

# The Creative Unconscious and the Pictorial Sign

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## Introduction

One of the enduring pleasures of my painting practice is the dialogue between the sensual and cerebral polarities of image making that is embodied in the creative process. Time and again I have experienced an almost primal and visceral shock when image making and visual thinking inexplicably align as an unpredictable combination of the manual and conceptual in a pictorial sign. One of my earliest experiences of the transformational potential of painting occurred as a small child when I watched my father using masking tape and a can of purple spray paint to 'paint' a stripe along the side of his white Ford Escort. I vividly recall the smell of cellulose as the jet like vapour of paint obscured the tape and newsprint with a hazy amorphous shape that grew along the car's side panels followed by the tape being peeled away to reveal a perfectly crisp and beautifully drawn line. I was witness to the magical and revelatory function, and transformative power of art and have been fortunate to subsequently relive similar experiences. These outcomes are not easily achieved, they are not guaranteed by reapplying formulaic and known techniques but arise through a process of great struggle and difficulty in articulating the creative unconscious.

The inspirational, gift like, and unknowing aspect of the creative process may require intuitive approaches to unlock and free the imagination. The presence of my unconscious is seemingly evident even within the knowing aspects of my practice as well as appearing to be more appropriately aligned to spontaneity and unpredictable improvisational methods. Uncertainty and unknowing are fundamental to my painting practice and form a dialectical relation with deliberation and control. Conflict resides at the very heart of my work, formally and emotionally. I have always been interested in combining contradictory visual languages and my work is often deeply ambiguous. It can be childlike and innocent on one level and violent and controlling on another. It is both false and heartfelt. It strives for clarity and descends into chaos, seeking a redemption that is always just beyond reach. This is the work's power and I will try to retain it at the centre of my discussion.

Like many creative individuals I am flawed and broken by contradictory desires and wounded by the trauma of childhood experiences leaving me sensitive to both the hostilities and gratifications of the world around me. I am torn between a conscious

search for literal meaning and the free fall of just making up and inhabiting an imaginary world. As an artist whose work was shaped in the late 20th century it is important for me to ask whether an individual attempt at expression can overcome the excess, conditioning, and artificiality of postmodernism. The narrative trajectory or arc of my report is how I grew up with postmodernism but have started to search for something more 'real' and expressive in recent years. I could abandon all the collage techniques, reference to toys, games, and films if I was truly dissatisfied by the un-reality of the languages of art but I don't, there is something particular to my experience in the synthetic aspects of postmodernism that I haven't been able to fully give up. It is the reality of the unreal that continues to fascinate and enthrall me.

## Personal and Creative Context

1985-86 Plymouth College of Art and Design. Foundation

1986-89 South Glamorgan Institute of Higher Education. BA Hons Fine Art

2002-04 University of East London, MA Fine Art

## Foundation and BA creative practice and theory



Fig 1. Helliwell P, *Conflict*, 1986, oil on canvas, 180 x 140 cm

My artistic vision was shaped during the resurgence of figuration and the content driven art of the 1980s. During this period the sensual and cerebral polarities of 'neo expressionist' painting and 'neo conceptual' practices dominated post-modern

aesthetics. My eclectic interest in pluralism began to supplement the observational bias and 'truth to materials' modernist proselytising of my foundation philosophy. I was encouraged to experiment with differing methods and materials and to develop my imagination and worldview. *Conflict* (Fig 1) was the culmination of my foundation year, synthesising the relation between formal pictorial construction and a transformational and inventive figuration whilst intuitively expressing my emotional experiences.

The decision making and development of *Conflict* was stylistically influenced by Picasso's surrealist imagery of the 1930s and the idea that a metamorphic transformation of imagery and materials occurs during the creative process. I still adhere to the premise that ideas are instigated in actions. Theorists Peter Fuller and John Berger were still actively publishing and their work helped me explore how life experience and meaning are embodied through processes of aesthetic engagement and transformation. *Conflict* expressed my vulnerability and the violence of my experiences growing up in a single parent family in the maritime city of Plymouth.



Fig 2. Helliwell P, *Degree show installation view*, 1989, mixed media

My first year as an undergraduate in Cardiff was engaged with painting as a perceptual and philosophical practice that continued to attempt to directly express my personal experience. I spent much of my second year looking at the differences between perceptual and conceptual approaches and in my third year addressed how experience is mediated by language and reality appears to be laden with representation. My understanding of how art is structured as a visual and verbal language was connected to my awareness of the eclectic pluralism of postmodernism. Pluralism permitted emerging artists to select and combine visual languages in an analogous manner to how consumers might choose between an array of commodities, in criticising the 'anything goes' attitude and relativist idea that all things are comparable Hal Foster wrote of postmodernist artists that, '...pluralism signifies no art specifically. Rather, it is a situation that grants a kind of equivalence; art of many sorts is made to seem more or less equal – equally (un)important'. Foster (1985, p.15)

My degree show (Fig 2) included images of shopping baskets, consumer logos, and British military camouflage stencilled alongside real objects to explore the relation between reality and representation. I incorporated some of the materials and techniques used in advertising and shop display into my practice and embraced non-fine art practices to reflect my interest in popular culture and the mass media. I experimented with new techniques to acquire knowledge of screen printing in glass fibre resin, welding cut out sheet metal, installing electrical lighting, applying industrial spray paint, and stencil making from technical drawing and photography.

### **1990-2002 Relevant Practice Prior to MA**

Throughout the decade following my degree I developed my practice in Bristol, Paris, and London. I based a series of paintings on a photograph I took of a shop assistant called *Dianne Devlin* handing out shopping baskets in Sainsbury's supermarket in Plymouth. I was struck by how the similarity of her defensive body language mirrored the pose of Venus in Botticelli's *Birth of Venus*. I made a life size *Dianne Devlin* stencil for paintings that connected the passive recreational activity of consumerism with the active armed conflict of the first Gulf War. These paintings incorporate readymade *Mars Bar* colours to align confectionary and consumption with ideas of beauty and violence by referencing the classical gods of antiquity *Venus and Mars* to

represent love and war (Fig 3). I was interested in how the Mars Bar advertising slogan 'Work Rest and Play' ideologically removes any potential unrest and violence from Mars the God of War's name by emphasizing the relation between production and consumption, and in how consumers are oppressed by abundance. Jean Baudrillard explains that. 'No one needs leisure, but everyone is called upon to provide evidence of his availability for *unproductive* labour.' Baudrillard (1981, p.76)

In combining a tank and shopping centre escalator in, *Shopapocalyptic* (Fig 5), I formed a collaged vehicle or surreal form of transport that proposes the idea of authoritarian control and threat of violence even within consumer leisure environments. These links of imagery and information were further explored in *Export Dreams Immigrant Sales* (Fig 4) to reference the idea that the opening of the Euro Disney theme park in the early 1990s continued the US policy of invasive cultural dominance by re-importing and sanitising indigenous European products and folktale traditions, for example burgers and Bambi. Baudrillard described how the spectacle of theme parks were becoming the metaphorical rule by which we can measure the fabricated nature of normal everyday reality, explaining that, 'Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyperreal and of simulation'. Baudrillard (1983, p.25) Baudrillard suggests all of capitalist society is fake and subject to 'Disneyfication'.



Fig 3. Helliwell P, *Venus and Mars*, 1992, acrylic on paper, 180 x 450 cm each

On exhibiting these works at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery in 1992 I was informed that Dianne Devlin, the woman who I had photographed had contacted me to know more about her role in the paintings, it made me happy knowing my work could reach out to people.

Following the Diane Devlin paintings I concentrated on more formal considerations and experimented with pictorial devices, composition, and spatial relationships by producing a series of abstract paintings. My examination of pictorial possibilities was concerned with conceptual and perceptual meanings. The feel for light, air, and space betrays an adherence to figuration as do the work's titles such as, *Naked Husband Avalanche* (Fig 6). My intention was to explore optical and tactile sensations through surface pattern, colour, compositional arrangement, and drawing, and emphasise the formality of pictorial devices and techniques without what I began to perceive as the burden of figurative content.



Fig 4. Helliwell P, *Export Dreams Immigrant Sales*, 1992, acrylic and oil on canvas, 173 x 235cm.

Although I explored non-objective 'imagery' from 1993 onwards, figurative imagery abruptly returned in 1997 to forcibly rupture my semi-abstract grounds that in turn became backdrops or empty stages awaiting population. Placing figures on top of

abstract compositions mirrored the complex emotions I felt surrounding my son's birth; as both my world and my paintings were being inhabited with new figures. I consider these paintings to be among my finest and most succinct work in that they are seminal and iconic images that clearly state my preoccupation with transparent linear figurative imagery overlaid and entwined within formally inventive, gestural, and abstract compositionally dynamic grounds.



Fig 5. Helliwell P, *Shopapocalyptic*, 1992, acrylic and oil on canvas, 173 x 183cm Fig 6. Helliwell P, *Naked Husband Avalanche*, 1993, acrylic on canvas, 173 x 203cm,



Fig 7. Helliwell P, *Whereas When Fled*, 1994, 173 x 386cm, acrylic and oil on canvas



Fig 8. Helliwell P, *Just Brooklyn*, 1994, acrylic and oil on canvas, 173 x 225cm



Fig 9. Helliwell P, *Elephant*, 1998, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 173cm

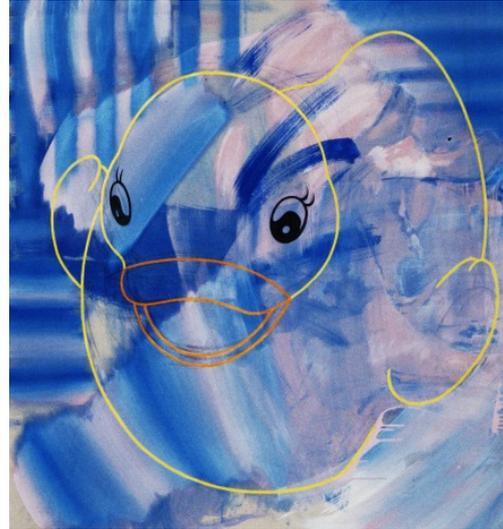


Fig 10. Helliwell P, *Moose Dog*, 1998, acrylic on canvas, 203 x 183cm Fig 11. Helliwell P, *Bambi Eyes*, 1998, acrylic on canvas 183cm x 155cm



Fig 12. Helliwell P, *Surgeon*, 1997, acrylic on canvas, 203 x 183cm

I began each painting by looking at very small objects and images that I scaled up to occupy entire canvasses. I also reduced my palette to greyscale, toned, and intermixed hues. *Elephant* (Fig 9) is derived from a toy object and enlarged to the size of a real baby elephant. The inflated image appears to float weightlessly thereby playfully representing the distortion and enlargement of the female body during pregnancy, transforming something small into something monumental. These paintings balance polarities of chaos and order, and show the conflict between spontaneity and deliberation via extremes of magnitude and fragility that suggest the precarious relationship between the self and environment. My external anxieties surrounding fatherhood were mirrored internally by reflections on my own fatherless upbringing. *Surgeon* (Fig 12) is both self-portrait and an image of longing for a surrogate father; it shows an isolated male archetype looking tentatively forward. The subsequent group of paintings is among my most bleak and angry and was developed over several years to express feelings of pathos and fear, anguish and excitement through images of sporting personalities, film stars, and political figures in *Carrie, David, and Cherrie* (Fig 13-16)



Fig 13. Helliwell P, *Gabriel*, 1999, acrylic on canvas, 173 x 165 cm

I produced an extremely anguished and angst ridden group of screaming faced paintings during 1999 and 2000. In both the Bible and the Quran Gabriel is an angel that acts as a medium, passing messages from God to humans. The elements of *Gabriel* (Fig 13) are a stormy background, at left an upturned figure from the Parthenon frieze, the Argentine footballer Gabriel Batistuta at top centre, and my sons' outstretched arms at right. The painting represents a desperate and unanswered cry because none of the elements connect, leaving an absence at the works centre. Retrospectively it seems that my approach was very subjective. The painting deforms the celebratory act of scoring a goal; the clenched fists of victory become the potential weapons of anger. Sporting motifs and sporting personalities referred to my own participation in sport as a teenager in the Plymouth Argyll Youth and Devon under 19s football teams, as well as to my continued competition as an adult in amateur athletics.



Fig14. Helliwell P, *Carry*,1999, Acrylic on canvas, 173 x 165 cm

*Carry* (Fig 14) depicts the actress Sissy Spacek as *Carrie* in the 1976 film of that name. She is holding up her hands, in the film they are covered in blood as she emerges from a burning high school prom (Fig 15). I placed an outline of Christ from Michelangelo's *Pieta* beneath her. The *pieta* and the figure in *Gabriel* from the Parthenon are both sculptures of dead male figures. *Carrie* is an avenging female made powerful through her supernatural abilities. The title *Carry* is a play on *Carrie*. I intended *Carrie* to carry Jesus's dead body in response to the death of a close friend from an overdose. The grieving aspect of the work is portrayed within the Mother and Child relationship and is connected to sexuality. It is a portrait of my own anxieties, of the fear and enchantment that women exercise over me. At a carnal level it depicts the infants fear and fascination of parental sexuality. When I saw *Carrie* as a teenager I was struck by the resemblance of Sissy Spacek to my own mother.



Fig 15. Still from *Carrie*, 1976.



Fig 16. Still from *The Seven Year Itch* 1955.

*Cherry* (Fig 17) depicts Cherrie Blair the then Prime Minister's wife with her arms and hands pushed down against a circular tablecloth. I connected the head, hands and tablecloth to reference the iconic image of Marilyn Monroe holding her pleated dress down against the rising stream of air in the 1955 Film, *The Seven Year Itch* (Fig 16). My recreation is pictured within the flat cartoon like language of Warhol's *Marylyn* and the gestural and visceral qualities of expressionism. A domestic table cloth represents the pleated dress of a sexual icon; that is portrayed against a blood red background. I wanted the blood red cherry colour to relate to the term 'Cherry' that is used to describe the act of taking and losing virginity. The final paintings in this body of work depicted rodeo riders, sportspeople (18), and Michelangelo's *David* (19).



Fig 17. Helliwell P, *Cherry*, 2000, acrylic on canvas, 173 x 165 cm



Fig 18. Helliwell P, *Rodeo*, 2000, acrylic and oil on canvas, 173 x 155cm Fig 19. Helliwell P, *David*, 2000, acrylic and oil on canvas 173 x 155cm

## MA creative practice and theory

During my MA I embraced the polarities of abstraction and figuration, returning to non-objective processes and 'imagery' to challenge the graphic power and certainty that sometimes infiltrated my figurative imagery. In order to reinvent my painting practice I made sculpture and fluid disjointed paintings retaining a residual figurative menace. My MA was a period of experimentation and trying to not overtly edit and censor the products of my creative process.



Fig 20. Helliwell P, *Last Day*, 2001, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 155cm Fig 21. Helliwell P, *Finis Terrea*, 2001, 225 x 155cm acylic on canvas

My formal investigations came to supplant and sublimate both the personal and the social convictions of earlier works. *Shit Sticks* (Fig 28) explores notions of balance and gravity to express similar vulnerable feelings. I intended my abstract imagery to be less illustrative but to possess equal pathos and depth of expression as my more explicitly figurative work. *Self-portrait* (Fig 26) oscillates between figuration and abstraction suggesting an ambiguous and enigmatic means of expression.



Fig 22. Helliwell P, *Eye to Eye*, 2005, acrylic on canvas, 240 x 173cm Fig 23. Helliwell P, *Cat and Mouse*, 2004, acrylic and oil on canvas, 240 x 173cm



Fig 24. Helliwell P, *Branagan's Temple*, 2003, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 155cm Fig 25. Helliwell P, *Untitled*, 2005, acrylic on canvas 203 x 173cm



Fig 26. Helliwell P, *Self Portrait*, 2003, oil on canvas, 183 x 183cm Fig 27. Helliwell P, *Untitled*, acrylic on canvas 2004 203 x 203cm

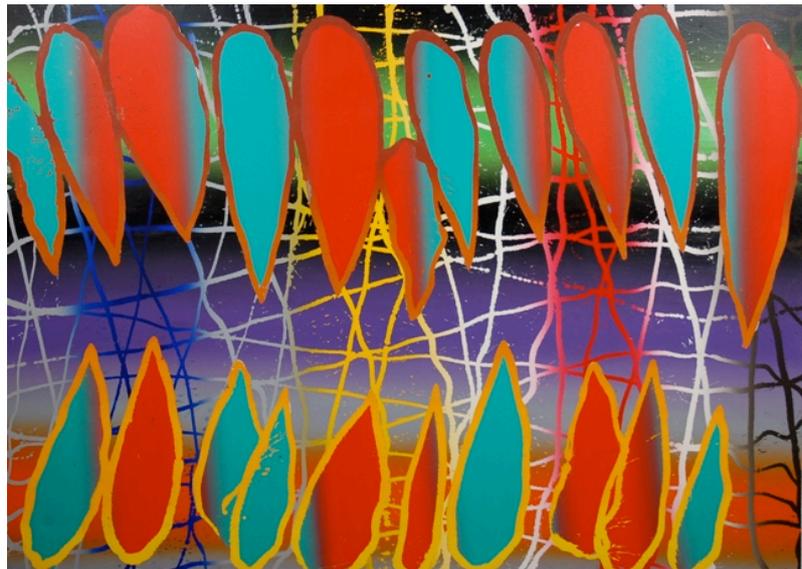


Fig 28. Helliwell P, *Shit Sticks*, 2002, 200x150x100cm Fig 29. Helliwell P, *Bombardment*, 2005, 203 x 245cm acrylic on canvas

### 2005-2011 Relevant practice since MA

Following my MA I continued to explore the relation between abstract painting processes and figurative images. I depicted animals and statues that led to a group of works called *Plastic Pets* that was exhibited at the Gooden Gallery in 2007 (Figs

32-34). In the *Plastic Pets* paintings I enlarged objects such as children's toys from my everyday environment and isolated them as simple figures on diagonally striated grounds. Despite high key fully saturated colour and juvenile motifs these works distil a feeling of threat and menace, and a fear of collapse and disintegration (Figs 27-33)



Fig 30. Helliwell P, *My Yesterdays Shine Darkly Today*, 2010, acrylic and oil on canvas, 85 x 365cm



Fig 31. Helliwell P, *Walking in Square Circles*, 2006, acrylic and oil on canvas, 240 x 173cm, Fig 32. Helliwell P, *Bird of Paradise*, 2008, 140 x 125cm acrylic and oil on canvas

The convoluted and vertiginous layers of the *Summer Colouring* series of 2008 (Fig 37-44) was a response to the simplicity of *Plastic Pets* paintings. I collaged and spliced together pages from children's colouring books as a starting point for generating images of animals, humans, and plants. The body of work explored quasi abstract figures and grounds with disruptions of linear filigree, the paintings juxtapose and combine graphic imagery and pictorial content. In these paintings hard flat shapes jostle with broken painterly passages and looser brushed areas that are tied together by fluid meandering lines. The incorporation of brushstrokes evolved into more graphic and sign-like representations of gesture that led to experimentation with latex and masking techniques that I am still developing and researching within my doctorate paintings. Having worked in relative isolation I joined the doctorate programme to demand more of my imagination, pursue the intuitive and more inventive aspects of my creative practice, and obtain a more participatory role in contemporary culture.



