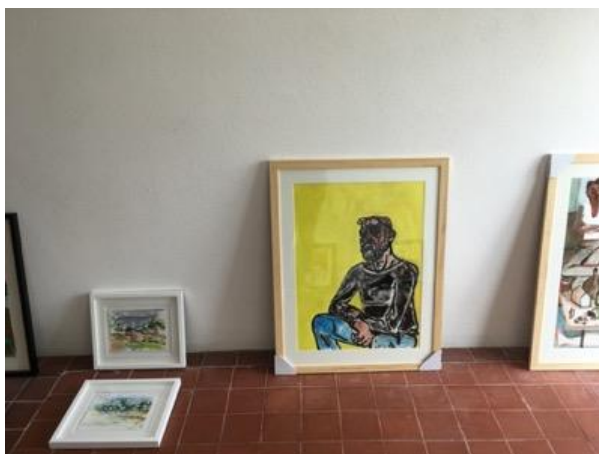
*Portrait Of Rupert Pohlmann Sitting On A Chair 75x50cm Oil*



See 'The Lost Paintings of Herzog Dellafiore'  
<https://susakpress.com/spiralbound/category/books/>



See 'Talking to Louise Bourgeois Ed.2' <https://susakpress.com/spiralbound/lb2/>  
– Reading at Studio 1.1, Redchurch St., London.



Wash 2, Angela Flowers, West Cork



*Some New World V1* 300x120 cm Oil



*Some New World V2* 300x120 cm Oil



Detail of *Some New World V1*



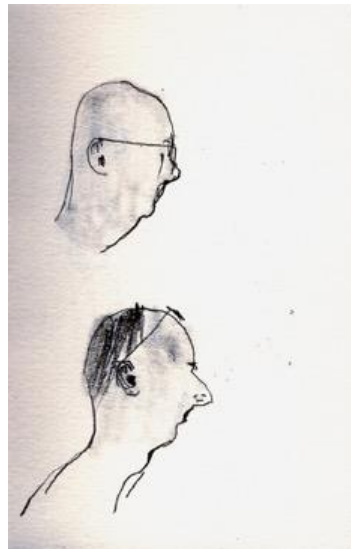
Detail of *Some New World V1*



*Cathy Wilkes Fan 40x30 cm Oil*



*Art Lovers 50x30 cm Oil*



Sample of drawings from British Council fellowship at the Venice Biennale 2019



*A Conference Of the Bald 80x120cm Oil*



*A Taxonomy Of Older Men With Hairstyles More Appropriate To Younger Women*  
100x120cm Oil





Installation view of *Some New World*, Daphne Oram Showing Space, CCCU January 2020





Installation views of *Some New World*, Daphne Oram Showing Space, CCCU January 2020



*Tourists In Venice* 40x50cm Oil



Studies for *Four Self-portraits*



*Four Self-portraits 100x150cm Oil*



*Old People Dancing 50x40cm Oil*



*Boy with Monkey And Dog 45x30cm Oil*



*Boy with Monkey, Dog And Ceramic Tiger 50x30cm Oil*

Sketchbook Drawings contemporary with adjacent paintings 30 x 20 cm pencil











*The Solid Model Of Time* 35x30cm Oil



*Joe Skipping* 45x45cm Oil



*If I Were A Sculptor* 45x30cm Oil



*Bald Man With Wind-up Tortoise* 30x20cm Oil



*Painter, Parka And Panter 30x35cm Oil*



*Linus and Tony 30x45cm Oil*



*Still life With Marble and Wind-up Tortoise 45x40cm Oil*



*Gallery Visitors* 45x30cm Oil



*Herzog Dellafiore 100x75cm Oil*





*Large Parrhasios At The Beach* 100x 75cm Oil



*Model Artist 45x30cm Oil*



*Woman Watering Plant 35x25cm Oil*



*Ensor And Milko* 100x120cm Oil



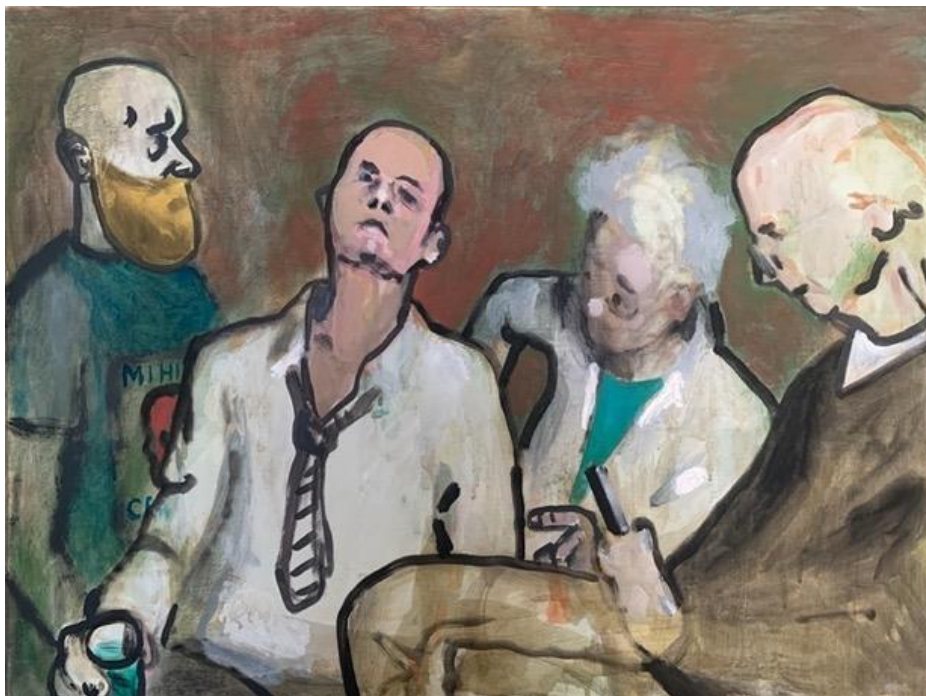
*Show Louise Your Trick, Joey 56x75cm Water-based media*



*Show Us Your Trick, Joey 56x32cm Water-based media*



*Show Us Your Trick*, Joey 56x75cm Water-based media



*Alexandr, Rick And Larry At The Hotel Millennium 56x75cm Water-based media*



*Bernardine Evaristo 75x56cm Water-based media*



*Bernie and Joe On The Panel* 56x75cm Water-based media



*Joe On The Panel* 40x35cm Water-based media



*Selection Panel 56x75cm Water-based media*



*Selection Panel V3 75x100cm Oil*





*Selection Panel V4 75x100cm Oil*



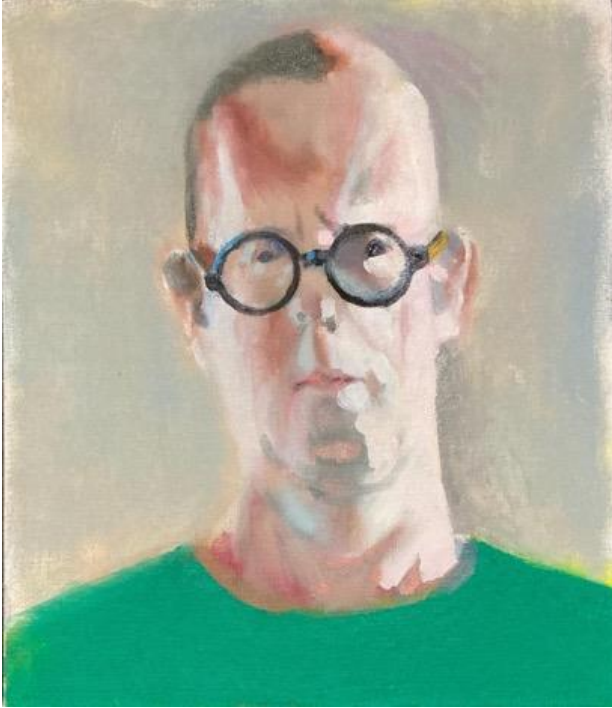
*Selection Panel V2 40x50cm Oil*



*Selection Panel V5 100x120cm Oil*



*Glass 45x30cm Oil*



*Green Self-portrait 40x35cm Oil*



*Drawing for Green Self-portrait 30x15cm Oil*



*Champion Self-portrait 90x40cm Oil*



*Assemblage 40x90cm Oil*



*Climbing 35x30cm Oil*



*Alan, Gryff and John With Pink Horse 40x65cm Oil*



*Alan, Gryff and John 65x100cm Oil*



*Alan, Gryff and John* 100x105cm Oil



*Drunken Wolf* 40x30cm Oil



*Henry And His Mum* 45x45cm Oil



*Pink Bear V1* 30x40cm Oil





*Centaur (first stage of Pink Horse V1) 30x35cm Oil*



*Pink Horse V1 30x35cm Oil*



*Pink Dog V1 30x40cm Oil*



*Pink Horse V2 35x40cm Oil*



*Proud Horse* 35x30cm Oil



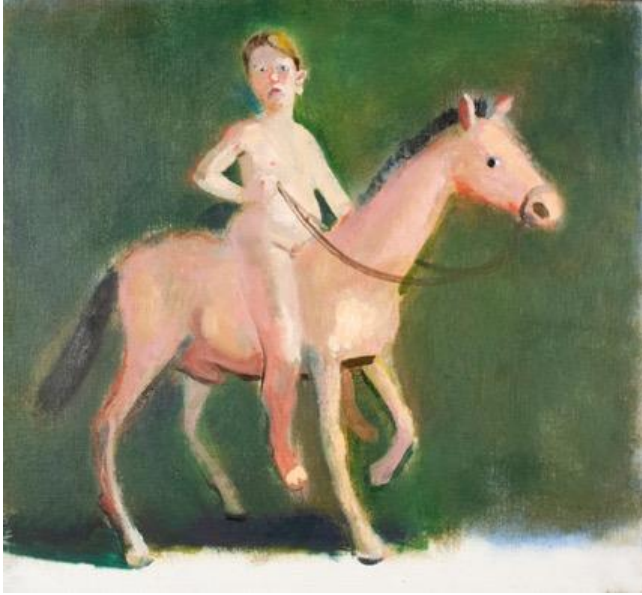
*Pink Bear, seated* 35x35cm Oil



*Pink Bear, standing 35x35cm Oil*



*Horse Man 45x40cm Oil*



*Horse Rider* 35x40cm Oil



*Act Happy* 35x45cm Oil



*Brown Bear And Happy Horse 35x40cm Oil*



*Horse Boy 45x35cm Oil*



*Malcolm's Deer V1 40x45cm Oil*



*Malcolm's Deer V2 40x45cm Oil*



*Malcolm's Boys 40x50cm Oil*



*Golden Boy And Dog Boy 40x40cm Oil*





*Little Red Boy* 30x20cm Oil



*Dog Boys* 45x40cm Oil



*Big Pink Bear 75x100cm Oil*



*Couple 30x35cm Oil*



*Herd V1 45x60cm Oil*



*White Dog/Black Dog 45x100cm Oil*



*Speckled Horse V3 40x45cm Oil*



*Pink Horse V5 45x50cm Oil*



*Brown Bear 35x30cm Oil*



*Happy Horse 75x100cm Oil*



*Big Pink Dog And Monkey 75x100cm Oil*



*Speckled Horse V3* 75x100cm Oil



*Standing Bear* 100x75cm Oil



Watercolours December 2021 – May 2022



*Malcolm's Boys* 15x32cm Watercolour



*Pink Bear* 15x32cm Watercolour



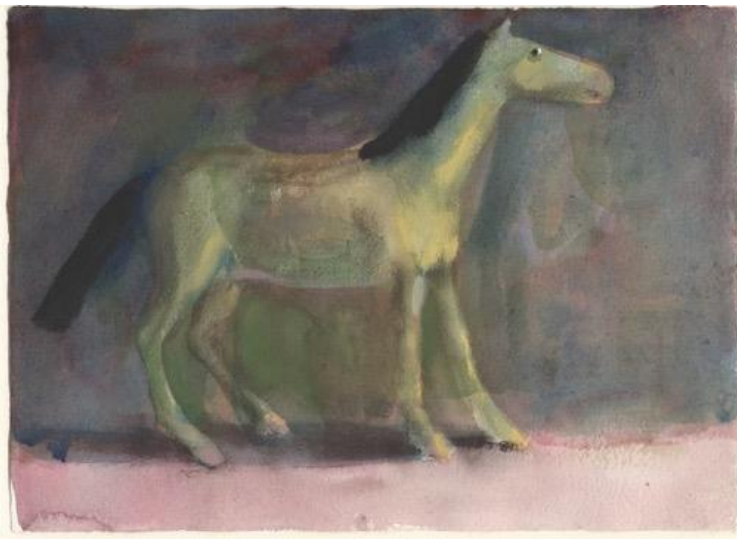
*Malcolm's Deer V1 15x32cm Watercolour*



*Malcolm's Deer V2 15x32cm Watercolour*



*Brown Dog* 15x32cm Watercolour



*Yellow Horse* 15x32cm Watercolour



*Brown Horse 15x32cm Watercolour*



*Horse Man 32x15cm Watercolour*



*Fat Pink Dog* 15x32cm Watercolour



*Fat Pink Dog And Monkey* 12x27cm Watercolour



*Malcolm's Doe* 15x32cm Watercolour



*Black Dog* 15x32cm Watercolour



*Little White Dog* 15x32cm Watercolour



*Little White Pony* 32x10cm Watercolour



*Standing Bear* 32x15cm Watercolour



*Standing Bear 2* 32x15cm Watercolour





*Red Dog* 15x32cm Watercolour



*Pink Bear* 15x32cm Watercolour



*Model Wife* 32x15cm Watercolour



*Three Dodgy Bears* 27x38cm Watercolour



*Facing Bear* 27x38cm Watercolour



*Tea-time Boys* 27x38cm Watercolour



*Malcom's Doe* 27x38cm Watercolour



*Little Red Dog* 27x38cm Watercolour



*Preening Pigeon V1 15x32cm Watercolour*



*Preening Pigeon V2 15x32cm Watercolour*



*Blue Horse 27x38cm Watercolour*



*Two Dogs 27x38cm Watercolour*

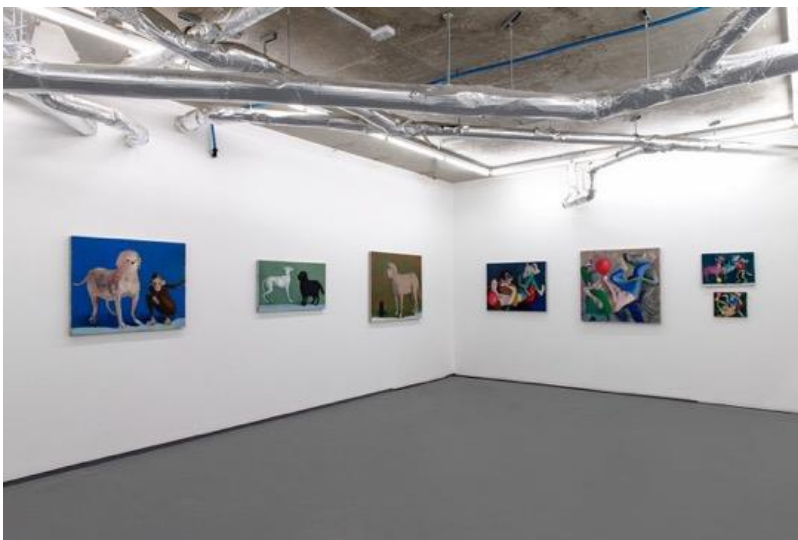


*White Dog* 15x32cm Watercolour



*Big White Bear* 27x38cm Watercolour

Studio shots from *My Animal Nature*, 24.2.22 – 13.4.22  
New Art Projects, 6D Sheep Lane, London E8 4QS













Practice Log 54 – commentary on the body of work as a whole.

8.9.22

It's a long time since I wrote a PL.

I became fed up with it. The exigencies of making a living and the studio practice itself made it too difficult to be returning to it over and over again. Wanting to paint always overpowers other urges. Also, I have been in the 'end-stage' for so long, writing up rather than doing the research, and then had to stop while my mother-in-law went through her last days.

I look over my photographs to see the sequence in which my paintings occurred. Several different strands of work went on simultaneously, and it surprises me to see the order in which the photographs show them. In the beginning of 2020, before the first lockdown occurred, I was making work that had evolved from the paintings called *Alexandr, Larry and Rick at the Hotel Millennium*. There was a moment when I thought of adding Bernardine Evaristo to the mix, because she'd been in the media a lot. It occurred to me that she, who had been an outsider figure, drawing her sense of worth from her oppositional position, was now in a position of power, an insider, a judge on selection panels. So, I used the *Alexandr, Larry and Rick* painting as a starting point for a painting of a selection panel. This seemed to have resonance with my growing awareness of my painting as an intersubjective object, a thing whose meaning and value is shared by different subjectivities: I don't 'know' what my painting means or whether it's any good, not in any definitive or totalizing sense. I rely on its reception to a large extent. The *Selection Panel* paintings seemed to explore this idea. I wondered how Bernardino Evaristo would respond to my paintings, or Alexandr Litvenenko, or Larry David. Grandpa Rick from *Rick and Morty* disappeared from the sequence, although Joe Skipping from my written fiction was on the panel. In Version 5 another older character appeared, too, the Distinguished Sculptor.

These paintings were not made thinking about any market, other than perhaps competitions or group exhibitions that I might be in or curate. I was focused also on the work of the PhD. Around this time though the *Artist Support Pledge* started, as a response to the lockdown. A market for small work emerged, which operated across social media. I sold several pieces of work from the studio, small stuff, things that I hadn't finished or didn't know what to do with. Then I ran out of that sort of work. So, I thought about what people liked in my paintings - dogs sprang to mind so I painted some on small boards. They sold very quickly. I started

painting small heads of young people, androgynous, often with baseball caps, sucking lollipops, and they sold quickly too.

No, that's wrong. In the beginning of 2020, I was still painting the *Some New World* paintings. The thing I was thinking about was linear or tone/colour means of expressing the form. *Old People Dancing* was the result of struggling over some small paintings from drawings I'd done in Venice and trying to work out which way to go. I made this big painting, based on the *Butchers Shop*, of myself in the studio, four times me, stretching and priming a painting, but somehow it didn't seem to work. One thing that did work in the painting was the way I made the paint table in the middle, but it was somehow too big. The painting was 150x180cm. But I made two little versions of the painting table, about 15x18cm, and they sold quickly on the *Artist Support Pledge* scheme.

The theme of tone/colour painting led to a series of paintings made using quite detailed tonal drawings as plans. I worked them out first and then painted them. They were small paintings mainly, although Dan Devlin and I talked about another project in which I made work while channeling Alex Koolman - I made a painting of Dan from a photograph, which he loved, and a large one of Herzog, using a photograph which I drew and then put into a larger drawing. The painting was good. I thought the painting was good. In fact, I thought it might be good, but I didn't really know. Dan, who was involved in the painting, liked the images of it that I sent. Two years later he saw the actual painting. He was very pleased with it, although I don't entirely trust his judgment over paintings. He is not a natural painter himself. Is that why I don't trust his judgment? Only over paintings. It's because he isn't very engaged with the material. Phil King is very engaged with it - it's a sort of obsession with him, making his own paint, drying out linseed oil and so on, so that I know when he talks about what's happening on the surface, he knows what he's talking about. Dan is more engaged with the ideas, and he also has a graphic sensibility. The image is what works for him. So, my painting of Herzog seemed to be a revelation to him, as it was his imagination made real by someone else.

Anyway, to return to the sequence. It seems that I answered the question about line and tone/colour with the paintings I made using Preiser railway figures. *The Solid Model of Time*, *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad*, *Parrhasios on The Beach* were all from this period, and they were made by doing a series of tonal drawings from the tiny models, until I had one I liked, then drawing that, then making a painting of it. I made the painting by putting loosely defined areas of thin oil paint down and the painting over them with more thin paint

until the image began to form and define itself. There is a lot of waiting around and hoping it makes visual sense.

It was this series which I left behind to make the *Millennium Hotel* paintings, which then led to the *Selection Panel* paintings. I wanted more positivity and muscle in the paintings. The animal paintings came partly from a yearning for something more exotic and stranger in the *Selection Panel* paintings. There was a period when I painted a self-portrait from drawings I'd made - it was rather well done, all silvery tones, pinks, and greys, and I sold it almost immediately through Instagram and then followed it by making a dog-headed self-portrait, from the waist up, with arms crossed, wearing a red Champions sweatshirt. This I think was January 2021. In the photographs these paintings are leant up against the *Selection Panel* paintings.

The dogman appeared in other paintings after that. Complete with his sweatshirt, which was sometimes green, and then the dogman became a type, as much as a single personality. I painted dog boys with different attributions, with human heads and dog back legs, or with dog forelegs and head and human legs. There were also horses with human penises, and then pink bears. I tried to paint them as if they were human, not animal, but animal shaped. The pink dogs were particularly effective, I thought. Then I discovered a sculptor who had similar ideas. I can't even remember her name - I didn't like the work, but it was very intense, very well realized, like Ron Mueck's work only more peculiar because the figures are so hybrid, human and animal. In fact, they're very disturbing, while I didn't want my paintings to be disturbing, more...what? I don't know. More like the idea of the animal-ness of humans than the reality, which hers were. She'd made things which were almost confrontational in their realism, while I just wanted to think about the way humans are animals.

It didn't last anyway. I began to lose faith in the idea. The highlights were the two *Alan, Gryff and John* paintings, I think, strange Baroque comedies of struggle or love. They began with my attempt to paint another centaur, like the one in *Embarrassing Centaur*, a singular painting I made that I returned to frequently, trying to work out what to do about. I sold that too, although for not much. While these were going on, I was also making little things for the Artist Support Pledge and selling them, often surprisingly quickly. By September 2021 I was painting herds and getting interested in pantomime horses, where the idea of the skin of the painting and the skin of the horse as covering over a human thing, a human content, emerged.

The *Artist Support Pledge* paintings were either these androgynous young people or animals, or people with animals. They were simple - not much going on in them other than a representation of the still form in space. I saw them as very different from the rest of the work, but Fred my new gallery dealer didn't seem to. I think he just saw them as smaller. He bought three paintings from me - a dog, a horse and one of the Preiser figure paintings of a sculptor at work. He did seem to like that one, or perhaps see it differently. He said something on those lines.

He then offered me a solo exhibition: I think this was in October and the solo show was the beginning of March to mid-April. A week or so later he said he'd like to take my work to the Springbreak Art Fair in LA. This meant that I needed a lot of paintings. I'd been trying to work through my PhD, doing more writing than painting, but it was not really viable to carry that on, so I dived into painting. This takes us up to around the new year. I think!

I ordered a load of small stretchers, so that I could make more small paintings - I was excited about these things and wanted to get more done, bears, dogs, horses, deer, and to find a way of getting people back into the work. The trouble was that the materials shop didn't send wedges for the stretchers so I couldn't use them. I had some middle-sized canvases and a couple of small ones already, and I kept up the pressure on the materials shop while I painted on them, but they just kept saying they'd have them next week, and then next week. In the end they never came, or certainly not in time. I ended up painting on the middle-sized ones.

