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MR. TAYLOR

Pebbles and Avalanches

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Curated by Clare Charnley

The Crossley Gallery
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Pebbles and Avalanches
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Introduction

Most of us can remember something a teacher once said to us, good or bad. Sometimes a remark made at an apposite moment can shift the course of a life or a practice. At other times influence can be so slow-burning that it is difficult to discern. In turn, and less often acknowledged, students' explorations can seep into their tutors' practice. *Pebbles and Avalanches* uses artworks to draw attention to the complex dynamics of this two-way process of influence between teachers and students of art.

It is not uncommon for art lecturers to discover that, by chance or perhaps because of cultural urgency, students are working through similar questions to themselves. Many of these 'artists who teach' find that splitting their time between teaching and making results in both activities energising the other. Investigations in the studio enter discussion in the classroom, in the corridor and among the assorted groups huddled, coatless, on the forecourt during fire practice.

This exhibition begins with the work of ten artist-teachers and students from The University of Lincoln, each one presented as part of a dialogue with something or someone that came before or after. Ang Bartram, Michael Healey and Alec Shepley can trace ideas back to conversations with their teachers that

still remain active in their work many years later. As a student, Catherine Burge inadvertently broke into Research Fellow Ed Allington's store room, stumbling across a sculpture that was to set up a conversation with him that continues to this day and informs the paired works they have made for this exhibition.

Almost uniquely in higher education, tutors have a considerable amount of one-to-one contact with students. At best these interactions are intensely creative; at worst they are the kind of experiences recounted by Paul Edwards and myself. "Make no mistake it is about power," Medina Hammad writes of the student-teacher relationship. It is not always wielded with sensitivity. Yuen Fong Ling aims to combat hierarchies of power by flipping the life class on its head. In another reversal of the usual set-up, Andrew Bracey invites University of Lincoln students to critique his work. Andrew swaps roles because the students' responses are of value to him as an artist. Medina Hammad also reveals the act of receiving from a student whereas Keith James finds himself following his own briefs, so occupying the position of a student and becoming his own teacher simultaneously. In another conflation of the two roles, John Plowman's works in the exhibition were made in collaboration with Fabiola Paz who was an undergraduate at the time.

My thanks to Sean Ashton and Mary O'Neill for their catalogue essays and to John Plowman for his help and advice. Thanks too, to my colleagues at The University of Lincoln for their conversations, which formed the impulse for *Pebbles and Avalanches*. I hope they enjoyed looking up ex-tutors and ex-students including Miriam Chiara, Lucas Delfino Garcia & Joana Cifre-Cerda; Steve Dutton and Percy Peacock; Roy Holt; John Rowen O'Neill; Lisa Watts and Robert Cross, all of whom contributed pieces that form the other half of these discussions between works.

The way an avalanche starts is unpredictable. If we step one centimetre to the side nothing happens. It can move a few rocks a few metres or reshape the whole mountainside. Mixing metaphors gloriously, and perhaps appropriately for an exhibition that represents so many different stories, *Pebbles and Avalanches* pulls back the turf a little and provides a glimpse of the mass of delicate branching mycelia running below and between.

Clare Charnley

The Desired Hexagonal Profile

This is a short tale about two artworks, one student, 22 art teachers and one visiting artist, from which probably not enough autobiographical detail has been removed. I am the student, I made the artworks, and the 22 art teachers are people who taught me from 1977-1997. Richard Wentworth is the visiting artist.