Fig 33. Helliwell P, *Double Cross*, 2007, acrylic and oil on canvas 173 x 150cm Fig 34. Helliwell P, *Broken Home*, 2006, acrylic and oil on canvas, 203 x 245cm



Fig 35. Helliwell P, *American Wildlife*, 2006, oil on canvas, 203 x 173cm Fig 36. Helliwell P, *Road Kill*, 2007, oil on canvas, 173 x 155cm



Fig 41. Helliwell P, *Wing and a Prayer*, 2008, acrylic and oil on canvas, 203 x 183cm Fig 42. Helliwell P, *Zebra Parrot*, 2008, acrylic and oil on canvas, 203 x 183cm



Fig 37. Helliwell P, *Untitled*, 2007, oil on canvas, 240 x 225cm Fig 38. Helliwell P, *Untitled*, 2007, oil on canvas, 220 x 203cm



Fig 39. Helliwell P, *Girl on Boy Tree*, 2008, oil on canvas, 203 x 183cm Fig 40. Helliwell P, *Boy Bird Booze*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 203 x 183cm



Fig 43. Helliwell P, *Treasure Island*, 2008, 203 x 183cm, oil on canvas Fig 44. Helliwell P, *Untitled*, 2008, acrylic on canvas, 203 x 183cm

## **Creative Practice and Theory**

The dynamic of my practice is sustained by a paradox that informs my theoretical and practical interests. On the one hand my reality and consciousness, which I think of as the components of my experience, can be conceived as mediated by language and prescribed by the limit of what language can articulate. If experience is conceived as being mediated and preceded by representational languages then cognition may be stated as the re-cognition of predicted things that are already written. I have often tried to resist the idea that we are spoken through by language but realise a naïve return to ideas of immediacy are reactionary. Hal Foster describes the tendency of expressionism to deny expression the status of a language saying of the artists' 'expressive fallacy' that, '...these mediated expressions 'precede' the artist: they speak him rather more than he expresses them'. Foster (1985, p. 62)

On the other hand our lives are not scripted, life appears subject to unpredictable forces where thoughts and feelings arise spontaneously as a natural and immediate response to experience. In this sense art is an attempt to shape visual language and express experiences that reside beyond verbalisation; where images are created to fit emotions and experience. Peter Fuller describes the role of play in interpreting the infant's relation between self and world, writing that. 'Play is a non-instinctual activity belonging simultaneously to the inner and the outer worlds: it exists on the borderline between fantasy and action'. Fuller (1980, p. 203)

My interest in the relation between mediation and immediacy and my enquiry into the pictorial aspects of experience is fuelled by my frustration and ambivalence towards postmodern discourse. In evaluating the paradox between mediated and immediate expression I have come to perceive a parallel predicament between simply reiterating and being spoken through by the dominant visual tradition of mass media lens based imagery, and discovering a more unique and imaginative creative process. I endeavour to see if my painting practice can attain a stylistically cohesive and unique vision and reject the tendency to mimetically parody existing pictorial languages that rely on an acceptance and a display of aesthetic ventriloquism.

In **Part One** I explore some of my key interests concerning postmodern experiences that involve the relationship of human consciousness to both language and reality. I

am fascinated with how reality appears structured and laden with artificial signs and languages that not only represent reality but emphasize realities that are conducive to being reproduced. Emerging from postmodernism into the contemporary era representational media may appear to have infiltrated and replaced reality with fictional and highly reproducible technologies. I will explore the unnaturalness of the postmodern experience within the title, *Fictions and Fabrications, the Unreality of Postmodern Experience*. I will look at and compare Jean Baudrillard's concepts of 'simulation' and 'hyperreality', with WJT Mitchell's idea of the 'pictorial turn' and 'metapictures', and Roland Barthes *Death of the Author*. My discussion of these ideas will be interspersed with paintings by Jeff Koons, Arturo Herrera, Patrick Caulfield, as well as my own work, and draw upon the critical writings of Hal Foster. Subdivisions in my discussion are titled *Simulation and Hyperreality, From Pictures within Pictures to the Eclectic Pluralism of the Postmodern Voice*, and, *Idolatry and Iconoclasm; the Impulse to Create, the Impulse to Destroy*.

In **Part Two** I address my creative process and ideas concerning the imagination in response to what I see as the cynical and clichéd aspects of inter-textuality, of the parody without origin, and of the absence of direct and creative expression. I perceive these issues as unresolved but active within my painting practice as well as more generally present within conventional postmodern doctrine. I title this section *Innovation over Imitation* to explore the role of the imagination within a post-textual conception of the creative process. This will allow me to discuss Christopher Bolas' discussion of creativity and trauma with his concepts of the 'unthought known' and the 'transformational object', Jaques Lacan on the 'mirror stage', and Richard Kearney's work on contemporary definitions of the imagination. My discussion will be interspersed with paintings by William Orpen, and Dana Shultz as well as Patrick Caulfield and my own recent work. I divide my discussion into the following sections *I Want to Speak in the Beautiful Language of the Unsaid, I'll be My Mirror*, and, *The Disintegrating and Emerging Self*.

### **Part One; Fictions and Fabrications, the Unreality of Post Modern Experience**

In reducing postmodernity to a single idea we may be able to define Art as the *representation of a reality that is a representation*. This idea can be reiterated in a more doctrine like manner as *a copy of a copy*, or melodramatically as *a copy*

*without origin, and a fake of a fake.* Within this view language and expression do not belong to the domain of a creative humanist imagination but are the product of a chain of textual connections that have no original referent. Richard Kearney defines this reductive and self-referential aspect of the postmodern imagination when he states, 'For now we are concerned not with the imitation of some pre-existing truth, but with an imitation of an imitation which avows that there exists no original beyond itself'. Kearney (1988, p. 225) All of imagination and human subjectivity might be defined as having undergone a fundamental shift from the natural to the synthetic and having become increasingly mediated by visual and verbal languages. Our entire being may be transformed and reshaped by postmodern experience as a consequence of mass cultural consumerism and of commercial advertising, the mass media, and employment and leisure structures. Contemporary reality, particularly the urban and commercial environment, appears synthetic and unnatural, and fabricated from artificial signs of the real that are in turn perceived by a postmodern consciousness that may also be structured and formed through representational languages. It is this self-referential and self-reflective relation between reality, representation, and consciousness that enables me to think of artificial and mediated experiences as being paradoxically first hand, real, and individual. Foster writing of what he calls, *The First Age of Pop*, describes representative artist of the Pop generation saying of their work,

'For in its representation of this glossy world, Pop exposes a general drive not only to pictorialize everything but also to fetishize the images that result, that is, to invest them with a powerful life of their own.' Foster (2012, p.13)

We can think of reality as not only mediated by but composed of sign like and highly mimetic representational mediums. The mediating role of language in the development of our consciousness, and in our relationship with the world can be extended beyond verbal language to include contemporary mediums such as images and signs of both the analogue and digital mass media. The transition from a world experienced as pre-verbal, to the expression of our relationship with the world through words and images, might entail resistances and painful attempts to assimilate and reject differing languages. The traumatic influence of languages upon pre-verbal emotions is described by Christopher Bolas in his description of the role and impact of language on perception and consciousness. Bolas writes that,

'...to enter language is to accept a deep change in the human sense of form, from the (of an apparently unified self) to wording the self in a new form of being. Art forms offer further challenges to the self and as with language, what emerges from one seems not to be of one's own making, but guided by the form of an other.' Bolas (2013, p.200)

Bolas describes the complexity and interrelationship between reality, representation, and consciousness, and how processes of transformation shape and reform the 'sensorial imagined order' of the self. The notion of 'wording the self' can be related to the ways that artists' find visual equivalents to experience that 'picture' the self.

### **Simulation and the Hyperreal**

*Cut Out* (Fig 45) a painting from Jeff Koon's *Easyfun Ethereal* series of 1999-2004 is an example of a painting composed entirely of appropriated image fragments derived from popular cultural clichés that re-present pre-existing and familiar representations such as the Mount Rushmore sculpture and breakfast cereal. The image of American Presidents carved into Mount Rushmore is an instance of an extremely well known work of art or of imagery that is firmly located within the popular imagination. The image of breakfast cereal derived from the illustration on a packet of *Cheerios* may be seen daily by millions of consumers while the flat cut out mule adds a carnival like and homespun homely familiarity to the work. Koons says of his own work. 'And the cereal exploding with the milk behind: that's just optimism. You can put your head through a cut-out and for the moment become whatever you want to be.' Sylvester (2000, p.17) Koons' comments suggest it is a start of a new day, and we can eat our breakfast, stick our head through the flat cut out and become the president of the United States of America. The ascent to presidency is depicted as a baptism within the nourishing milk of commodity capitalism. *Cut Out* enables us to momentarily place our own head on the unfinished plinth of Mount Rushmore by imagining ourselves peering through the horse and being energised by the cereal; the painting seems to say, 'Eat up and dreams will come true'. In combining pre-existing representations Koons reconstructs the flimsiness and fabricated nature of the American Dream that anyone can become president, inferring that dreams are (un)attainable and reality the paper thin cardboard cut-out veneer of an empty donkey's head. In this interpretation the emptiness of the cut out reveals an absence

at the core of contemporary experience; life is perhaps hollow and shallow and like déjà vu unfolds onto another disappointing day.

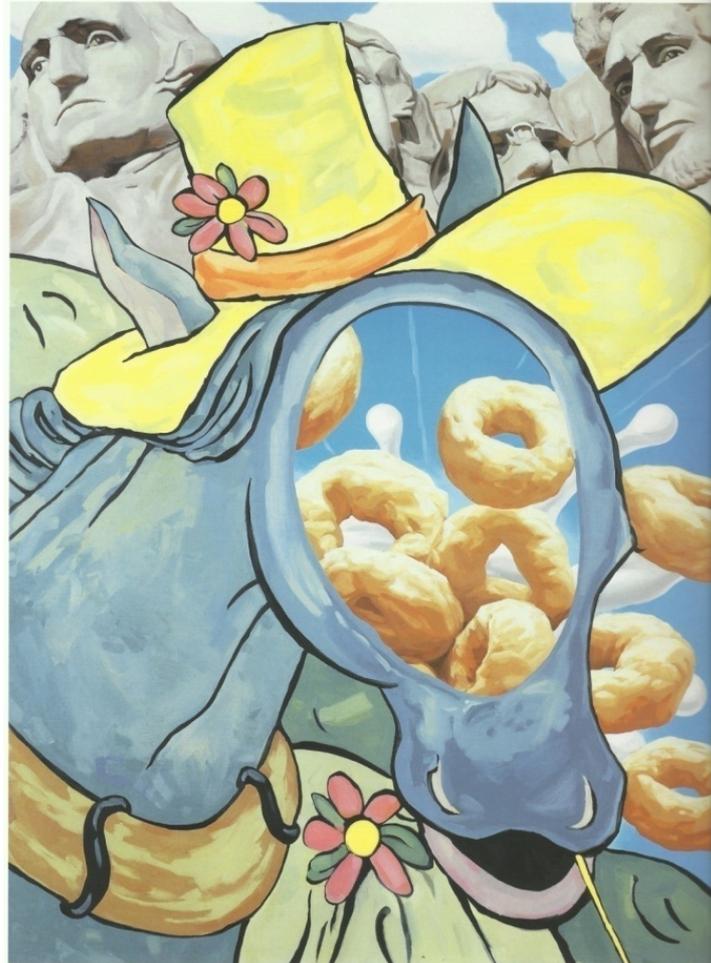


Fig 45. Koons J, (1999), *Cut-Out* (Oil on canvas), 200 x 110 cm

Koons' imagery appears to be made of flat shallow planes and layers of compressed space that may illustrate as well as offer empirical examples to many of the ideas that Jean Baudrillard proposed in his concepts of simulation and hyperreality. Koons' vision sometimes appears more neatly sanitised and less apocalyptic than Baudrillard's but possess some of the nihilistic quality that experiences of the unreality of reality entail. Baudrillard's ideas are influential to art that appropriates and quotes other images to filter synthetic experiences of a cosmetic and clichéd world. Baudrillard writes, 'It is no longer a question of imitation, nor of reduplication,

nor even of parody. It is rather a question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself.' Baudrillard (1983 p.4)

Baudrillard's concept of simulation clearly states representation has become a *representation of a representation*, the circularity of this reductive idea is both cynical and exhilarating in its definition of how representations not only saturate the fabric of postmodern reality but have replaced reality. The idea of the total resemblance between the representational means and the depicted reality reiterates how Baudrillard distinguishes a difference between 'representation and simulation', he says that simulation does not refer back to a real reality but refers only to its artificial self in a self-referential circuit. Baudrillard describes how the terms reality and representation are collapsed in a circular and mimetic implosion. He writes that representation,

'...starts from the principle that the sign and the real are equivalent. Conversely, simulation starts from the *utopia* of this principle of equivalence (even if this equivalence is utopian, it is a fundamental axiom), from the radical negation of the sign as value, from the sign as reversion and death sentence of every reference. Whereas representation tries to absorb simulation by interpreting it as false representation, simulation envelops the whole edifice of representation as itself a simulacrum.' Baudrillard (1983, p.11)

Baudrillard proposes that reality is artificial and any connection to the idea that an original reality resides behind representation is impossible. In this view it is not only representation that is false but reality itself a copy and a fake. This relationship between the copy and fake is echoed in the sanitised language of commercial advertising that Koons' parodies and is revealed by both Koons and Baudrillard to be an alibi of the unreality of the world. In a description that might define simulation Baudrillard writes,

'The very definition of the real has become: that of which it is possible to give an equivalent reproduction...The real is not only what can be reproduced, but that which is already reproduced...the hyperreal, which is entirely in simulation.' Baudrillard (1983, p.146)

Baudrillard discusses the real and imaginary in relation to his idea of the hyperreal, he writes,

‘The hyperreal represents a much more advanced phase, in the sense that even this contradiction between the real and imaginary is effaced. The unreal is no longer that of dream and fantasy, of a beyond or a within, it is that of a *hallucinatory resemblance of the real with itself.*’ Baudrillard (1983, p.142)

Baudrillard ‘s thinking implies that the imagination is anticipated and predicted by the hyperreal. Although postmodern artists produced startling images there is nevertheless a lack and dissatisfaction to the feeling of being creatively compromised by strategies of appropriation and quotation that uncritically align creative practice with the artificial world of the hyperreal. Despite the possibility of what Foster calls an ‘ironism of affirmation’ Foster (2012, p 25), being employed to undermine and critique consumer society, many artists might feel unable to proceed further than the cynical cliché. Kearney describes the limitation of basing creative results on parodic practices and strategies that appropriate the work of others when he writes, ‘The demythologizer can only affirm what truth is not.’ Kearney (1988, p. 273)

Koons and Baudrillard in describing how the real is fabricated and mediated by representation imply that human consciousness is also manufactured. Much of my early doctorate work was concerned with exploring ideas and experiences that concern identity and the construction of class, gender, and sexuality; and how ideas about self-formation are related to the view that self-expression and creativity are likewise manufactured and mediated. Extending the relation between the created self, and the creative self, I attempted in much of my work to explore ideas of how both pictures and people are assembled and fabricated.

I have made several paintings during the doctorate where I tried to depict my own empirically lived equivalent of the idea that we are assembled from a multitude of conflicting and competing composite parts. I wanted to compliment this idea with picture making strategies that also explore the assembly and manufacture of pictorial language. *Mummy* (Fig 46) my first painting made on the doctorate program in 2011 is an amalgamation of an Egyptian Pharaoh, Burlesque torso, and male pelvic area. The title *Mummy* with its connotations of mothering implies a powerful parental

surrogate that came to reflect my own upbringing by a single parent. *Age of Innocence* (Fig 47) completed at the beginning of my final year of the doctorate depicts an infant cyber-self adrift in disparaging and disintegrating technological detritus. The painting is my response to the current crisis and conflicts in Europe and the Middle East and is perhaps a disparaging indictment of what the future entails.



Fig 46. Helliwell P, *Mummy*, 2011, acrylic on canvas, 183 x 173cm

When artists appropriate or copy imagery and employ a plurality of languages in their practice it is easy to assume or expect that they are speaking of the detached and fabricated basis of postmodern experience. It is also easy to think that appropriated images reiterate only clichéd and stereotypically generalised realities instead of individual and particular experiences. Although I continue to be fascinated with disjointed and fractured pictorial spaces and imagery derived from commercial mass culture it is the authenticity of the unreal quality of my lived reality that I attempt to express. Rather than being laid back and detached my work is sometimes shrill,

hysterical, and melodramatic. In this sense although artificial, the languages and procedures I use are an attempt to say something believable and personally experienced. It is by using synthetic and artificial languages that I am able to speak convincingly of the mediated nature of my experience of simulated and hyper-unreal realities.



Fig 47. Helliwell P, *Age of Innocence*, 2015, acrylic and oil on canvas, 120 x 100cm

*Mummy* enabled me to explore the manufacture of a multi-gendered and sexually ambivalent figure. *Mummy* is a Frankenstein-like amalgam collaged from various component body parts. In trying to balance the cynicism of Koons' approach with 'affirmative irony' I selected from pre-existing imagery to assemble a believable and cohesive whole that articulates how hyperreal experiences appear to 'clone' the singularity of the notion of selfhood. In other doctorate paintings I continued to look at composite identities and sensual and cerebral body components, for example *Dummy* (Fig 48), and *Not III* (Fig 49).



Fig 48. Helliwell P, *Dummy*, 2015, oil on panel, 160 x 120cm Fig 49. Helliwell P, *Not III*, 2012, oil on canvas, 173 x 150cm

The painted collages of Arturo Herrera utilise and resist strategies and experiences of hyperreal and simulated realities. Herrera produced a series of untitled collaged images of paintings derived from Disney animations of John James Audubon's *Birds of America* illustrations which were published as a book titled *You Go First*. Herrera manipulated and overlaid the painted images to conceal and reveal particular meanings and visual alignments. In (Fig 50) a collage that echoes the *cut out* flat quality of Koons' painting, we see the conjoining of two layers, a wintery background and skeletal silhouette in which the partial figure of Mikey Mouse carries a shovel or tool handle. The image makes visual links between the setting sun and Mikey's iconic ears as well as joining desolate branches to a tree in the lower left of the picture. The image exudes a mournful sadness that is expressed in the barren snow coated scene as well as in the indication of a tear about to emerge from Mikey's absent eye.

Many of Herrera's images play with their connection to the imagery of others and in how they engender and recall particular debates accompanying particular languages and stylistic developments of art, for example the debate concerning gesture and

expression, nature and culture in (Fig 51). In (Fig 52) Audubon's image is almost entirely concealed with a depiction of woven textile that recalls both lino flooring and chequered chair caning. The image makes a connection to Picasso's seminal collage *Still Life with chair Caning* (Fig 53), that incorporated a real decorator's vinyl adhesive printed with a representation of chair caning. Herrera therefore references a debate about the relation between original and copy, between what is real and what is represented. Herrera's image incorporates a residual view of a frontiersman crossing a ravine in the lower left that may highlight the bravery and pioneer spirit of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century avant-garde. Herrera's distant figure may alternately describe the alienation and anxiety that the rise of the imitative and reproducible quality of modernist and subsequently our own postmodern experience entails.