It's interesting that it's only now that I realize that the middle-sized paintings I did, 80 x 100 cm, are a lot like the *Artist Support Pledge* paintings. Single, still forms in space, like *Standing Bear*, or two figures, like *Dog and Monkey* and *Black Dog/White Dog*. They weren't like *Alan*, *Gryff and John*, for example, or the *Selection Panel* paintings, which are more complicated. I was going to say far more complicated, but I don't think that's correct. These latter have more stuff going on, more narrative I suppose. Will Self liked the *Standing Bear* best. That's the one he stood in front of for the photograph of us that Fred took for social media. Marcus Cope, another younger artist for whom I have enormous respect, liked *Alan*, *Gryff and John* best. Marcus' paintings have a high narrative content, and they're very complex, involving shifts in spatial construction and in how they represent things. But then Will is a writer and his whole existence is narrative.

(He was hilarious, coming through the unlocked gate at Damien Hirst's smaller gallery. Like an outraged parrot fixing the poor woman in charge of the place with an accusing stare. 'Why was it locked? Is someone going to steal the paintings?' he demanded. I got up and



wanted to say 'put her down, Will, she's just doing her job' but he was funny and kind - he didn't push it at all.)

I don't know that 'complicated' is the right word. Maybe it is. Maybe 'complicated' expresses the difference between them quite well. The surface of the *Selection Panel* painting is literally more complicated than the *Standing Bear* painting in the sense that there are more things depicted. I don't know whether the ideas or the feelings expressed are more complex. I literally don't know.

How can I not know what I am expressing in my own painting? Because other people's ideas and feelings about them extend my own ideas and feelings. The fact that Will liked my *Standing Bear* painting alters how I think and feel about it, and Marcus's reaction to *Alan, Gryff and John* makes me think about what I was hoping to do in it in a different way.

Funnily enough, this idea has already been made pretty explicit for me: a few years ago, I was painting still life paintings in order to avoid any narrative. My friend Iain Nicholls was visiting, and he wandered into my studio and gave me an impromptu and uncalled-for tutorial. He wasn't brutal or anything, but he wasn't particularly complimentary, talking about a specific still life. The next day I painted a monkey into the still life, which became a disrupted and no longer organized composition. It was only later that I realized that I had depicted the experience of having someone come into a settled situation and chuck stuff about. Iain was the monkey who was rearranging the still life. My painting was changed by someone else's ideas. I did some more monkeys, but I eventually felt too confined by the content, which was a domestic space made by a tablecloth and some fruits, and one or two monkeys. That was more or less all.

Those monkeys were great though and they sold. The point is that they wouldn't have arrived without the stimulus of Iain's critique. Painting is a social act. Except that this contradicts the idea that the artist is someone who creates from a kind of 'hyper-individuality', is a special and isolated agent of his or her own creativity. I have ideas, for sure. I don't know whether they are original. I put them through the filter of my painting, or the ideas emerge while I am painting, and are then bashed around while the painting goes on, but when other people see them, or even before other people see them, when I just think about other people seeing them, they are altered.

This is a description of the painting as an intersubjective object. When I say 'when other people see them, or even before other people see them, when I just think about other people

seeing them, they are altered', I am describing intersubjectivity. 'When I just think about other people seeing them' describes a situation in which my own subjective position alters in relation to the painting. I imagine what another person might think about the painting and how I think about the painting changes. The painting is not altered. My position in relation to it is. I may then alter it.

This reminds me of a Facebook exchange between Phil King and someone else, who asked him about the supports on which he paints. He described his seemingly contradictory position, in which he uses very cheap canvas stretchers, or even just bits of cardboard, which he doesn't prepare in any meticulous or careful way, perhaps adding a layer of white oil paint to make the surface of the cheap canvas take the paint more easily. At the same time, he spends a lot of time researching and making his own paint, including drying and preparing his own linseed oil and grinding the pigment. He said that he didn't want to start the painting beforehand: that using a conventionally, traditionally prepared canvas meant that, for him, the painting started with value added already. If you use a proper, deep set of stretcher bars and sized and oil-primed linen then the thing you are painting on is already pretty nice, it's already more or less got everything you want in a painting. It's like having a head start.

But Tom Palin says that just sticking a bit of canvas up on the wall says 'this is a painting'. Rose Wylie's paintings were all unstretched and kind of stitched together. I can't resolve this. I like the feel of a properly made canvas. I have spent some time thinking about finish and how the image relates to its support, though.

Publications available online:

1. Charles Williams (2019) *Talking to Louise Bourgeois* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition) Spiralbound Press London <https://susakpress.com/spiralbound/lb2/> accessed 24.3.23
3. Charles Williams, Daniel Devlin (2019) *The Lost Paintings of Herzog Dellafiore* Spiralbound Press London <https://susakpress.com/spiralbound/the-lost-herzog-paintings/> accessed 24.3.23.
4. Will Self (2022) *Charles Williams* New Art Projects [https://newartprojects.com/shop/nap\\_publications/charles-williams/](https://newartprojects.com/shop/nap_publications/charles-williams/) accessed 24.3.23

## Appendix 2

### Contents

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#### 3. Edited PL/PLAnalysis (see attached PDF)

Each extract is a page from the sub-theme analysis stage or from the Practice Log itself, specified by the subheading. Specific extracts are colour-coded to a theme.

#### Colour code

Community	■■■■■■■
Self	■■■■■■■
Content	■■■■■■■
Process	■■■■■■■
Surface	■■■■■■■

### i. Chapter 3

#### Extract 1.

*PLAnalysis. Self-conscious*

9. It feels a very 'natural' way of painting to me and makes the linear work I have been doing seem distant, but in a good way, as if it shows my potential, as if I am looking at a time when

I was really good, and these new things are just in my comfort zone. I don't like this, or rather, I do like it and I don't. I am uncomfortable in my comfort zone! (It's an annoying phrase, and I had a colleague who rather over-used it as a criticism of our students, to the point where I began to secretly think that there might be good things about staying in the comfort zone.) PL17

10. But a self-conscious style has the advantage over the unconscious style, which you have no control over. My recent paintings, *Sleeping Reader* and *Remembering Visits To Joe S.*, are unconscious, a 'return' to a 'natural' style, but it's not natural, it's an amalgam of paintings I like rather than something determined by me. PL17

11. Maybe I am not exceptionally talented though. PL24

12. Then, on a walk on Tuesday I thought more about the Venice trip, which is playing on my mind, and I came up with this; the thing that obscures my exceptional talent and so on is lack of focus. This lack of focus may well be because I have a huge lack of actual self-esteem, that my sense of an 'exceptional talent' only lasts intermittently and I am often faced with an abyss of uselessness – what have I achieved, who do I think I am? – and this manifests in a kind of dodging around the issues, a fudging in search of charm, or a way of trying to have it both ways. PL24

13. I've tried to get around the idea of the solipsistic with my Golo Brdo project, and that work started yesterday. PL25

14. But Tim Hyman always says that my figures are fools, and that I approach the world with gentle (genteel) malice. I've refuted that before but actually, actually my visual art started with parody, satire, and porn, drawing caricatures of my teachers to the general amusement of my peers, and sex scenes so that I might make my fantasies more real. Since then, it's like I've spent the last thirty years trying to prove that I can paint, that I am a serious artist, that I can make as beautiful a painting as the next person. PL25

15. Maybe I shouldn't bother. PL25

16. With the smoother canvas, a great deal of complexity is possible, but I didn't know how much I wanted, and conversely, the very rough canvas precludes smoothly applied films of paint because the nodules of the linen interrupt it. PL25

17. It was an awkward process, but it was interesting that I was able to stick with it. PL25

18. I resent this bloody log. I resent having to stop and write it down. The pull back to the computer with its attendant time-wasting mechanisms. The stopping for just a moment while try to recollect my thoughts. They're always so messy and incomplete anyway. PL25

19. So it may be that Domenico is giving me permission to please myself, to be obscure. No one else is going to care much anyway, so go ahead. Other things that gave me permission: seeing the Sironi paintings in the Ca' Pesaro. Michael Taussig's drawing in *I Swear I Saw This*. Maybe Picasso, maybe Phil King. PL26

## Extract 2

PL35 25.4.20 p5

I also remembered the thing Marcus Harvey said, about taking a series of elements and fitting them together, an approach where you look at the painting as if it were a collage of different things – in his case, the photographic image of Myra Hindley, the enormous canvas, the children's' handprints.

Maybe I can look at my paintings in the same way. Figures, canvas, dark space.

1. Thinking about these elements: we could say there's an idea I get in my head as I'm walking or something.
2. Then I paint it, having selected a canvas, and maybe looked at the source image or index. The painting doesn't satisfy me. It's not specific enough, the shapes are too generalized, the colours seem too arbitrary.
3. I draw it separately, carefully, and tonally. Shapes become more specific.
4. I return to the painting process and this time the problems are more specific. I finish the painting.

## Elements

1. Image/index. Preiser bubble-gum blowing figure. Roland's paintings, Chardin *Soap bubbles*, my tonal theme.
2. Selected canvas. Linen, particular size, surface.
3. Shapes. Formal – do the shapes express the form?

4. Colour. Formal and symbolic. Expression of an emotional register.
5. Image 'refocused'.

### Emotions

Excitement, certainty, uncertainty, frustration, absorption (minor or more specific frustrations and annoyance), satisfaction, delight.

It goes from the image in my mind to the one on the page or canvas. Then to the drawing. Then back; the background is a dark blank from which the image emerges. Things in the background are literally mashed into the overall colour as they disappear when I smear the paint over or scrape it back.

### 2.5.20



Chardin *Soap Bubbles* 1733-34  
Oil on canvas 61 x 63 cm Metropolitan Museum, NY, USA

### Extract 3

*PL35 p3*

out what I felt about it. I liked its sense of the figures coalescing out of their background and standing on the exposed, white-primed canvas at the foot of the stretcher. There was something very satisfying about this sense of them emerging from nothing and balancing on

the edge of the rectangle, something that made the *paintedness* of the image very present, as if they had painted themselves.

On my walk on Friday, it occurred to me to make an homage to Roland Hicks' photorealist paintings by using the Preiser figure of the girl blowing a bubble in her gum. They do balloon figures, too, and I was actually thing about those first. Again, there's a sense of something that wasn't there a moment ago and won't be soon either, which I think relates to the sense of the figures making themselves. From this thinking I am now at the point where I want to paint Joe Skipping in this very tonal way too.



The images are orthogonal in the sense that they are explicitly to do with depth, of *in there* rather than *across*. Maybe instead of *rather than* I mean *as well as* or *as intensely as*, The orthogonal relationship is extremely important.

### Is there a difference between *depth* and *space* in painting?

I drew several more in this way, in my A5 sketchbook. First, I drew the Preiser girl, who I have already started as a painting. Then I wanted to reprise the parka from the *Painter, Parka and Panter* painting. I am interested in the ambiguity of the shape the parka makes, the way it redefines or exaggerates the body; it makes a bulk of it, or perhaps expresses the mass of *body* in a different way. I am dubious about this drawing. I included a large paper grocery bag in the drawing, so that there were two big, ambiguous shapes with mysterious

openings. I haven't concluded this idea, but I developed it in another direction by making another drawing with a woman in a huge puffer coat followed by the angry, hairy bald man I saw in Venice. This made me think more about the *depth* of the image and the next one was Joe Skipping, resting on his arms. Again, the orthogonal relationships are foregrounded. His head strikes us first, then his arms resting on the bottom of the page, then his body. He emerges from the darkness, or he emerges from the surface.

#### Extract 4

##### *PLAnalysis Process (small)*

...is left as Viridian underpainting and white canvas, while the hand that strokes the dog is a lumpy twin of the head. The dog itself is described with a thick, shiny black outline, filled in loosely with Yellow Ochre, and remains jarringly graphic, unlike the Pinocchio head, which is in comparison quite subtle. The background is a dead mat, dull green, which has the effect of shoving the figures forward and making a huge differential between figure and ground.PL5.

53. On starting the painting I used thin Green Umber on a hog hairbrush to roughly indicate the figure and began to use it to 'block in' the background. This is my usual technique, and it is analogous to my observational drawing technique, in which I use light, scribbled pencil marks to establish a general idea of the form and the tonal arrangement in front of me before making more definitive demarcations of edges of forms, tones and so on. The use of this technique gives me time to observe the forms in front of me, and I can make mistakes in the drawing without having to 'live with them' - a lightly scribbled mark is easier to rub out or to ignore than a heavily inscribed, determined one. A heavily scored line also takes on an authority - there seems to be a moment in assessing the likeness of a given line or form in front of me when it and the representation have an equivalent emotional or intellectual weight, which prevents a proper or fuller examination of the object as it turns into the subject.

However, as I scrubbed into the canvas I remembered the heavily painted background of the Alexis and Zola painting meeting the open, unpainted area of Zola's figure, and Schiff's description of Cezanne painting not from the general to the particular but from the particular to the particular (Schiff 1984 p116 Corot, Monet, Cezanne), not wanting to make a composition in the traditional sense but to find the composition through the



process of the painting, and I reasoned that as I knew what kind of background I wanted, and I knew what shape of body and head and so on, it would be more authentic not to pretend that I did not know. Accordingly, I painted the background in as I wanted it to be at the end of the painting. I then took up loaded brushes and described the head and face as directly as I could.

This is the dilemma identified above. If painting is a continuous process of discovery, at what point does the activity stop and if it can be said that provisionality is a positive good in the process, then how does the artist prevent it from becoming inauthentic? I concentrated on the head and neck, leaving the body, which was clothed in an orange tee-shirt in the previous incarnation, as an undefined mass, although I did establish the legs, arms, and hands quite early on. As the painting progressed, I began to think about the neckline, where skin met tee-shirt, and I made it gradually more asymmetrical, exposing more of one shoulder. There came a point where I decided it was right. I then went further into the definition of the face, but I never took the arms and hands beyond an indication, and they remain a shape of bare canvas defined by the frontiers of paint around them.PL5.

54. I am decoupling the technique from the method; the technique of originality, as defined by Schiff, being in this case a heavily material response to a visual stimulus, I am taking my visual stimulus from inside me. Heavy, lumpy paint applied thickly as if in a frenzy in response to a visual stimulus is used as a signifier of authenticity, as is the practice of leaving visible measuring marks on the surface, connoting effort spent in visual calculation in the method of painting 'from life'. By using the technique, I am implying personal presence, making the image more 'real'.PL5

#### **Extract 5**

##### *PLAnalysis Process (Small)*

is left as Viridian underpainting and white canvas, while the hand that strokes the dog is a lumpy twin of the head. The dog itself is described with a thick, shiny black outline, filled in loosely with Yellow Ochre, and remains jarringly graphic, unlike the Pinocchio head, which is in comparison quite subtle. The background is a dead mat, dull green, which has the effect of shoving the figures forward and making a huge differential between figure and ground.PL5.

53. On starting the painting I used thin Green Umber on a hog hairbrush to roughly indicate the figure and began to use it to 'block in' the background. This is my usual technique, and it is analogous to my observational drawing technique, in which I use light, scribbled pencil marks to establish a general idea of the form and the tonal arrangement in front of me before making more definitive demarcations of edges of forms, tones and so on. **The use of this technique gives me time to observe the forms in front of me, and I can make mistakes in the drawing without having to 'live with them'** - a lightly scribbled mark is easier to rub out or to ignore than a heavily inscribed, determined one. A heavily scored line also takes on an authority - there seems to be a moment in assessing the likeness of a given line or form in front of me when it and the representation have an equivalent emotional or intellectual weight, which prevents a proper or fuller examination of the object as it turns into the subject.

However, as I scrubbed into the canvas I remembered the heavily painted background of the Alexis and Zola painting meeting the open, unpainted area of Zola's figure, and Schiff's description of Cezanne painting not from the general to the particular but from the particular to the particular (Schiff 1984 p116 Corot, Monet, Cezanne), not wanting to make a composition in the traditional sense but to find the composition through the process of the painting, and I reasoned that as I knew what kind of background I wanted, and I knew what shape of body and head and so on, it would be more authentic not to pretend that I did not know. Accordingly, I painted the background in as I wanted it to be at the end of the painting. I then took up loaded brushes and described the head and face as directly as I could.

This is the dilemma identified above. If painting is a continuous process of discovery, at what point does the activity stop and if it can be said that provisionality is a positive good in the process, then how does the artist prevent it from becoming inauthentic? I concentrated on the head and neck, leaving the body, which was clothed in an orange tee-shirt in the previous incarnation, as an undefined mass, although I did establish the legs, arms, and hands quite early on. As the painting progressed, I began to think about the neckline, where skin met tee-shirt, and I made it gradually more asymmetrical, exposing more of one shoulder. There came a point where I decided it was right. I then went further into the definition of the face, but I never took the arms and hands beyond an indication, and they remain a shape of bare canvas defined by the frontiers of paint around them.PL5.

54. I am decoupling the technique from the method; the technique of originality, as defined by Schiff, being in this case a heavily material response to a visual stimulus, I am taking my visual stimulus from inside me. Heavy, lumpy paint applied thickly as if in a frenzy in

response to a visual stimulus is used as a signifier of authenticity, as is the practice of leaving visible measuring marks on the surface, connoting effort spent in visual calculation in the method of painting 'from life'. By

#### Extract 6

*PL35 p6*

Preiser figure: cf. Chardin children blowing bubbles and the figure of the blown bubble generally, glass, soap bubbles. 'While it is not certain that he intended the picture to carry a message, soap bubbles were then understood to allude to the transience of life.'<sup>182</sup> It's to do with the impermanence and the awareness of mortality, also the **contradiction between the phenomenological experience of time as a constant and the representation of a series of moments, like a reel of film**. It is a 'still'. The figure is absurd in that it is a representation of a 'still' moment with huge weight, or comparatively huge weight – the bubble is the same as the head, it's a solid mass that represents the lightest manifestation of form.

It is also a craft-object. Or maybe it's better to describe it as a hobby-object which has been made to be part of a diorama for railway modellers. I know you can buy the individual pieces uncoloured and paint them yourself, and I can't see how they could be painted by hand commercially, the finish is too exact and consistent.

Mass-produced, it fulfils a requirement. The hobbyist can dream up a tableau and find Preiser figures to fill it, whatever it is. There are even saucy ones. In fact, the saucy ones are quite popular in terms of what people search for. The Preiser figure fulfils an aesthetic function in the sense that it is an element in the designs made by railway modellers who create their own worlds.

By putting it into my paintings I am bringing in both the question of time and the question of aesthetic individual personal worlds, other subjectivities, and another set of considerations about what constitutes 'art', 'design', 'otherness', or alterity.

There's also the sense of nostalgia which railway modelling almost epitomises. Painting itself might be seen as a nostalgic activity, My painting certainly is, My references are so much to do with the past, I'm not really interested in contemporary art.

Painting and railway modelling have their correspondences. Iain Nicholls researched the relative sales of Art magazines and railway modelling ones, and the latter are more popular. They are both milieux in which esoteric details and imperatives exist without being apparent to the outsider.

Cf. the two RA students who both made abstract paintings based in the deployment of squares and rectangles on the rectangle of the support, One made them in primary colours and the other in tertiary, but they both came from entirely different angles; one was an 'unreconstructed' organic abstractionist with ideas about the purity of the aesthetic experience, and the other was a Post-modernist who wanted the appearance of factory-made objects, made in an ironic field of interests. The latter student was insistent that their work be hung separately because the correspondences outweighed the differences. To an outsider not versed in the esoterics of art discourse the two paintings would have looked very alike.

#### Extract 7

*PL35 p6*

Preiser figure: cf. Chardin children blowing bubbles and the figure of the blown bubble generally, glass, soap bubbles. 'While it is not certain that he intended the picture to carry a message, soap bubbles were then understood to allude to the transience of life.'<sup>183</sup> It's to do with the impermanence and the awareness of mortality, also the **contradiction between the phenomenological experience of time as a constant and the representation of a series of moments, like a reel of film**. It is a 'still'. The figure is absurd in that it is a representation of a 'still' moment with huge weight, or comparatively huge weight – the bubble is the same as the head, it's a solid mass that represents the lightest manifestation of form.

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#### **Extract 8**

*PL35.25.4.20 p7*

The painting refers to Chardin's bowl of raspberries, as well, in its small scale and umber background, with her red hair, the pink balloon and her flip flops. It's a scale thing, and it's also to do with the phenomenology of representation, the 'thingness' of things. This is related to Hopper, Derain and William Nicholson, and Merlin James' writing on the self-consciousness of representation.

#### **Drawing Process**



I draw out an image: first I take up the box with the Preiser figure in it, this time it's the man trying on a pair of trousers, and I examine it from different angles before deciding on one. I hold it in my left hand and draw with my right, my left arm resting on my knee. Then I put it down and draw from memory then take it up again, I notice all sorts of small things, the folds in the surface, the surfaces, the shadows. I draw in a mixture of tone and line, the line to find the edges of the forms.

The drawings are quite small. Then I turn the page and use my memory alone, drawing from one angle, this time as a plan for a painting. That's what the drawing is, rather than as a drawing in its own right, it's a plan for a painting, to see what its pictorial qualities are, how I might change as I go along, I start with a very tonal, loose line, whizzing about to make general areas of light and dark and then I build up the complexities, with line at the end, again to find the edges of forms, I use this end stage to re-consider what might occur in the image, In this case I gave him bare or socked feet instead of the shoes the figure wears, I also pay a lot of attention to the edges of the image.

During this process I notice things about the image, for example, I noticed how very eloquent the cast shadow was and worked to bring that out in the plan drawing.

I then stared at it for a while, noting things in my book like its similarity in feel to a Hopper painting. I wondered what I might do with that, how it might develop, and I thought about its 'self-portrait' quality. From there I started to think about monkey paintings – I'm sure that

monkey paintings will sell! Also, Annabel Dover, whose paintings I have just bought, clearly likes them and sent an image of one of them to one of her contacts - and I thought about...

### **Extract 9**

Practice Log 5

4.2.18

I haven't updated my record of studio activity for a while.

I have worked on several different pieces; the work to do with the FRGB/Koolman project has consisted of three paintings, two quite large and one relatively small. Then I made a Christmas card, and something about that activity and the outcome has suggested a different track.

The three FRGB paintings were 'We Are, All Of Us, The Children Of The Chairman', 'Boy With A Rat' and 'Colonel V.I. Evans And His Son'. In formal terms what I have been excited by is the possibility of painting quite resolved figures against an entirely matt, black background, which seems to project them forward. There is something very satisfying about this, which I am not clear about. It may be that the background resolves any discrepancies of form in the figures, makes them definite and clear, or it may be a 'craft' thing, giving the painting a state of 'high finish'.



*'Boy With A Rat' (unfinished state) approx. 100x50cm, oil*



*'We Are, All Of Us, Children Of The Chairman' approx. 180 x 150 cm, oil.*

In terms of the continuing narrative, the 'Children' painting is set out as a kind of 'statement' or declaration painting, the sort of image that might be placed in the anteroom of an institution to indicate its values or political position, almost like royal portraiture. I am quite interested in Roman painting, and I understand that there were portraits of the Emperor in all official buildings, often very crudely painted and on fairly cheap bits of board. I think few of these have survived, because of their cheapness. I could not resist placing a rat in the bottom left-hand corner though. The adult figure is a Colganite, a member of the ultra-orthodox organisation that controls morals and ideologies in the FRGB, and the children are orphans. In some way they are 'all of us', too, the citizens of the FRGB.