In 1997 I made a work entitled *Art Teachers 1977-1997* (featured on the cover of this catalogue). I was about to complete an MA in Sculpture at the Royal College of Art and I suppose I wanted to make something that marked the end of my life as a student. The work consisted of 22 pencils in a black box. Each pencil had a bit gouged from the blunt end and a name written on the bare wood – the names of people who taught me art from 1977-1997:

Mrs Moulton
Miss Wright
Mr Joyner
Mr Cook
Mr West
Paul Setchell
Anne Roberts
Tony Keeler
Derek Mace
Pete Knox
Rod Newlands

Victoria Mitchell
David Batchelor
Pete Cartwright
Alain Ayres
Lee Grandjean
Terry Powell
Eric Bainbridge
Helen Chadwick
Alison Wilding
Nigel Rolfe
Tony Carter

The pencils were not real pencils but wooden dowels shaped and painted to look like pencils, specifically, jumbo pencils – the kind you get in museum gift shops. This may seem a deviation from an otherwise tight conceptual premise; but consider that I had to fashion each one on a belt sander to get the desired hexagonal profile. There was a clear gain in scaling up: I got to keep my fingertips.

Initially, I was unsure whether to include everyone who had taught me art or to establish criteria for narrowing down the field. I eventually decided that, to make the cut, the person had to have taught me over a period of time – they had to have been responsible for my development in a pastoral as well as intellectual sense. The first to go were the supply teachers – those with no formal art training who came in to dole out the paints when Mr Joyner was off sick. The only non-art teacher to be included was Mr West, who taught history by drawing stickmen on the blackboard.

Discounted, also – and we advance now to my undergraduate and postgraduate years – were the Visiting Artists. I don't mean the roster of Associate Lecturers who breezed in twice a month to talk about Man Utd and PJ Harvey, I mean those whom you saw only once and expected to change your life forever with a single unflinching comment. Visiting Artists were not so much teachers as trouble-shooters. If the job of the

Resident Tutor was to balance objective criticism with pastoral encouragement, what you got from Visiting Artists was pure, unalloyed judgement. Their job was to place the same obstacles in your path as the art world might. Those obstacles would sometimes turn out to be haystacks and you would drive straight through them; more often, they would turn out to be brick walls.

My most serious crash-test dummy moment came late, while I was working on my box of pencils. My Visiting Artist rule had led to some controversial omissions; in particular, I wavered for a long time over the inclusion of Richard Wentworth. Wentworth came in to the sculpture department just once during my time at the Royal College, and everyone wanted a piece of him. His solution was a 'drive-by' tour: he would cruise the studios, pausing for a quick chat when something caught his eye, and at the end of the day we were to gather in the seminar room to hear his overall verdict.

Howie Street was immediately seized by an atmosphere of disingenuous industry. People sanded stuff that didn't need sanding, carried bits of wood from one place to another – then carried them back again. As Wentworth approached my studio space, I was putting the finishing touches to a 'stack' piece, a work made from forty or so stretchers, placed horizontally one on the other, with a final kosher sheet of MDF on top to make it look

genuinely solid. This sheet had a pale atmospheric finish obtained with chalk and sandpaper, the intention being to create a lightness that contrasted with the heaviness of the stack, whose sides were painted black. As Wentworth walked past, he rapped it with a knuckle. 'I thought so,' he said, ascertaining that it was indeed hollow, and advanced to the next student.

Making a hollow stack is more difficult than making a solid one; but it's much cheaper. But if you're making a prop, then acknowledge it. Don't offer me a prop in lieu of a sculpture. Acknowledge the stack's hollowness as part of the artifice, rather than assuming I'll turn a blind eye to this pragmatic contingency. At least, that's what I thought Wentworth was saying.

I hope all this is apropos of a serious point about teaching: that the fleeting encounter is often the more truthful encounter. The fleeting encounter is more likely to expose alien elements introduced pragmatically, accidentally, whimsically, or subconsciously, into a process, with a resultant deviation of meaning. Returning to *Art Teachers 1977-1997*, I'm tempted to say that the names written on those pencils are united, not just by the fact that they all taught me something useful, but by the fact that they helped sustain the illusion that the deviations were part of the plan, or could be incorporated into the plan simply by acknowledging them. The Visiting Artist is more likely to

present you with a choice: adhere to your plan more rigorously or ditch it and embrace the deviations. In my case, the prop issue was an epic deviation that had gone unaddressed: all along, it seemed, I'd made things that were 'prototypes' for sculptures rather than actual sculptures, and the Resident Tutors hadn't noticed.