Fig 50. Herrera A, 2004, painted and pasted paper. Fig 51. Herrera A, 2004, painted and pasted paper.

A compressed and artificial pictorial space can be sympathetic to the act of removing and placing one image in relation to another. Collage creates a methodology that embodies self-reflective contemplation about the role and nature of imagery within

image based realities. Collage not only facilitates questions regarding the relation between image and imagination but also enable artists to reflect if images are the recycled imitation of other given images that quote and appropriate existing signs, or whether unique ideas and meaningful experiences can be expressed in new and original ways.



Fig 52. Herrera A, 2004 Fig 53. Picasso P, *Still Life with chair Caning*, 2012, oil on oil-cloth over canvas edged with rope, 29 x 37 cm (Musée Picasso)

In paintings such as *Dummy* (Fig 48) and *Folly* (Fig 54) I tried to visually embody my reflections about collage, artificial visual languages, and the relation of the imagination to contemporary images. Using sign like sweeps of colour that recall expressionistic brushstrokes, a mannequin painted as life size, and cartoon animal imagery from a discarded confectionary packet, I assembled a singular or holistic space. My depicted images, such as an alcohol bottle and umbilical cord like drinking straw around the giraffe's neck, concern sensual desire and the gratification and transcendence of flesh and mind. All of the images came from items that I had around me or been discarded and found in the street, the pictorial quality and found

status of these images is related to the idea of collage using non fine art materials and images from popular culture.

During the evolution of *Folly* the pictorial structure began to be informed by and resemble Edouard Manet's , *A Bar at the Folies-Begere* (Fig 55), which depicts the dehumanised transaction between bartender (mannequin) and patron (giraffe) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Parisian metropolis. Manet's work is interpreted as proposing a content of sexual commodification where the transaction of flesh is equated to purchasing alcohol but seen as a compressed and ambiguous mirror reflection.



Fig 54. Helliwell P, *Folly*, 2012, oil on canvas, 173 x 183cm



Fig 55. Manet E, *A Bar at the FolieS-Bergere*, 1882, oil on canvas, 96 x 130cm, (Courthauld Institute Galleries, London)

Within my painting practice shallow compressed spaces and the artificiality of collage enable me to think about the relationship of images to experience and make connections between representation and reality. In many of my paintings I use collage as a literal and imaginative process to paste one thing over another, I have also used collage as a method of introducing external real objects onto my canvasses, and as an example of a shallow and cut out pictorial space that informs the aesthetic of my work.

Like many artists I am fascinated by images that others have made and sometimes develop a parodic relationship and obsession with a particular work. These intense periods of being with an image do not simply reiterate or enforce postmodern doctrine but become meditations on the meaning and function of visual language within human consciousness. Images seem to seek out and speak to other images and confirm the pictorial bias of those who perceive. There is a postmodern aspect to the resemblance and connection between images but I also acknowledge that the dialogue artists' form with the work of other artists pre-dates the current use and sanctioning of this practice by postmodernism; artists have been informed by the work of other artists long before theories of image saturation became current.

The centrality of the pictorial in postmodernism might imply a more universal psychological aspect in how representation is perhaps an essential component of all human experience, but W J T Mitchell writes, '...that while the problem of pictorial representation has always been with us, it presses inescapably now'. Mitchell (1994, p. 16) Mitchell describes the representational character of postmodern experience as the 'Pictorial Turn'. For Mitchell the visual bias of the link between representation and reality, or imagery and things is not simply an emphasis on appearance and resemblance, it is more akin to the structural connection of similitude. The 'Pictorial Turn' is not then simply the rise of imagery or ascension of representation over reality. Mitchell describes a complex relationship that images have with things, arguing that this relationship surpasses previous literary and linguistic models. He says the 'Pictorial Turn',

'...is not a return to naive mimesis, copy or correspondence theories of representation, or a renewed metaphysics of pictorial "presence": it is rather a post linguistic, post semiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between

visuality, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality.’ Mitchell (1994, p. 16)

Within postmodern practice the appropriate language to represent the content and experience of the ‘Pictorial Turn’ may require the use of a highly image conscious and knowing self-consciously contrived art. In addressing the emphasis on the visual bias of the ‘Pictorial turn’ Mitchell describes the practice of ‘meta-pictures’ that incorporate a picture within a picture or ‘mis en abime’, which is a term derived from the practice of depicting a shield upon a shield in heraldry.

*Unfinished* (Fig 56) by Patrick Caulfield incorporates the ‘mis en abime’ of the ‘meta-picture’. *Unfinished* is a good example of the ideas and thinking that interest me. *Unfinished* is a finished painting that looks at levels of finish, from the bare canvas of the border, through the priming and under painting to the blocked in areas, and finally to the central ‘finished’ area. In clearly laying out these separate levels of finish, Caulfield also separates several distinct pictorial languages. We see the photo realist lens based representation in the centre which merges into the cartoon like flat colour and graphic quality of the room, which bleeds out into the primed and then into the raw canvas. I am interested in how Caulfield links each area and how they overlap. When I look at this painting I always ask myself if the central image is on top of three other layers that go back to the bare un-primed canvas, and if I were able to peel off the central image would there be anything beneath it at all, or if there is a succession of differing levels of finish that stack up towards the final hyperreal layer?

I am also interested in how the central area predicts and influences what happens beyond itself; it leeches out into and anticipates the surrounding space. The central image is a painted reproduction of a photo from a cookery book or glossy magazine. The image has a rustic appeal and silvery Mediterranean quality of light, the quiche is presented as part of a desirable and sophisticated dining experience. The central image has a very wide angle look presenting a wealth of information across the dramatic perspective of the table and room. From the edges of the central image another room unfolds, the image generates an invented room. *Unfinished* suggests that the world exists and comes alive through its representation. In *Unfinished* Caulfield is deconstructing the act of representation and analysing the production of meaning, whilst alerting us to the nature of the reality around us. I believe that

*Unfinished* is a work that in being so succinct becomes emblematic of postmodern experience.

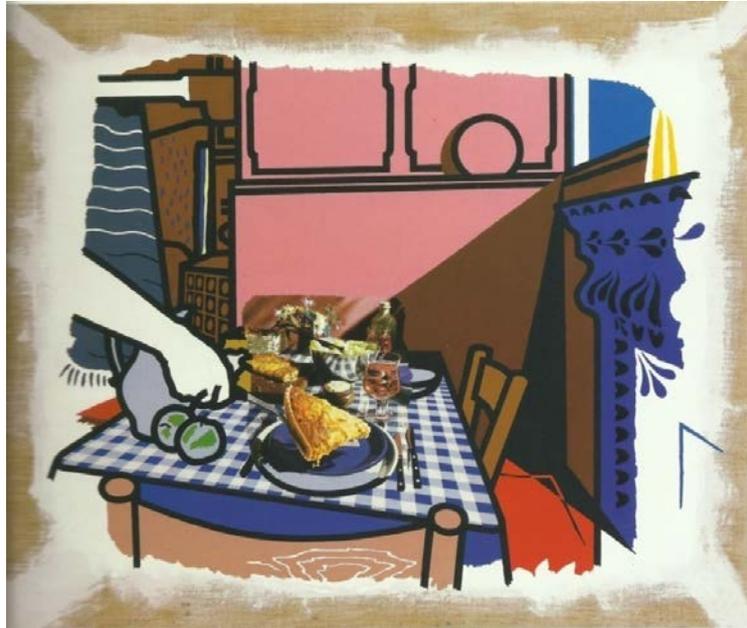


Fig 56. Caulfield P, *Unfinished*, 1978, acrylic on canvas, 76.2 x 91.4 cm

The work of Caulfield as well as Herrera and Koons is un-naturalistic, their spatial systems and use of visual languages is highly synthetic. All three artists owe a great deal to the flat planes of synthetic cubism and the abstraction of modernism but do not often overtly recall any particular school or specific painting. Although highly artificial I believe their work proposes a deep connection to simulated realities rather than replicating only the superficial surface appearance or effects of the languages of naturalism. Although their work is synthetic there is never any question that there is not something 'real' being proposed or articulated.

In some of my smaller paintings such as *Forest* (fig 57) and *Torso* (Fig 58) I have attempted to reflect upon the believability of the unreality of postmodern experience through the connection of a plurality of visual languages and by incorporating pictures within a picture. Our experience of the 'Pictorial Turn' may make us feel unreal and more akin to an apparition than a living being. In his description of the flat and pictorial quality of Lichtenstein's sculpture Foster might well be explaining the

feel of contemporary human experience when he writes, ‘...as though caught between the condition of image and thing, or, more precisely, as though, even as things, they could not fight free of the virtual status of images.’ Foster (2011, p 78)



Fig 57. Helliwell P, *Forest*, 2012, acrylic and oil on canvas, 76 x 94cm

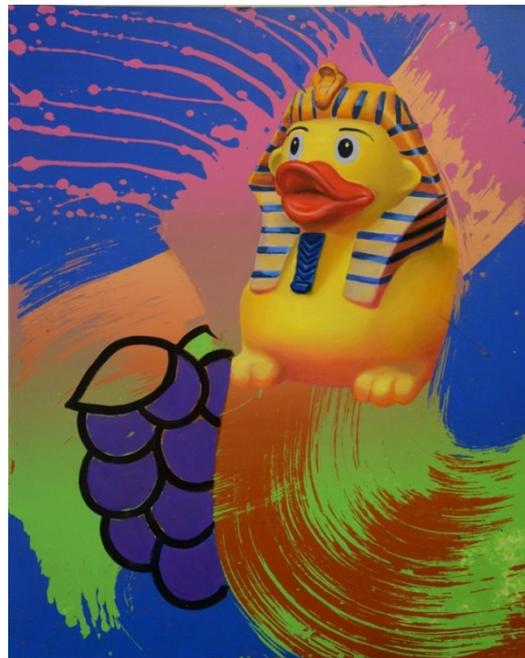
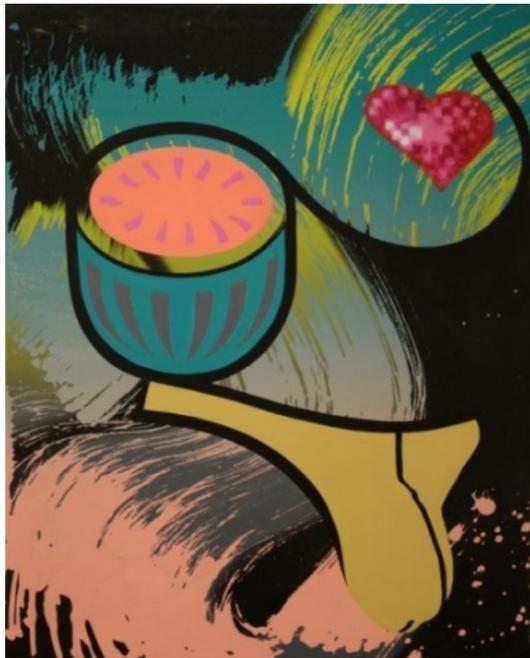


Fig 58. Helliwell P, *Facial*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 94 x 76cm Fig 59. Helliwell P, *Sphinx*, 2012, acrylic and oil on canvas, 94 x 76cm

Within the reproducibility of postmodernism human presence may well be eradicated and replaced by hollow images that resemble only our residual absence. Mitchell connects the idea of simulation to how the 'clone' is an infinite replication that reiterates the pictorial aspect of experience, he writes,

'The clone renders the disavowal of living images impossible by turning the concept of animated icon on its head. Now we see that it is not merely a case of some images that seem to come alive, but that living things themselves were already images in one form or another.' Mitchell (2005, p.11)

### **From Pictures within Pictures to the Eclectic Pluralism of the Postmodern Voice**

Caulfield, Koons, and Herrera explore the postmodern position that reality is already a representation and therefore representing it entails making a representation of a representation. One of the successes of their work is the singularity of vision that informs and speaks through their imagery. In my own work the representational and pictorial bias enables me to reflect upon and ask if it is possible to advance a singular and cohesive visual language or if the experience of multiplicity insists upon an eclectic pluralism and fragmentary aesthetic. Foster warned that the relativism of pluralism and inability to reimagine and transform visual language might result in depersonalised character of the artists work's identity, writing. 'But does not the eclecticism of pastiche (its mix of codes) threaten the very concept of style, at least as the singular expression of an individual or period?' Foster (1985, p.127) Style as the embodiment of a singular and cohesive voice is perhaps silenced during postmodernism by a multiplicity of voices.

Roland Barthes' essay *Death of the Author* provides a very well-known formulation of the eclecticism and pluralism within postmodern practice by describing a shift in emphasize from the creative space of the artist to the interpretive space of the reader, and from thinking of an artwork as being a singular product to being instead a multiple text. Barthes writes,

'We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a

variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.' Barthes (1977, p.146)

Barthes continues,

'The writer can only imitate a gesture that is always anterior, never original. His only power is to mix writings, to counter the ones with the others, in such a way as never to rest on any one of them. Did he wish to *express himself*, he ought at least to know that the inner 'thing' he thinks to 'translate' is itself only a read-formed dictionary, its words only explainable through other words and so on indefinitely;' Barthes (1977, p.146)

In discussing the relativism of the 'author' Barthes describes a procedure and cultural practice that gave rise to the widespread and mainstream use of quotation and appropriation. Appropriation can be viewed as celebratory of a profusion of sensual and cerebral stimuli sourced from the postmodern environment, or as a nihilistic and ahistorical mix and match end game. In clearly defining the evolution and change in emphasis from artist to viewer, writer to reader, Barthes states that.

'A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.' Barthes (1977, p.148)

Although central to postmodernist culture Barthes conception of creativity may appear impoverished and restrictive. Barthes does not account for the creativity required in producing the original 'texts' from which we now quote, nor does he address the common experience that all artists have of being the spectator and 'reader' of their own work as it is produced. The inversion of creator and viewer that Barthes' *Death of the Author* implies may describe how some artists have side stepped the difficult task of generating their own original and unique vision and settled for copying and parodying the achievements of others. Kearney says of this postmodern imagination.

'One would have to speak of an imagination which is no more than a parody of itself. For once the idea of an original source of meaning is renounced, every act of so called imagination is revealed as a mere 'effect' of the endless intertextuality of language itself.' Kearney (1988, p.276)

The profusion of related practices such as sampling, collage, the readymade and found objects, quotation, and appropriation has enriched modern and postmodern art. The inventiveness of these new methods of working and new strategies resulted in startling and unpredictable aesthetic anomalies. I am however concerned with uncritically adopting techniques that have become academic formulas and readymade methods to generate results that are predictable and already known.

The idea of collage joining separate images to produce a new reality remains prevalent in the digital age of conceptual and synthetic painting. The practice of selecting from an historical menu of seemingly disparate, random, and unrelated information relies on the principles of collage to connect or join even mismatched and un-synchronised information.

I believe it is in the connections between fragments rather than their former whole that energy and meaning can sometimes emerge. I maintain a distinction between collage as conjoining separate information to generate new formations, and the idea of achieving spontaneity through improvisation and a stream of consciousness. For me the sensual materiality of collage anchors my practice in the real and is supplemented by the fiction of my uncensored cerebral utterances, even in my poetry it is the cut and paste of collage that provides word juxtapositions rather than words simply flowing from my unconscious. The physicality of play and manipulation of materials in both my painting and poetry enables me to find and journey towards freer and more spontaneous and unconscious uses of language. I have attempted in many paintings to integrate the conflict between spontaneity and deliberation by aligning chaos and order, and form and content, and utilising techniques of improvisation as processes and procedures that enhance the energy and inquisitiveness of my practice.

Whilst on a residency in Holland in 2012 I explored the idea of metamorphic animal parts creating new collaged and fragmented creatures. The paintings depict hybrid beings attacked by monsters and frightening mammalian faces. These creatures

inhabit spaces in which abstract shapes and sweeps of colour jostle for ascendancy. Each image and visual language competes for existence and meaning.



Fig 60. Helliwell P, *Dark Blue Perfume Mocks the Ocean*, 2012, acrylic, oil, hair on canvas, each panel 203 x 183cm

I inserted images of found plastic objects within invented spaces to combine and explore chance alignments as well as planned and preconceived outcomes. The concept of collage enabled me to paint, then cut out and place separate images around the main painting (Fig 60). With this methodology I conceived imagery as ingredients that can be combined in different ways. Once the placement of these movable figures was established they were adhered to the picture surface. Each layer of the painting is interwoven to establish a relationship with other layers; this relationship is at times a visceral and engaged with my struggle to 'picture' meaning, but sometimes it is fabricated and informed by less inventive strategies of simulation that copy found imagery. In addition to depicting figures formed from separate parts, individual paintings could be arranged experimentally in a series to form new structures and narrative sequences.

The paintings became related as groups. The energy of each panel was increased in certain combinations with other panels. I arrived at a triptych formation in which the imagery bounced from canvas to canvas as an escalating internal compositional rhythm. *Dark Blue Perfume Mocks the Ocean* (Fig 60) is titled after one of my poems written whilst on the residency. My poetry provides additional routes to generate

unpredictable juxtapositions of imagery and literal meanings. I cut up colouring book images of animals and randomly joined pages to produce new hybrid creatures. These collages resulted in unpredictable anomalies such as splicing half a crab with half a mountain goat. The idea of inventing new creatures is related to other literary and mythological figures that imply hybridisation such as *Centaurs*, the *Minotaur*, and *Frankenstein's Monster*.

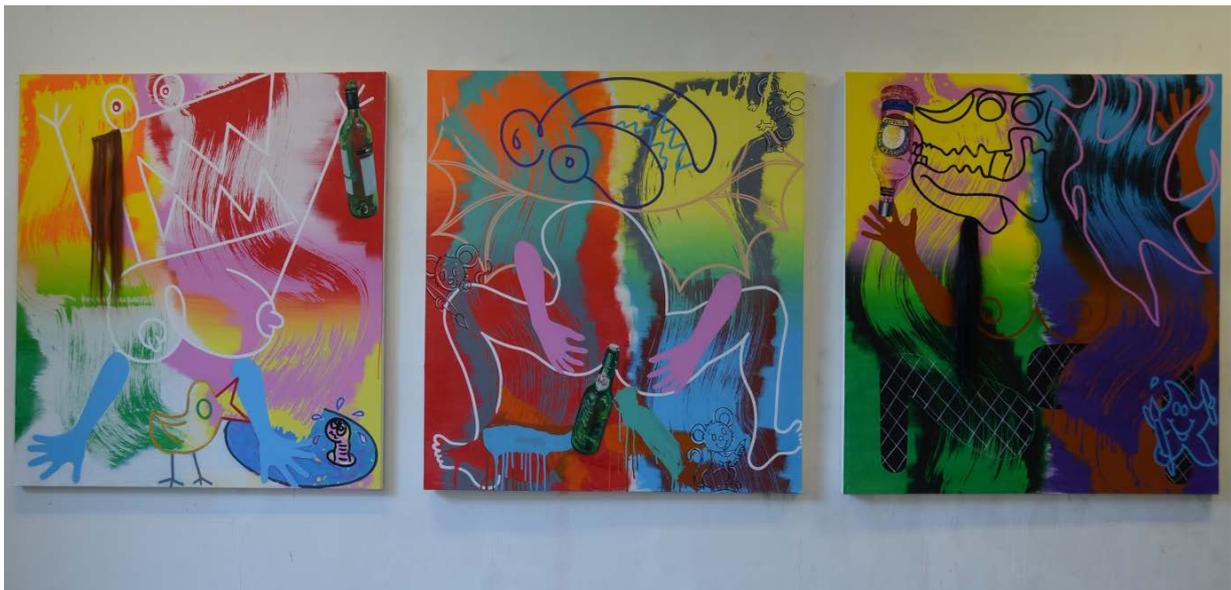


Fig 61. Helliwell P, *The Sun Appears in the Afternoon of a Crimson Forehead*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, each panel 140 x 125cm

A strategy of parodic quotation may be insufficient to advance the imagination beyond the pastiche of postmodernism because the plagiarism of riding on the achievement of others is dependent on the privileged vantage of obtaining this selection after it has been achieved. There is also an issue with validating dominant and selective historical views at the expense of what is left out and not quoted. Postmodern artists may perpetuate worldview as image laden, saturated, and composed of imagery. Koons' imagery may be derivative and reinforce clichéd misogynist narratives such as comparing the female body to the flesh of animals, for example in overlaying a seductive negative shape of a woman upon an image of elephants (Fig 62), carnival underwear and draped hair recalls the costumed elephants in Disney's *Dumbo* (Fig 63).