Vladimir Ilych Evans is a war hero and poet, who wrote the defining poem of the Revolution, 'Boy With A Rat', about his son playing with a rat during a bombing raid, and the two paintings commemorate both the poem and the writer. As the painting progressed, Evans lost an arm, and possibly the other hand. He had already lost an eye.





*Portrait of Lt.Col. VI Evans And His Son' (unfinished state) approx 180 x 150cm, oil*

The large portrait is deliberately awkward in composition, with the figure of the boy lying across the bottom and the man diagonally slotted in. The boy is an adolescent, living in an extremely constricted society in which there is little room for self-expression or rebellion, things contemporarily lazily associated with the state of teenage. He is also the subject of a nationally known poem, and, like Christopher Robin, someone everyone thinks they know. Evans himself, who has sacrificed himself for the people, and his son in a way, is an awkward figure. I wonder if he might take on a Milton-like presence, becoming the conscience of the Revolution.

Then this Christmas card. I make a Christmas card every year; my wife and I come up with an idea for an image which we find amusing - it's usually some new social or fashion phenomenon - and I make a small image, usually a watercolour or gouache, which I scan into PS and make into a card. One year, for example, when the fashion for wearing underpants so that the band showed above the waist of your trousers became ubiquitous among the young, I did a painting of the top of someone's jeans with the underpants' band

reading 'Happy Christmas'. This year we thought the 'man-bun' fashion was pretty funny so I did a painting of Santa Claus with one.



*'Santa Man Bun' approx 5x5cm watercolour and gouache*

I really liked this image and couldn't get it out of my head. It was something to do with the red against the dark background. I had also been to see the Soutine exhibition at the Courtauld, too, which may have reinforced my feeling. Coming back from another trip to London with my brother-in-law and his twins, we were joined on the tables we occupied on the train by a person who gave an ambiguous impression of a gender persona, being quite heavy set and what you might call craggy in facial features, while wearing makeup, painted nails and with various rainbow-design accessories. The children, who are 13, found this fascinating, and took careful note, although, to my relief, they are old enough not to make loud comment. What struck me most was the person's hair, which was worn long and loose, but balding in the classic male pattern, so that long strands depended from an otherwise hairless front pate. It made an image of bravery in the face of physical inevitability.

So when I next went in the studio, I used the two small canvases I had prepared, both about 40 x 20 cm, one of normally textured artist's linen, the other the antique French linen I have, which is smoother and lighter, to make two paintings in which I explored what I could remember of the person's visual impression on me, plus the Soutine/Santa Man Bun colour. As well as the Soutine I was also thinking of the red stripes in Jasper Johns's early 'Flag' paintings, in which the basic cadmium red is augmented by pinks and magentas. I was also interested in comparing the physical effect of the two differing surfaces.



*Androgyne* (French linen)



*Androgyne* (artist's linen) (unfinished states) 40x20cm, oil

My next studio day, which was last Friday (2.2.18) saw another development, in which I used Pinocchio as the subject/object of the painting. After seeing James Frost's lecture on articulated puppets and thinking about the Pinocchio story with our Illustration students, I wanted to explore the idea of the portrait/painting in terms of the puppet. The inanimate object given life, the illusion of life itself; the idea of the painter as puppet-master or controller of the lives of the depicted characters, the agency of the characters. One could argue that there is a qualitative difference between the 3D puppet and the depiction of the person or subject, and that the depiction might constitute a mirror or a window into another world in comparison to the presence in this world of the puppet. But a puppet is in some sense an embodied depiction of a person, so perhaps the flatness of the painting is less important to this question than the presence itself. If an image might be seen as a text, then a 3D image might also be seen as a text and therefore the qualitative difference is not significant.



*Wheelbarrow And Monkey Pinocchio*



*Adidas And Rat Pinocchio* (unfinished state) 50x40cm oil

**Other notes:**

*Two new paintings: they're little ones, something like 12x8 inches, identical sizes but one on heavy linen and one on the antique French stuff. I wanted to see how the two compared, I think. Then I was thinking about the deep cadmium and dark green in Soutine's portraits and I remembered I have a litre of expensive cadmium deep red that I haven't used. Then I was thinking about the androgyne idea that I had played around with in the Tiresias painting now covered over by Boy with A Mouse, and the photographic exhibition in Budapest of androgynous characters. I started the two paintings on Thursday evening, between bouts of teaching preparation, and then yesterday afternoon after I had finally drawn a line under my PD duties, I got to grips with them both.*

*The night before I had drawn this character in my sketchbook: he was a person who had got on the train and sat on the same table as me and Anna when we returned from London with Lec and the twins last week. Initially he looked like a rather large chap in a long raincoat, with long hair and a scarf. It's a normal male look, but when he sat down a femininity in his appearance became clearer. His hair, for example, receded more than it first seemed and the long strands that sprouted from an otherwise naked scalp and curled over his forehead gave an impression of a desperate clinging to an inaccurate self-image. His long fingernails were painted black. The twins pointed out that he was wearing a rainbow coloured watch strap and had rainbow-coloured shoelaces. He watched some entertainment on his tablet, his face rather petulant as the twins' noise level grew; we were playing charades.*

*So, he pushed his way into my consciousness as I began to work on the twin paintings. Anna had complimented the beginning stages of the paintings but as the evening went on and the end of my painting time approached, she poked her head round the door and said 'who's that awful woman? Or man? Who's going to buy that? They were so lovely...'*  
*'It's that guy from the train. I am painting androgynes' I said.*  
*'I just don't understand...'* and she walked off.

*It's a nice technique, to have roughly the same picture going on two paintings and move between them, because you can get one to a good position and then work the other one to a place beyond that and go back to the first one. This leapfrogging can develop the way work gets to resolution because the variables are limited. It might only be relevant to those specific pictures - the resolution might not be appropriate for any other pictures - but you will have two pictures instead of one, and the two pictures will have taken the resolution further than one might have gone.*

*The French linen seems to soak the paint up more, and its smoothness tends towards a flattening of the paint. It's more graphic somehow, while the chunky texture of the artist's linen, which may be a variety called 'super seven', seems more conducive to piling the paint up on the surface. I suppose the texture visually breaks up the edges of forms and makes lines less distinct, whereas the smoother surface makes lines and edges more evident. I was also thinking about how the work would look in a scanner; the way that the solid quality of oil paint operates as opposed to the flatness of watercolour when being copied digitally. These paintings would fit on my scanner.*

*The other thing is that these paintings are not really connected to my FRGB work. I am not sure how I feel about this; perhaps a little anxious that I will lose interest. I enjoyed the challenge of *The Poet Cl. V.I. Evans and His Son*, although I am not sure it's finished, and I don't think I have got the background right. I loved the dead matte black backgrounds of *Boy with A Mouse* and *We Are All of Us the Chairman's Children*. But I can carry on with *The Poet*.*

The image remains an image, 3D or otherwise, its agency other than the viewer. We observe a depiction of a depiction in these paintings, in the sense that the figure carries a strong resemblance of a mannequin or puppet. In Pinocchio's case, a being in transition from puppet to 'real boy'. But it might be said that a portrait of a 'real boy' is a depiction of a depiction, in the sense that the depiction is of a temporary and staged state of being - the subject(object) 'sits for a portrait'; there are well-documented examples of Euan Uglow's subjects, for example, being carefully dressed, coiffed and posed in 'unnatural' positions for his paintings of nudes, but an ostensibly simple painted record of a person's features is still to some extent a performance. The agency is largely with the artist and the depiction of the subject is at least one remove from the person being painted.

## **Finish**

The question of finish has become urgent. On my recent visit to the exhibition 'Cezanne's Portraits' at the National Portrait Gallery I marked a relationship to finishing a painting that I had not experienced before. Firstly, in the painting 'Paul Alexis Reading A Manuscript To Emile Zola', 1869-70, 130x160cm oil. This was a much bigger painting than I expected. I am not sure whether I have seen it before: there was an exhibition at the RA called 'Early Cezanne' that made a big impression on me in the eighties, and it may have been included in that, but I have seen reproductions and imagined a much less grand painting. Famously unfinished, TJ Clarke referred to it in his recent review of the NPG show, focussing on the

scribbled indication of Zola's robe set against the smeared linear construction of the manuscript Alexis reads from. I found the painting to some extent repellent. The muddy and umbrous colour scheme and the oil laden paint made a rather greasy surface, and the Alexis figure presents itself as a homunculus or golem of streaked brush strokes, shoved awkwardly into the box of the painting, his head bent to accommodate the top of the painting, while his feet are tucked under the rather wobbly and unstable chair, at least 30cm above the bottom edge of the painting. Much of the painting appears to have been made in a rush of uncomfortable decisions; Zola seems to await completion, and Cezanne was either saving that joy or trying to put it off, but either way the end did not come.

It is an intensely seen and uncomfortable painting. I do not know how well the paint has survived, and it may have grown darker over the years. The visibly high oil content in the paint may have affected the ageing process. It was also difficult to see the painting clearly in the context, because of glare from the glazed frame as well as the constant jostling from other art lovers. For me the painting possesses an immediacy and I want to say a violence in the rapid application of the paint. I might compare this speed of execution to Van Gogh's working methods, in which a plan of action, colour and drawing are worked out and rehearsed and the painting completed in a forty-five minute or hour-long session and suggest that Van Gogh's focussed performance invariably resulted in a painting entirely resolved, whereas early Cezanne often holds resolution back. I would suggest that he does not finish his painting of Zola either because he does not know how to resolve it, or that on some level it is resolved, or that the lack of resolution itself allows something greater or more interesting than any possible resolution. TJ Clark might offer the latter.



### **What does it give the viewer?**

The first question that occurs to me is, does this connect with my ideas about the false use of Barthes' ideas of studium and punctum in looking at paintings? That the qualitative difference between painting and photography is so great that it is not legitimate to apply the same methods of analysis to both might be exemplified by this painting, in that in Gell's words 'it posits a universe in which I am (Cezanne)', while a photograph might allow us to imagine we are in front of the subject but not that we are making the image itself, composing it, refining it. Photography relies on illusion alone, while this painting forces us, the viewer, to imagine what it must be like to be both looking at the object of the painting, imagining it in the studio, and painting it, because we are, in a way, being asked to finish it. What happens next? Should anything happen next?

I am not sure that this is a great set of ideas though. It suggests that a routinely unfinished painting is better than a finished one, which leads to a preconceived rule - always leave a bit of the painting blank, or unfinished. Which I am uncomfortable with, because it's a bit ridiculous to start something whose resolution is deliberately held back. Even tantric sex allows you to have an orgasm eventually.

Later in the exhibition I looked at several paintings entitled 'Madame Cezanne in Red Dress', with this idea of unfinishedness in mind. In one version of the subject, held at the Museu de Arte de Sao Paulo, for example, the paint surface remains broken and dissolute throughout, the support showing through the mesh of paint in several places, and certain areas, hands, and face in particular, more 'resolved' in the sense of the system of the marks being closed and completed, than others. I wondered what made this different to the 'British Impressionist' style of painting in which marks and strokes are dabbed down in a 'loose' and 'expressive' way, hinting at edges and volumes, and it was clear that Cezanne is not hinting at anything. Even in the 'unfinished' state, the painting is clear about its meaning, the form is apparent. The unfinishedness tends, rather than making a graphic or generalised form, to bring forward a form in space, almost a solid form sculpted in the space of the canvas.

In Balzac's 'Unknown Masterpiece' Frenhofer paints a picture entirely incoherent except for a perfect foot, before committing suicide. Zola's Lantier in 'L'Oeuvre' displays attitudes closer to Manet and Monet than to Cezanne's - Cezanne's ambition in painting would not tend toward grand, social statement as Lantier's did - and the catalogue suggests that Cezanne's relationship with Zola petered out for other reasons than Cezanne's taking umbrage at being

depicted as a suicide. Frenhofer is closer to the view of Cezanne that this exhibition suggests.

### Chapters

Cezanne v Duchamp in my training

Puppets, mirrors, statues, and masks.

Cezanne, unfinishedness and the provisional

Gell, ritual activity, common experience, and practice

Drawing, improvisation, and the performative

Fictions, layering and context.

Social context and power structures.

How can fictional scenarios be developed through my art and writing, as parallel processes seeking to respond to the same inquiry?

How can invention and improvisation in art be used to create an alternative world?

How in my practice can an alternative world offer insight into social status and self-affirmation?

Is there truth in art, or is it all artifice and invention?

How can painting act as a way of fictionalising the self?

How in my practice do anxieties about who and what I am emerge?

Do the invented characters in my art act as surrogates for me? If so, how can improvisation help these surrogates get better at showing who and what I am?

### **1.3.18**

In the last couple of weeks, I made another work, more obliquely referring to *Mr Oldham And His Guests*. I have called this *Real Boys*, and it is a part of a looser project in which I think I am examining some ideas about the state of being a man. It is another taxonomy painting, presenting three different states of manhood or characters that have emerged in the practice. They are Pinocchio, Danny Macnally and the androgyne that I came across on the train from London a few months ago. I presented them from waist upwards, from left to right in the order above. Pinocchio has a monkey with a lemon in its mouth on his head, Danny has a Crass tee-shirt with the logo central in the image and the androgyne is carrying a chihuahua.





The painting is made so that each character is described using a different method of painting, and as much as possible, each section or element is painted in a different way. Pinocchio is wearing a red sweatshirt which is painted rich in pigment but thinly, although there is a 'man with wheelbarrow' logo in Bright Green Lake on the chest, but his head and hands are painted quite graphically. Unlike the studies I made, his head is clearly stylised - it could be a puppet's wooden head. Danny's head and bare arms are painted smoothly, with close tone and temperature relationships, and his tee-shirt is painted in small strokes built up over a visible under painting. The logo is painted with Johns' flags in mind. The androgyne is painted absurdly thickly, using crusty Naples Yellows, Unbleached Titanium, Flesh Pink, Warm Whites, and the hair in Umbers and Ochres, but all very choppy and on the surface. The orange tee-shirt is painted lushly with thick strokes, like a bravura painting, but the arm on which he/she carries the chihuahua is left as Viridian underpainting and white canvas, while the hand that strokes the dog is a lumpy twin of the head. The dog itself is described with a thick, shiny black outline, filled in loosely with Yellow Ochre, and remains jarringly graphic, unlike the Pinocchio head, which is in comparison quite subtle. The background is a dead mat, dull green, which has the effect of shoving the figures forward and making a huge differential between figure and ground.

Although this painting was made partly in response to the Highmore painting and I wanted to explore some of what I had thought about in relation to it (the taxonomy of human characteristics, the cognitive dissonance involved in deploying disparate techniques in the same image, but also the Caravaggio-esque box of space with figures in a light from the side) I also wanted to think about the difference between the Cezanne project of representing existing human figures, painting someone he saw sitting in front of him, and my own, which is drawing the figures out of my imagination or memory.

The Baudelaire dichotomy (portraits are either fiction or history) seems to have little to do with my practice, as it is clear that the portraits are all fiction in the sense that none of these people exist except in my head. They are all fiction. But history could be regarded as fiction. A narrative is presented and described as 'history' but remains a narrative which cannot encompass all the facts. In 'On Exactitude In Science' (from 'A Short History Of Infamy' Penguin Books 1975) Borges describes a map made so large that it covered the whole kingdom that it described. Valabregue is now known to us only as various narratives; because of Cezanne's fame, the dominant narrative is his role in Cezanne's life, but he will be remembered as an ancestor, a writer, a friend of the family. There may be photographs, but these will be seen in the light of the Cezanne portraits. Arguably he has become narrative, and any singular truth about him is impossible.

The sense in which the figures in this painting are not history, then, may be quite close to the sense in which Valabregue is not fiction. It occurred to me that the contrasts between the figures in the painting increased the sense of their fiction, so I set out to paint a single portrait on a similar scale to the first Valabregue portrait, in order to isolate the figure and to use some of the terms that Cezanne uses in his portrait. I chose the androgyne figure, partly because of the relative simplicity of the image, and partly because of the ambiguity that he/she presents in depicting a figure that refuses clear signifiers of gender.

In depicting the figure, I referred to both the Valabregue portrait and to Fayum portraiture, a genre whose primary function was the representation of the face of a deceased individual, apparently in as unmediated a way as possible. While there are certainly class indicators in these depictions, in a contemporary context there is little else that might be described as artistic license or 'spin'. The faces are recorded in a formulaic but sensitive and differentiated way, directly, the eyes of the deceased meeting the eyes of the viewer. In Levinas' terms, we are facing 'the other'. The other is uncannily similar to us.

On starting the painting, I used thin Green Umber on a hog hairbrush to roughly indicate the figure and began to use it to 'block in' the background. This is my usual technique, and it is analogous to my observational drawing technique, in which I use light, scribbled pencil marks to establish a general idea of the form and the tonal arrangement in front of me before making more definitive demarcations of edges of forms, tones and so on. The use of this technique gives me time to observe the forms in front of me, and I can make mistakes in the drawing without having to 'live with them' - a lightly scribbled mark is easier to rub out or to ignore than a heavily inscribed, determined one. A heavily scored line also takes on an

authority - there seems to be a moment in assessing the likeness of a given line or form in front of me when it and the representation have an equivalent emotional or intellectual weight, which prevents a proper or fuller examination of the object as it turns into the subject.

However, as I scrubbed into the canvas I remembered the heavily painted background of the Alexis and Zola painting meeting the open, unpainted area of Zola's figure, and Schiff's description of Cezanne painting not from the general to the particular but from the particular to the particular (Schiff 1984 p116 Corot, Monet, Cezanne), not wanting to make a composition in the traditional sense but to find the composition through the process of the painting, and I reasoned that as I knew what kind of background I wanted, and I knew what shape of body and head and so on, it would be more authentic not to pretend that I did not know. Accordingly, I painted the background in as I wanted it to be at the end of the painting. I then took up loaded brushes and described the head and face as directly as I could.

This is the dilemma identified above. If painting is a continuous process of discovery, at what point does the activity stop and if it can be said that provisionality is a positive good in the process, then how does the artist prevent it from becoming inauthentic? I concentrated on the head and neck, leaving the body, which was clothed in an orange tee-shirt in the previous incarnation, as an undefined mass, although I did establish the legs, arms, and hands quite early on. As the painting progressed, I began to think about the neckline, where skin met tee-shirt, and I made it gradually more asymmetrical, exposing more of one shoulder. There came a point where I decided it was right. I then went further into the definition of the face, but I never took the arms and hands beyond an indication, and they remain a shape of bare canvas defined by the frontiers of paint around them.



The body presents me with the most doubt. For a long period of time, it was like the arms, although there were some roughly drawn indications of form. Then it was a red mass, crudely filled in with thin, runny paint. At a certain point I covered the body with thin but definite Cadmium Yellow Deep, which is a kind of orange. It is quite a strong colour so that even though the paint had not been brushed heavily in or put on with a palette knife, it was still powerful. I did not modulate it very distinctly, and in reference to the famous Cezanne quote, I drew an apple on the tee-shirt as a logo, painted much like the Chihuahua in the previous painting, although slightly more as a graphic design.

I am not sure whether I should have simply left it rather than adding the colour to it. What have I added to the image? The colour itself? This leads me to the next question; what have I added by continuing the painting generally, rather than stopping at the point where a head is recognisable?

In this case, I wonder if the answer is in the definition. If the figure I am conjuring has no other reality than what is in my mind then there is nothing to answer for or to; there is no recognition from outside of me. The subject cannot look at it and say, 'who's that meant to be?' and nor can anyone else except me. However, the image needs to carry conviction, and for me in this instance that seems to lie in delicacy or focus. I don't need much more in the

way of hands or arms and the tee-shirt can just be an orange blur, but I would like to know how the form beneath the lower lip moves as it transitions to the chin, and how the individual hairs sprout from the bare, bald forehead.

I am decoupling the technique from the method; the technique of originality, as defined by Schiff, being in this case a heavily material response to a visual stimulus, I am taking my visual stimulus from inside me. Heavy, lumpy paint applied thickly as if in a frenzy in response to a visual stimulus is used as a signifier of authenticity, as is the practice of leaving visible measuring marks on the surface, connoting effort spent in visual calculation in the method of painting 'from life'. By using the technique, I am implying personal presence, making the image more 'real'.



I then painted over an oil on sized paperwork that I had started the day before. I am not sure how successful this was.

#### **Extract 10**

*PL35.25.4.20 p8*

...round from the *Boy with Monkey* paintings, and I moved down the page in a kind of rhythmical swirling motion, to make another figure. Then I took my stump and moved that around, making another tonal value and added finer details until a girl a little like Mina emerged with a monkey perched on her back. I could even see what colours I'd use.

### Woman Blowing Bubble Gum

Meaning is folded back in on itself. The bubble she blows is a metaphor for the passing of time and the brevity of life, but it is frozen in time, a permanent fixture like Bentham at UCL, as an image is, but it goes further because it isn't actually a bubble, it's a blob of the same material as the head and body which pretends to be filling it with air. The passing of time is frozen and solidified. Time is made absurdly solid. It's a representation of a representation of a metaphor.

But this exegesis doesn't cover it. It isn't adequate to the experience of either making or looking at (experiencing) the piece of work. Is description enough? Physical description that is, exact size, colours, shapes, textures. Procedural description, I did thus and then that or guesses about it made from the physical description? The object remains mute. Symbolic exegesis doesn't touch the procedural, procedural doesn't touch the symbolic. Also, the symbolic especially, if detached from intentionality, changes with each viewer, changes for the painter as well – "I thought I was painting about my mother, but it turns out I was painting about my wife" (cf. Jay 1 and 2.)



Before and after 9.5.20

This painting is now called *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad* because I noticed the similarity to *Between The Clock and the Bed*, Edvard Munch 1940-43. My question here is what makes the after better than the before? What do you get that's extra? Munch himself is like that, I remember the last exhibition at the Tate. I went in three times, the first time in disgust at the way he just couldn't be bothered to finish the work, the second time feeling...

### **Extract 11**

*PLAnalysis.Content.Subject.p8*

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<sup>182</sup> Catalogue entry for Chardin *Soap Bubbles* 1733-34, website of Metropolitan Museum, New York <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435888> (accessed 4.5.20)

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*

...has occurred to me over the last few days that it might be a good way of beginning to explore the grotesque, the caricatural and the satirical. Of course, this is one of the origins of my artist-self, entertaining and titillating my friends when I was a teenage, and it may be a way of escaping decorum and transcending my 'training' and the need to gain approval of the old...of old men. Of the old men of the Academy. The people who say whether what you've done is any good, or is art.