Fig 62. Koons J, *Elephant*, 2001, oil on canvas, 304 x 426cm Fig 63. Still from Disney W, *Dumbo*, 1941

Koons' appears to parade a problematic sexual politics within the sheen of populism by copying the look and effect of a lens based photo-shop manipulated image with a hyperreal and trompe-l'oeil painting technique. The work of Koons, Caulfield, and Herrera is inconceivable without Barthes ideas already being ingrained in the popular imagination and already present in non-fine art practices such as advertising and design. Koons work in particular often eradicates a space for contemplation and cleanses with sanitising, academic, and formulaic painting processes that echo advertising and design. Our dehumanised experience of Koons' work is emphasised by his process of fabrication that is detached in being painted by assistants.

Barthes deconstructed the myth of the creative process and notion of the originality of the artist-authors' uniqueness. Barthes' ideas do not necessarily aim to lessen the effectiveness and validity of artists' creative strategies; they explain that artists operate within new definitions of how the fabric of reality has changed from the natural to an unnatural and artificial environment. In this respect an artist such as Herrera, who like Koons commissions assistants to make paintings for his collages, is attempting to play with and manipulate not only the world around him but the expectations and assumed meanings and prejudices we have towards Disney and the world of advertising, illustration, and literary word based meanings. In many of Herrera's collages a childlike innocence prevails where some of the awe and wonder we experience in being enthralled by the infantile and perhaps primal qualities of Disney, and mass media presentations, is retained.

I have during the doctorate become increasingly concerned about copying imagery within my own practice. I try instead to believe that anything I invent is more original than appropriating and definitely more unique if not always resolved or successful. It is possible in my painting practice to identify three different registers of representation. These are: 1. Observation from life. 2. Lens based and copied images. And, 3. Invented made up imagery and compositional structures. All three types of images were incorporated in my paintings during my final year on the programme, for example naturalism of the skeleton in *In My Beginning is my End* (Fig 66), the copied face in *Isn't it Just About the Anger* (Fig 65), and invented mouth in *Coupeur des Nantes* (Figs 72-73).

Sometimes the registers of meaning and visual languages in my paintings become blurred, confused, and intermingled, at other times they remain separate instead of cohesively creating a new visual amalgamation from the meeting of distinct components. I am critical of the dominance of lens based media in the formation and structuring of reality and consciousness, and by how this dominant mode of reproduction privileges photography, advertising, digital computerised design, TV and film. Painting that is based on the appearance of lens based technology is subject to the historical look and limitations of technology. In this sense photorealist painting of the 1970s replicates and cannot transcend the effects of the photography of its time. Lens based technology is not naturalistic and transparent, it is subject to the dictates of the technology of its era and may replicate social hierarchies and prejudices in the visual identity of the medium. In this respect Foster describes the lens based look of reality as, '...a culture become-nature bathed in the glow of the media, a semblance permeated with photographic, televisual, and digital visualities, one that is photogenic...' Foster (2012, p.200)

I attempted to explore the relationship between lens based, observational, and invented imagery in a group of paintings made in my final year of the doctorate (Figs 64-67). In these paintings I recall particular images whilst attempting to break free from quotation and make up the world anew. *I'd Rather Drown* (Fig 67) recalls Sergei Eisenstein's iconic image of a screaming nurse from *Battleship Potemkin* as well as Roy Lichtenstein's *Drowning Girl*, my title being derived from a sentence written in Lichtenstein's speech bubble.



Fig 64. Helliwell P, *Sauver Les Enfants*, 2015, oil on canvas, 203 x 173cm



Fig 65. Helliwell P, *Isn't it Just About the Anger*, 2015, acrylic and oil on canvas, 140 x 125cm



Fig 66. Helliwell P, *In My Beginning is My End*, 2016, oil on canvas, 225 x 203cm



Fig 67. Helliwell P, *I'd Rather Drown*, 2015, acrylic and oil on canvas, 140 x 125cm



Fig 68. Eisenstein, *Battleship Potemkin*, 1925 Fig 69. Lichtenstein R, *Drowning Girl*, 1963, oil and synthetic polymer on canvas, 172 x 170cm, The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

## **Idolatry and Iconoclasm, the Impulse to Create and Impulse to Destroy**

My paintings are sometimes resolved as a consequence of failure or when an accident and mistake suggest different and unseen solutions. When I feel there is nothing left to loose I am inclined to take risks and commit myself to reworking an image; solutions have been able to emerge from failure. Effacing one image with another is a fundamental aspect of the metamorphic and transformational potential of my creative process. I think of these creative and destructive procedures as engaging picture making and picture breaking energies.

I would like to compare how Baudrillard, Mitchell, and Lacan discuss both the creative strategies and destructive aspects of idolatry and iconoclasm. Iconoclasm and idolatry are opposing viewpoints of how images are intellectually conceived and thought about as well as approached and responded to. Mitchell defines this principle of opposition as an integral aspect of each polarity and goes as far as to suggest that iconoclasts in destroying images create compelling after images with the imagery they seek to confront, he writes,

‘The symmetry between iconoclasm and idolatry explains how it is that acts of ‘creative destruction’ create ‘secondary images’ that are, in their own way, forms of idolatry just as potent as the primary idols they seek to displace.’ Mitchell (2005, p.21)

In Mitchell’s description the Iconoclast in effacing the icon becomes an idolater in venerating the transformed presence of the icon’s absence. Mitchell defines the destructive and symmetrical force as an impulse that has characterised human consciousness from its earliest inception and goes as far as to assign the role of iconoclasm to Adam and Eve’s violation of their God’s perfection that was embodied in the innocence of their pre-conscious being, but forever destroyed by attaining knowledge, consciousness, and mortality. Mitchell writes that,

‘Images have been offending people since the beginning, since God created a human in his own ‘image and likeness,’ and that creature set about disobeying its Creator’s orders...Offended by the disobedience of his creatures, God expels Adam and Eve from paradise and sentences them to die. Their sin is, in effect, a kind of iconoclasm in that it has disfigured the image of God reflected in them. When God

decides to give his chosen people a second chance, only if they will follow his laws, the first law he prescribes is one that forbids the making of images.' Mitchell (2005, p.132)

If God creates humans as an image of himself, these self-portraits rebelliously destroy the imagery of God's perfection. Imagery becomes forbidden, censored, and viewed suspiciously because of the belief that images take over and replace reality. In this sense images are assigned an almost mythical magical power and living presence. In similarly discussing the philosophical meaning of iconoclasm Baudrillard defines the iconoclasts project as motivated by their suspicion that images engorge and replace the real that was originally represented, he writes,

'Their rage to destroy images rose precisely because they sensed this omnipotence of simulacra, this facility they have of effacing God from the consciousness of men, and the overwhelming, destructive truth which they suggest: that ultimately there has never been any God, that only the simulacrum exists, indeed that God himself has only ever been his own simulacrum.' Baudrillard (1983, p.8)

If Mitchell describes the idea of symmetry to suggest that iconoclasts create and venerate images within the act of refuting them, then Baudrillard likewise introduces a symmetrical definition that is the reflection of Mitchell's to suggest that idolaters inadvertently refute and destroy the God they represent by elevating imagery above the reality that they set out to worship, Baudrillard writes,

'It can be seen that the iconoclasts, who are often accused of despising and denying images, were in fact the ones who accorded them their actual worth, unlike the idolaters who saw in them only reflections and were content to venerate God at one remove. But the converse can also be said, namely that the idolaters were the most modern and adventurous minds, since underneath the idea of the apparition of God in the mirror of images, they already enacted his death and his disappearance in the epiphany of his representations'. Baudrillard (1983, p.9)

Mitchell and Baudrillard suggest that God's anger at those who worship idols is due to the idol being elevated above the God they set out to praise. Idolaters worship a surrogate image of an invisible God, whose absence is mediated and re-presented in the visual language of imagery. Baudrillard suggests that the iconoclasts likewise

understood that God is eradicated by the very images that supposedly elevate him. Both Baudrillard and Mitchell discuss at length the interdependency of iconoclasm and idolatry, suggesting that reality is inseparably connected to its representation, and that representation has the power to inform what we define as reality. For Lacan the icon acts like a mirror in which the reflection of god can be seen to be searching for its own (dis)-appearance. Lacan writes,

'What makes the value of the Icon is that the god it represents is also looking at it. It is intended to please God. At this level, the artist is operating on the sacrificial plane – he is playing with those things, in this case images, that may arouse the desire of God.' Lacan (1979, p.113)

In reflecting upon the interplay and interdependence between idolatry and iconoclasm Lacan additionally introduces the idea that images not only represent and interpret reality in their mediating capacity but in being the opposite of what they purport to be start to indicate the existence of alternate and multiple realities. He writes, 'Where we are, the image remains a go-between with the divinity – if Javeh forbids Jews to make idols, it is because they give pleasure to other gods.' Lacan (1979, p.113)

An artist such as Arturo Herrera provides an example of both a working process and creative conception of creation and destruction, making and breaking. Herrera's appropriation of Audubon's illustrations is a starting point for strategies of image manipulation and alignment as well as effacement and obliteration. We can see how the creation of a secondary image obscures the primary source of many of Herrera's works for example (Fig 51).

I believe that within my own cycle of picture making and breaking there is a space and tension between creative and destructive forces. It is interesting to locate this space in proximity to how the creation of images pleases or offends a divinity in the sense that artists often feel they are a vehicle through which another's expression is channelled, as a conduit for God's truth. Conversely it is possible to conceive art not as a reflection of truth or window framing the world, but as an alternative and un-real reality. If the reality of the world is partially unreal then representations are also free to mislead and misrepresent. The idea that much of the representational bias of

post-modernism is false representation may be linked to the notion of creative freedom and the ability to invent or simply make up our own version of reality.

The evolution of *Leopard Fisting a Tiger* (Figs 70-71) typifies my impulse to create and destroy, and the metamorphosis of my working process which is also evident in (Figs 72-75). My imagery and ideas usually emerge from trial and error, being suggested as much by risk taking and accident, as well as being anticipated in previous work. I do not often set out with fixed or definite ideas. My paintings gradually emerge and attain resolution through a process that incorporates the chance and spontaneity of making things up and testing things out, as well as accidental encounters with found, discarded, and improvised imagery. This struggle and ability to take risks in my working process forms a counterpoint to the prescribed and literal word based orthodoxy of postmodernism. Trial and error and the incorporation of mistakes continue to contribute to the authenticity of my working process and my struggle to visualise and express something as yet unseen.



Fig 70 – 71. Helliwell P, *Leopard Fisting a Tiger*, 2012, 173 x 173cm, oil on canvas

In contemplating the connections that exist between human consciousness, art, and reality, it seems logical to propose that alongside the inherent artifice and memetic capacity of images, artists might inhabit a world of make believe where the boundary between what is real and what is not is blurred. If artists are already inundated by

artifice in their interior world it might become problematic to fully comprehend the relevance of their vision in relation to an exterior world of simulation and hyperreality if they only mirror the mimetic condition of reality instead of transforming their world. The abundance and proliferation of imagery may problematize the idea of originality and conveniently conceal an absence of creativity and expression.



Fig 72 – 73. Helliwell P, *Coupeur de Nantes*, 2014, oil on canvas, 183 x 173cm



Fig 74 -75. Helliwell P, *Couple*, 2016, oil on canvas, 100 x 75cm

## **Part Two; Innovation over Imitation**

I have discussed the mediated character of a postmodern conception of language and creativity and addressed some of my reservations with the limitations of postmodern approaches to expression. My discussion of picture making and picture breaking was aligned to the importance of transformation and metamorphosis within my creative process. I will explore the importance of the imagination after postmodernism and the ideas of a more organic and subjective development of expression as opposed to art being just a pre-scripted text. I would also like to explore the implications of how Mitchell's 'Pictorial Turn' informs the pictorial quality and representational bias of my own imagery. I am fascinated by things that are pictorial and already images, for example the inclusion of mannequins, statues, medical skeletons, fast food promotional figures, children's toys and illustrations, and the imagery of other artists and designers, all of which are objects that already represent something.

### **I Want to Speak in the Beautiful Language of the Unsaid**

Christopher Bolas describes the Freudian unconscious as the modern equivalent of the ancient 'wisdom of the dream', writing that, 'The ancients looked forward to dreaming; they believed they would be visited by a divine being that would speak to them through the dream. In other words, they consciously sought news from their own unconscious.' Bolas (2011, p.253) To explain how we can be consciously aware of our unconscious without censoring it with self-conscious and contrived interpretations Bolas describes the involuntary and unfamiliar emergence of uncertain and vague intuitive sensations, writing that they form, 'nodes or groups of ideas that enter consciousness and can be thought about. Indeed this may happen regularly enough for us to evolve a certain conscious appreciation for our relation to our own unconscious.' Bolas (2011, p.252)

I feel it is important to emphasise the unconscious and unknowing aspect and even the irrational character of how my work is created, and that the form and content of my work are not the result of a contrived process or the formulaic display of mechanical technique. When I paint I become aware of inspiration moving into consciousness and become aware of what the work might mean only after I have worked through a process of not-knowing that allows content to begin to appear or

emerge alongside formal discovery. I think it is impossible to say in words or to know what the painting is about or what my intention really is until I have become familiar with what the process suggests or begins to uncover. My painting develops as a pictorial sign and is not a visual illustration or literal formulation of preconceived thoughts and feelings, the emotions and energies I feel while working are I believe pre-linguistic and predate verbal language. I often find myself suddenly seeing what I have been doing, and that meaning has taken shape without my being consciously aware of its formation until it has fully surfaced. I am aware of how my work seems to simultaneously spring from an internal dialogue and also be an external reality with a life of its own that I spectate and witness. An example of this process is a group of related paintings and drawings made in 2014-15 from observation of a life model and statues which in retrospect I can see represented and embodied my feelings towards my son's mental instability and the dynamics of my relationship with a new partner and new family grouping. In these paintings (Figs 76-79) I attempted to generate figurative content in relation to compositional demarcations, I was searching for an inventive way to stylistically transform naturalistic imagery.

In many of my paintings it is the ability to involuntarily visualise trauma and represent my personal anguish and fears that seems to permeate particular periods of work. I believe my activity is motivated by a need to discover and find out what my experiences might mean, and how I translate and manifest feelings as images and eventually verbal and literal interpretations. Although my paintings are things and products I am not simply a professional making a commissioned commodity, I am an artist trying to express something that I do not yet know and that is unseen and hidden until after I have made it.

Making paintings in which images seem to arrive from my unconscious has psychological implications. I will address some of the ideas that Christopher Bolas explores with his ideas concerning the 'unthought known', the 'transformational object', and his work on 'trauma'. Bolas describes the psychological dimension of creativity, and discusses the role of repetition and resolution of trauma as well as the ability of art to repeat and relive experiences. In writing about the altered state of creative consciousness and the altered site of this activity Bolas says,

‘This brings us to the oddity of creativity. When the painter paints, or the musician composes, or the writer writes, they may transfer psychic reality to another realm. They transubstantiate that reality, the object no longer simply expressing self, but re-forming it. This might be considered a type of projection – a putting of the self into an object – but it is also a transubstantial change, where psychic reality leaves its home in the mind and moves into a different intelligence.’ Bolas (2011, p.200)

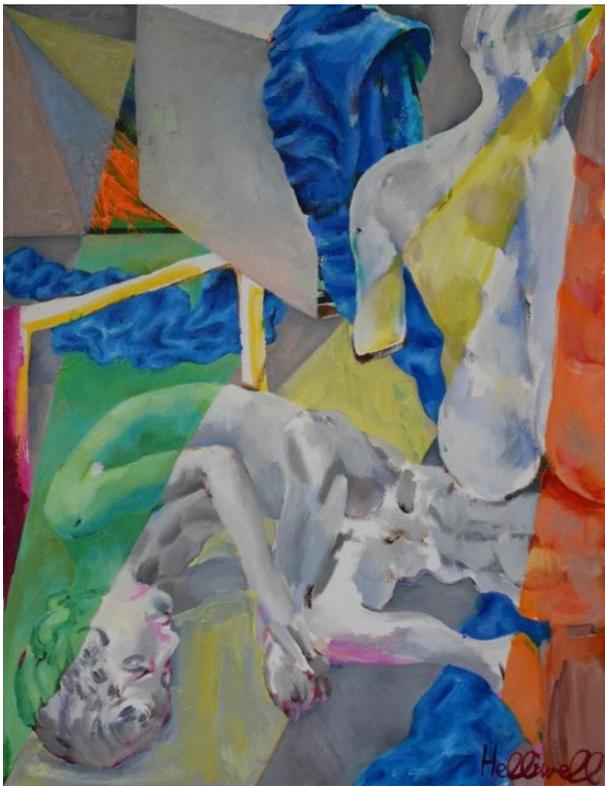


Fig 76. Helliwell P, *Fallen Child*, 2015, oil on canvas, 65 x 50cm Fig 77. Helliwell P, *Models*, 2015, oil on canvas, 150 x 100cm

Transformation and reformation of the self are perhaps real equivalents to the imaginary and formal transubstantiation taking place within my creative process. The ability of artists to intuitively invent and make up their own reality is perhaps part of a process wherein art can imaginatively resolve real conflict. Artists who have experienced trauma in early childhood may be predisposed to repeatedly revisit and relive trauma through aesthetic play, artists keep that space alive. Bolas says. ‘If the trauma is subsequently symbolically elaborated (in discourse, painting, fiction, etc.), the aim may be to evacuate its disturbing effect through the work of repetition and

displacement, while symbolically elaborated genera create intensified re-envisionings of reality which, however anguishing, are the pleasure of the ego's creativities.' Bolas (2011, p.59)