43. *What's behind these is that in a recent spell in Europe I noticed how older men tend, rather than in our more utilitarian culture where the balding head is shaved, to cultivate and develop dependent styles, bravely showing off what little there is left. It seemed also to resonate with the absurdities of the GD Tiepolo 'Punchinello' paintings that I was looking at, in which figures are entirely disguised by the coverings of mask, costume, false stomach and belly, and foolish hat. We are not simply what our visible tissues and surfaces might suggest.*PL29

44. In other words, what is it to be an artist, which is actually my theme. Today I realised while I was driving my painting to Trinity Buoy Warehouse that that is what I think about, and that is why I paint, why I am interested in Carracci, Domenico Tiepolo, Highmore, maybe even Kitaj and Marcus Harvey. What it means to be an artist is my Jewishness, my White Working-Class culture.PL30

45. Tim Hyman's review of Kitaj's autobiography: 'He recognized that large-scale compositions of figures (frescos and altarpieces, "history paintings" and grandes machines) had for centuries been at the core of Western painting.<sup>184</sup>' which reads to me like a kind of mission statement. Also, I am thinking of Marcus Harvey saying he wants to make paintings that would make a film director want to be a painter. PL32

46. Saw Almodovar's *Pain and Glory*<sup>185</sup> on Monday night (10.2.20); apparently an autobiographical piece<sup>186</sup>, it moves right through and across the life of his protagonist, telling stories from all stages of it, talking about what? Desire, acting, addiction, pain? His mother and father, his life in art. There was a lot about his energy and his need to be creating at all times as a young man, and as an older man – I suppose in his early sixties – he is tired, and everything hurts. Maybe he's just worn out.PL32

47. In fact, the chief inspiration of this painting was a student who took noticeable pains with her make-up, and I was thinking about the similarity between the way make-up and paint are



used to make a face, while in the self-portrait more about how paint can be used to describe form and at the same time make itself, the material, present.PL32

48. I have been thinking about the aspect of the Butchers Shop which Tim Hyman would say is an Altarpiece, the way the space crushes the figures forward and it operates like the Blake drawing, the Vision of Ezekiel, so the space becomes an active part of the painting, pushing the figures into the space of the viewer. The Butchers Shop does this, as does Gersaint's Picture Shop.PL33

49. Also last night I was thinking about the way I have made all the personnel the same. They're in the same outfits, but they are different. That was because I wanted the painting to be a kind of self-portrait, it's me in the long years, endlessly stretching canvases. I wear the same outfit as I get older. I thought that maybe the individuals looked too different from each other and the point would not be made, and one of my last moves was to give them all the same glasses, but then I thought maybe that looks as if they're all working in a factory in China churning out stretchers. PI33

50. This morning I was thinking about Christopher Gilvan Cartwright's paintings, which I like very much, and thinking that, like the large Auerbach Underground Station

## **ii. Chapter 4**

### **Extract 1**

*PL 43 p4*

There was the thing I thought about how the way art is valued changes as different people with different sets of concerns become powerful or more visible in the art world. Bernardine Evaristo's book *Girl, Woman, Other* opens with one of her characters thinking about how, when a black, female Director of the National Theatre is appointed, she, a black female playwright, has work commissioned when before she had felt ignored. I was thinking about how Bernardine Evaristo is in the position to influence what work is seen, read, and performed now and how important it seems to many artists to feel that they are on the outside.

That was the main thing I was conscious of thinking about, but of course there are many ramifications of that, and the idea is more complex. I spend a lot of time thinking about what

good art is, or specifically, what good art is to me in terms of sales and how I can alter that, and, in the process of the Studio Practice, I spend a lot of time trying to work out if something I am doing is good. Does it work? Is the question I was introduced to on Foundation, and it still appertains today. Does it work doesn't mean does it look beautiful it means does it do the thing you want it to do, and the question really is, what is it you want it to do?

*What is good* is an intersubjective vector of forces that could be described simply as artist, object, and viewer. As Phil King says, a 'painting is part of something that makes it art - part of a larger machine. I make something in the studio and it is like a stone. It might just gather art moss, but it hopes to be part of something. It is a partial object'. The viewer, perhaps, completes or re-determines the object. He goes on to say 'it's not that collecting 'creates art' but it is a fundamental part in taking a singular object and making it a part of something else - it is part of making that object art....'(p7)

I am aware that there are many influences and pressures at work on my Studio Practice; other peoples' opinions, teachers, friends, my wife, things I have read or heard all play a part on what I make. What paintings have been selected by panels, as well, has a bearing on the Studio Practice. In painting the Selection Panel, I might be personifying the very people or ideas that drive the Studio Practice.

The painting *Larry, Rick and Aleksandr at the Millennium Hotel* 56 x 75 cm, gouache, was based on or was a variation on the Joseph Highmore painting *Mr Oldham and his Guests*, and I have used this as a kind of model for some time, including in the FRGB series.



*Mr Oldham and his Mates* and *The Chairman Drafting the Seven Year Plan*, both 100 x 120 cm, oil on linen. *Mr Oldham and his Mates* now destroyed.

## **Extract 2**

*PL18 13.3.19 p5*

26.2.19

Talking about holding on to your back catalogue is something that I always think about when I think about Jason. It may be because of his conviction that there will come a time when the work has an agreed value, that someday there will be a demand. I think he got this conviction from his father, whose work did achieve a demand, and who undoubtedly lived through a long time when no one bought much from any artist.

I looked over my old work (again!) the other day, trying to find space in my storage area, and could feel tears welling up, as usual, as I looked over my recent flurry of still life paintings. They're so good! Look at that detail, look how that bit works! Why did no one buy them?

In fact, they did, they bought them when there were monkeys in them and fewer skulls, but I only did a couple of monkey paintings and then stopped. Maybe I should do more.

I took three paintings out of the storage area. One is big enough for the Sky Portraits programme, and the surface did actually have a scratch on it, so it needs reworking anyway. I took it off the stretcher and put some fresh linen on it. The other two were one of the dark, ruined landscapes, I think the weaker one, and the largish, blue still life with goldfish bowl.



It isn't this one, but quite like it.

I decided to 're-purpose' the paintings – rather than re-stretch the canvas and start anew, to change the images by adding and subtracting, but substantially keeping the original painting.

### Extract 3

#### *PL Analysis.Surface.Surface*

1. Clothes, skin, surface. It is related to the idea that each separate element of the painting should be as different as possible from all the other elements.PL3.
2. I was concerned to keep the 'collage' approach to form during this painting, to have each separate element as distinct as possible from the others in order to problematize the surface and the unity of the image itself by drawing attention to its facture, and to emphasize the assemblage element of the work, the sense of its coming together as a collection of parts. PL3
3. I thought a lot about the skin of the painting as I worked on it. Both as a material thing, as detailed above, but also in the sense of a 'screen' to a different reality. It

**Commented [WC(1)]:** see Cloth, planes of structure/colour.

**Commented [WC(2)]:** collage as surface, surface as collection of parts.

**Commented [WC(3)]:** Distinction between 'actual' skin and 'virtual' screen, dividing material from non-material. See also note 7 re Cezanne.

would be easy to say 'to my own inner reality' but I don't recognize it in the sense of the image that emerges being formed in any concrete way in my mind beforehand.PL3.

4. The surface is nice to work on, though, which is rare when I start a painting. I think the level of absorbency, the amount of size and primer on this canvas is just right. It's one layer of rabbit skin glue and one of Roberson's oil primer, on 'super seven' linen, and I have let it dry for about two weeks. I have bought some very expensive ready-made canvases made by Old Holland and Claessens, very classy materials people, but the surface of those seems quite slippery compared to this.PL3.
5. *...while the chunky texture of the artist's linen, which may be a variety called 'super seven', seems more conducive to piling the paint up on the surface. I suppose the texture visually breaks up the edges of forms and makes lines less distinct, whereas the smoother surface makes lines and edges more evident.*PL5
6. In one version of the subject, held at the Museu de Arte de Sao Paolo, for example, the paint surface remains broken and dissolute throughout, the support showing through the mesh of paint in several places, and certain areas, hands, and face in particular, more 'resolved' in the sense of the system of the marks being closed and completed, than others.PL5
7. Cezanne is not hinting at anything. Even in the 'unfinished' state, the painting is clear about its meaning, the form is apparent. The unfinishedness tends, rather than making a graphic or generalised form, to bring forward a form in space, almost a solid form sculpted in the space of the canvas. PL5
8. The surface of the painting was susceptible to change, though, however difficult the process. The fact that the alterations, the process, is clearly visible in the final (?) version is good, and I deliberately used thin washes of colour so as not to hide anything.PL7.
9. Matisse, who comes across so beautifully in print, is often worryingly ugly in reality, the finish of his paintings surprisingly rough, greasy, and lumpy. It

Commented [WC(4)]: Anti-stratigraphic

Commented [WC(5)]: See note 6.

Commented [WC(6)]: Duality

works well in reproduction because the surface doesn't contradict the form.PL8

10. James Elkins (1998) might observe that what I was doing by covering the white primer with red or yellow earth coloured paint, in the method I had derived from Goya, was making a 'mark, which is now to be considered as a 'colour', a field or surface of uniform aspect'(p25) and it seems to me that my current method is similar. The colour I am making is white though. In a sense, the painting starts when I stretch the linen over the frame; from then on, it's all mark-making.PL10

#### Extract 4

*PLAnalysis.Process.Start*

opposites in the description of form in painting – such an appropriate name – and decided to try to make a painting which had all of them in it.PL36

19. I did need to get this going, it's not like I was avoiding anything, but on the other hand I am beginning to see a disjointedness in the way I look at my work. I got very excited about the Preiser figures, for example, and then as soon as I heard the words *Dogs of Form* (I don't know how I heard them, and I think it was an idea that just occurred to me) I was off on that tangent.PL37

20. I had a sudden vision of this painting while on my walk on Wednesday, and in a moment off from my essay on Community I started it. It didn't look much like the painting in my mind, but that wasn't a very clear image; he'd been moving, somehow, trotting along and that looked or felt absurd.PL38

#### Extract 5

*PLAnalysisProcessFinish p2*

9. I don't know what to do. It is not the provisional thing I thought it was going to be. I like the colour. There's a sort of cloisonné element with the thick black lines, making the colour shine

Commented [WC(7)]: Contingency, lack of agency

out more. I don't know. I am thinking of painting another version of the same thing to see what happens PL8.

10. I have rehearsed this painting so many times, and when I painted it, when I work on it, I still seem to need to do it fast. Why is that? Is this a fully realised image, now, in the Heidegger sense, an image whose meaning is now closed? I am not sure about that either. There's a lot of process still evident, there's a lot of unfinishedness, but it isn't ambiguous. Ambiguity does seem to be something I am uncomfortable with. PL8

11/ ...unlike the *horror vacui* of the Nagasaki Chen painting, I am trying to use the figure/ground relationship to express the wobbliness of the activity, and to bring the meeting of eyes with the viewer into focus. I am not interested in expressing the qualities of the surroundings. In fact, I am using the title of the work to give the viewer that context, and I think I am doing that so that the context becomes or takes on another quality; it becomes more conceptual than it would be if represented clearly, so that the viewer brings only his or her own experience to the context. PL8

12. The Will Self painting is a very clear figure/ground equation, and the Nagasaki Chen and Tim Hyman paintings are more about the composition. I felt the need to explore a line between the two, which I think is implicit in the first 'Uneasy Relationship' painting. This is the beginning of that exploration. I am looking at Matisse seriously for first time for nearly thirty years. Matisse was the first artist that I really felt anything about; I had a near-mystical experience looking at the 'Romanian Blouse' painting in the Baubourg in my trip around European galleries in 1987. My research into Cezanne seems to have led me to Matisse, it's to do with the 'unfinishedness' I think.

13. *Cezanne, unfinishedness and the provisional* PL9

14. But it is the hand that drew my attention, in its unfinished state. Looked at in reproduction, a hand-shaped form is apparent just crossing the bottom edge of the palette, but it doesn't make much sense there - a palette is not rested in the crook of the arm and the thumb should be pushed through the hole (back to the Falconer again). Anyway, in the flesh the hand/arm/palette/rags/brushes form is not at all clearly defined, but *you know it's all there*. Like the mess of female grooming equipment on a Bonnard painting of a dressing table, Ambiguity does seem to be something I am uncomfortable with PL9.

15. It was appalling but I carried on until I had some kind of resolution PL9

16. The Camilla paintings are in temporary abeyance; I have not finished the second one, and if I do, it might affect the first, I might want to repaint. PL9

**Commented [WC(8):** Ambiguity is also a value that I say I want in my work; contingency, unfinishedness, the ability to change the work.

**Commented [WC(9):** FIGURE AND GROUND

**Commented [WC(10):** See note above

**Commented [WC(11):** Emotional content

17. On my trip to Provence I came across something that I noticed earlier this year at an exhibition of Matisse's work at the RA, which is the ropiness of his surfaces. I have discussed this elsewhere (p76), but I find it very interesting. The work seems in reproduction very crisp and graphic but in reality, is anything but, the surface betraying workings out, re-modelling, re-thinking, re-assessing. It's a truism now to talk about the many versions of a painting that he'd go through, the Baltimore bather being a splendid example, but the smoothness of the photographs covers up the sheer bloody-mindedness of the process. Richard Diebenkorn, whose work was heavily influenced by Matisse, suffers a similar smoothing out in reproduction.

#### **Extract 6**

*Practice Log43.16.11.20 p5*

*Mr Oldham and his Guests* has a relationship with the Dutch 'Caravaggisti'; my strange obsession with Annibale Carracci seems to have an echo in this. I was shocked when I first came across the painting because I felt it was anomalous in its context. Highmore was, as far as I was concerned, a painter of puppet theatre morality plays, like Hogarth, and this painting shows full-sized, animated men engaged in the characteristic activity of such men – drinking and talking while seated. Perhaps I mean my own characteristic activity. If there is a constant in art, perhaps it's this. Painting what one sees in order to understand it.

In the process I tried to maintain the open, tone/colour method that I used with the Preiser figure paintings, where the painting seemed to coalesce from loosely made areas of colour. I wanted the sense of the forms hovering in front of the viewer on the blank canvas and in version 2 I left the bottom strip, which depicts a table between the viewer and the panel as white canvas with objects loosely drawn on it. Now I feel that I should have done the same with the other paintings, rather than 'filled it in' with yellow ochre, although at the time this did seem to resolve the paintings really well.

There's lots of content in these paintings.

*Mihi Hodie* on the tee-shirt.

The blue pencil that echoes the stylus held by 'Sappho' in the Pompeii fresco.

The glass that Bernardine holds – water as a metaphor for death.

The conical hat person's eyes are concealed by his dark glasses – in version 3 he wears the DHL tee-shirt which was big fashion news in 2016 when *Vetements* appropriated it and sold their version for £185 each. He has the Adidas logo on his hat.



In Version 3 and 4 the personnel are, from left front: one of the *Peru Two*, young woman caught smuggling cocaine in 2013; Larry David, although in version 4 he is not very recognisable; Aleksandr Litvinenko; Joe Skipping. The back row is, in version 4, Bernardine Evaristo, the figure in the conical hat, and a woman found guilty of murder in France – I don't know her identity. In version 3 Evaristo and the conical hat person are reversed. Larry David is looking at his phone in all the paintings, and Litvinenko and Joe are both looking at the viewer, one almost comatose, the other very keenly.

Each character carries a story into the narrative of the painting. Larry David, for example, is freighted with stories, and he is also the hero of the Adam Kotsko book *Awkwardness*. Bernardine Evaristo has been mentioned already. Litvinenko was famously assassinated by the Russian secret service, although they have never admitted this. He became a sort of Christ figure, dying gradually in his green hospital sheets, his hair falling out and his wife becoming more vocal in her denunciations. The British government were seen to be rather venal and lacking in moral fibre; 'we' protested but that was sort of it. Litvinenko died, and 'we' did very little about it. It's a whole story of international relations. Joe Skipping is an invention of mine and his story is available too, and the unknown French murderess lurks in the background. The only story-less person is the one in the conical hat; he seems to wear his personality on the outside, though, being an accumulation of descriptors – he is fat, he wears a funny hat, his glasses conceal his eyes, his tee-shirt bears text, he has long lank hair (and a beard in version 3) – he might not have an existence under those things.

The painting also recalls the *Conference of the Bald* and *A Taxonomy of Older Guys With Hairstyles More Appropriate for Younger Women*. While there is this flood of stories all jammed onto the surface, there is also the sense that the old bald guys are in the front, they are in charge. This recalls the feeling I had when I was first on the selection panel for the NEAC, when I felt the hierarchy of the situation very strongly.

I have spent the whole of the afternoon doing this, talking about paintings that are sitting in the room next to me, but referring to their photographs for detail and description. I have also

#### **Extract from Instagram**

Posted 13<sup>th</sup> November 2020

**person 1**

You are really great artist 🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰🥰

103 w

**charleswilliamsstudio**

Person 1 that's really kind of you, thank you!

103 w

1 like

**Person 2**

Oh fab

111 w

**Person 3**

I know these people.I have come across them a few times over the years....Down with begrudgers!!

111 w

1 like

**Person 4**

No wonder I get rejected...

111 w

2 likes

**Person 5**

Brilliant 🥰🥰🥰

111 w

1 like

**Person 6**

Some seriously shady side eye going on! Brilliant 🥰

[111 w](#)

1 like

**Person 7**

I thought it was a great piece of satire - a bunch of judgemental panelists - as opposed to a bunch of panelists using their judgement

[111 w](#)

1 like

**Person 8**

Love it.

[111 w](#)

1 like

**Person 9**

It's hotting up. The intensity builds...

[111 w](#)

1 like

**Person 7**

Is the DHL logo a play on delivering a verdict/judgment?

[111 w](#)

1 like

**Person 7**

A panel of begrudgers

[111 w](#)

1 like

[charleswilliamsstudio](#)

[Person 7](#) - is that what they look like to you? Wonderful!

I started this series thinking about how, as your 'career' as an artist develops you turn from being the person being judged by panels to being someone who judges others. Even informally. Then I thought about how a painting represents the artist, in several different ways. So this is a sort of self portrait as much as anything else. My painting assesses me.

[111 w](#)

2 likes

[Person 7](#)

[@swiftcharles2002](#) wow, in that case I see someone who is viscerally hard on themselves. Sideways looks, folded arms, mirrored glasses, upturned nostrils, downcast eyes, hands covering mouths....sorry, that might be out of turn, difficult to get the tone right on social media

### **iii. Chapter 5**

#### **Extract 1**

*Practice Log 52, 16.8.21 p4*

I posted a photograph of *New Jeans: Between Carpenter and Dad* on FaceBook and someone (Matthew Askey) responded by pointing out the figure's resemblance to the Millet *Angelus* painting. There is indeed a correspondence, not only in the stance of the figure on the left, but between the shape of the shadow in my painting and the figure on the right. There's also something in the quality of light.

My painting is supposed to refer to the Munch painting, and really, I think I am using it to think about how I feel about ageing and death, but there might also be a sense of religiosity in the work too, or at least something to do with the ritual and customs of everyday life.



Millet *Angelus* 1857–1859, 55.5cm x 66cm

## Extract 2

*PracticeLog35.25.4.20 p3*

out what I felt about it. I liked its sense of the figures coalescing out of their background and standing on the exposed, white-primed canvas at the foot of the stretcher. There was something very satisfying about this sense of them emerging from nothing and balancing on the edge of the rectangle, something that made the *paintedness* of the image very present, as if they had painted themselves.

On my walk on Friday, it occurred to me to make an homage to Roland Hicks' photorealist paintings by using the Preiser figure of the girl blowing a bubble in her gum. They do balloon figures, too, and I was actually thing about those first. Again, there's a sense of something that wasn't there a moment ago and won't be soon either, which I think relates to the sense of the figures making themselves. From this thinking I am now at the point where I want to paint Joe Skipping in this very tonal way too.



The images are orthogonal in the sense that they are explicitly to do with depth, of *in there* rather than *across*. Maybe instead of *rather than* I mean *as well as* or *as intensely as*, The orthogonal relationship is extremely important.

### **Is there a difference between *depth* and *space* in painting?**

I drew several more in this way, in my A5 sketchbook. First, I drew the Preiser girl, who I have already started as a painting. Then I wanted to reprise the parka from the *Painter, Parka and Panter* painting. I am interested in the ambiguity of the shape the parka makes, the way it redefines or exaggerates the body; it makes a bulk of it, or perhaps expresses the mass of *body* in a different way. I am dubious about this drawing. I included a large paper grocery bag in the drawing, so that there were two big, ambiguous shapes with mysterious openings. I haven't concluded this idea, but I developed it in another direction by making another drawing with a woman in a huge puffer coat followed by the angry, hairy bald man I saw in Venice. This made me think more about the *depth* of the image and the next one was Joe Skipping, resting on his arms. Again, the orthogonal relationships are foregrounded. His head strikes us first, then his arms resting on the bottom of the page, then his body. He emerges from the darkness, or he emerges from the surface.

### **Extract 3**

44. I find the linear work, on the whole, much more visually exciting, or engaging. It's visually direct and mobile, while my tonal or painterly apprehension of form tends to look porridgy and worthy. PL17

**Commented [WC(12):** Another false binary? I mean, it's not a rule is it, but a feeling I had at the time, which I contradict elsewhere.

45. I was struck by the depiction of the white rippling cloth in the 'Butcher's Shop', over the figure carrying the scales who seems to me the most powerful figure in the painting, and over his fellow butchers, their aprons, and shirtsleeves. There seems to me a correspondence between cloth and flesh, the great haunches of meat sliding in linear shapes across the surface. The apron of the scales-bearer is also very linear in depiction. PL18

46. I was trying to make at once a painterly and a linear form, I think. PL18 see note 40.

**Commented [WC(13):** Resolution as a possibility. Maybe this is related to Finish? Also, are we looking at a false binary again?

47. They've accepted 'Charles In London', which is a very linear painting, so I don't need to pretend that I am anything other than I am. PL18 See note above – resolution linked to authenticity.

**Commented [WC(14):** Is resolution (Finish) linked to authenticity? Well yes!

48. So, I did, and in fact I made most of the outline in one go, without much revision, and then reinforced the line only, which has the effect perhaps of 'equalising' the line, taking out some of the inconsistencies that may provide interest, but it also allows the form a greater confidence. PL20

49. One big difference between the painting I did in the 90s and these paintings is the frankness of the outlines, which I have been using to start the paintings, drawing them out quickly but decisively and then going over the lines if I have to. In other words, a balance between linear and tonal, not either/or. PL25

**Commented [WC(15):** See note 46

50. It wasn't delicate drawing at all, and in fact some of the lines of composition have been established very deeply and then painted over with other forms. PL26

51. I spent a long time drawing the boy in the middle of the fresco and his friend, trying to understand the pictorial relationship between the 'father' and these two figures, and it never really became clear. The feet and the legs are just not quite in the right place. PL26

52. I started this painting yesterday. It's from a drawing, itself from a sketch that I made quickly in the British Pavilion.PL27

53. Or for me when I "let my hair down" I try to paint like I am drawing out some directions for someone or a diagram of some invention – it's done without thought to aesthetics. But it's hard! 'Cos you aren't giving directions. (Iain Nicholls) PL28

54. This pull between line and tone is becoming more and more intense. Line's surface quality, pushing the image up to the surface, closing the forms so that they read positively and clearly, against the way tone creates a box of light within which shapes can be hidden, reinforced, de-emphasised, moved, or slid around, and ambiguities are tolerable. Maybe there's also a sense that it is obvious when there's an ambiguity in the line but not in tone, so that the intention is not so clear.PL32

55. I had a great sense of the painting describing an alcove, a space cut back in the wall, when I saw it the first time. PL32

Commented [WC(16)]: See note 46

Commented [WC(17)]: Line on the surface, tone pushing back into it. See note 55

Commented [WC(18)]: anti-stratigraphic?

#### **iv. Chapter 6**

##### **Extract 1**

*PLAnalysis.DrawingLineToneSpace* note 32.

you don't have the information you need to get around. Having the information makes you a native - there is an exclusivity and a glamour implied by the possession of the information which enables you to navigate the environment. My impression of Will Self is that he has a lot of it.PL8.

23. *Drawing, improvisation and the performative* PL9

24. I made a charcoal drawing as a deliberate preparation or rehearsal for the oil painting, cutting a sheet of paper to the exact proportions of the canvas that I had earmarked for the painting, and I used this drawing to work out various things about the composition, before

Commented [WC(19)]: Improvisation



starting the painting. I loaded the paintbrush with the very saturated black paint and got to it.PL9.

25. At around this point I have abandoned tertiary colours in making the oil paintings, in favour of this primary palette, although I am still using the tertiary palette in what I call drawings, the work on paper, in about half the cases. This is done on extremely heavy paper - it's not much cheaper, so it's not expense that makes the two processes different, but scale and medium. PL9

26. The works on paper that led to it are certainly tonal. Maybe it needs a slower approach.PL10

27. I painted a three-quarter length portrait of Minna on it, entirely line drawn, it's really a drawing, I think. Now I will look at it until I think of what to do next. PL10

28. I have just gone to make tea, and while I was downstairs, I thought that I should do a charcoal drawing to 'fix' the form. But then I thought that I would have been finding other ways to make the form, taking the struggle away from its true site, which is the canvas. A bit like this activity of recording what I have done. PL10

29. Just thinking about a conversation with Joy Mower about Causey's 'Drawn to See', in which she talks about what information we are seeing or interpreting from the drawings he makes. The relevance to me/my work is that I am drawing (painting) information about the world in my head that I am drawing(!) out for the viewer to interpret, to see. PL11

30. I don't really understand why the outlines became more important than the colour, in the head as well as the tee-shirt. It does seem to me that the body is quite strongly implied in the painting, underneath the tee-shirt.PL12

31. A Bellini *Pieta* suggests a form and a space in which to develop the image - a frontal and quite simple figure emerging from or descending into a tomb, which is, essentially, a hole in the ground. I developed the idea in a few sketchbook drawings.

32. They both had yellow backgrounds, but I felt that the colour was too significant: it seemed to be saying too much, especially in the painting that I had actually used more colour in to describe the torso, so in order to bring back the simplicity I painted white over the yellow on that one. It now has the immediacy of a drawing. It looks like it could have been made with a sharpie.PL14

33. So, I did, and in fact I made most of the outline in one go, without much revision, and then reinforced the line only, which has the effect perhaps of 'equalising' the line, taking out

## Extract 2

*PLAnalysis.Process(small)* note 24.

23. It's quite a big composition. Whenever I have copied Mr. Oldham I have had difficulty sorting out the different figures, because they do not differ from each other as much as they appear to in scale.PL3.

24. There are other things; there's an accepted idea that one should paint the body under the clothes, which I suppose would help in making a convincing structure or form to the figure, but I wanted to see whether or how far I could ignore this, so as the greatcoat on the figure closest to us ('Kevin Stanley') evolved as a smudged grey and white ground shape, I decided to try to keep it like that as long as possible, a kind of blurry structure out of which his peevish head emerges.PL3

25. Outlined the female figure in '7 Year plan' and then altered her, destroying the outlines and redefining her - made her more tonal, but it was only after I had outlined her in thick black lines that I was able to. Something about making a definite statement at some point. The soldier figure is outlined though.

26. I was concerned to keep the 'collage' approach to form during this painting, to have each separate element as distinct as possible from the others in order to problematize the surface and the unity of the image itself by drawing attention to its facture, and to emphasize the assemblage element of the work, the sense of its coming together as a collection of parts.PL3

27. As with most paintings, there was a period of uncomfortable 'havering' while I gathered confidence - it's 150 x 100 cm and occupies a large part of the studio - and then I tried to 'scrub in' areas of tone, but it took a lot of time. The next move was to establish the figure on the surface and fill in the background. Why do it like that? Well, partly because that has worked quite well in the last few paintings. I made a lot of mid-grey paint and smeared it over everywhere that wasn't the figure or the foreground on which he is standing.PL3

28. ...a row placed against an indeterminate background, their feet on white canvas PL1

29. I have painted it very thinly in Italian Umber, it's a tertiary without a huge kick. There's a lot of canvas showing, so it can be altered without too much agony and 'unintentional' pentimenti. (Pentimenti is always unintentional, but that's only in theory). PL1

30. I thought, I could turn it round, make it landscape format. I could paint smaller figures, rather than bigger, which is always the tempting challenge. PL1

31. I painted a portrait of Danny Macnally last week, on quite a large scale, although on a smallish canvas. It's portrait format, perhaps a metre high. The portrait is head, shoulders and down to waist.PL1.

32. I came up with the idea of butting canvases against each other to make some larger paintings after the surgery thing PL1

33. At a certain point though, I used a very neutral grey paint – Michael Harding Neutral Grey – to paint the background. Instead of treating it ambiguously or passively, just to fill in blank space, which is the temptation with backgrounds, I used it as a means of

### Extract 3

Practice Log 20 15.4.19

The two painters with their rags upheld look a little as if they are waving hankies; the vague concept was the painting's-eye-view, with a rag held up to wipe away a mistake. This to reinforce by its comic failure to adequately represent it, the cloth of the painting, the linen support.

The boy drinking has a glass of red wine in one hand and a bottle of white, casually but provocatively held between his thighs in his other. It's a crude joke about the colour the liquid will have when it emerges, but it could also be blood (life) in one end, piss (waste, death) out the other. Or he could be drinking a glass of red wine before going on to white.

The woman emerged last. I had this tall, thin canvas and I thought 'I haven't painted a nude for ages.' Simply that. The words came fully formed in my head. I then thought about an exhibition that a lot of people I know were in and I wasn't, called 'The Nude' – I met the curator a few months afterwards, Dan Coombs, and he said, 'you should have been in that'. Much to my secret annoyance.

My next thought was how to fit her figure into the space, and then I was caught up in the struggle to make her convincing. I decided quite early on to avoid prurience by having her cover her private parts; this also meant that I could use her arms in an interesting way to articulate the composition, by their moving over the shape of the canvas.

Her hair gave me a headache. We saw an exhibition of Henry Moore's drawing at the Henry Moore Foundation in Hertfordshire on Saturday, and it occurred to me that Moore might 'distort' the female figure in his Classical Period Picasso way as a means of making them 'a-historical' – they are not betrayed into any specific time by their clothes, or so he hopes,





by their hairstyles, their clothes, their fashions. I think they probably are though –all wear skirts or dresses, all have long hair – but the ambition is there. It comes across most strongly in the more explicitly surreal paintings, making dark and/or dream-like spaces in which the figures stand or sit.

#### Extract 4

*PLAnalysis.Cloth note 30.*

30. I am intrigued by the idea of cloth as a kind of elemental surface, an original surface perhaps – I want to say an 'Ur'- surface. The thin-ness of textile and its capacity to carry light, the basic element of the language of painting, makes it a 'describer', and at the same time a 'coverer'. It covers things. It wraps 'things', like language wraps things. Cloth is used by painters to wrap things, so that, intent on the description of cloth over things, we accept the presence of the thing beneath the cloth.PL18

31. The butcher's shop is full of flesh, full of revealed depicted life, from the raw meat and skinned bones of the produce, through the half-covered butchers to the fully clothed customer, whose every part, save hands and face is covered, but also revealed – the cloth-bunched codpiece hides and reveals at the same time. PL18

32. I began my painting, thinking about cloth; the way the canvas 'takes' the paint, and the way cloth supports the image.PL18

33. I keep thinking about cloth with these paintings, the cloth of the linen support, the depiction of cloth, the cloth that contains and describes the human presence, the cloth that the painter uses to wipe and correct.PL18

Commented [WC(20)]: four senses of the term

34. The two painters with their rags upheld look a little as if they are waving hankies; the vague concept was the painting's-eye-view, with a rag held up to wipe away a mistake. This to reinforce by its comic failure to adequately represent it, the cloth of the painting, the linen support. PL20

35. I have described how the first one emerged above, but I think that really what I was doing was examining approaching painting a human form 'without cloth', without the curtain that conceals and suggests at the same time. PL20

**Commented [WC(21)]:** IS this possible, then, in the terms I have set out? See note 37

36. Without cloth, the human figure is revealed as more marks on cloth. There is no curtain to suggest anything. PL20

37. For example, the GB Tiepolo figure seems at first sight to be holding a folded piece of cloth in the hand furthest from us, and you can trace the cloth to around his feet, so that he appears to be carrying a great swath of white linen. But when you look again you see that his hand is hidden from us, and in fact the cloth is the head-covering of a woman, who may be wearing spectacles. I am not sure how well she was realized in the first place or how she has fared over the years or in the transfer of the work from the Tiepolo villa to the Ca' Rezzonico. PL25a

**Commented [WC(22)]:** Cloth as ambiguity

38. ...the use of clothing and textiles as analogies of conditions in the material world PL26

39. These are two paintings called 'The Painter's Cloth'. I have called them that because I want an ambiguity – it focuses on the idea that a painter might have a cloth to paint with, but I also paint on a cloth, and therefore in a sense I might even *be* cloth. The painter *is* cloth. PL29

#### Extract 5

*PLAnalysis.Cloth note 31.*

30. I am intrigued by the idea of cloth as a kind of elemental surface, an original surface perhaps – I want to say an 'Ur'- surface. The thin-ness of textile and its capacity to carry light, the basic element of the language of painting, makes it a 'describer', and at the same time a 'coverer'. It covers things. It wraps 'things', like language wraps things. Cloth is used by painters to wrap things, so that, intent on the description of cloth over things, we accept the presence of the thing beneath the cloth. PL18

31. The butcher's shop is full of flesh, full of revealed depicted life, from the raw meat and skinned bones of the produce, through the half-covered butchers to the fully clothed customer, whose every part, save hands and face is covered, but also revealed – the cloth-bunched codpiece hides and reveals at the same time. PL18

32. I began my painting, thinking about cloth; the way the canvas 'takes' the paint, and the way cloth supports the image. PL18

33. I keep thinking about cloth with these paintings, the cloth of the linen support, the depiction of cloth, the cloth that contains and describes the human presence, the cloth that the painter uses to wipe and correct. PL18

**Commented [WC(23)]:** four senses of the term

34. The two painters with their rags upheld look a little as if they are waving hankies; the vague concept was the painting's-eye-view, with a rag held up to wipe away a mistake. This to reinforce by its comic failure to adequately represent it, the cloth of the painting, the linen support. PL20

35. I have described how the first one emerged above, but I think that really what I was doing was examining approaching painting a human form 'without cloth', without the curtain that conceals and suggests at the same time. PL20

**Commented [WC(24)]:** IS this possible, then, in the terms I have set out? See note 37

36. Without cloth, the human figure is revealed as more marks on cloth. There is no curtain to suggest anything. PL20

37. For example, the GB Tiepolo figure seems at first sight to be holding a folded piece of cloth in the hand furthest from us, and you can trace the cloth to around his feet, so that he appears to be carrying a great swath of white linen. But when you look again you see that his hand is hidden from us, and in fact the cloth is the head-covering of a woman, who may be wearing spectacles. I am not sure how well she was realized in the first place or how she has fared over the years or in the transfer of the work from the Tiepolo villa to the Ca' Rezzonico. PL25a

**Commented [WC(25)]:** Cloth as ambiguity

38. ...the use of clothing and textiles as analogies of conditions in the material world PL26

39. These are two paintings called 'The Painter's Cloth'. I have called them that because I want an ambiguity – it focuses on the idea that a painter might have a cloth to paint with, but

I also paint on a cloth, and therefore in a sense I might even *be* cloth. The painter *is* cloth.  
PL29

### Extract 6

*Practice Log 16 20.2.19 p4*



This relates to the idea of puppetry and manikins in depiction of humans, characters. The life that I sense 'behind' the painting *Intrigue* by James Ensor (1911), for example, comes from the space between the representation of the eyes and the representation of the bodies and clothes of the personages we see arrayed in front of us. The confusion and ambiguities involved in the depiction of cloth, mask, body-part, puppet, and prop overloads my capacity to register different values, and the material descends into an undifferentiated mass. They could be people, or they could be puppets. What holds my gaze as 'real', as 'living' are the glances back at me; they're not all mimetically convincing, and some look more like holes or sewn on patches, others like flat schema, but enough have the appearance of my experience of seeing eyes in the real world, or eyes behind masks in the real world, to give me an uncanny feeling of being regarded from behind a surface.

It is 'stuff' that we pile up between our own selves and others', the Other. I know very well that the whole of the painting is painted, there's no one behind it looking at me, but in the space between the two 'dialects' of form, one making the 'stuff', the other making the eyes, there is a slippage of my cognition or apprehension – perhaps while I am busy saying 'that's not real, that's just paint' to myself about the 'stuff', my brain just accepts the reality of what it registers as eyes.





### Extract 7

*PLAnalysis.Cloth note 24.*

Atlantis as an off-cut. I was rather taken aback by it when I stretched it on a different stretcher, how thin it was and how much size and primer I had to use. There are pinholes in it, where the interstices of the fabric have not been filled, so that if you hold the other painting I did on this stuff up to the light, it would shine through.PL10

21. ...as neutral as possible in what they say with clothes or posture or surroundings about the social status, condition, or position of the subject PL14

22. (Pontormo's) Joseph cycle: the figures are made up of a kind of neutral or putty-coloured face and hands, sometimes legs, and then larger masses cloth of primary or certainly brightly coloured secondaries, in extraordinary folds and gatherings, making indeterminate ambiguous shapes. PL16

23. In the portrait of Odoni the collector of antiquities, the body is depicted as a great swollen stuffed cloth doll, with skin-coloured extremities, the head a circle of hair and beard around a pale face. This cloth/human hybrid is echoed in Hadrian's head, the sculpture half pushed out from under the table, its green cloth falling round the stone curls. PL16

24. (Of Melone) The cloth here acts differently, it's like a collage, huge areas of bright colours and luminous shadows, stuck on an otherwise dull coloured world.PL16

**Commented [WC(26)]:** cf earlier refs to bonelessness, doll-like forms etc

**Commented [WC(27)]:** cf earlier refs to cloth as layers in the Parrhasios sense.

25. The life that I sense 'behind' the painting *Intrigue* by James Ensor (1911), for example, comes from the space between the representation of the eyes and the representation of the bodies and clothes of the personages we see arrayed in front of us. The confusion and ambiguities involved in the depiction of cloth, mask, body-part, puppet, and prop overloads my capacity to register different values, and the material descends into an undifferentiated mass. They could be people, or they could be puppets. What holds my gaze as 'real', as 'living' are the glances back at me; they're not all mimetically convincing, and some look more like holes or sewn on patches, others like flat schema, but enough have the appearance of my experience of seeing eyes in the real world, or eyes behind masks in the real world, to give me an uncanny feeling of being regarded from behind a surface. PL16

26. In the Melone painting, then, there may be a similar action; there are two dialects at play, the highly coloured cloth and the dull coloured rest of the space, and my eyes track from 'cloth' to 'space', experiencing a jarring sensation each time they cross the boundaries, each time feeling relief or excitement at the different reality that they now inhabit. PL16

27. [The Titian makes] another play with cloth again. Close examination of the surface of the painting reveals the heaviness of the texture of the cloth on which it is painted, stained brown, the clots of paint sitting on and dragged over the warp of the linen, the forms smeared over the grid of the thick strands. The image emerges out of this mess, and is barely discernible, a shadowy space that seems to coalesce and then fade. PL16

Commented [WC(28)]: This is linked with Process

28. There is a painter's cliché about the need to paint clothed figures as if you could see the flesh beneath. I would argue that all these paintings do the opposite of this, in order to make the images more real, or more 'there'. PL16

29. There seems to me a correspondence between cloth and flesh, the great haunches of meat sliding in linear shapes across the surface. PL18

#### Extract 8

*Practice Log 1 10.3.17 p7*



Alex Paints Danny 1977 120x 240 cm, oil on linen

I can't remember much of the process of this painting. It's quite disturbing, really, how easily it disappears. In a way, the essential structure of the painting was present right at the beginning, in fact it didn't change much at all during the process. It became sharper and more focused, I suppose, although even in that I am not being precise, because the hands, the body and the head are deliberately very different and sharpness wasn't what I wanted. The truth is I think I knew exactly how the painting would look as soon as I started it, except I wanted a lighter background.

#### 4.4.17

I painted a portrait of Danny Macnally last week, on quite a large scale, although on a smallish canvas. It's portrait format, perhaps a metre high. The portrait is head, shoulders and down to waist. Yesterday I went into the studio and saw a larger canvas lying near this portrait, which was leaning against the plans chest. I wondered how the larger canvas would look, abutted against the lower edge of the portrait, and if I could paint Danny's lower half on it convincingly.

It was quite a violent move, to break the portrait convention and twist it into a different painting. It reminded me of the idea Peter Vuykavic put forward, of Traumatic Reiteration, that a tree will fall as if dead in the forest, but because it is actually still alive, a new shape will emerge, a different iteration of the tree, two more trunks growing vertically out of the now horizontal old trunk. This seems more apposite than the Deleuze image of the rhizome; the

process, while traumatic and transformative, has not gone in an unpredictable or random direction. It has reiterated itself in a new way but the process is still of itself, rather than flowing away to become something else.

8.4.17

The painting I discuss immediately above is called 'Dan and The King'. I began the first part, the portrait of the younger Danny (Danny was a cool name in the early eighties, the Marco or Matt of those times) after my 'Turps Surgery', in which I received the rather pedestrian but probably quite apt advice to make larger paintings. I had painted two more already; 'Alex Koolman Painting' a slightly more than life size profile depiction of Koolman from thighs upwards, in the position he

#### **Commentary on PLs 16 and 18**

27.4.22

#### Commentary on PLs 18 and 16

Process is described in a way that draws attention to its *ad hoc* nature; PL16 opens with a description, in actual time, of realising I have no photographs of work I'd just painted over and then finding one.

I state that **'I can't really remember' what my intentions were in painting** over the works illustrated, although I also state that I would know what I wanted to do if I stood in front of the painting. This suggests that the process is available to me in a way that the product is not. In process intention is clear, or perhaps clearer.

Another way of looking at it might be that the *personae* of painter and of viewer, or thinker about the painting, are separate things.

Even though **I don't admit to knowing what I was about in painting the two large figures in red dresses**, I draw a pretty explicit connection in PL 16 between the studio and looking at paintings which depict human presence using cloth. *Formally speaking, the paintings were both led by the enormous landslide of Cadmium Deep Red that I applied by palette knife. I tried to avoid drawing the dress shape out and then filling in, but to some*

*extent that's what I did. Then the rest of the painting was carved and wiped out of this mess.'* I then go on to describe looking at paintings in the National Gallery, the day before starting these paintings, and writing notes about how the cloth depicted in them also depicted human presence.

Later in the PL I note that **my attention span 'is not very long, and that I respond in the studio to every passing fad and impulse. Every time I see an exhibition, every time I see a TV programme (I saw a Sidney Nolan documentary the other night) I go into the studio and take another direction.'**

The sense that the **work progresses in a state without much systematic self-awareness** is evident in this PL. In the following section I say *'it's as if I don't want to talk about them, as if words might obstruct their development'* and then go on to detail a painting I made in the early 1990s that took me by surprise – a figure appeared without my willing or planning it, as if from the end of my brush.

It is further evident that the two large 'red-dress' paintings were developments of two smaller ones, mentioned in the text (*'...painted two little paintings over the androgyne studies, as detailed in 12.2.19'*) These two smaller paintings were themselves painted over two extant paintings. The extant paintings had been made in January/February 2018. I had written about them in PL5, in relation to the Christmas card that I had made that year, which was particularly saleable, I thought. I didn't mention this in the PL but hid behind observations about colour use and fine detail instead. Smaller paintings (I had been making large paintings for a while), fine detail, rich colour, a lot of red are all factors that I thought might make a painting more saleable. Bearing in mind the annual dearth of ready cash in January/February, it is interesting that *'I set off painting what I think are more charming paintings for the New English Art Club Annual Open this year'* (PL17) at the same time of year, the next year. But **I don't mention that I am painting over work made with a similar aim in mind in PL17, nor do I think that it actually occurred to me that I was doing so at the time.**

There is **a similar sense of a lack of systematic control over the work and my interests** evident in PL18. It begins with a description of my encounter with *'the Carracci painting 'The Butcher's Shop' (1583), which I saw for a few minutes at Christ Church College's Picture Gallery, last year. The gallery was closing, and I asked the attendant which painting I should not miss in the gallery, and she sent me to this.'* **The painting came as a complete**

**surprise to me;** subsequent research revealed that I had seen and enjoyed Annibale Carracci's work before, without really acknowledging it, and that the Carraccii had had an indirect influence on my work through Reynolds' interest in them in his *Discourses* – the idea of the academy life drawing has a significant relationship with the Carraccii, for example.

Specifically, the encounter with the painting leads to a focus on the question of cloth in depicting human presence in my own work, and to the research detailed in PL16, but it becomes significant in my understanding of my own work generally, but I want to stress the random quality of this encounter. Also, that I had seen his work before; his 1604 self-portrait is described in PL1 as a work I came across on Facebook.

PL18 expands on the idea of covering and depiction. Covering or clothing as verbs are what happens in depiction. Canvas or paper are covered with paint or charcoal to depict, an idea is clothed in visual form. In PL16 I discuss clothing as a wrapping form which is painted in order to describe what is beneath it, but in the Carracci painting the thing underneath is depicted in stages of unwrapping and deconstruction, from clothing to skin to carcase to joints of meat.

The painting I begin with addresses this question by using two formal means of depiction in one painting, a linear one which describes the apron, taking up much of the surface of the tall, thin rectangle, and a tonal one to describe the artist wearing the apron and the space around him. I point out the resemblance to an earlier painting 'Steve and Leon', with a similar shape, which depicts a large white canvas that echoes the shape of the painting itself, held at a slant but flat to the picture plane, with the hands, feet and head of the person carrying it visible at its edges.

Later in PL18 I describe the process of painting over two 'finished' paintings – one of them had actually been exhibited, I think. '*I decided to 're-purpose' the paintings – rather than re-stretch the canvas and start anew, to change the images by adding and subtracting, but substantially keeping the original painting.*' The re-purposing was a process of covering over certain areas of the painting. I changed the orientation of one painting so that it became a tall thin image instead of a landscape. In the other I replaced the central image, a large goldfish bowl, with a young man, eating a bag of Haribo goldfish. Again, '***I can't really remember the intention of*** the painting of the goldfish bowl, although to some extent the intention of the new painting is added to the intentions of the old. '*The goldfish are a reference to Matisse, I expect*' is not a definite enough statement to build on.