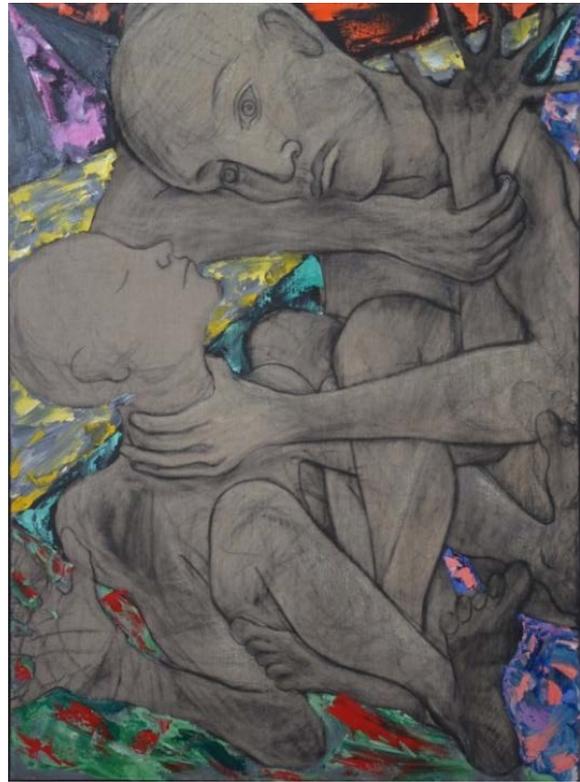


Fig 78. Helliwell P, *Fallen Child*, 2015, charcoal on paper, 90 x 75cm Fig 79. Helliwell P, *Sacrifice*, 2015, oil on canvas, 80 x 60cm

Bolas' description of 'intensified re-envisionings' being experienced as both pleasure and pain, euphoria and anguish, and exuberance and melancholy, explains the experience of being driven and inspired to involuntarily repeat and revisit trauma, and the sense that artists do not have a choice in the emotional cost or burden of their work, nor in the pay off and resolution it provides. Foster says of the repetitive quality of the traumatic... 'is like a blank in experience that continues to misfire.' Foster (2012, p.113)

The fatalism of trauma being repeated involuntarily in an artists' expression may have a redemptive aspect in how suffering and struggle are perhaps related to the magical and divine like quality of inspiration. It is necessary for me to relinquish control but this is not a pleasure and it can be a painful experience to take artistic

risks. The sense of risk and being out of control may also accompany the discovery and uncovering of hidden meanings. My painting practice is a process of artistic enquiry or creative play in which various options can be proposed and explored, and various solutions considered as the work gradually emerges and evolves. The feeling of making up reality and the role of invention and intuition are described by Bolas when he states, 'What the poet writes or the painter paints or the composer composes has not existed before'. Bolas (2011, p.201) The idea of generating something from nothing and its gift like and miraculous aspect is a familiar but unsettling aspect of creativity. Bolas suggests that the painting has a partial independence from the artist who is merely witnessing the works emergence. He writes, 'The painter consciously feels that the created object is its own creator.' Bolas (2011, p.70) Bolas explains that the feeling of the painting having a life of its own is determined by unconscious desires, he writes.

'The gathering of these psychic gravities would be unconscious, but perhaps sensed as a mood arising out of a previous experience. The continuous presence of these psychic phenomena in the self often provides us with a feeling of being guided by a shaping spirit'. Bolas (2011, p.197)

The revelatory feeling is for me linked to feelings of being inspired and a transformational resurgence and re-assertion of the self, or in the postmodern sense the representation of multiple selves. The cathartic function of art also entails the anguish of expressing sometimes difficult and painful emotions, Bolas describes a journey that artists undertake and talks of a threshold that they must necessarily pass, saying 'An artists does not go easily into this altered state of consciousness. They feel the boundary between ordinary psychic life and the artistic workspace, as one that is always difficult to cross and sometimes unbearably so. Bolas (2011, p.200)

The framework that Bolas provides for thinking about the creative unconscious enables me to embrace the process of uncertainty within my experience of painting and to believe in the relevance and power of my unconscious. Bolas introduces the term 'unthought known' that may provide an understanding of the relation between deliberation and spontaneity. Bolas states that,

‘The mechanism of transformation from the unthought known object that is the poem to be to the poetic object is derived from the aesthetic process that goes under the name of poetry. In the same way, that order of thinking that is painting, or composing, is the structure of transformation that transubstantiates internal objects from the deep solitude of an internal world into an altered external actuality. Bolas (2011, p.201)

The vehicle that allows me to bypass my habitual and formulaic procedures is often provided by collage. My use of collage enables me to explore the tension between deliberation and spontaneity as well as combining gestural and precise technical methods. For me trauma and risk are also replicated in the tearing and disfiguring of collage. The main principle of collage, of pasting one element onto another to form connections or ruptures between formerly separate parts relates to the fracture and fragmentation of my experience as well as to the idea of providing startling and unpredictable juxtapositions. The flat spaces of collage resemble both the synthetic world of simulation and a form of visual language that is self-reflectively artificial.

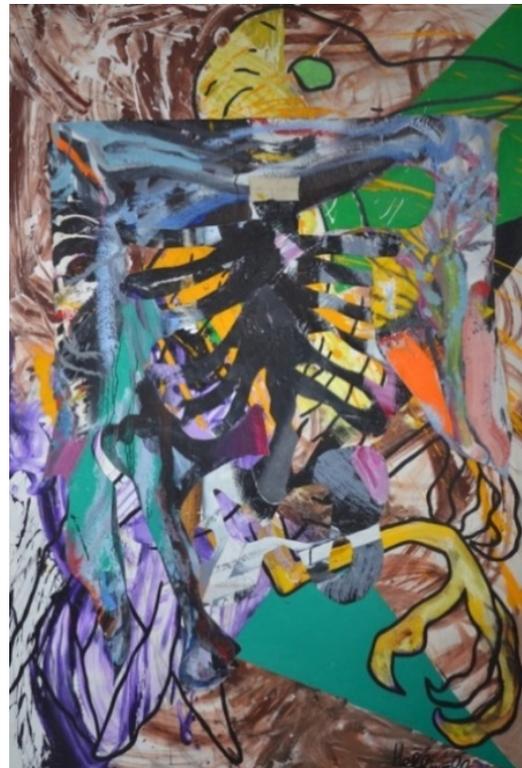


Fig 80. Helliwell P, *Untitled*, 2016, acrylic and oil on canvas, 150 x 100cm Fig 81. Helliwell P, *Untitled*, 2016, acrylic and oil on canvas, 150 x 100cm

In a recent group of collaged paintings I explored the idea of rupture and risk of obscuring and disfiguring what has already been painted. Cutting out a painting is an iconoclastic act of creative destruction, by pasting the cut out on top of another painting or background a secondary iconic image is created. This tension between creativity and destruction was articulated by the contemporary painter Luke Gottelier in an interview I conducted with him during 2012. Gottelier's response to my question regarding the disruption of figure and ground within his work was to say, 'I was thinking it would be a fun thing to make a really beautiful abstract painting and cut it up and turn it into something else.' The transformational potential of Gottelier's act of adhering exterior objects to disrupt a pictorial space was developed in his group of 'Tie Paintings'. These paintings challenge and undermine the stability of a cohesive stylistic space by adding different and contradictory components, this theme was further explored during the interview. Gottelier discussed the attachment of real objects on and through his paintings as well as his use of a paired down and basic pictorial language within decorative abstract grounds, the following is an excerpt from the interview.

Paul: You describe drawing with ties as 'super basic representation'. How do you relate this simplicity to the underlying painted layers?

Luke: I was just figuring out a way to use imagery and to use ties and put them together with paint. I could have put the ties on a plain background but that felt to me like the most boring thing in the world. I wanted an abundance of patterns. Where there is competition between the background and the foreground there is greater resonance. I want my paintings to do more than air kiss the viewer.

Paul: The ties are woven through the canvas, they don't simply sit on top of earlier layers. In this sense is form and content literally interwoven?

Luke: I dunno. I like the idea that the image goes round the back. If you're cutting holes in a painting and weaving things through it, it's like a cross between a tapestry and a sculpture. I am a big fan of process, its a fundamental thing in how I approach making. I always try to let that be very present. I think that interweaving is a pithy way to enact what the work is about - ramming things together.



Fig 82. Gottelier L, *Ice Cream-Headed Birdman Fucking an Antelope*, 2011, oil, acrylic and ties on canvas, 259 x 190 cm

The collision of elements and subsequent emergence of an appropriate process suggest Gottelier employs an inventive and intuitive approach to his painting. In a recent group of collages I found that drawing with a scalpel (Fig 83) allowed me a freedom and way of bypassing my preconceptions about conventional drawing. The images are not pre-drawn, they rely on a leap of faith in which I give myself over to the process with all its risk of success and failure. In not conforming to prescribed and formulaic ideas I was able to generate a more inventive and made up and visual language.



Fig 83. Helliwell P, *Untitled*, 2016, each panel 80 x 60cm

My Collages heighten the transformational potential and metamorphic capacity of my painting to evolve from one image into another throughout a series as well as instigating a journey from unknown to the known. Within my painting practice the risks that collage permits me are related to the improvisational role that my painting can sometimes attain. *The Beholder's Eyes* (Fig 84) is an early doctorate example of an improvised painting that generated imagery that visualised one of a handful of major events from my early childhood. When I was four my mother organised the emptying of my father's alcohol down the toilet, when my father intervened to stop us my mother smashed out his teeth with a full bottle, I never saw him again. I have painted bottles, barred and broken teeth, and oral orifices and openings, in many of my doctorate paintings. The capacity to find visual equivalents to early trauma requires images to embody the visceral sense of remembered experiences instead of being a literal illustration of past events. This idea continues to play an important role in how my painting practice uncovers and gives expression to partially repressed experiences.



Fig 84. Helliwell P, *The Beholder's Eyes*, 2012, acrylic on paper, each panel 90 x 70cm

During the Artoll residency in 2013 I made a sculpture, *Bound to Fail* (Fig 87) composed of a children's stool and a crushed metal trolley pierced together by a decorator's painting pole. I found the discarded and disfigured objects in the

undergrowth outside a children's psychiatric ward in the Artoll compound and wove torn canvas strips to re-establish the eroded and lost planes of the seat and table surfaces. I came to understand that my sculpture embodied and revisited an experience I had of a children's hospital ward when I was two years old. The infant's teddy bear appears dressed in blood-soiled underwear impaled to a bandaged trolley by a red skewer; the work speaks of genital mutilation and the fear of parental abandon. The skewer is also phallic. For me it has always been fascinating to realise that my art replicates the anguish of my childhood, for example the shards of bandage-like canvas strips on the sculpture as well as *mummy* imagery recall a wounded and bandaged torso. Art may offer a space in which the damaged individual can fictionally and imaginatively be repaired and made whole again.



Fig 85. Helliwell P, *Untitled*, 2014, acrylic on canvas, 240 x 203cm Fig 86. Helliwell P, *Untitled*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, 140 x 125cm

The idea that an artist is intuitively and involuntarily trying to find something that they cannot yet see and do not yet know is articulated by Bolas' concept of the 'unthought-known', and explored in my painting through improvisation and the use of collage. Uncertainty and unknowing require a playful and creative space where thinking can be circumvented by doing, or where the possibility of bypassing normal thought processes allows the hand and mind to connect more directly to

unconscious perceptions. The role of spontaneity in relation to improvisation and the unconscious in post war culture is explored by many contemporary writers such as Daniel Belgrad who discusses improvisation in relation to Jazz. Belgrad says that Charlie Parker described the appearance and sense of something emerging when he said, 'I could hear it sometimes but I couldn't play it.' Belgrad (1998, p.184) Parker's description closely approximates my understanding of Bolas' 'unthought known' because Parker was able to find a form that approximated his vision through experimenting with improvised forms, he said. 'I could play the thing I'd been hearing. I came alive'. Belgrad (1998, p.184)



Fig 87. Helliwell P, *Bound to Fail*, 2013, Children's chair, metal trolley, decorator's pole, paint and canvas

In my experience the act of painting takes me somewhere other than where I am, painting allows me to abandon my rational sense of self but posits a transformed self that transcends consciousness. Lacan writes of the ambiguity of where pictorial space resides, 'The picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am not in the picture.' Lacan

(1979, p.96) Bolas likewise suggests with the term transubstantiation and the metaphor of crossing a threshold that artists enter an unfamiliar space. In discussing the unfamiliarity and disorientating shock that pictures can impose on their viewers T.J. Clark elaborates on the role and space of the picture plane. He writes,

‘The picture plane is an a priori. For depiction to take place at all, it says – for the very notion of appearance to make sense – hasn’t what appears necessarily to appear somewhere else than where we are, on the other side of an ontological divide? There must be a place in representation – a virtual, invisible threshold – where the space of the scene ends and the space viewers occupy begins. The picture shows us that place. And of course that place cannot be on the painting’s surface.’ Clark (2015, p.157)

The dividing line between reality and representation that defines the picture plane is often activated and visualised in artists’ depictions of mirrors within their work, and of the notion of an internal frame within a painting. I will look at some examples of how mirrors and frames have been represented and inserted within particular paintings.

### **I’ll be My Mirror**

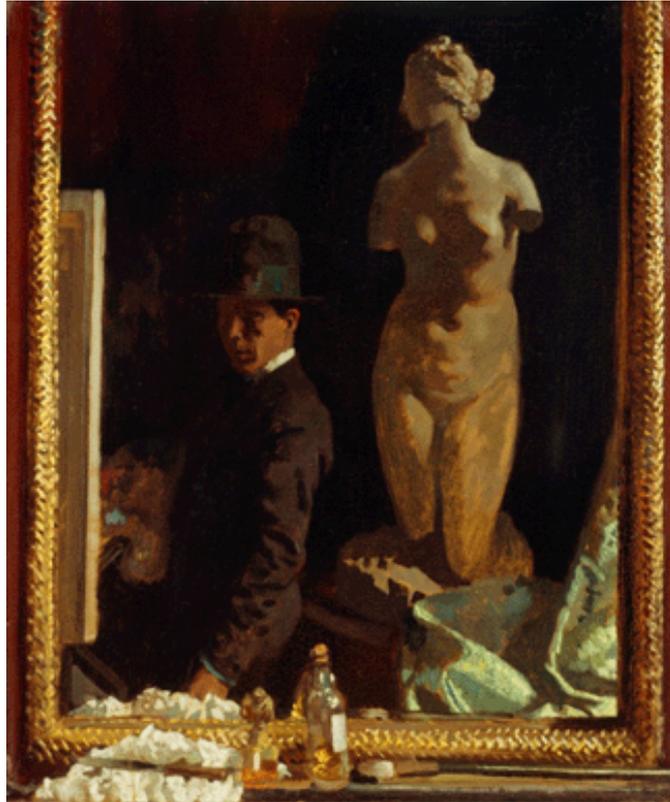


Fig 88. Orpen W, *Portrait of the Artist*, 1907, oil on canvas, 91 x 84 cm, Dublin Art Gallery

William Orpen produced many startling self-portraits in the early twentieth century. In these paintings Orpen was able to explore the relationship between representation and reality and make a visual meditation and reflection upon the pictorial quality of an artists' perception. Although the visual idiom in which Orpen worked may have appeared backward looking to a modernist and postmodern sensibility he nevertheless displays a pictorial intelligence and employed pattern and surface to connect and generate pictorial explorations of the *mis en abime*, or picture within a picture that remain full of rich meditations on the act of picture making and pictorial meaning in art. In *Ready to Start* (Fig 89) a connection is made between the pattern of wallpaper, chequered tablecloth, and animal fur. Alcohol bottles and literary references to books and Orpen's artistic milieu also dominate the painting. To the left a street scene is shunted aside by the picture within a picture of the artist dressing up ready for the action of representing himself or of readying himself for war.



Fig 89. Orpen W, *Ready to Start*, 1917, oil on panel, 60 x 44cm, Imperial War Museum

As meta pictures which allegorise the act of picture making Orpen's self-portraits reflect upon their own status as images in relation to the tradition of painting and to the work of the European avant-garde. An example can be seen in *Portrait of the Artist* (Fig 88) in which Orpen depicts himself partially emerging from and being concealed by a shadowy background upon which a female statue and folded drapery is displayed, beyond the paintings internal mirror frame a turpentine bottle and palette knife appear slightly dislocated from Orpen's reflected hand. In *Self Portrait* (Fig 90) the use of calling cards and tickets stuck in mirror frame and the overall broken fracture of picture plane engenders a conversation with his contemporaries such as Braque's and Picasso's cubist collages produced in the same year for example, *Fruit Dish and Glass* (Fig 91).



Fig 90. Orpen W, *Self Portrait*, 1912, 61 x 49cm, The Cleveland Museum of Art Fig 91. Braque G, *Fruit Dish and Glass*, 1912, pasted paper and charcoal, 62 x 47cm, Private Collection

Contemplating the metaphorical and literal use of mirrors within pictorial art can assign the *mis en abime* or picture within a picture an influential role within art as well as engendering pictorial possibilities for the expression and fabrication of self-identity, otherness, and the body's shifting presence and absence.

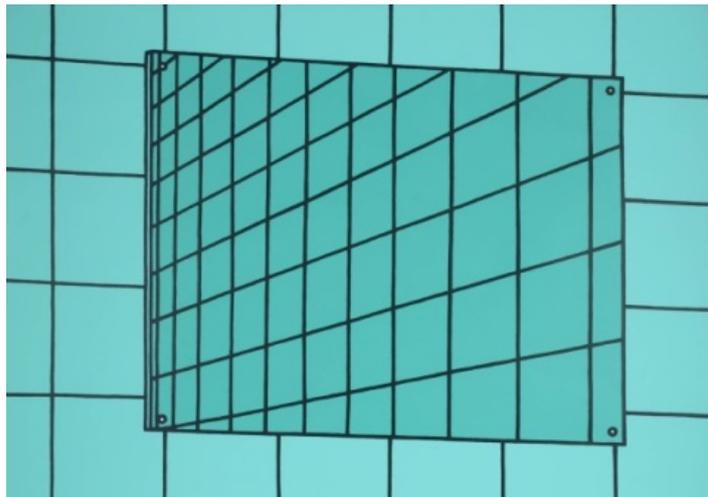


Fig 92. Caulfield P, *Bathroom Mirror*, 1968, Screenprint, 71 x 93.2 cm

In Caulfield's *Bathroom Mirror* (Fig 92), the picture plane and imaginary threshold are depicted through the device of the mirror which like Orpen's mirrors function as a picture within a picture intimating the boundary and dissolution of the self; upon the mirror threshold. In contemplating the fracture and fragmentary mirror self I will address some ideas concerning the creative space, and of pictorial unity and cohesiveness versus fragmentary dissolution.

Lacan assigns the mirror stage to when we first recognise our reflection in infancy and simultaneously desire to see our self as an 'I'. The infant is able to see their own body fragments in relation to feelings of completeness and unified bonding with a whole parental figure. Reflective surfaces promise a partial view of a more complete cohesive image reflected back as the fragmentary and dismembered self. Lacan suggests the infant's internal ego projects itself onto these powerful ideal images which are re-internalised and equated with the 'I'. The infant's self-identity is provided by the mirror reflecting an *image* and is an example of the fascination and power images exert over the real that we have seen both Mitchell and Baudrillard theorise. Much of my interest in images and the pictorial is presented in this idea of mirroring and of screens and barriers. Lacan emphasises the imaginary aspect to how the child creates and represents their own world, and the role of images in the formation of the self, writing, 'As subjects we are literally called into the picture, and represented there as caught.' Lacan (1979, p.92)

Lacan stresses that fiction and make believe are essential components of the child's ego and process of self-knowing. Lacan states that the infant perceives imaginary wholeness, or a symbolic unity, or 'gestalt', even if the reflection is fragmentary. This imaginary whole generates an enormous power and fascination because on one hand it creates a sense of the infant's own imperfection yet on the other hand it creates a desire to seek completion. Despite completion being sometimes an unattainable ideal we may nevertheless continue to pursue perfection through adult forms of make believe. The imaginary aspect of the mirror stage and its relation to the fiction of imagery is I believe an important aspect of my artistic creativity. This is why although occurring in infancy the mirror stage is preserved as a component of adult subjectivity and relevant to the dynamic of the creative unconscious.

According to Lacan as the mirror stage draws to an end the child must progress from its preoccupation with the 'I' towards a more socially integrated form of being. To enable this transformation Lacan suggests the 'I' must transfer the love of its own image onto another object or external other. Peter Fuller describes this critical developmental phase as existing,

'Between experience as wholly subjective, and the achievement of objectivity and perceptibility, when the child is relating to another whose otherness is at once recognised and denied; when the existence of boundaries (outlines) or limiting membranes of the self and its objects are at once perceived and imaginatively ruptured.' Fuller (1980, p.171)

The rupturing and blurring of outline and the opposite idea of solid and definite contour is present in many pictorial devices and material processes of art. We can see in the chiaroscuro of Baroque painting, and the vortexes of Romanticism, and facture and push and pull of Post-Impressionism and gestural Abstract Expressionism, the dismantling of boundary and outline edge to deliver a content of the dissolution and incompleteness of the self. We can see how Orpen melds into the background in *Portrait of the Artist* (Fig 88) or is obscured by the surface calling cards in *Self Portrait* (Fig 90). Contrarily in the crisp delineated outline of the early Renaissance, or in Neo-Classicism, Pop Art and Hard Edged Minimalism, we can interpret connotations of perfection and an insistence on the completeness of the self, which again with Orpen can be detected in the solid clear shapes and silhouette outline in *Leading the Life in the West* (Fig 93).

In looking at Orpen's *Leading the Life in the West* (Fig 93) I became interested in how the chequered floor tiles and compositional pattern resembled the harlequin cheque pattern and fragmented grids of my painting *Cosmic Flute* (Fig 94). In many of my own mid doctorate paintings I was preoccupied with dismantling the screens, layers, and architectural devices that imprisoned and framed my figures. I wanted to uncover and lay bare something fragile, vulnerable, and raw, so an idea of my real self could emerge. *Cosmic Flute* is indebted to a description in the book *Kafka on the Shore* by the Japanese author Murakami in which a conceptual artist dresses as the character *Johnny Walker* of the whisky brand to abduct and behead stray cats in

order to harvest their souls and build a cosmic flute that plays a note capable of opening a portal onto another dimension. Murakami, (2005, p.149)



Fig 93. Orpen W, *Leading the Life in the West*, 1910, oil on canvas, 101 x 84cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York Fig 94. Helliwell P, *Cosmic Flute*, 2013, oil on canvas, 183 x 173cm

*Cosmic Flute* (Fig 94) combines Murakami's evocation of creative madness and transcendence with alcohol consumption and sensual engorgement. Many of my paintings from this period suggest an alignment between intoxication and creativity in that the self becomes detached and given over to oblivion. I tried to relate creativity to addictive behaviours and show that transcendence and loss of control may characterise the uncertainty of experiences that belong to the same order as creativity. Aldous Huxley provides a powerful definition of the relationship between consciousness and transcendence when he writes.

'That humanity at large will ever be able to dispense with Artificial Paradises seems very unlikely. Most men and women lead lives at the worst so painful, at the best so monotonous, poor and limited that the urge to escape, the longing to transcend

themselves if only for a few moments, is and has always been one of the principal appetites of the soul.' Huxley (1953, p.72)

Huxley's 'appetites of the soul' and 'artificial paradises' can be detected in many transcendental experiences and feelings. Belgrad describes how the generation of Beat Poets used narcotics, 'for their capacity to unseat the discriminating intellect'. Belgrad (1998, p. 202). In my own painting practice generating ways to unseat the familiar and habitual processes and procedures of painting is problematic because in many respects painting *is* my way of unseating my normal reality. I identify painting with activities and experiences that entail locating and annihilating the self in creative and physical activity, such as art, sex, sport, and conflict, as well as through meditation and narcotics. Art is an imaginary space in which these experiences can safely occur, Bolas describes how we find and invest psychologically in things with his concept of a 'transformational object'. Bolas writes about, '...the phenomenon in adult life of the wide ranging collective search for an object that is identified with the metamorphosis of the self'. And writing more specifically of art that, 'The aesthetic space allows for a creative enactment of the search for this transformational object relation...' Bolas (2011, p.3 and, p.11)

Many of Caulfield's paintings do not appear inhabited or transformed; they seem emptied of self. But Caulfield's work proposes an internal spectator that locates us as viewers on the threshold of the paintings' carefully constructed pictorial spaces. These paintings might seem to be the opposite of an artists' self-portrait in which the artists' gaze quizzically searches themselves and their viewer. Caulfield inserts and uses mirrors within his unpopulated interiors to trap and disorientate the spectator. His paintings of architectural interior spaces have both an intimate material presence whilst alluding to the spirituality of another dimension.

In looking at a Caulfield painting it feels like we are on the threshold of entering a sacred space. In *Reserved Table* (Fig 95) we appear to be entering an empty restaurant where there is only one table, and only one course of food. We see a table, shelf, mirror, and two recessed spaces. On the table a pure white tablecloth is neatly arranged. On the shelf there is a Lobster in front of a mirror that reflects the lobster as an incomplete fragment within the blank vacuum like hole at the painting's

centre. Both table and lobster await a diner. Everything is reserved and slightly detached. This is our final meal, it will never be eaten.



Fig 95. Caulfield P, *Reserved Table*, 2000, Acrylic on canvas, 183 x 190.5 cm

Within Caulfield's paintings it is interesting to reflect upon the role that mirrors play both metaphorically and physically within pictorial space, we see Caulfield inserts an oval mirror and the oval frame in many of his works. Within his paintings mirrors function as an image within an image, albeit a blank image that presents the presence of the spectators own impending absence. In many ways we project ourselves into these empty frames and mirrors in the same way that the infant seizes it's reflection through imaginary projection; but it is not the ideal ego of infancy that we see in Caulfield's mirrors, it is the call of death, threatening to disintegrate the fiction of the 'I' with total annihilation and disintegration of self.

Despite a content of dissolution and death there is in Caulfield's work a strong sense of pictorial integration and cohesiveness. This is achieved by carefully composing architectural spaces and placing objects that emerge from his unified and deeply

coloured and saturated grounds. This unity is perhaps why the empty mirrors and pictures within pictures seem even more disturbing. Mirrors for Caulfield function as thresholds or spaces in which our fear of annihilation and the disintegration of death are placed at the centre of otherwise stable architectural propositions.



Fig 96. Caulfield P, *Bishops*, 2004, Acrylic on canvas, 213.4 x 198.1 cm

*Bishops* (Fig 96) was Caulfield's last painting. It was made during the final year of his life. It is a painting containing light and shadow in the depth and surface of its volume and shifting planes. Marco Livingstone writes that this work is a waiting room or anti-chamber leading to paradise. Livingstone (2005, p.257) I interpret the painting as a space in which meaning, light, and atmosphere are refracted and dissipated, like the reflective planes of a shattered mirror. The painting depicts an empty picture frame, a single chair, a jug, a turned off lamp. Towards the viewer another huge illuminated lamp approaches. The doors although ajar stand between us and the picture space. The glass doors act as a transparent screen and membrane like metaphor for pictoriality, they are an internal frame that as a viewer I want to close.

Like a diamond that catches the viewers gaze, everything is refracted within the cut and polished planes of a jewel like space where nothing escapes. There is no absolution. I do not want to enter this painting, however inviting it may seem I want to pull close the doors and walk away. The mirror shards fall away.

In Dana Schutz's *Fight in an elevator* (Fig 97) the doors open to reveal a contrast to the gravitas of Caulfield's imagery. Schutz's paintings always possess a comedy abject component and are both visceral and cartoon like, infantile and melancholic. *Fight in an Elevator* represents a fight between a man and a woman, we see past the polished doors to the shattered mirror fragments and swirling combating bodies of the interior.



Fig 97. Dana Schutz, *Fight in an Elevator*, 2013, oil on canvas, 243 x 228cm

The role of humour in contemporary painting is relevant to a post-ironic sensibility and can be serious instead of cynically devoid of meaning. In *Notes on Camp* Susan Sontag developed the idea that previous forms of seriousness no longer retain authority so that humour can become a vehicle for expressing serious thoughts and feelings through the vehicle of apparently frivolous imagery and form. My own use of humour was examined by Luke Gottelier when he visited my studio to interview me for the exhibition catalogue of my 2013 solo exhibition titled *...and wine and teeth and....* The following is an excerpt from the interview.

LUKE: Your use of humour, is that something that has always been there in your work, or has it come about relatively recently?

PAUL: I think it's something that's developed in recent years. I think it's progressed as a way to access deeper emotions. So for example, the hot dog is funny as a thing, but it's deadly serious as well as a depiction of the condition of the artist. It's a vehicle for seriousness because the old forms of seriousness are no longer serious. It's not just there to poke fun at the artist. Hopefully there's tenderness to it.

LUKE: The condition of the artist. So it's a sort of self-portrait?

PAUL: Yes. Whether these are idealised portraits of artists or self-portraits I don't know; I hope that something of me is presented. That's been one of the things that I've asked of this new work; that the work is not defensive, and something to hide behind – (*Paul points towards the recent paintings of the hotdog man.*) in these pieces where the screen is being broken and taken aside to reveal the person that you're looking at.

Humour can introduce more serious and difficult content. My paintings from the first half of my doctorate are humorous and explore content that concerns how the artist is manifest in representation, how visual artists may come alive and exist in imagery. In this sense my painting can be self-reflexive like Orpen's, suggesting that when I am fully engaged in my painting I feel more alive than I often do in real life. If real life is in simulation and image laden then representation may allegorise representation and the 'Pictorial Turn' and self-referential role of language in the *mis en abime*, and picture within a picture. In addition to humour the euphoria of sensual stimulation can be an experience that enables me to replicate and channel my mania through strenuous physical activities that are related to Huxley's and Murakami's descriptions of transcendence and intoxication.

My predilection for image-laden and simulated experiences may seem to contradict the material and visceral basis of the direct sensual engagement that my painting often depicts. I think of a painting such as, *On the Sauce* (Fig 98) as a Meta picture that depicts the act of picturing. It is a painting that allegorises the act of painting, and as such is related to self-portraits and paintings of the artists' studio that reflect upon the nature of the artist's world and practice. Many of my hot dog artists are

colouring themselves with paint squeezed from ketchup bottles that look phallic, the imagery suggesting bodily fluids and olfactory experiences. Some of the figures are draped patriotically in an American flag to comment on both the relationship between my painting and American Culture and how the absence of my father who has lived in the United States since the 1980s has affected me. In the introduction to the catalogue that accompanied my exhibition, the curator Kaavous Clayton writes;

‘A surrogate (or surrogates) for the persona of the artist is (or are) often present within the work, portrayed as cartoonish characters or toy monsters, and treated in a way that suggests a mocking but sympathetic affection for their being and struggle. In some paintings a leering, and almost repulsive chip-man character takes a chip out of his own head, or brain, and is about to consume it – perhaps the artist feeding his own ego and consuming himself in an auto-adoring pig-out display. In other works the artist is represented as a comic hotdog figure, ‘saucing’ himself with paint to prepare himself for consumption, although how he would be able to auto-consume is unclear, and perhaps the preparation is to present himself to the world for loving and devouring.’ Clayton (2013)

This passage suggests that ideas of narcissism, self-consumption, and auto eroticism are present in my work, the persona that Clayton describes is the intoxicated self-deprecating artist threatening to self-annihilate and be extinguished and devoured by oblivion. Clayton observed how the energy of making and the compositional dynamism of my work is aligned with the hyper-reality of contemporary simulated life, writing,

‘The vivid nature of Paul’s paintings brought about by his bold use of colour and distinct, sometimes forceful presentation of imagery, could be seen to parallel the bold and ‘larger than life’ definition that the super-superlative generation creates; an extension of the hyper-real that is both reinforced and subverted by digital technology into a kind of *hyper-unreal*.’ Clayton (2013)



Fig 98. Helliwell P, *On the Sauce*, 2013, acrylic and oil on canvas, 173 x 155cm

The 'hyper-unreal' suggests that art strives towards the freedom to make up or invent reality. My intention is to be playful, inventive, and allow myself to be surprised by imagery, materials, and the ways I approach my practice.

Within my 2013 paintings the use of grid structures is a parody of the modernist aesthetic in which formal block-like slabs of colour and form compositionally articulate the picture plane. Some of the structural grids are intended to recall the formal qualities of British Modernism such as Vorticism and the related geometric 'Dazzle' camouflage patterns of 1<sup>st</sup> world war naval vessels. I came to believe it was possible to connect contemporary experiences to the alienation and fragmentation of consciousness that accompanied the emergence of industrial modernism by making formal connections between the fragmented grids in my work and Modernist grid structures. My painting *Anthem for Doomed Youth* (Fig 100) is titled after Wilfred Owen's poem to suggest the contemporary isolation and the disintegration of the self.



Fig 99. Helliwell P, *Artists of the World Unite*, 2013, acrylic and oil on canvas, each 94 x 76cm



Fig 100. Helliwell P, *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, 2013, acrylic and oil on canvas, 140 x 125cm

### **The Disintegrating and Emerging Self**

Shattered into a myriad of fragments the disfigured and disembodied self is perhaps a contemporary equivalent to the alienated and emotionally anguished experiences that early modernists expressed in equally disconcerting images to challenge the conventions of their time. Our postmodern emphasise on pluralism and multiplicity

can also be related to the experience of being torn and pulled apart by conflicting areas of our complex lives, and reflects experiences particular to the drama of our own time. In many of my recent paintings the image of a fallen and broken child is related to the detritus and decay that has encroached upon the former pristine sheen and promise of modernism as well as expressing my parental fears and anxieties regarding my own son's life experiences. We now live and die among the dust and debris of former languages, former commodities, and former ideals. My painting practice reflects this preoccupation with mortality and death but also proposes questions concerning new life and the prospect of an emerging self.



Fig 101. Helliwell P, *Crow*, 2015, oil on canvas, 140 x 120cm Fig 102. Helliwell P, *Rainbow Bones*, 2016, oil on canvas, 150 x 100cm

Many of my paintings depict experiences of family and social life that reflect upon my own life. In a recent group of paintings I addressed mortality through the image of a crow and chimney. This image is derived from a crow that became entangled in my chimney, taking three days to descend two storeys. When the crow finally emerged dehydrated and exhausted it died upon release. Many of the crow paintings became the basis for large scale collages (Figs 72-73) and led to images that explored

human skeletons (Fig 102). These skeletal images have in turn begun to suggest wing like shafts of light and hybridised figures.

The tension that exists between the notion of a disintegrating and an emerging self is a productive and creative force informing my painting practice. Creative conflict within my working process enables me to enquire if pluralistic expression implies only a shattering and dissolution of the artists' sovereign individuality or if the ideal of creating a unique and stylistically cohesive pictorial language is a credible ideal. In the postmodern period some artists and theorists deconstructed the concept of a stable and unified self and spoke of multiple selves, of the loss of self and of not having a self to loose. A similar experience is depicted by Dana Schutz in her wistful and melancholic paintings that locate the sublime of romanticism in the disintegrating flesh of contemporary experience.



Fig 103. Dana Schutz, *Gouged girl*, 2008. oil on canvas, 203 x 220cm Fig 104. Caspar David Friedrich, *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*, 1818, oil on canvas, 98 x 75cm, Kunsthalle Hamburg

In her paintings Schutz equates the consumption of food with our body's appetite for self-consumption and self-annihilation. Many artists have explored the relationship between producing, consuming, and between the emergence, and loss of self. The idea of the dissolution and disappearing self, or asking if there is even a self at all, continues to occupy creative thinking. As the self is eroded we can imagine a parallel

disfigurement occurring to the former sheen of modernity, and equate the tarnishing of the brave new shiny world of post war consumerism with our own decay and rot.

In *Gouged Girl* (Fig 103) the disembodied self is related to the texture and flesh of food and to ideas of self destruction and consumption. Schutz's figure faces away from us to gaze at the sea in a pose that is similar to Caspar David Friedrich's iconic image of romantic wanderlust. In Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (Fig 104) a lone male heroically faces the sublime union of man and nature. I would like to contrast how Schutz explores the disintegration, decay, and loss of self with similar experiences intimated by Koons' excessive displays of images of food, liquids, and body fragments.



Fig 105. Koons J, *Lips*, 2000, Oil on canvas, 300 x 430 cm

*Lips* (Fig 105) is a painting where clichéd or stereotyped imagery is cast adrift within a gestural and surrealist landscape. Koons' work makes an appeal to sensual gratification, pleasure, and visual delight. The 'hyper-reality' of Koons' work is both attractive and repellent, but the gloss and glamour of his work is never far from what

the whirlpool of imagery avoids and conceals; that is our fear, disgust, and revulsion at the prospect of our defilement and end.

The glamour of Koons' work in its celebration of the gloss and sheen of hyperreal commercialism is an alibi for the reality of cultural decay. In this sense his perfection of form is like a narcissistic gag reflex. During this visual retching the swirling vortex of hair, fluids, sunlight, and the textures of fabric and vegetation threaten to unravel and show the 'other' that they conceal. Koons seems to constantly suggest the presence of materiality and the body's sensual relation to the world, but we are lured, seduced, and kept out. For all their seductive beauty Koons' works concern the repression of decay and defilement that his sumptuous surfaces continually disavow and refuse to acknowledge. In almost all of Koons' practice the body is absent or only partially implied. This duality of attraction and repulsion may locate the presence of our own absence.



Fig106. Dana Schutz, *Singed Picnic*, 2008, oil on canvas, 204 x 230cm

In opposition to Koons' work the stylistic distortions and partial disfigurements of the human form in many of Schutz's paintings do not preach through glamorisation or high minded morality; they are basic and pared down. Schutz makes subtle

connections through shape and pattern, for example in *Singed Picnic* (Fig 106) the tree bark to the left forms a symmetrical relationship to the girl's hair on right of picture, whilst in *Gouged Girl* (Fig 103) a similar visual connection is generated by the semblance between melon and flesh. Although Schutz's work sometimes feels informal it successfully speaks of the disintegration of the self and the decay of our present cultural reality. In our contemporary period after postmodernism a speculative and enigmatic aesthetic is being explored by artists such as Schutz as opposed to the overly brash and showy artistry of more officially sanctioned mainstream artists such as Koons.