In the last paragraph of PL18 I say of the tall thin re-purposed painting that '*I haven't much to say about this painting yet*', which implies that the process of making sense of a painting might take place after or away from the activity of making it. I address this more directly later in PL18 in notes made on titles.

### Conclusion

Saying 'I can't really remember' about the intentions involved in making a painting may not be an authentic statement. It may be that I don't want to remember or that the ideas are too confused or complex at the time of writing. It might also be that the two processes, the activity of painting and the developing of a narrative about the meaning of the painting, are too far apart for me to be able to articulate the latter immediately after making the work.

However, the picture that these PLs paint is of an artist whose conscious focus is almost entirely subsumed by an unconscious, unarticulated and ever-changing set of interests that lead the studio practice without volition. Intention is not sustained over a series of paintings, but rather shifts and changes as different things enter the arena. The narrative that is built up about the meaning of the paintings is often *post hoc* although a general idea of a theme is evident in the shift from one painting to another, as demonstrated by the reference to Matisse compared to the examination of covering and cloth. Covering and cloth being a more sustained theme.

Ingold – Cultural Improvisation?

Deleuze

What about the Graw book? Could this be a way of having a bash at the medium of success, or at alienating ideas like Merlin's?

### Coda 19.9.22

It occurred to me today that the paintings in water-based media that I did in the winter of 2020, the *Millennium Hotel* series, have prefigured, in their rapid application and their mixed means of expression, linear and tone/colour, the paintings I made this winter, watercolour paints heavily applied using animal motifs – this horse is an example. I am not sure of the exact chronology, but there is a similar palette and a similar level of finish. They are not paintings made after careful preparation and built up in layers, but rather sloshed on and attacked.



*Large Horse* 39 x 29cm watercolour, gouache 2022



*Larry, Alexandr and Rick At The Millennium Hotel* 52 x 72cm, watercolour, gouache, acrylic 2020

This might indicate a cyclical pattern of making work in the studio practice. I think I get tired of things easily; it becomes tedious building layers up slowly and I just want to make images without thinking, without reflection.



## v. Chapter 7

### Extract 1

#### *PLAnalysis.Self-conscious Note 4*

1. The problem of ekphrasis is in the shift in the nature of the activity. The process of physical making, up to a resolution if not *the* resolution, is neither linear nor particularly lateral, and seems to exist in different temporal stages simultaneously. Ideas, changes of direction and things that occur seem to happen sometimes after the fact or event - I might make a form in paint, recognise it somehow and then see a connection with something else, which might determine the next thing but then that itself might change how I see the first form.PL13

2. It is also difficult describing a 'thoughtless' activity, in that the brush moves one way and I follow it, rather than my consciously determining each move, but in order to claim the activity, the language I feel compelled to use is one of determination - I did this, then I did that, this suggested that so I did the other. The activity itself is resistant to this description. I might spend pages over the description of the process of painting an image, then the next day in the studio my first impulse is to scrape the image all off and render the writing pointless.PL13

3. Is my ekphrasis too dependent on describing stages instead of the flowing activity, the jump from one resolution to another, to explain the actual process? Like taking a breath and diving - I can't really remember the process of the dive, from the bit where my feet leave the board to the bit where I hit the water? PL13

4. This process of recall, verbalising the process of making, is absolutely antithetical to the work itself. While making is an improvisational process, full of anxiety and hope, recalling it is the most tedious business. I am desperate to make short cuts, to circumvent the description in order to get back to the process or to find something more sensually pleasing. This is not pleasing. It feels painful and constricting. What happened next? And next? And next? like a police procedural drama

As if it were a crime I am describing, I try to justify myself and I gloss over things. For example, I am not sure when I actually did begin or at least re-commence this painting; was it two days ago, or did I do it last week and leave it over the weekend? I say it was last Friday but I can't be sure, and I certainly can't remember every mark and swirl of paint

How can I deal with this? I am anxious that my record of my work contains something of use that it is rigorous enough to elucidate my practice, but it is a tedious and unreliable process. I can't seem to make it a systematic record and to some extent the record actually threatens the work itself. PL13

5. I don't know that this is a particularly fruitful line of thought. Oil painting and acrylic painting *are* different things, which lead to different outcomes, but similar enough not to escape the same category, as paintings. PL13

6. As I look at these paintings, I wonder what on earth was happening, what was I thinking about, and I can't really remember. PL16

7. If I go next door to the studio, I will know instantly and will probably feel very confident about altering at least one of them, or perhaps starting another painting, but the thing is, as I look at these four images, I wonder why I changed the one on the top right at all? PL16

8. I haven't even mentioned these. I did them the week before last, and then went on to the two small blondes. They're still there, in my mind and in the studio, but it's as if I don't want to talk about them, as if words might obstruct their development. PL16

**Commented [WC(29)]:** There's something here about distance from the activity, isn't there? Also I was thinking yesterday about how unplanned my painting practice is. I'm like Homer Simpson in 'Chocolate World', anything to do with paint distracts me.

## Extract 2

### *PLAnalysis. Self-conscious Note 7*

1. The problem of ekphrasis is in the shift in the nature of the activity. The process of physical making, up to a resolution if not *the* resolution, is neither linear nor particularly lateral, and seems to exist in different temporal stages simultaneously. Ideas, changes of direction and things that occur seem to happen sometimes after the fact or event - I might make a form in paint, recognise it somehow and then see a connection with something else, which might determine the next thing but then that itself might change how I see the first form. PL13

2. It is also difficult describing a 'thoughtless' activity, in that the brush moves one way and I follow it, rather than my consciously determining each move, but in order to claim the activity, the language I feel compelled to use is one of determination - I did this, then I did that, this suggested that so I did the other. The activity itself is resistant to this description. I might spend pages over the description of the process of painting an image, then the next

day in the studio my first impulse is to scrape the image all off and render the writing pointless.PL13

3. Is my ekphrasis too dependent on describing stages instead of the flowing activity, the jump from one resolution to another, to explain the actual process? Like taking a breath and diving - I can't really remember the process of the dive, from the bit where my feet leave the board to the bit where I hit the water? PL13

4. This process of recall, verbalising the process of making, is absolutely antithetical to the work itself. While making is an improvisational process, full of anxiety and hope, recalling it is the most tedious business. I am desperate to make short cuts, to circumvent the description in order to get back to the process or to find something more sensually pleasing. This is not pleasing. It feels painful and constricting. What happened next? And next? And next? like a police procedural drama.

As if it were a crime I am describing, I try to justify myself and I gloss over things. For example, I am not sure when I actually did begin or at least re-commence this painting; was it two days ago, or did I do it last week and leave it over the weekend? I say it was last Friday but I can't be sure, and I certainly can't remember every mark and swirl of paint. How can I deal with this? I am anxious that my record of my work contains something of use, that it is rigorous enough to elucidate my practice, but it is a tedious and unreliable process. I can't seem to make it a systematic record and to some extent the record actually threatens the work itself. PL13

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**Commented [WC(30)]:** There's something here about distance from the activity, isn't there? Also I was thinking yesterday about how unplanned my painting practice is. I'm like Homer Simpson in 'Chocolate World', anything to do with paint distracts me.

8. I haven't even mentioned these. I did them the week before last, and then went on to the two small blondes. They're still there, in my mind and in the studio, but it's as if I don't want to talk about them, as if words might obstruct their development.PL16

### Extract 3

*PracticeLog54.8.9.22 p3*

stretchers so I couldn't use them. I had some middle-sized canvases and a couple of small ones already, and I kept up the pressure on the materials shop while I painted on them, but they just kept saying they'd have them next week, and then next week. In the end they never came, or certainly not in time. I ended up painting on the middle-sized ones.

It's interesting that it's only now that I realize that the middle-sized paintings I did, 80 x 100 cm, are a lot like the *Artist Support Pledge* paintings. Single, still forms in space, like *Standing Bear*, or two figures, like *Dog and Monkey* and *Black Dog/White Dog*. They weren't like *Alan*, *Gryff and John*, for example, or the *Selection Panel* paintings, which are more complicated. I was going to say far more complicated, but I don't think that's correct. These latter have more stuff going on, more narrative I suppose. Will Self liked the *Standing Bear* best. That's the one he stood in front of for the photograph of us that Fred took for social media. Marcus Cope, another younger artist for whom I have enormous respect, liked *Alan*, *Gryff and John* best. Marcus' paintings have a high narrative content, and they're very complex, involving shifts in spatial construction and in how they represent things. But then Will is a writer and his whole existence is narrative.

(He was hilarious, coming through the unlocked gate at Damien Hirst's smaller gallery. Like an outraged parrot fixing the poor woman in charge of the place with an accusing stare. 'Why was it locked? Is someone going to steal the paintings?' he demanded. I got up and wanted to say 'put her down, Will, she's just doing her job' but he was funny and kind - he didn't push it at all.)

I don't know that 'complicated' is the right word. Maybe it is. Maybe 'complicated' expresses the difference between them quite well. The surface of the *Selection Panel* painting is literally more complicated than the *Standing Bear* painting in the sense that there are more things depicted. I don't know whether the ideas or the feelings expressed are more complex. I literally don't know.

How can I not know what I am expressing in my own painting? Because other people's ideas and feelings about them extend my own ideas and feelings. The fact that Will liked my

*Standing Bear* painting alters how I think and feel about it, and Marcus's reaction to *Alan, Gryff and John* makes me think about what I was hoping to do in it in a different way.

Funnily enough, this idea has already been made pretty explicit for me: a few years ago, I was painting still life paintings in order to avoid any narrative. My friend Iain Nicholls was visiting, and he wandered into my studio and gave me an impromptu and uncalled-for tutorial. He wasn't brutal or anything, but he wasn't particularly complimentary, talking about a specific still life. **The next day I painted a monkey into the still life, which became a disrupted and no longer organized composition. It was only later that I realized that I had depicted the experience of having someone come into a settled situation and chuck stuff about. Iain was the monkey who was rearranging the still life. My painting was changed by someone else's ideas.** I did some more monkeys, but I eventually felt too confined by the content, which was a domestic space made by a tablecloth and some fruits, and one or two monkeys. That was more or less all.

Those monkeys were great though and they sold. The point is that they wouldn't have arrived without the stimulus of Iain's critique. Painting is a social act. Except that this contradicts the idea that the artist is someone who creates from a kind of 'hyper-individuality', is a special and isolated agent of his or her own creativity. I have ideas, for sure. I don't know whether they are original. I put them through the filter of my painting, or the ideas emerge while I am painting, and are then bashed around while the painting goes on, but when other people see them, or even before other people see them, when I just think about other people seeing them, they are altered.

This is a description of the painting as an intersubjective object. When I say, 'when other people see them, or even before other people see them, when I just think about other people seeing them, they are altered', I am describing intersubjectivity. 'When I just think about other people seeing them' describes a situation in which my own subjective position alters in relation to the painting. I imagine what another person might think about the painting and how I think about the painting changes. The painting is not altered. My position in relation to it is. I may then alter it.

#### **Extract 4**

*Practice Log 7 20.4.18 p2*

It's ages since I properly logged my studio activity. This is because the situation at CCCU has taken a difficult turn, and I haven't been sure of my position. Without teaching, I cannot afford to carry on the PhD and must, anyway, re-focus my attention to more immediately remunerative work. I have been making watercolour paintings that I think will stand more of a chance of selling, and, although 'commercial' work (my Christmas card of 2017) did send me in a different direction, this strand of work has remained intact. I have just not wanted to write about it.



*Camilla Kendall* 50 x 35 cm, oil on paper

I had prepared a number of sheets of heavy drawing paper with rabbit skin glue, for oil painting, and had made three paintings of 'Andro', but starting this one I decided to make a portrait as if I were looking at someone. Continuing my 'direct' theme, rather than make a tonal 'cloud' in which to discover and refine the form as one, I tried to paint each part of the figure as it emerged, the forehead, the eyes, the nose, across to the hair, using the 'neutral' green as a background but only to establish the edge of the form, not as an overall background. I did not make a loose form first but made the whole form as I went along. In this I kept the work of Alice Neel at the forefront of my mind.



Alice Neel, *Portrait of Donald Goss* 1968 152 x 102

In my view much of Neel's work has a strong sense of the relationship between painter and sitter. They are highly informal, so there's no feeling of a 'posed' or considered view, but because of the furniture, the poses, the clothes and above all the frank gaze of the sitter at the artist, a relationship.

#### Extract 5

Practice Log 10 8.10.18 p4

*Camilla and Minna* is a resolution of sorts to the state it was in at the beginning, and I like it, or rather, I feel like I have just stopped, breathless, on the edge of a cliff with it, and any more work will turn it into a ghastly mess. It is a game of second-guessing or suicide chess, I don't want to make marks or moves that look contrived or the product of a plan, but I need a plan. It's the opposite of *Minna Standing*; it relies to a large extent on its graphic quality, rather than colour, but it's forceful and rapid and perhaps thoughtless.

Is it thoughtless? Instinctual, perhaps. Did it need to be so rapid? I *did* sort of lose it, in the sense that I lost the clarity that I sought when I started, and I felt that I had to resolve it in this 'expressive' fashion. I was desperate. Perhaps the rapidity prevents the kind of bravura or illustration-in-a-bad-way that I am trying to avoid. Why am I trying to avoid it, though? Why could I not paint this one like I painted 'Andro'? I still can, of course.

What if there are just some paintings that need a longer go than others, or demand a tonal approach rather than a graphic? Maybe this is one of them. The works on paper that led to it are certainly tonal. Maybe it needs a slower approach.

I will look over the preparatory paintings again and see if they present any ideas. The colours are not primary, for example, as the *Minna and Joe* paintings are. Is there something about my painting two female figures as opposed to a male and a female? *Charles and Joe Skeaping*, for example, resolved itself really well as a primary palette/graphic painting. Actually, the two Camilla paintings were also primary paintings so that's not the case.

*In 2008, Charles Williams accidentally recorded a conversation with his friend the artist Joe Skeaping, whose later suicide caused a brief media sensation in the early part of 2009. In the conversation, Skeaping appeared to be confessing to the murder of his partner, Camilla Kendall, who had up till then been thought to have slipped on a cliff top walk near Fishguard in Pembrokeshire and fallen to her death, in 2001. Skeaping's elliptical confession was undiscovered on Williams' phone until quite recently; the police, after being apprised of the content of the recording, have decided that as both parties are now dead and their daughter has now achieved majority no action should be taken, but Williams has been left to make his own sense of the situation, which he has with this group of paintings.*

1.11.18



Extract 6



*Second stage*

This represented a major change for me. My view of painting is that the means, the process, and the result must mesh; I paint on heavy linen, using oil paint, because the process of painting I use is one of many revisions, and is essentially tone/colour. The process is one of discovery and each painting relates only to itself, is sufficient to itself.

I decided that the most direct way of painting this picture, of realising the image which I had planned out, was graphically, rather than tonally. That if I painted it tonally it would be 'knitting', using the process of painting as a pleasant pastime. No risk, just gradually building up the forms. I knew how to do it.

The thing is, I don't really know how to make a graphic image, especially when I don't exactly know what the image is. So, the activity takes on a risky, performative aspect. I really don't know what's going to happen. I can take cues from studies but that's all.

**Extract from earlier:**

*The question is whether or not I am secretly confident of success when I 'take risks'; after all what is the risk in painting a picture? I am not going to die if I don't get it right. The only authentic answer I have is that it feels risky, that I get short of breath, that adrenalin runs, and that when the painting gets to the point where I know I have made sense of the forms I feel an endorphin rush similar to the feeling I might have after physical exertion. The next painting is usually started in a nostalgic attempt to regain that feeling.*

There isn't much risk in this assembling of tonal form; I know I can do it. In a way, I could say that I have been *trained* to do it, although that removes my agency. I wasn't trained. I was given various options to follow, and I followed that one.

But I know I can realise form in that particular way. The risk or originality or 'me' must therefore be more in not knowing what the image is going to look like when it's finished, but this begs questions about when a work is finished, and about how much or little I actually admit to knowing. The painting 'The Chairman At The Battle Of Whitstable, 1952' for example, was already well-realised in my mind and in studies before I started painting it.

The risk might be in whether anything's new or different, but it is always going to succeed on some level, will always fulfil the criteria of making a convincing form. These heavy outlines are risky because there is no hiding.

(Leonard McComb once used the expression 'hiding in tone' to refer to my drawing, and I have bashed my head against it ever since; it's not hiding, it's discovering gradually. But perhaps he's right, and I need to 'discover' more immediately.)

Having made this version, I then went away to think. The black paint is heavily saturated – I add raw black pigment and some solvent to an already strong colour. I do this to exaggerate the graphic quality and each move or stage produces a slippery layer of black paint that is hard to fight against, remove or paint over. This means that I cannot act in a provisional or 'sketchy' manner, I have to make my mind up and do it.

In fact, the drawing and the methodology resembled the small sketches I make in my sketchbook in the way the form was realised.

## **vi. Chapter 8**

### **Extract 1**

*Practice Log 1 10.3.17 p1*

#### **10.3.17**

I woke thinking about a painting that I have started, of two figures. It is a portrait format painting, of Danny McNally and the Old Che Man. When I started it, I was thinking about the row of men I'd painted, like the still life work I did last year, a row placed against an indeterminate background, their feet on white canvas, casting shadows. Victor Willing answered Paula Rego's question 'how do you make things look as if they're standing on a surface?' by saying 'paint their shadows'. They are like Goya's Royal Family, too, a row of undistinguished people, looking out at you if they feel like it, not if something else catches their eyes.



I thought 'I don't like it, it seems indeterminate, unintended', because what I'd done is I'd thought I'd like to paint another just like these, what should I do? Maybe change the format? In fact, I had painted a surrealist object next to Danny, and then changed it into Old Che Man, because it had seemed a bit forced.

So, then I thought I can change this painting, it doesn't need to stay like that. I have painted it very thinly in Italian Umber, it's a tertiary without a huge kick. There's a lot of canvas showing, so it can be altered without too much agony and 'unintentional' pentimenti. (Pentimenti is always unintentional, but that's only in theory).



**Extract 2**

*PracticeLog35.25.4.20 p2*

everything clear, and it was only when I began to feel uncomfortable and changed it, yesterday, that I remembered my experience with *Some New World 2*, when I realised that form did not need to be defined sharply at all, you can rely on light to do that.

Evening. I painted more on two other versions of this image, one tall and thin, with a huge china tiger and one more of a copy of the Carracci painting, on heavy textured linen. **It is strange how the image resolves itself, the oddness of it. In my mind I have an idea about how to resolve it, how I will make it a box of light and just add the colour in loose shaped blocks, in reality I try to make the shapes legible, connect them the rest of the form, outline and so on, but it is kind of unnecessary.** I like the smaller scale painting. The larger one I am unsure of.

I am enjoying the use of rich colour, at the moment the rich turquoise in particular, which I am setting up with a faint magenta. Don't want too much but there's enough to make the paint operate as colour rather than shape. It's so hard to not force the shapes out, to carve them into firm existence, which deadens them, loses the space, loses the colour. If the colour makes the shape the painting seems to have more space and life. I'm going on like this because I am a bit frustrated with myself. I only succeed by default - I try to paint the shape over and over and then suddenly realise that I don't need to, the shape is already there, and then I go on to another part of the painting and do it again, go through the same process.

Maybe I should not have the radio on, maybe that would make me concentrate more. I don't think so, I would just think about something else.

I tried to sell a little painting I did of two dogs on this artist support pledge Instagram thing - I sold one last week about half an hour after I put it up and I thought why not do another? Not a sausage. But I have sold very well in the last couple of weeks, through the Social Media in one way or another, so I feel okay about it. Interesting how I can't predict or plan or control sales.

The last few paintings I've made have been extremely tonal in the sense that they are more or less the opposite in approach from the linear ones. The brushed lines with which I made form in those paintings and drawings were definite and positive *even though* I often didn't know how the image would resolve. I might for example set out to paint Joe Skipping in his final days, and know the pose, the way he'd look out at the viewer, perhaps even stuff like

what he'd wear, but then I'd let the brush find its way, almost, making snap decisions as I made the work – the edge of the nose like this, the neck like that.

These on the other hand are more like the drawings I did in Venice, slow accretion of tone built up until I became clear about what it is I am painting, who the character might be. Then I have to resist the temptation to fix the character by using lines to define the edges of forms, to make it sharper, to reduce the ambiguities. In *Painter, Parka and Panter* I made a tiny image and that seemed to help in this ambiguity. Sometimes a blob seems to suggest much more than carefully realised form, I like it, it seems more open.

This morning I was thinking about Christopher Gilvan Cartwright's paintings, which I like very much, and thinking that, like the large Auerbach Underground Station paintings that I also liked they were paintings that allowed an ambiguity all over the surface. A blob up at the top, a blob in the middle. The whole surface works, without hierarchy. I was thinking, how can I make paintings like that, but just the process of writing this clarifies that question: I'm too interested in character to want to make paintings about landscape or space.

There is something else about these tonal paintings. I think I'm doing it because I had a tonal painting called *Some Men* over the piano for ages and I kept looking at it, trying to work...

### **Interview with Phil King**

Phil King (P) and Charles Williams (C)

This is the record of a Facebook Messenger conversation over nearly a month.

25.7.19 - 22.8.19

C. I have a number of questions. Can we start with your personal history, so I can establish context?

P. I went the Bath Academy of Art from 84 to 87. Then did the Goldsmiths MA from 1991-3

C. Who was that painter you liked that taught at Bath?

P. It was a part-time MA and I had studio in my flat then a studio out in Stratford. My tutor Peter Kinley was the guy at Bath. I also had Michael Simpson at Bath too. A funny thing was I had the artist Ed Whitaker as a tutor at Bath. Then he was on my MA course at Goldsmiths as a student with me.

C. Were Simpson and Kinley both formative? I mean, in their content? Do their influences stay with you?

P. I look at Peter Kinley's paintings all the time and think about him a lot too. He died in 1988 unfortunately. In 1987 he went on sabbatical and had a big sell out show in NY. I want to do a big feature on him in Turps. Michael Simpson has finally hit the big time with his huge paintings ... Blue chip gallery in Berlin etc...

C. I have a number of headings I want to ask you about; the first one is Improvisation.

I spoke to Simon Bill about a passage in his book 'Brains' where he talks about making a painting - his protagonist says that a moment comes in the painting when he 'knows' it's finished, that whatever he does the piece will be okay now. I compared this to a documentary I saw about boxers, in which they had found a way of measuring and comparing hormone levels in the two fighters. Apparently, there's a moment when the winner realises, he's going to win, and from that moment, he will - his hormone levels rise and his blows become more sure, his footwork more precise. On the other hand, the sad thing is that the loser also has that moment, when he knows he'll lose, and from that moment his hormone levels drop, his blows become more clumsy and his footwork less sure.

Simon says that he has spoken to lots of painters about this moment and the feeling is recognised by many. Some of them are quite poor painters. So, it's no guarantee of success. But here's the thing. I asked him if he has it and he says not any longer, that he proceeds by a mixture of intellect and chance so it doesn't happen anymore. So how do you know it's finished?

Compared to Michael Simpson, for example, your painting shouts 'work in progress'. They're not objects refined to eliminate the hand of the maker, are they? So, the sense of process is on the surface.