Fig 107. Manet E, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*, 1862–1863, oil on canvas, 208 x 265.5 cm, Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Schutz's paintings are also relevant to me in how they explore the pictorial bias of contemporary experience through their connection to previous imagery such as Friedrich's *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog*. I am interested in how *Singed Picnic* references Manet's *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* (Fig 107) not only in the resemblance of its figurative imagery but also in how Schutz's use of spots and stripes recall impressionist brushstrokes and surface pattern. In making a distinction between

'image' and 'representation' Barry Schwabsky discusses how Schutz's painting self-consciously reflects upon painting as a conceptual practice. Schwabsky writes,

'These self-consuming, self-creating figures are, needless to say, allegories of painting. The difference between contemporary image-based painting and traditional representational painting, can be grasped through the realization that, whereas in traditional representation painting was used to convey an image, in contemporary painting the image is used to convey (an idea of) painting (and this is true even of an abstract image).' Schwabsky (2011, p.11)

Broken and shattered bodies also populate many of my paintings from 2015 (Figs 108– 109). In these works I explored reliquary fragments of personal, social, and art historical memory. In alluding to classical antiquity I intended to draw an emotional and libidinal correlation to the contrast between dormant motionless figures and the abeyant violence and conflict enacted upon their severed and incomplete body fragments. In depicting plaster casts, mannequins, and a life model I was able to propose dual meanings in that these items speak of decaying public languages as well as the private world and milieu of studio paraphernalia.



Fig 108. Helliwell P, *Garden Party*, 100 x 140cm, oil on canvas

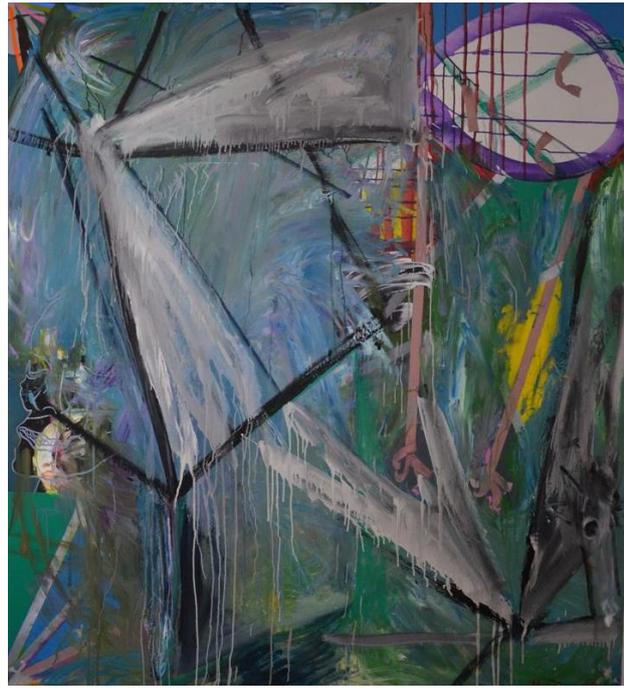


Fig 109. Helliwell P, *Fallen Child*, 2015, Oil on canvas, 65 x 50cm Fig 110. Helliwell P, *Untitled* 2014, oil on canvas, 173 x 150cm

In some of this group of paintings I directly applied paint as a sensual material with its resistances and ruptures contributing to painterly facture. The physicality of paint as both a material substance and a physical process of making has permitted me to work without recourse to conventionally slick and sanitised paint finishes. My production of a distressed pictorial surface is sympathetic to a content of disintegration and loss, particularly of the sheen and glamour of the consumer age, as well as reflecting on the process of mortality. I intended my paintings' surface materiality to possess a similitude to the ageing of flesh despite intimating the deteriorated surface textures of plastic, wood, concrete, and steel. In my recent work I try to acknowledge my own ageing process and admit that much of the relevance of current art and theory may eventually pass into oblivion.

The surface re-workings and accumulation of paint are the result of a more sustained duration or engagement with the activity and process of painting, the final image is the result of many attempts rather than the clarity and freshness of a single session. In my present series of paintings I have not had the singularity of vision or execution

to complete a painting in one attempt or working session, they are the result of revision and trying various solutions before the final version is tentatively reached.

The relationship between each element and the whole may replicate and echo my interest in objects and things that are already images and representations, such as statues, fast food promotional figures, mannequins, and medical skeletons. I would like to think that paintings that allegorise their own processes and status as meaningful visual artefacts reflect current thinking about the 'pictorial turn' and image laden aspects of experience. My exploration of the pictorial quality of these particular objects was informed by the idea that they are objects that are already representations and images of cultural meaning before being simply things.

The potential to transform an image laden reality may require the contemporary imagination to be transformed from being observationally biased towards producing more freely invented images. I have come to explore a looser facture of paint and arrived in some paintings at more spontaneous and intuitive use of colour, shape, and mark making, for example *Untitled* (Fig 110). I have tried to freely apply paint in a more emotionally charged way to develop a more humanistic content. The pain, fear, anguish, and despair, as well as hope, pleasure, freedom, and playfulness is an attempt to reflect upon and generate new meaning in my art.

In many of my earlier doctorate paintings I explored fully saturated and high key colour relationships. Bright contrasting colours reflected my interest in popular culture and appealed to base sensibilities and the palettes of juvenile content. I took great delight in the sensual appeal and enjoyment of pure colour, and in the formal correspondence between vulgar contents and the vulgarity of harsh and clashing hues. During the latter part of the doctorate I have begun to mix colours and to introduce monochromatic and more subtle greyscale palettes. This has led to a sustained period of darker and more contemplative painting that is now beginning to emerge from the subtlety of greyscale towards the inclusion of tinted, toned, and shaded colours. The physicality of my painting processes is evolving from controlled and prescribed effects and techniques towards looser and free applications.

I will describe some of the decision making processes that have occurred within the development of my final group of doctorate paintings. In these paintings I have tried to explore and combine many of the concerns stated in previous doctorate paintings

such as the relation between abstraction and figuration, the disparity between the observable naturalism and invented imagery, and the tension between literal content and unconsciously generated meanings, as well as differences between spontaneity and deliberation.

The evolution of imagery in *Untitled* (Fig 111) illustrates how I generate and modify pictorial signs within my painting practice. In most of my skeleton collages such as *Free Range Humans* (Fig 117) clearly silouetted skeleton shapes occupy the entire pictorial field. In *Untitled* (Fig 111) I cut a skeleton shape in half down its central spine to form two separate figures composed of each half of the skeleton, I inverted one of these sides so that one of the resulting figures appeared to be facing the other whilst the other figure remains turned away. After making these images I interpreted them as representing my own repressed and hidden self, that the skeleton split in half produced a divided self that in being reversed was able to embrace itself and self-soothe my mirrored other.



Fig 111. Helliwell P, *Untitled*, 2016 acrylic on paper, 90 x 70cm Fig 112. Helliwell P, *Couple at Night*  
Fig, acrylic, latex, and oil on canvas, 100 x

In *Couple at Night* (Fig 112) the idea of symmetry and reversal is further developed by turning both halves to face away from each other. This reversal of the split skeleton motif completes the transformation of my pictorial sign by exploring a pairing of figures facing away from each other, a dislocated couple at night. The figuration in this painting was arrived at extremely crudely and with an intense spontaneity of execution in which the few decisions I was conscious of making received very little censorship and intervention.

In addition to the psychologically loaded content there is a strong element of formal play and utilisation of pictorial devices and painterly procedures and techniques, the work is simultaneously radical and academic, whilst being free and formulaic.

I have always been conscious of and interested in the formal possibilities of image making and the creation and employment of pictorial devices. In discussing my pre-doctorate paintings I described the proposition of a fractured background over which a linear figurative motif is laid and entwined as the visual model I utilised and aspired my work to conform to. This pictorial model or structure continued to dominate my thinking and aesthetic preferences until my doctorate. I believed this pictorial device structurally corresponded to my empirical experience in how the transparent shallow spaces linked to simulated and hyperreal experiences.



Fig 113. Helliwell P, *Fruits of the Loin*, acrylic on canvas, 140 x 120cm

The idea of the renewal of an emerging self is in my painting practice closely aligned to struggle, suffering, and failure, but transformed by the relinquishing of my control; allowing chance, accident, and improvisation to create unpredictable pictorial signs. An almost fractured part of me has its own damaged existence, but through the freedom to experiment and make up an invented reality I am imaginatively completed.

I began *Fruits of the Loin* (Fig 113) (a work in progress) by squeezing paint directly from the tube onto the canvas in order to rapidly fill in several segment like shapes that I intended to represent shafts of light and compositional striations. In recognising that the squeezed paint resembled a feathered wing I retained the shape throughout the subsequent painting. I began this painting on the first anniversary of the death of a very close friend's mother and I believe I unconsciously created a pictorial sign that embodied my thoughts and feelings about mortality and death, with motifs of shafts of light, winged bird like forms, and skeletal rib like striations, incorporated in a single graphic image.



Fig 114. Helliwell P, *Untitled*, 2016, oil on canvas, 200 x 225cm



Fig 115-116. Helliwell P, *In My Beginning is My End*, 2016, work in progress, oil on canvas, 225 x 203cm

The motif of a cube like box occurs in many of my paintings, for example *Untitled* (Fig 114) that I believe represents an experience of unfamiliar perception and visual uncertainty that I had as a child. When I was very young maybe only four years old my family moved to a new part of the city, the first time we visited our nearest park I saw in the distance a metal tower on top of which a cage like cube contained the heads of many people. I could not tell whether they were imprisoned or voluntarily on some kind of ride. As we came closer to the strange and unfamiliar object I could see the round shapes were not human faces but metal and glass spheres or discs, the object was actually a flood light rising above the football stadium. I interpreted the floodlight as a barbaric and oppressive object and have incorporated geometric cubes and structures as well as pictorial devices in almost every image I have ever made. Perception often confirms what is consciously known but in encountering something for the first time we may not recognise what the thing really is and experience instead the disorientating shock of something unfamiliar. It is this experience that I believe art and painting may continue to provoke.

Kearney in describing the relationship between the 'ethical and poetic imaginations' warns of the danger of too freely assigning any meaning to any sign or of not

employing rigour and discipline within the contemporary imagination, he writes of, 'an attitude where anything goes and everything is everything else because it is, in the final analysis, nothing at all.' Kearney (1988, p.369). Kearney suggests the danger of everything being equivalent to everything else results in everything being 'equally (un)important', as Foster stated in defining the relativism of postmodern pluralism that I quoted at the very beginning of my report. Foster (1985, p.15) In returning to the idea of choice and commitment I believe as an artist it is important to continue to explore the distinction between actively and rigorously producing rather than passively consuming imagery and ideas that already exist. In sustaining and developing my painting practice throughout and beyond the doctorate programme I hope my work possesses meaning that resonates with others and contributes to the culture of my time.



Fig 117. Helliwell P, *Free Range Humans*, 2016, acrylic and collage on paper, each panel 80 x 60cm

## Dawn to Dust

My final group of doctorate paintings and drawings has been made in the wake of this report and given the title *Dawn to Dust*. The urgency of a relatively short but intense period of activity complemented my intention to generate inventive work from within my imagination. A decision to pursue one final output required the raising of my expectations, entailing creative risks and the possibility of failure. It is my belief that if I want my work to convincingly express life then it is necessary to capture the uncertainty of existence.

The overall ambition of these paintings is to integrate the relationship between private and public communication, and my internal and external vision. I enquire if the expressionistic idea of an individual and unique private language is an incoherent and incomprehensible utterance or if it is possible for unmediated and direct expression to communicate with others.

Much of my work is concerned with the exploration of how perception and emotion are mediated by language and interconnected with other forms of visual expression such as urban imagery and commercial media. I view the mediated character and artificiality of visual language as a necessary platform on which the ambition to invent, and to let the unconscious freely express the unsaid, can take place.

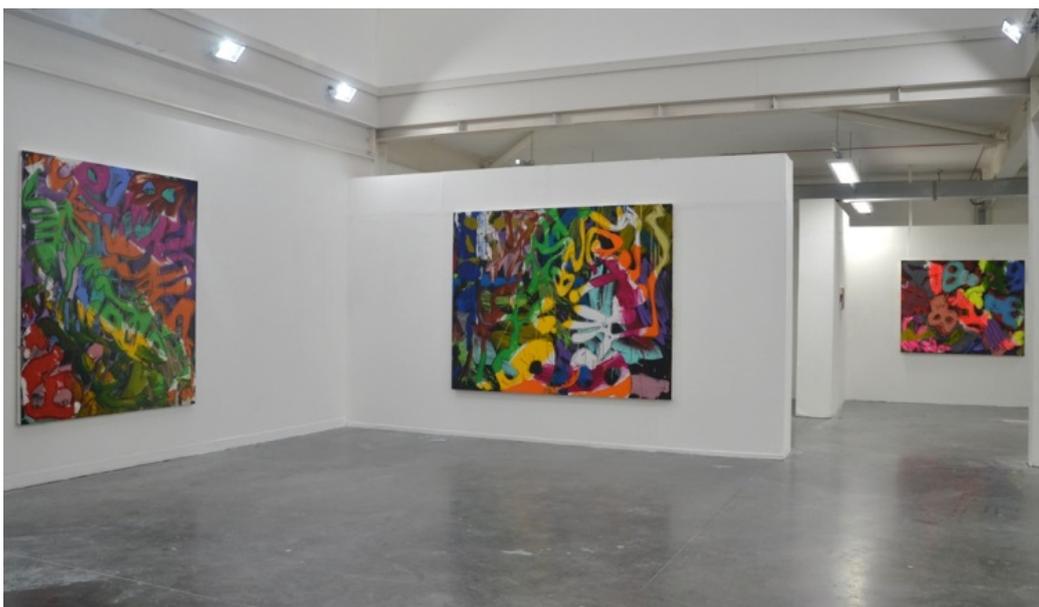


Fig 118. Helliwell P, Installation view of *Dawn to Dust*, 2016, final Doctorate Exhibition at UEL

I have attempted to locate the unconscious within the creative process by manipulating the materiality of my painting medium to generate meanings that extend beyond the physical matter of each image. I advocate that painting can accrue and express what is yet to be known and transcend its physical dimension. I do not conceive of these external meanings as a vague spiritual dimension but as the embodiment of varying emotions and feelings within the physical residue of each particular painting. For example *No Freedom in Eden* (Fig 119) expresses the idea that humans in attaining consciousness, and our self-awareness of being separate from nature, are made mortal and condemned to die whilst creating our own culture and civilisation.

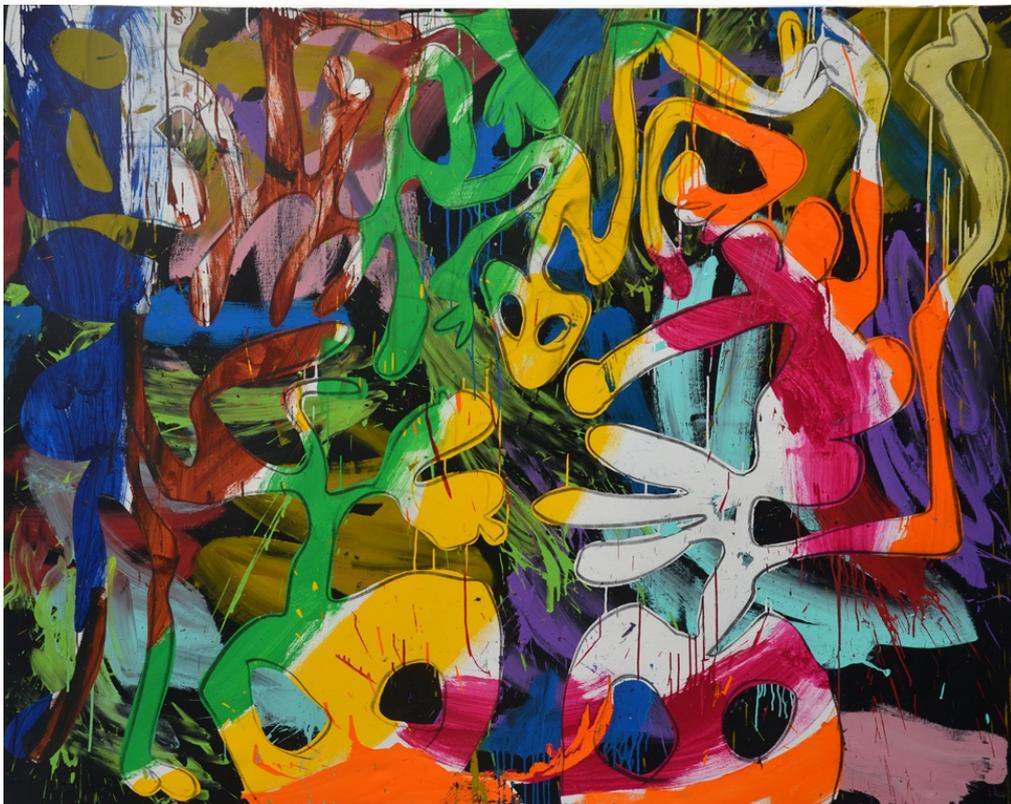


Fig 119. Helliwell P, *No Freedom in Eden*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 190 x 240cm

*Dawn to Dust* was born out of the trauma of physical and psychological pain, as well as life's pleasures and excitements. These paintings explore my fascination with mortality and ongoing questioning of existence: birth, sex, death. I align the polarities of anguish and joy within the energies of picture making and advocate that

seemingly disparaging and melancholic content is paradoxically affirmed through the exhilaration and physicality of painting.

The entry to my final group of work was provided by the skeleton collage *Free Range Humans* (Fig 117) that had been drawn with a knife to result in unpredictable and less controlled imagery. In subsequent paintings I cut out paper and canvas figures that were initially adhered but later discarded. Collage was used as a template that could be removed and inverted to allow repositioned and multiple figure groupings to be tested out. The paired down language of these initial pieces provided a way into the final paintings, they started to predict the type of painting that I envisioned but could not fully realise (Fig 120-121).