P. I don't think the sense of work in progress is really intentional. I do have an intention to get to a clearly finished thing. I was impressed by Michael Craig Martin even at Bath and one of my favourite painters is Milan Kunc.

C. Did you see Milan Kunc as a kind of possibility in terms of the New British Painting (Jackowski, for example) going on at the time or were you not affected by that lot?

P. No, I've never been interested in British Painting at all really. I thought Kunc was a kind of universal revelation of what painting could be! Still think he was the precursor to the nightmare of Koons and his kitsch works. Craig Martin is all about having a pictorial idea and then realising it as cleanly and directly as possible, whereas Kunc makes 'finished oil paintings'

C. Like Michael Simpson?

P. Yes, Simpson kind of finished. But the evidence of painterly facture is still strong. So, in comparison each of my paintings feels like a bit of a failure. They have a partial nature. I'm kind of riddled with a Cezanne thing. My paintings are a bit like things have been thrown in the air and I'm juggling them. To bring them on to more of a finish I'd have to choose a specific aspect of them.

They can look old and finished and a bit vandalised and forgotten.

But then hopefully the sense of things being up in the air comes to life.

There is one thing though: I often cut a hole in them. Something which does risk killing them off and often does.

C. What about disappointment? You have talked about this before and I am intrigued by the idea

P. I have to say I have a variety of approaches, and a range of ways of starting. I try and come from a totally different place for each painting. Sometimes I have a clear image idea, other times I just make marks. Sometimes I have a colour feeling I just have to get out somehow. Sometimes I pick up an old painting and carry on. Sometimes I'll have a repro of a painting that haunts me by somebody else to hand and 'copy it'. Sometimes it's a combination of all those things or a surprising new way of starting that I haven't thought of yet.

I have this idea that we look at paintings as images a lot and that actual paintings can look pretty disappointing in the flesh in comparison to their reproductions or screen presences.

There's always pretty much a sense of disillusionment and loss of agency as I work but then that combines with something else and seeing that something else, I tend to run out of steam and just look at it.

I like having old work around so I can sit the new something else next to an old something else and wonder what the fuck is going on now.

C. But once a choice has been taken, that precludes the others. Your range of reference seems to me to be very wide and also what might be described as old skool; you're looking at Fine Art principally, the history, the canon, rather than, I don't know, addressing sociological issues. There's a sense that you regard it all as available for playing with. That kind of approach is often seen as elitist. I suppose the extempore methods and lo-fi materials tends to counter that. Have you made a positive decision to resist commodity fetishism in how you assemble paintings or is it a by-product of the process? I am thinking I suppose of Michael Simpson's highly finished works made with recognised art media?

P. Anything I do is pretty much a result of the process and accident. To be honest, I spend a lot of time just hopelessly sitting looking trying to figure out how to read what's going on. When, or if I can, I tend to then carry on painting with a terrible feeling I'm ruining whatever it was.

One reason I like posting my work online as I work is that that seems to speed that process up a bit. But it also has this thing where I feel that I'm disappointing other people (obviously they probably don't care). It's a kind of device that heightens the stakes a bit.

C. That's something else I wanted to talk to you about. The audience. What other people are you talking about? Do you have a sense of a kind of wider, platonic arena where your work operates, separate from sales figures and patronage?

P. I get a lot of encouragement and likes on Instagram and Facebook. I think I use that sense of eyeballs on images of my paintings as a sort of mirror. Like when you're in the studio and look at the work in it to get another angle on it and it looks completely different and all the mistakes and weaknesses are more apparent or not.

C. You seem to have a pretty good grasp of Deleuze, he seems to be important in your work; personally, I find him very difficult. There might also be a relationship in your work to Bakhtin, in a sense of the encyclopedic - there seem to be no holds barred in your content - and to an extent in a sense of the grotesque or caricatural. Would you agree?



P. Yes. Though like Deleuze it is a creative parodic relationship with the encyclopedia. I really value Broodthaers and his silly museums too.

C. That is a very grand (in a good way) vision of the possibilities of Art. Elitist, though? Is that something you've been accused of, I mean? I don't think you give a shit about it, but is it?

P. I don't really know what elitist would mean really or what to say about it very quickly. Art is a solitary address at base, I think. But parody implies an engagement and I'm very influenced by pop art. Warhol is a big deal for me. We were visited at Bath by Jannis Kounellis and I saw all his shows in the UK over many years and he is key to me - he's like the opposite to Warhol - and his internationalism is pretty profound and I identify with it.

I think being taught by ambitious older painters who were in the provinces and seemed at first to be pretty ignored, but then turned out to be really respected and in tune with 'something else'. The fact that Michael is now blue-chip seems pretty natural and right to me. When I came to London in '88 and my general peer group were on Cork Street etc.

It just seemed 'of course'. But I've always been influenced by figures like Beuys and Kounellis and rate poverty too. Kinley was a young student at the ruined Düsseldorf Academy in 1947 at the same time as Beuys and would talk to us about German painting as it arrived. I remember him asking what we thought of Baselitz! I'd been to Germany on a school exchange at 13 and I guess I felt a connection and interest and being from Bristol I was part of a general Concorde project internationalism.

We went to live in Toulouse for 5 years and I grew up bilingual. So, the idea of a national art was never my horizon. The Arnolfini in Bristol had a program of things, after endless Richard Long shows, of Penck, Appel and big foreign painters to go along with Christopher Le Brun. So, it was a mix. And both Kinley and Simpson were very 'foreign' and international figures.

C. European/American?

P. European.

P. I don't know if Michael is Jewish but he is incredibly East End. And Peter Kinley escaped Austria on the *Kindertransport* to Liverpool.

C. That would be my objection to the idea of British Art. My apprehension of British culture is that it is either literary or just different versions of Munnings, and in fact the

stuff we like, the good stuff, is usually satirical, or done by outsiders, or Jewish. Or all three.

Tell me about the materials you use in painting.

P. Again, it varies. Acrylic and vinyl paint... I have painted on plastic with the Vinyl. But then an obsession with making a kind of crude paint with fat free milk and cottage cheese, eggs and superfine, sun-clarified linseed oils and pigment. I love old painting manuals and experimenting. The goal is cheapness but quality. I paint on cardboard a lot. I have this notion that a painting has to prove itself instead of already coming with 'a quality'.

C. You're talking about Ralph Mayer, among others? I share that enthusiasm, and I also want to take 'the material' properly into account; I liked Michael Baxandall's C15th Italian painting book very much and it made me look at the different contexts for different materials a lot more - fresco painting leaning towards the linear, for example.

P. I should mention my mum who is from the Welsh valleys and went to Cardiff art school in the 1950s. She had a little success in Wales before moving to Bristol and giving up. She had a rigorous academic training but then a really modernist exposure when she did her teacher training year with lectures fresh from Hull art school. So, I grew up with her paintings around.

C. So you're an insider?

P. Not really. My upbringing was dominated by the aircraft industry. It was all consuming. I guess pretty international though and ultimately, the paradigm was modernity. My mother had no connections in any art world or anything, but her paintings are better than anybody else's and actually in retrospect not that far from Kinley's approach. De Stael is in there and real materiality.

A fascinating part of the recent Lee Krasner show was the documentation of her school and art student years in New York and the sense of women art students of the time. I talk to my mother about her experience of art school in Cardiff in the 1950s. She was from a mining community in the Welsh Valleys and saw it as a route into becoming an art teacher. The proper art school was very academic, but she often talks about how she was exposed to modern art ideas by lecturers who moved down from Leeds art school to teach on the art teacher training course that she did afterwards and it was after that that she spent a summer in St Ives and really found something.

I think her friends were mainly women then, but it was the guys who assumed the mantle of 'artist'. The Paula Rego film sparked a good conversation with her. She always been relatively secretive about her painting, focusing on being a teacher, and writing this I realize that she probably wouldn't ever have called herself an artist.

At Bath, Michael Simpson would draw a line between painting and art, the feeling was that art was something that happened down the line, or not. And Peter Kinley was a link back to my mother's era of painting. (He was funny as he'd say he was really a sculptor!) Even in a small college like Bath we were exposed to radically different attitudes within painting. Maria Lalic taught there, for example, and she would have nothing to do with young male art student painters like me, with any trace of expressionism. (Great to see her work up at the Tate Modern recently).

In the 1990s there was a sense of painting having to justify itself in relation to lots of other exciting options and discourses rather than being a self-justifying activity. I'd say my concern and engagement with painters is after college education, those who persevere regardless in the strange activity when they leave.

I've managed to avoid teaching all my life, maybe the closest I've come is working as a teaching assistant and I feel that's kind of how I see working with painters who want to learn from me. Maybe painting itself is in the place of the teacher. Maybe it is the feeling that painting provokes education and learning rather than being subject to it. This raises a thought about the 'absolute' aspect of painting, its non-relation to anything, how part of its interest is its resistance to being related to and how exposure to working painters is often an awkward one - they aren't necessarily teachers.

C. Tim Hyman suggests that Art's main function might be its ability to suggest an alternative way of living or a utopia. He regards my work, as an example, as reflecting an inability to believe in an alternative. What do you think in terms of your own work?

P. For me I think I try and avoid idealism and utopia seems to me to be linked to that. I have a very black humour and am rather drawn to Robert Smithson's entropic understanding of culture - there is no consolation in art and it's a kind of memento mori. Baudelaire lurks for me and I think that Courbet's Burial, a painting that he described as the burial of romanticism, is where I come from mentally.

Having said that I'm fascinated by the idea that Capitalism and its post-war consumer culture deliberately creates short-term utopian stuff so we are actually in a condition of being trapped in endless 'alternative ways of living', lifestyles and holiday utopias. People literally go and hang out by the sea, as in Matisse's 'Joy of Life', once or twice

a year. And they work towards a happy, classy cruise-ship retirement, or at least that is what is sold.

This Neo-art is now the rule or general condition that we live in and Van Gogh's sunflowers hang on the walls of the airport lounges. So, to say that Art's main function is to suggest alternatives to all the alternative lifestyles and that its utopias might mean something now feels, in terms of Art's alternative, like a total disappointment.

Art just can't compete with the bait of profitable utopias that can be bought and lived right now with enough mullah. The alternative it might offer feels negative and old in comparison to everyday, escapist, contemporary utopian consumption. It has to compete with the flood of individualized options available on mobile phone or PC numbered solitude.

Actually, I think my paintings play a bit with old art and its dreams in as much as they kind of crash into un-idealistic material actuality, they flirt with being rubbish like Kurt Schwitters. Any transcendence is some kind of formal structure from 'olden times'. I do think art can put us back into other times, not as an alternative but just experiencing somewhere else, other lights, a breath of different air, although my inconsistency as I roughly copy and inhabit past art prevents any sense of belief in their horizons as 'places to actually go'.

Also my paintings will only work with audience participation. They only become art with viewers working with them, without that they are just paintings, a great personal hobby. They kind of beg to be collected! I think that achieving art status means getting into communal circulation somehow, working 'collectively' and in a radical anti-communal world that in itself precludes taking something utopian and alternative on board.

I'm fascinated by the idea of collecting and I wonder if that's what actually creates art in the end. Maybe this is an answer: Art now is a combination of art and anti-art - a self-contradictory disjunctive form. So, Hyman is half right. Duchamp ended his life in an apartment surrounded by Matisses and I can't imagine an art that doesn't fully include them both. I think mine does a bit - it doesn't agree with itself. I guess my utopia is manifest in my work as one of endless arguing.

C. Can't argue with that! Unfortunately, though it produces more questions. Could you expand for example on the idea that collecting creates art? Is that a reflection of the importance of the curator, for example, or the more general idea that lots of small private collections somehow aggregate in a plane of reality that is visual culture?

P. I think that it is an unacknowledged creative thing that a painter is in relation with. What would an art world without collectors be like? Well, we do kind of know because it is a regular condition in a personal sense. But a collector might mean a private collection or an institution - often they turn into the same thing - a private collection can become a whole museum. So, collecting (a strange illogical thing that all sorts of people do) is a kind of primal part of how we as a society make art.

A curator is something else and to me a sort of middle person like a dealer, trying to rationalize and organize it all. But for me both painters and collectors are somewhat mad and intriguing aberrations, on which the whole edifice of art rests. When you go to Paris or Lisbon or NY or whatever often whole galleries will be displays of some individual's private collection - donated and accepted as a whole. That is a whole economy of desire, that then becomes institutionalized.

It's not that collecting 'creates art' but it is a fundamental part in taking a singular object and making it a part of something else - it is part of making that object art. It's something I do with my own paintings - I arrange them in different 'collections'. There is a curiosity about the act of collecting, as there is in, say, Marcel Broodthaer's work.

Painting is part of something that makes it art - part of a larger machine. I make something in the studio and it is like a stone. It might just gather art moss, but it hopes to be part of something. It is a partial object. I don't mind showing a painting on its own now because somehow it feels incomplete and partial on its own and I don't mind that incompleteness. It has that kind of bits-and-pieces life I find really animating.

C. Thinking of the idea of the collector as an integral part of the painting and its life, did you read the Boris Groys 'Total Art of Stalinism', in which he puts forward the idea that the ultimate author of USSR Socialist Realist painting was Stalin himself?

P. I didn't no. I think that idea goes in too much for the importance of 'a signifier' that's to say it feels like a hunt for 'the single thing that gives meaning' So once we say 'this thing isn't the signifier of the work' (the author for example) then we're off looking for where and with whom the creation of meaning rests, so if not with the artist then the responsibility must lie with some other despot!

I think my thing is that there is no signifier, it's rather that any meaning is generated in changing relationships and work. There is no single collector - though collectors would like to claim the god-like power to create meaning for themselves - that guarantees meaning out of disparate artworks that they gather. Rather, collectors and their

collections are a relationship that also includes the artists and their viewers. Art is a manifold situation.

C. Oh, yes. So taking the Heidegger idea of meanings being open and extending it from the studio, through the gallery and into the works' subsequent lives?

P. Yes - art is an open situation - perpetually creative if it is to work. Nobody owns it (which apparently provokes intense desire to try and do so!)

Actually, this touches on why some art provokes ownership battles and hence enormous value while other art stays ownership-free - art straddles being valuable private property and valueless commons, seemingly free property. Work that was initially seen as not worth owning and without property can suddenly transform into full of desirable property and worthy of fighting to own. But it is the same art. Nobody 'gets it' in either case.

C. This is something I wrote about the Venice Biennale and I wonder if it makes sense to you in terms of what you are talking about?

*In his essay 'The Historical Function of the Museum', John Berger[i] writes that*

*"it is necessary to make an imaginative effort which runs contrary to the whole contemporary trend of the art world: it is necessary to see works of art as freed from all the mystique which is attached to them as property objects. It then becomes possible to see them as testimony to the process of their own making instead of as products; to see them in terms of action instead of finished achievement. The question: what went into the making of this? supersedes the collector's question of: what is this?"*

*Is any separation from the market which Berger calls for possible though? Objects exist as product; this society takes product as value. Operating in apparent contradiction to the market might in fact be quite a good strategy for success in the market, but while artists who rely on seemingly unconnected organizations (academic institutions for example) for support for their practice they must instead trade in cultural capital - they work a different market but a market, nevertheless.*

*In 'Success and Failure in Picasso', Berger goes further, offering a critique of the art business that seems prescient, considering it was written in 1965 while Picasso was still alive.*

*'Art, and especially 'experimental' art, has become a prestige symbol, taking the place in the mythology of advertising, of limousine cars and ancestral homes. Art is now the*

*proof of success...In a competitive society rewards such as are now offered for art are bound to mean an immense and uneconomic number hoping against hope for their chance...(for) today the living artist, however iconoclastic, has the chance of being treated like a king; only since he is a king who is treated rather than who treats, he is a king who has lost his throne'.*

*The Venice Biennale acts like a contemporary Field of the Cloth of Gold, inviting the greatest artists of the world to gather in glorious validation of their exceptionality. But however they critique the social condition, however abject or contemptuous they may present themselves or their work as, the real message is how very wonderful they, and the country that presents them, must be. As Bataille[ij] says, "The painter is condemned to please. By no means can he transform a painting into an object of aversion. The purpose of a scarecrow is to frighten birds from the field where it is planted, but the most terrifying painting is there to attract visitors."*

*Berger's thesis on Picasso is a similar one. However anguished, in poor taste, violent in content or roughly-made, however challenging, his work is received with gasps of admiration. Amazing. Incredible. It is Picasso whose 'most terrifying painting' is (nevertheless) there to attract visitors.*

C. In your work, in which I think you explicitly reject or act in contrary to market values, I also notice a willingness to confront 'the lot'; you don't seem to want to join a gang (for example abstract formalism) or another (for example, London School), which might define itself by what it excludes (a narrative, perhaps, the literary, or in the case of the London School, Greenberg maybe) but rather you want to have it all. I suppose that is the high ideals of European art you talked about earlier.

P. Well I would admit that there is a sacrifice of exclusive logic on my part with an underlying anti-art, Dadaist anti-speculation and investment thinking, but that has led to feeling like I've found more intuitive consistencies and a larger logic. I mean I think about Matisse a lot and he began to look more and more like an artist who wanted to have it all, but we tend to think of him as very programmatic and consistent. Paul Klee too. It's just that they tended to get tidied up retrospectively.

I think creative work is very untidy. I tend to try and get myself into a place where I don't know what will happen. But more and more I find that there is a logic there so even that is a bit disappointing! No matter what I do, a sense of recognition that I'm consistently doing something comes back.

To be fair to Greenberg I think that is where his thinking was at, it's just then he, and younger painters of the time, drew conclusions and tried to make the 'found' consistencies of the previous generation into a conscious logic. He got impatient with Pollock and Krasner when they later 'went back' to include the explosive nature of Picasso and Matisse and European art in their work anew.

The whole idea of progress in art makes no sense to me to be honest and to define painting in terms of US concerns in the 50s and 60s, something which only Brits seem obsessed with, is to lock oneself into an odd comfort zone which the actual artists were actually kicking against. I mean the idea that large ambitious paintings are a retreat of Ab-Ex, when large paintings were always a Victorian Salon thing seems obtuse to me. It's like pretending that that exclusive USA logic somehow resists and escapes the bourgeoisie when it is in fact ultimately bourgeois.

There is no escaping the bourgeoisie in painting. It covers all the bases anew every generation, but we can be crafty and smart and open lots of creative doors, escaping the encyclopedias and all-containing investment speculation, and make unexpected, creative promiscuous connections everywhere. For example, I really enjoyed the last Auerbach show at the Tate which he laid out himself. Each room and suite of rooms felt remarkably different and surprising - his consistency seemed to me more intuitive and playful than grindingly stuck to. But then the last room was curated and the familiar sense of ennui returned.

When Berger sneers at collectors I think he's being a bit limited, as I think collecting at its best is a creative intuitive activity driven by impulses and so perhaps an integral part of an ongoing creative reckoning. Collectors exist on the knife edge of being speculative arseholes and liberating nutters looking to escape the predictable boredom and entertainment scams of their class. A class that lost definition post WW2 until the 2009 bank crash but is suddenly asserting itself again on all fronts like a state of nature having a final last gasp.

I always found Damien Hirst inspiring in that regard with his inclusion of collecting dynamics within his work. I think our generation was all about the rediscovery and assertion of a European bourgeoisie in London, with all the art collecting and pavement cafes in Shoreditch! Brexit from that wayward perspective is a reactive pleb attack on all that - or rather an exploitation of it. But continual crisis and rebellion is the ultimate bourgeois reality!

The UK is a funny place though and even saying 'bourgeois' out loud seems inappropriate and wrong. Aspiration to escape class, working or middle class,



motivates the bourgeois, so there is no picture of it until it fossilizes a bit once every few decades. It contains everything, collects everything. My feeling is that creative artists have a kind of love/hate awareness of all this, both ultimately bourgeois and ultimately resistant to it.

This holds true for Dadaist types and Greenberg types. Sometimes artists go all conservative to escape the dominant bobo needs, sometimes they go all radical and fierce. It's a dance. Picasso is all about that. Berger going off to a French peasant village to be an ultimate authentic non-bourgeois voice, while denying that he's selling his books in the bourgeois marketplace seems less honest than Picasso weaponizing that ultimate bourgeois object the easel painting against whatever bourgeois hegemony he lived through and he lived through several different ones. Including ones which took him as a model! Anyway, it's all very complicated!

C. Crikey - an attack on John Berger! What next? You'll be saying you're an atheist or something. Seriously, I haven't really thought of the idea of the collector like that. It's hard for me to see people who buy my paintings very clearly at all. Literally, in that they all seem to be dead or just not interested any more, and figuratively in that one is either hysterically grateful to them or desperate for them to say they'll buy something. I always thought I'd eventually have a stream of the very wealthy, anonymously buying paintings from my highly efficient dealer, but it turns out that it's a much more personal/painful business than that, and one in which I feel more discomfort than I can describe. I have anecdotes. But, as you imply, the thing that creates the market or space for the work is the taste of the collector(s), and the meanings are then able to be generated. Without the space, no meaning. Is that right?

P. Yes, I guess it pays to be pragmatic and not be caught up in an idealistic judgmental Never-Never land. Which sounds very defeatist and not fierce. Actually, it is a kind of realism which Berger was good at, it's just that his grim, back to nature form of it seems a bit unreal when all the peasants are now dead or finally being wiped out. It feels like heritage leftism.

You're right of course - dealers and collectors create a cringing nightmare world but they are the business end of it. My feeling is different periods have different people in those slots, so we can look at relatively socialist periods and dealers and collectors reflected those values just as much as they reflected Thatcherite ones in our neo-liberal era. It's not a given that they are venal bastards, however it is always good for artists to treat them as such because that's our job.

The Dadaists had enthusiastic bourgeois collectors who couldn't get enough of being continuously insulted. Publishers and their agents are kind of the same. Nobody tends to have a go at them because somehow the written word is closer to God and hence goodness than compromising, commodity-bound trading in objects. Must be all linked to Puritanism ...

C. Possibly - you mean the idea that after the end of the Civil War and the waves of iconoclasm the English were unable to see the visual arts as viable and took refuge in the literary? There's also a class/economic thing, isn't there, that the further away from primary production you are the higher up the social scale you go. Certainly, saying 'writer' instead of 'artist' when asked my profession seems to get a more respectful response.

Can I ask you a little more about 'creativity' now? You have talked about your family background and how that has to some extent determined your outlook on visual art and your kind of personal cultural context. To go further into that; I often feel that being an artist is a kind of consolation, that it's a state of continuous self-affirmation that only someone who needs that reassurance would want to do. There's another idea that the artist is a 'wounded child' - I think that's a psychologist's term - in need of healing, continuously picking at the wound and opening it up again. What is early 21st century culture but the state of woundedness? might be the response (I am thinking of Mark Fisher here) What do you reckon, or do you have no truck with such thoughts?

P. I do think of creativity as troubling but haven't really thought about that in a personal way. I mean I kind of think artists would be creative even coming out of the most utopian of families and are creative coming out of the most difficult circumstances. It isn't something born of either lack or plenty is it? Creativity seems to be about escaping what we know, then we have to deal with the new situations that it puts us in, and it is a shared adventure, as I stress with the role of audience and collectors who roll with the creative momentum of the artists contribution.