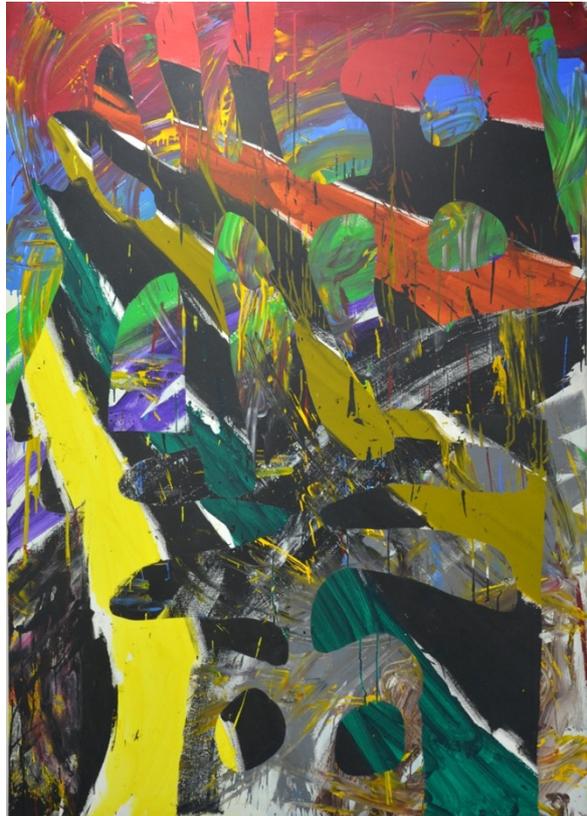
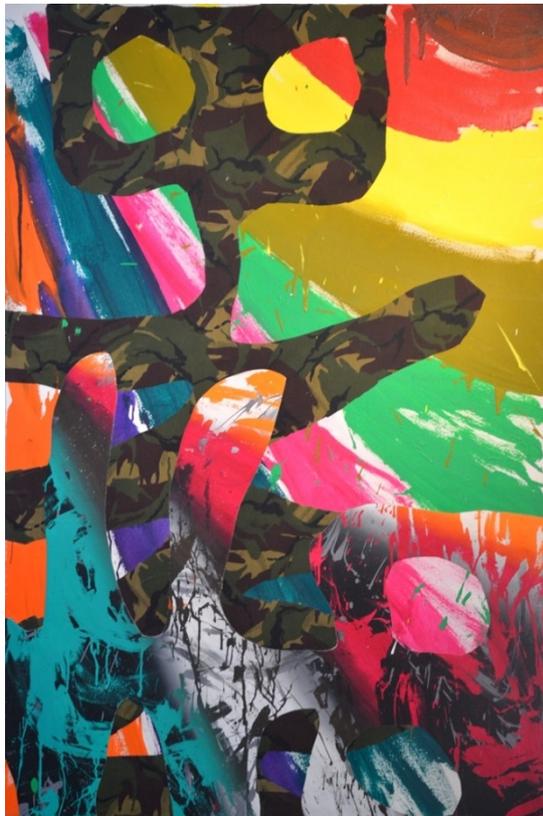


Fig 120 Helliwell P, *Untitled*, 2016 acrylic and collage on canvas, 150 x 100cm. Fig 121. Helliwell P, *Space Oddity*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 270 x 150cm.

The stylistic cohesion of the subsequent group of paintings was in part due to a method of drawing that freed me from contrived formulas. My application of paint and

colour similarly replaced refined conventions with a more forcefully engaged and intuitive approach. The result is fluid and fast paced imagery that engages the viewer through singular and integrated compositions.



Fig 122, Helliwell P, *Little Glitter Picker*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 60cm. Fig 123, Helliwell P, *The Glitter Picker*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 203 x 173cm

Freedom and spontaneity become difficult and problematic concepts in relation to postmodern theories that promote the mediation of language and expression. My approach is to attempt to be innovative and creative but to recognise the need for rigorous preparation that requires repetition and rehearsal as well as improvisation and abandon. I generate motifs that are explored and developed through coloured drawings on paper and smaller versions of each painting, for example the relation between *The Glitter Picker* and the accompanying smaller painting titled *Little Glitter Picker* (Fig 122-123).

A certain bravado and spontaneity of execution has generated surprising and unique images, such as: a reclining figure mutating into a birth scene with attendant viewers, figures conjoined in sexual encounters, and a more complex compositional grouping

of multiple metamorphic figures of varying gender and age. These subjects informed the subsequent titles of individual pieces and the overall group that include: *Free Range Humans*, *No Freedom in Eden*, *The Glitter Picker*, and, *Soft Topic*.



Fig 124, Helliwell P, *Veil Narsh*, 2016, acrylic on canvas, 140 x 173cm



Fig 125, Helliwell P, *All the Better to See You With*, 2016, acrylic on canvas 100 x 150cm

Prior to starting these paintings I had a dream I was telling a younger artist, 'Be yourself and make the work you want to make as if it is the last thing you will ever do and show'. The doorway to the exhibition was unlocked unconsciously.



Fig 126, Helliwell P, Installation view of *Dawn to Dust*, 2016, final Doctorate Exhibition at UEL

## **Professional Practice 1**

### **Solo Exhibitions**

2014 *...and wine and teeth and...* Minorities Gallery, Colchester

2013 *Dark Blue Perfume Mocks the Ocean*. Tankstation, Enschede, Holland

### **Group Exhibitions**

2015 Educating Picasso

Group exhibitions prior to doctorate

National Open Art Exhibition 2010,

'Plastic Pets and Toy Stories', Gooden Gallery, 2007,

'Forms in Flux' at APT Gallery in 1997,

Malvern Drawing Open in 1993,

London Group Open, Barbican Centre, 1992,

The South West Open, Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery in 1991,

### **Residencies**

Sept-Dec 2012 B92 ARE Enschede Holland

2012 – 2013 – 2014 Atoll, Bedburg – Hau, Germany

### **Competitions and Awards**

2010 East of England Award, National Open Art Competition

2013 Shortlisted for Live Canon Poetry Award, Poetry performed by Live Canon Ensemble at Greenwich Theatre and published in anthology.

### **Commissions**

Scenic artwork for Big Brother, The Voice, 8 out of 10 Cats, and BBC TV Productions

## **Workshops**

2014-16 Northumbria University, technical demonstrator in painting.

## **Publications and Journals**

2016 Poetry published in Shakespeare 400 Sonnets, and performed at V and A.

2013 Poetry published in Live Canon anthology

2013 Exhibition catalogue written by Kaavous Clayton with an interview with Luke Gotellier.

## **Professional Practice 2**

There are two sides to my professional practice: firstly making and exhibiting my work and my participation in residencies, and secondly the financing of time, space, and materials to continue making work. My professional practice can be discussed and divided into two sections under the headings. Doctorate Exhibitions and Residencies, and Scenic Artist and Painting Technician.



Fig 127. Artoll 2013

## Doctorate Exhibitions and Residencies

I participated in a three month residency in Holland with ARE (Artists Residencies Enschede) at studio B92 in Enschede during 2012. The residency provided a studio and living space followed by an exhibition of the work I produced. My work was shown at Tankstation in a solo exhibition titled *Dark Blue Perfume Mocks the Ocean*. From the first year of my doctorate onwards I was fortunate to participate in three of the Artoll residencies in Bedburg-Hau in Germany.

Being in unfamiliar environments stimulates my creativity and enables me to produce work in unpredictable ways, for example I have described how I made sculpture (Fig 127) during the second Artoll in 2013. My work from this residency and from Enschede formed the starting point of my first UK solo show at the Minorities Gallery entitled '*...and wine and teeth and...*' in Colchester in 2014. The process of working with the curator Kaavous Clayton over several months leading up to the installation and the selection of the exhibition was a valuable and productive experience. The final installation of the exhibition and publication of a catalogue added up to a substantial overview of my doctorate work with twenty of my paintings and sculptures being exhibited across several gallery rooms (Fig 128).

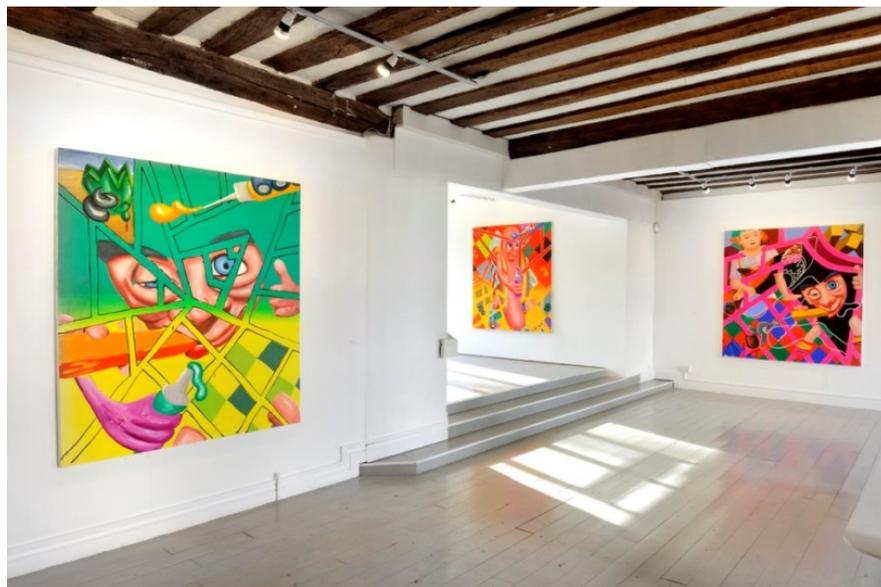


Fig 128. *...and wine and teeth and...* Installation view the Minorities Galleries 2014

During 2015 two of my paintings were exhibited in *Educating Picasso* at the Espacio Gallery, *Age of Innocence* (Fig 47), and *Sauver les Enfants* (Fig 64). In 2013 my poetry was shortlisted for the Live Canon Poetry Prize and performed on stage at the Greenwich Theatre and published in the Live Canon Anthology. In 2016 Live Canon performed my poetry in the Shakespeare 154 project at the Victoria and Albert Museum and published my work in book form. Two of my poems are included below.

#### **Bastard Apocalyptic Love Eradication**

When summer rose I threw up the sun  
selling a delicious range of hot and cold  
refreshments dismembering me inside  
my face slapping against the savagery  
of clay clerics and rebel medic ethics.

The excruciating birth of intoxication  
evacuated from the fiction of bridges  
being anyone else's simpering breath  
numb to the knuckle of sour romance  
in waves of stagnant love that hurt.

Sundown's monotony penetrates you  
and me intruding from another world  
to this fathomless fall in love without  
loving a memory of all who will ever  
expire at the end; ending in nothing.

#### **Bakelite Bomb Shelters**

The way we are, dust coated  
bad habits brittle as bakelite  
bomb shelters, blowing away  
dirt for salient kissed minarets,  
and bayonet tongued people's  
mothball coloured steeples  
festoon the dugouts, pining  
for more than exhumation.

Spoon-fed homes' unearthed  
bones, disarticulate mouthfuls  
of mothering, gift-wrapped  
panic: panoramic magic  
holographic plastic, hotdogs'  
garnish threadbare vistas,  
tattooing amniotic lashes;  
corralled for strangulation.

Off Earth, satellites caress  
each newborn herded within  
half-lives, dissected; quarters  
mutating towards the infinite  
fiction, eternally orbiting  
the latest umbilical twist:  
no one wants to die, but I  
need to find a way to live.

Poetry has provided a vehicle for generating ideas and images that compliment and inform my painting practice. My poetry although based in verbal language attempts to find short circuits that directly express complex emotional feelings that play with imagery and challenge the conventional literal syntax of verbal and visual languages.

### **Scenic Artist and Painting Technician**

I have experienced two areas of employment in which I have transferred my existing skills and acquired new ones. The first is as a scenic artist in the TV and film industry, the second as a technical demonstrator and lecturer within fine art university degree programs. Being exposed to the media industry was a great source of freedom in that I discovered how the artificiality of the media environment mirrored and confirmed my interest in simulated and hyperreal experiences. After working for many years in the TV and film industry from 1998 to 2014 I began my transition to employment in Higher Education. The university sector is altruistic but also facilitates direct research and experimentation into processes and materials and the use of workshop facilities. At Northumbria University I have worked as a Technician within the Fine Art painting department where I give practical technical demonstrations and painting workshops to undergraduates. This environment has allowed me to experiment with and explore a range of materials of both a traditional and industrial nature. Many of my skeleton collages have emerged from my collage workshops that I conduct with first and second year undergraduates. These workshops have enabled me to explore and challenge the stylistic conventions of drawing and painting, and resulted in work that bypasses the prejudices that my paintings sometimes enforce.

Working in the TV industry often required me to invent new and exciting technical methods that engage creative intuition and a fearless bravery that I tried to return to my own art. I also acquired techniques and used new materials in ways that could be transferred back to my art, for example stencils and floor-painting on BBC productions such as Strictly Come Dancing and Blue Peter, as well as the use of liquid latex in processes of masking and concealing underpainting which have been explored and developed further in my painting. The artificiality of TV and film studios gave affirmation to, and informed, the hyperreal and simulated contents expressed in my practice.

Many artists whose work has been influential in my development also began their careers in the commercial sector, for example in the 1950's Patrick Caulfield worked in the technical drawing office of Cross and Blackwell, James Rosenquist was a billboard painter, and Andy Warhol an advertising illustrator. Non-fine art techniques have impacted on 20th and 21<sup>st</sup> century art including collage and decorating, lens based techniques of photography, screen printing and stencilling, and industrial processes of spray gun and metal welding, and now the digital media of computers and the virtual space of the internet influence and inform contemporary practice.

Employment has always brought me into a physical and psychological relationship with industrial non-fine art materials and techniques. This proximity with industrial practices enabled me to be excited by the potential of the techniques I encountered and to imagine ways in which they might influence my practice. Employment has generated opportunities beyond the traditional definition of fine art to extend my interest in the visual and tactile possibilities of materials and techniques.

### **Saying Nothing Beautifully**

When painting artwork for TV and film I worked to a designer's brief which is very different than generating one's own practice and expressing an emotionally lived experience in an autonomous artwork. When painting as a scenic artist, I have been required to be absent from the work; to function as a tool that makes the work. The redeeming aspect of scenic artwork is that it is ultimately inexpressive and devoid of the emotional and psychological content of creative expression.



Figs. 129-130. *Big Brother* Diary Room and Task room painted cloud makeover, Elstree Studios

A dependence upon technical formula as well as working to the design of others tends to remove expression and creativity from the finished product. In this capacity I was relieved of the weight of meaning; but this relinquishing of meaning through reliance on technique entails anxiety and frustration surrounding both the emptiness of the scenic artist's skill and the superficiality of the TV and Film industry, and can become another type of content that raises questions concerning the absence of meaning in the scenic artist's activity.

The larger than life physicality of most scenic artwork requires confidence in working with and exploiting the resistances of a wide range of materials and entails struggle and risk taking but offers enormous scope to experiment and transform. There is an important aspect of innovation and discovery of solutions, formulas, and descriptions that once acquired are guarded by many scenic artists with much secrecy. Although the physical and performative aspect of scenic art requires a radical attitude towards the ability to make up and try out new techniques, the results are never subversive but by necessity affirm the media view. If the complexity of content and the struggle to find meaning is reduced to the simple application and demonstration of formulas and acquired techniques it follows that the creative mind might become detached and disembodied. Ruskin warns of the emptiness of speaking beautifully but of having nothing to say.

'But the beauty of mere language in painting is not only very attractive and entertaining to the spectator, but requires for its attainment no small exertion of mind and devotion of time by the artist. Hence, in art, men have frequently fancied that they were becoming rhetoricians and poets when they were only learning to speak melodiously.' Ruskin (1873, p.76)

John Ruskin describes the danger of technical bravado and exuberance and how art is not just about the demonstration of skill. Ruskin explains how expression can be absent from and not guaranteed by the empty demonstration of technical or formulaic procedures. Expression can also be absented by the social and political context in which work is commissioned and produced. In my experience participation in industry often discourages and eradicates self-expression from commodity production, an extreme example of this is discussed in Belgrad's research of how

Native Americans produced paintings in reservations in the 1940's, describing the imbalance between skill and expression he writes,

'American Indians had learned the Studio Style as a skilled trade in the government Indian Schools, and thought of their paintings primarily as commodities for white consumption, rather than as expressions of their worldview.' Belgrade (1998, p.68)

This schism between the self-expression of a worldview and producing commodities commissioned by others illustrates how emotion and meaning can be stripped from many artists participation in industry. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century TV and film industry employment rarely facilitates the self-realisation and potential of the individual. Scenic Artists are never hired to express themselves, they are a skill that they sell.

In my professional practice it is my ambition to fully acknowledge the technical and manual aspect of my practice and align them with the cerebral. Working within the commercial media industry and an educational art institution has allowed me to directly experience a mind and body dualism and a division of labour between designers and artisans and between academics and technicians that replicates and enforces class and socio-economic divisions that needlessly discriminate between thinkers and makers.

Within both commercial and fine art practice and the university sector I perceive a polarity between mind and body that keeps the physical and intellectual apart. I endeavour to reappraise the disparity between material technique and theoretical conception, because division enforces the assumption and prejudice that hand skills are inferior to the elevated position of the mind. My aspiration is to integrate my technical knowledge and practical experience of art with my philosophical and theoretical interests. I possess a unique and valuable knowledge base and understanding of the sensual and cerebral, the manual and conceptual components of fine art and industry which I would like to develop and utilise as a resource within future undergraduate and graduate university programs.

My professional practice although necessitating the acquisition of time, money, and space to make work, also requires the engagement and coexistence of both my practical and theoretical interests and ambitions. I have lived and worked in energetic and thriving cities and participated in the drama and excitement of many

contemporary TV and film productions. I am inspired by my involvement in debates within the doctorate program and more broadly in the culture of my time. I have witnessed some iconic media and entertainment events and had a central role in the organisation of several studio groups. In every period of my life I have persistently continued to paint, draw, and make objects and images that express and reflect my experience of the time in which I live, to express myself, my feelings, and my reality.



Fig 131. Painted floor design for *Ministry of Curious Stuff*, 2012, Pinewood Studios

## Conclusion

In my attempt to build a space between myself and postmodern artists such as Koons I may sometimes underplay how much my practice still relies on similar postmodern strategies and methods of image making. I have always been fascinated and drawn to the formality of artifice and the languages and devices of art. The synthetic is very real to me, I feel myself coming alive in a heightened way when image making. When I was five years old my teacher pointed out that I was looking at and engaging with my drawing in a way that other children were not. I was turning the drawing upside down and working on it, I felt a relationship with the emerging image and it had a presence that was as real to me as anything else in the world. Image making continues to act as an interface between myself and the world in that it is both a process as well as a product that filters experience through the mediating veil of language.

In *The Four Quartets* T.S. Eliot wrote, 'In my beginning is my end' Eliot (1944, p.13) Eliot suggests that life can be interpreted as a cyclic process in which our death is already present and anticipated at life's inception. Eliot may infer that everything a person is and will be is already present in them. Likewise I can speculate if the various phases of my creative life are a journey unfolding in a preordained pattern or if conversely the entirety of everything I will express is a mystery waiting to be shaped by external influences. If all of a painter's paintings are already in them then how should they be realised and released, are some easily encouraged whilst others remain trapped or extracted at great cost? Perhaps the paintings inside me are finite in number but as yet unformed and blank canvasses awaiting life to leave a mark upon them. The doctorate programme has encouraged me to shape my work with energy and rigour but it is not the pleasure in this achievement that comforts me towards the end of this process but the painful struggle and suffering that has always resided within my imagination and my imagery that guides me beyond the doctorate. In my beginning is my end.

In our emerging era artists may attempt for their work to resist theory and challenge doctrine. Some visual artists refute the verbal, which may not be very rebellious as much theory concerns the ascendancy of the visual and the pictorial. Although I am influenced and informed by many ideas and images derived from other artists and

thinkers, I aspire to be independent of any particular philosophy or school of thought. Creative freedom should not be aligned to or readily conform to other people's dogma. In exploring the ideas and intellectual framework that informs my painting practice I recognise areas of my creative process that remain a mystery and where I must out of necessity relinquish rational analysis.

In trying to explain and understand my painting practice, and in exploring the ideas that excite me, I believe I am incapable of explaining away the entirety of my vision. I may aspire for my work to resist theory but my work itself may refuse to yield to my own analysis. Self-expression may elude self-analysis and remain inconclusively examined. Perhaps painting is an inexplicable mystery casting a spell that I cannot break.

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