It opens things up. But it needn't be wounds, it might be out of feeling safe and just desiring something new. I think I might be interested in form and creating a sense of unity somehow in a world where we are constantly bombarded with disruptive forces.

Others might make work about creating disruptive forces, and I too might be sometimes, I suppose, in that any unity created has to include disruptive forces in order to feel real. I'm kind of wary of creativity being this feel-good capitalist thing - disrupters breaking up old forms in order to create new businesses - I guess I think that creativity might be resistant in some way.

That sounds pretty paradoxical. It certainly resists 'me, me, me' culture, I think. I have no idea how though ... It's always a surprise. I mean creating things seems to be a pretty universal human concern and must have happened in the incredibly rare situations when everybody was relatively happy and therapy wasn't invented yet.

But as I write I see I have to admit I don't really know what creativity is, which is part of the point really.

C. Yes, I don't really know how much there is to be gained from looking at this. It does tend to the biographical. On the other hand, it might be interesting to look at what images convey if they can be detached in any sort of way at all from the bracket of Art. I am looking at the work of an anthropologist called Michael Taussig, for example, who uses drawings almost as a kind of madeleine.

To go back to the idea of 'British Art', I have just come back from Ireland where I met 'one of Ireland's leading artists'. His work seems to consist of portraits of important cultural and political Irish contemporaries, paintings of the Irish landscape and meditations on Irish history, which is of course a little embarrassing as most of it is in relation to the oppression of the Irish by the English. The idea that the Visual Arts reflects the culture of the nation it comes from was quite apparent. In this case, the culture of 'us' is defined by the 'other'. Is the alternative the Venice Biennale though? Each nation trying to reach out to others, with increasingly more anodyne ideas? The *Barca Nostra* seems more and more a powerful image.

C. And on the subject of the collector, the painting 'Mr Oldham and His Guests' by Joseph Highmore has become a touchstone for me. Apart from anything else, the story of its commissioning is that a Mr Oldham invited three friends to dinner one evening. They arrived to find that he had forgotten his invitation and gone for a long walk, and by the time he returned they were drunk on negus. So amused was he by this that he commissioned one of them, Highmore, to paint them all in memory of it.

Oldham seems to have inherited a lot of money and made more, but then spent it, rapidly becoming a bankrupt. He spent some time at court, earning his place at the table by his amusing songs and general wit, until ending his days in debtors' prison. There does seem to be a portrait of him playing several instruments at once. He was, I suggest, a liberating nutter in the first degree. The disinterestedness of the commissioning - there can have been no capital value at all in this painting for Oldham, no prospect of resale, no greater significance - is what attracts me to it.

P. I think my general point is that art is kind of a theatre and so a shared activity - but it has 'leading parts' and one of those roles is the 'individual artist' who enacts a particular story. But for this to be made possible a whole machinery is at work, a supporting cast and audience. And they are all working together to create the myth. The artist above all has to method act to perfection.

C. Is this connected to what Matthew Collings says about Lynette Yiadom Boakye? That the work is an 'enactment', or maybe the pretense is more apparent?

P. Maybe. There is a kind of invented pretense with her work. Because the portrait tradition is so about the 'capture' of real people, individuals (it's almost the invention of them within that tradition) so a portrait painter creates an impression of some real person. But she makes people up. So, there's a disjunct.

Manet is interesting in that regard, because his models played a game in a made-up world theatre. Dressing as a Spanish Guitarist, or a Toreador or undressing as Olympia, the same model staged and apparently suggested ideas. Matisse picked that tradition up, he had costumes from the film company in Nice for his models to play with, then sat in his white coat like some doctor painting them, going with the orientalist fantasies but somehow, we feel the made-up nature of it all.

C. Is that what Matthew is talking about though? I felt there was more to do with an extra level of self-consciousness; painting black people in a white culture, using white culture techniques in a kind of 'assumed' way. Thinking about the idea of the Visual Arts reflecting the culture of the nation it comes from. I feel a little as if I am treading on eggshells here, trying to avoid being accused of racism, but Lynette is undeniably a black artist in a predominantly white culture.

P. Well what Matthew thinks is above my pay grade. My feeling is that there is something in painting portraits or portrait-like painting in the tradition that is a contrast and a space that gives whatever it is she does traction. I like her work because it is kind of anti-identity politics in a surprising way, or rather it shows identity politics being the old individual portrait tradition and not a new paradigm at all. or something. Anyway, it's the feeling of something not quite right but fitting right in that I like, something generic and explosive. ie, it fits right in but doesn't.

C. A bit like the Highmore painting.

Could you look at the shared activity-ness, the theatre, as a Bourdieu-type habitus? I have a sense that the round, the theatre, and the set of roles that you describe sets us on rather predetermined roles. Sometimes in teaching I think that I am merely

substituting my taste for the student's, that I am trying to inculcate them in a finite system, in the same way I suppose that a medical student might be given boundaries and limits on his or her interests and ways of being; you must behave in a certain way, for example, and you must consider these ways of thinking about health but not those. Perhaps when you say that something 'fits right in but doesn't' is when it gets interesting to look at.

P. I think that's where form comes in, and artists create and work with forms or maybe unities. An audience might be a form of unity. The way I think of it is that form can be looked at as a kind of horizon - we all have our own horizons and our art shows other people that horizon.

But horizons are open things, we can go beyond them and over them easily enough but these horizons come with us. One thing about me is that I have had to move around a lot since childhood so I might think that, for example, France has a different cultural horizon than the UK and the US a different one again, and wherever I stand I bring my own horizon on all that with me.

I guess in teaching we might be a group, all standing together looking at more or less the same horizon but all bringing our own horizons with us. To learn we look at the teacher's horizon and they fill us in on its contents as best they can. They try and keep us focused within it as much as possible so we don't go wandering off over it and get distracted. We take it all on board.

But it's inevitable that we wander off again. It's a limit, but we need limits to have content to take on board. I've been asked to write an essay for a show of painters and wrote this: "Maybe it was the French dramatist and poet Antonin Artaud who did most to articulate the impact of forces on form; in his essay *The Plague* he wrote of the horror of disease visited on a port after the arrival of a ship from over the horizon. He carefully, if pungently, describes how deadly new forces destroy the city from within and without. Since his devastating insights artists have been trying to play catch up and it can often feel that vocabulary itself has been scoured away, caught, and double-bound by impersonal and deadly forces, whether those of universal war or less intensely, but still catastrophically, those of the art market and fashion in which galleries themselves can feel like war zones. Forces that don't just invade us but actually well up from within as if we think them up ourselves. The unfashionable nature of form is part, in fact, of its resistant nature. Artists, those irreducibly amateur professionals, make form part of life. A part that can at times create a sense of containing life itself, a unity of the life that we inhabit and the one that inhabits us."

We're always bombarded and disrupted and affected by chance things so form, horizon, gives us room to breathe. Art has that role, but it also does the opposite too - it disrupts us and brings things from over the horizon all the time, things that, like Artaud's plague, might seem to come from within. Art is interesting to look at when it is both able to contain and able to express - when it has form to hold us together but also is full of difficult forces that don't fit in it and put its horizon in question.

What's your PhD on again?

C. Me. An auto-ethnographic study of my studio practice. As my anthropologist friend says, serious navel gazing.

P. So, I guess the question is 'how does what you are asking me relate to that?' Does it mean you are asking me questions about you? Because you don't know - being an artist and all - but a painter's collector might know more about the painter than the painter does, and you're put in the same boat as everybody else looking at yourself as an artist sort of 'over there'.

C. Exactly so. I am trying to work out things like the habitus in which I operate, and to understand what the various imperatives are that determine my practice and where they come from. Also, what the hell have I been up to for the last thirty years. How do I explain it? Ethnography carries lots of interesting ideas about object and subject, which are sort of familiar to anyone trying to develop work in a studio. What do I want to do next? Why?

P. It's very dissociative! Michael Leiris did something of the sort in his books. He was an actual ethnographer who turned it on himself.

C. Yes, Leiris is one of my main models. I refer to my studio practice as a timid adventure in comparison to his journey to Africa. I wasn't very impressed with his essay on Bacon in the monograph he did though.

P. Henry Miller's books always struck me as a sort of objective study of the worst kind of behaviour - a sort of an anthropological study. then they were taken up as a celebration of 'his' persona. And Picasso's idea that his paintings were a kind of autobiography to be studied seems relevant. The 30s seem full of that kind of artistic disassociation.

C. An impossible attempt at objectivity, you mean? I am not really looking at the work as an autobiography, more trying work out what the work means, in the broader sense. That's the habitus element, I suppose, what it means to be doing this. My own

autobiography comes into it, much as you articulate earlier in this exchange, but it's not the main driver. I guess the main driver is the cultural context, and that is what I am trying to examine. I think.

P. There's stuff in Deleuze about Hume and habit - his idea is that British philosophy avoids German and French idealism and works pragmatically with habits...

C. Oh, Christ another impenetrable philosopher.

P. ...and he links habit to habitus ... so, as I said, the horizon. Annoyingly Deleuze is actually much easier to read in French. It's weird. It's like there's too many words in English so simple things get over-translated and gnarled up or something.

C. Maybe you should do a translation? Actually, I meant Hume.

P. I think there's actually a whole book on Hume. I've not read it. *Desert Island* - a collection of short essays is really good - better than the big tomes and full of interesting ideas and teasing out his themes.

"Anthropology aspires to be a discourse on humanity. As such, it presupposes the empirical discourse about humanity, in which the speaker and the object of his speech are separate. Reflection is on one side, while being is on the other. Seen in this light, understanding is a movement which is not a movement of the thing; it remains outside the object. Understanding is thus the power to abstract; and reflection is merely external and formal. It follows that empiricism ultimately sends us back to formalism, just as formalism refers back to empiricism. "Empirical consciousness is a consciousness directed at preexistent being, relegating reflection to subjectivity." Subjectivity will thus be treated as a fact, and anthropology will be set up as the science of this fact. Kant's legitimizing subjectivity does not change the essential point." Deleuze (from *Desert Islands*)

C. If I understand it, he seems to be refuting reflectivity wholesale here. I think that I have kind of accepted the total subjectivity of the whole enterprise, and to some extent I do use anthropology as a science of subjectivity. What is the choice though? What I am interested in is not what you would call an exclusive logic, or I would call a gang to belong to in which I can subsume all my ideas, but the mesh of different imperatives that the habitus creates, or maybe that the different horizons in which I operate allows. One horizon might be academic, one personal and autobiographical, another just money, another my particular set of friendships and so on. The mesh that this creates is what interests me and it's hard to see any other methodology than a reflective, careful examination of the practice itself that might answer the questions.

P. Deleuze is simply separating philosophy from anthropology rather than writing off anthropology. He's just differentiating rather than judging. 'This is how anthropology works' in the context of a review of a book of philosophy.

C. To get back to disappointment: making a radical difference between perceptions or appearances of the work - the pristine screen against the abject reality of cardboard or the corner of the studio against framed on a white wall - you are making more explicit the lack of agency that the artist has in determining meaning in the work. As you say, this makes the artist's role less central and perhaps more like the leading actor in an ensemble, and so puts an emphasis on the habitus. This is probably why I am finding this so interesting, because I am interested in the mesh rather than an essential or singular idea. On the other hand, it does downplay the role of creativity, which I think we agree is a very muddy area to consider. I was wondering though if you might see any connection between your activity and, I don't know, ritual artistic activities in tribal societies like in Polynesia, for example. Gift economy activity.

P. You might have to put the first part of the question a bit more clearly for me. I'm guessing that what you are saying is that seeing a picture of the art object on the pristine screen, in a kind of organized idealism, somehow heightens the idea of a solo creative actor? Something that is challenged when the disappointment of the more disorganized, less pure, cardboard, and messy studio reality? Putting the same picture on a white wall of a gallery also heightens the isolated idealism, the idea of solitary creativity?

I'm not sure I follow how stressing the disappointing gap between idealistic presentation and actual materiality makes explicit the lack of agency?

I think that disappointment works no matter what the artwork is made out of or where we come across it - but it is true that it is linked to materialism vs idealism. Seeing actual art in the flesh can be a realization that is far less organized and pure than an image of it promises. Mondrian and Malevich might be the most clear examples where they look really grungy 'in real life' and that actually adds a lot to their meaning - and to the sense of the actual horizon in which they were painted - seeing the texture enables us to create a feeling of the texture of their original habitus somehow, that they were part of the habitual texture of another time and place, another horizon, the feeling of it - somehow we have a feeling of the



image space that the paintings create being created and experience is a form of participation.

seeing the paintings is somewhat disappointing because we can see the grounding habits of their actual making and this works against the purity of their image seeing on screen or in a book where they are already part of another more organized and ideal world, a separate world.

Seeing them firstly as part of the actual other place that their texture indicates somehow, and then as part of the actual place in which we are experiencing them, their texture makes their presence felt in our own habits, is doubly grounding and actual and the full disappointment of any idealism is ours in that moment in the museum, in the mausoleum as captured relics of other possible forms of civilization.

The image goes through a kind of death and then mourning leaving its idealism behind, and it is at that point that we can begin to join in creating a new sense of the paintings in a kind of 'co-experiencing' of how they actually work. Great art works in manifold ways so each viewer creates a whole different experience out of their creative relation with them. Any sense of unitary meaning or previously organized form is lost - we leave the organized image in the encyclopedia or in the computer with its exclusive idealistic organization of the world behind for rather more unknown and so compelling horizons - experiencing art as a form of creative immediacy and co-experience.

In that sense the museum is linked to the presentation of holy relics - dead bits and pieces that faith brings to life. Often in cult rituals where they are paraded and waved about. It's not such a far-fetched narrative when we look at Malevich and his quasi-religious paintings.

But it isn't faith as such that activates modern painting and old paintings looked at as if they are modern paintings ... but a simple trying to figure out how they might have worked when they were made something which makes us in turn re-create and hence create them. They would be dead objects without us engaging in their clues - in the digital world of 'the encyclopedia', page and screen, it is assumed that they are part of an idealized organized culture. It is only when we look at them as separate from that all embracing idealism that the images, we look at can come to life anew.

The original artist is a player in the manifold drama of this form of engagement in art, just another part in how they work rather than some god like still living creator figure.

They remain dead, as dead as the art objects they left us. But looking at those dead objects is a form of sympathetic co-experiencing with the objects making that re-animates them.

It is very much a kind of ancestor worship on some level, but one in which looking becomes work to reanimate the habits and life and creative enterprise of the dead, rather than as in a dark rural African hut, or some cathedral, with magic mumblings and pourings.

An anthropology of the life of the screen or encyclopedia would Devine a sense of belief or faith in its ideal organization. Its pure glowing world of isolated objects. A kind of algorithmic and art historical defined paradise in which artists are only supposed to live on through their ideas presented as isolate and original. This exclusive coordination is the contemporary transcendent god, it has no place for actual art experience in it ... (unless we are able simply to use it to look for clues to the reality of art objects and their making).  
Nothing can really live up to representation.

C. There seems to be a highly controlled output of Mondrian paintings on the web - a few years ago, in setting up slide talks I found it very difficult to get any decent slides at all. Very low res and often cleaned up. Which could describe the general myth of Mondrian too, which also misses the very odd and the particular and the specific in favour of the myth. Representation leads astray. Mondrian is presented as a god. I don't think that ritual art makes the artist a god, but often the artist is a conduit for a god, or a divine essence perhaps. Maybe it's a Western condition, given our propensity to make unitary deities and load them up with significance. Jesus was a man and at the same a god. Mondrian was a man making odd things and at the same time a god of Modernism. This is all Representation maybe, in the sense that a person becomes an icon. Mondrian becomes an isolated object in a glowing world.

P. The enlightenment and the counter reformation in the UK wasn't secular ... That's to say the habits of the scientists included God. It's funny being in France where the revolution took on religion head on, seeing it as a guarantee of the old order. Our *Maire*, a green, sneers at the church as 'the cult'. But the revolutionaries knew the power of religion and tried to set up rational cults, their own calendar etc. Idealism, and the Germans had it too, made a God of reason ... Hegel had his idea of an all-inclusive encyclopedia and of 'the absolute'. Theosophy of course is a religion, maybe the modernist religion, and Mondrian is tied into it. Foucault traced how God became man... First to the king and then to the individual God like citizen ... And it was Nietzsche who traced the evolution and borrowing of God likeness into

humanism God like ego. Artist's just as they worked in religious societies 'for God' became the avatars of God like humans. Creative egos. Standing as the identity of man and God.

Books, the Internet, in the form of encyclopedic all containing knowledge stand for God too. All knowing. In the enlightenment this all-knowing God worked like clockwork was profoundly rational as was nature and science was about figuring out his laws. Now we have google and our glowing screens that we pray to and worship and try and figure out and represent every single micro detail of our world into a single all containing knowledge.

Art disappoints all that quite profoundly. An actual Mondrian can be profoundly disappointing because it lets us down into a disenchanting disunity where the making is visible.

But we then work to reconstruct the magic, but it is new and different every time ... And our own creativity is in play, for us, but if we are able to communicate it for others too. But it is not a transcendent all-inclusive kind of new knowledge but a partial shared one. It might even contain bits of God, of religious aspects and also a secular scientific approach. But it has no laws yet, we have to write them knowing that we will forget them, or the next person coming along might be creating their own contradictory laws ... Or even that that next viewer might be us who has forgotten what we knew last time we looked. Art is a kind of endless work, for, everybody involved and puts everything in question all the time.

Artists, rather than being United God like representative human beings with unshakeable judgements, are temporary split up workers playing roles as needed, actors. They create as makers and as viewers and come together in 'art' which is a troubling complex unity up for grabs, but also weirdly giving a good impression of something absolute.

Disappointment is a call to creative arms as opposed to passive reading and looking religiously at screens. It demands a 'what are we going to do about this energy and responsibility. How can we make this work? A painting is never going to work as well in real life as it does on screen ... So, we have to get stuck in and make it work better in reality. Painting is not passive experience but a shared work.

Such an approach demands real ethics as it is shared and not about the artist ego God who is commonly understood as the unique selling point of art.

Absolute and solitary. I'm actually fascinated by Clyfford Still who plays with all this ... Or is he a victim of it. Anyway, he created a materialist religious car crash out of painting. Is it

parody? Or a kind of Nietzschean embodiment of his own culture's expectations? Him and Warhol seem to me to play a similar game of embodying ... Acting. Warhol, like a lot of artists, actually was a practicing Catholic of course. It's a rich questionable field.

C. That's an interesting comparison. Are you suggesting that Still 'acted' more self-consciously than, say, Pollock, creating a persona and then making the paintings to fit it in a more self-aware way?

P. I think he had a very strict philosophical consciousness - Emerson - Nietzsche (Nietzsche was very influenced by Emerson) so had a strong script. I like him because he is so alien in many ways - a real challenge ... And I think he acted like a challenge and a catalyst for the other artists. He actually was a farmer from the far west, a dockyard worker, whereas Pollock wasn't really a real cowboy or authentic working man but played that role for 'the city folk' to the hilt.

Still played the role of the professional artist as he conceived it. The professional American artist.

The professional non-bourgeois American artist.

C. We're sort of getting into what I think of as 'the mesh' now. I like the idea of the 'strong script' for example.

Phil, I've just been reading a writer called Tim Ingold who talks about the surface, mainly in terms of writing. After some speculation on various ways of thinking about the page, weaving, maps, a face and so on - it's pretty good stuff - he talks about the computer screen as a medium that, as well as offering us up a and down and across, also offers us, or seems to offer us, depth, but he sees it more as a mirror, reflecting us back rather than allowing us to look at another face. I was reminded of you talking about the difference between the apprehension of a painting via the screen and in real. I wonder if you have any further thoughts on that? There was a connection with what you called disappointment; I think.

P. There's just been a discussion on Matthew Collings page about Francis Bacon. And a number of painters were saying how much better they were in reproduction and on the screen. I was saying how I was the opposite now, how physically interesting and engaging

the actual paintings are. But I remembered also how initially disappointing and thin I'd initially found them, how they didn't live up to the pictorial excitement of their reproduction. The glass intrusive and in the way, the material thin, the action diffused and flat and over egged. But then, seeing big shows, seeing a lot of them, noticing details, noticing surprises, inevitably happens. They start looking different every time, their size and scale feel vital. And then it's the reproductions that feel disappointing.

Cezanne has that, too, I think. His paintings can blaze onscreen. Look a bit academic in books though I remember being at ok and out of my skull looking at a Mt. St. Victoire catalogue and the landscape feeling so real and tactile it was painful. Seeing the real things is a bit disappointing compared to that but then having felt the disappointed feeling, having given up, that's when the painting starts to work as multiplicity of noticings ... part of the physical realm of where it is but also full of active visionary potential too.

C. I've noticed that paintings on fb etc with a lot of 'expression', loose paintwork, drips and so on, get a lot of likes and support, a lot of stuff about how exciting the surface is. But it's a representation, with, as you say, layers of glass between it and the viewer. At several times removed. It's an idea of expression. Is that different from looking at the actual expression, and what is the difference?

P. From my perspective I'm more interested in how I can as active viewer creatively experience a painting. I'm not bothered by hierarchies in terms of "the real original being better" it's all a chain of different experiences. A reproduction generates a whole new set of possibilities in a picture. It is partly different kind of experience of generating meaning. Including the meaning intend or expression intended. 'Disappointment' is more a sense of not meeting expectations ... reproductions or removed viewing actually generate lots of interesting expectations that aren't in the experience of the original. And vice versa.

C. Accepting that the image when reproduced has its own validity and that might be a different thing from the thing itself. That's an interesting thought but it's really hard to accept, I think. It's challenging when you invest a lot in the surface, wanting something very specific and then the photograph turns it into a kind of cliché. By which I don't necessarily mean photos=cliché but more that differences can be flattened out, colours generalised and that correspondences with other images seem to emerge that would not with the 'real thing' (it's a picture not a real thing) because of scale. But then these correspondences may be good to look at. Control is relinquished even more, I suppose. I am thinking about the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction now.

P. Back in the day painting had a whole life as engravings then as a b+w ... then there is the phenomenon of prints. I'm pretty comfortable with paintings having a different kind of life beyond their materialist immediacy. In people's heads as memories etc. The physical immediacy of a painting as a thing in itself, as full-scale experience is clearly its own thing though...the thing that generates all the other forms of circulation. But the other forms generate different rewards all of their own. I'm interested in the play between such different kinds of realms. Travelling between them but knowing they have different natures that are wrongly assumed to be comparable because the picture 'looks the same'.

The thumbnail ... images organized in encyclopaedic form fascinates me. An actual painting can totally disrupt any encyclopaedic certainties. Doesn't fit the filing system...

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<sup>184</sup> Hyman, T (2018) *A Born-again Jew* – review of *Confessions of an Old Jewish Painter* by RB Kitaj. NYRB, April 19, 2018

<sup>185</sup> *Dolor Y Gloria (Pain and Glory)*, (2019) Motion Picture, P. Almodovar, Spain

<sup>186</sup> Kermode, M (2019) *Pain and Glory: bittersweet perfection from Pedro Almodovar* Guardian 23.8.19  
<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2019/aug/25/pain-and-glory-review-pedro-almodovar-antonio-banderas-penelope-cruz>  
(accessed 11.2.20)