I wonder, now, as a Resident Tutor myself, how many such oversights I'm guilty of – and whether I might rethink my whole teaching rationale. Perhaps I should replace some of the standard half-hour tutorials with a series of 'assists': spontaneous (or premeditated) actions performed with minimal verbal qualification, designed to highlight blind spots in a student's thinking. Of course, such a strategy would presuppose two things: optimum attendance and optimum industry, a continuous festival of artistic production (the tutor wandering among the camp fires like some imperious witch doctor). And what would the students make of these fleeting encounters if they weren't flagged up in advance as legitimate pedagogical offensives? We can imagine the course leader's introduction at the start of the year: 'Now, our programme consists mainly of lectures, seminars and individual tutorials. However, from time to time you should expect us to walk into your space and perform some gesture that will be explicable only in retrospect...'

sean Ashton

The Art of Giving Lightly

I am what most people would deem an educated person. I have a little pile of certificates somewhere that provide evidence of my educational experience – Intermediate and Leaving Certificate, Degrees, PhD etc.. I also have a pile of odder qualifications and awards – Irish Dancing, Italian, Cookery, First Aid, Ethics, Young Printmaker of the Year, that sort of thing. This accumulation of pieces of paper suggests a conventional and successful engagement with the educational system. What they do not show is the lived experience, the fear of school that resulted in a chronic suspicion of authority, the days spent hiding in a field behind our house because I was afraid of yet another public humiliation at the hands of Mrs Buttimer or the Sisters of Mercy, yet another whack with a ruler, another hour spent standing on my desk as punishment for being me. These early experiences of education did not however put me off but instead made me increasingly determined to prove that knowledge comes in many forms and from the most unexpected places – and that I could acquire it. While I would rather not have had the experience of Glasheen National School and Mount Mercy College, they were not all a waste and may in fact have made me a better teacher. They taught me that rules should be questioned, a perfect grounding for deconstruction, and that respect is not given automatically by virtue of the position someone holds but is something that one earns every day. They also taught

me to recite poetry by heart and to perform mental arithmetic, which have proved endlessly useful.

One would imagine, given the bad start, that I would have escaped the system as quickly as possible. On the contrary, I have spent most of my life in education one way or another, more as a student (22 years!) than a teacher. I realised that I loved learning and sharing the pleasure of learning. In hindsight, the shift from problem child to star pupil seems swift and exciting. One day I was destined for delinquency, the next I could do things, I could do them well, and I was praised. In reality this transition took a little longer and a lot of hard work. The experience of being valued for what I had done was all the more significant because it had been so rare. When it came it brought with it a sensation of being somewhere that I belonged, I was home. In art school, I encountered people who did not teach as much as give me the skills and confidence to learn myself. Rather than being based on an explicit educational philosophy, for some of the teachers I encountered the knowledge of the benefits of this approach came naturally, for others it was a successful strategy adopted because of laziness. This teaching wasn't always done in lectures or classes but through conversations in the canteen or the pub, a recommended book or a piece of music.

These seemingly slight encounters acknowledged a trust in my commitment and dedication to my subject as well as valuing my ability to acquire knowledge independently. Of course, there were wasters, it would be romantic and deceitful to suggest that art education in Ireland and England in the 1980s was not without its problems: there were the lechers, the incompetents, the lecturers who liked to talk so that they could talk about themselves, and the ones that just liked to talk, but fortunately art school allowed one to pick and chose, and to give some a wide berth.

In 1983 the printmaking tutor at the Dun Laoghaire School of Art arranged for me to spend a term at the Edinburgh College of Art and a summer staying in her brother's flat in Amsterdam. She sent me off with a portfolio full of paper and copper plates and phone numbers of people I should contact. This proved to be a decisive trip that helped to form a way of thinking about art and the world, as well as to consolidate often thought but badly expressed ideas that I wanted to work on. That tutor does not know that she changed my life, nor do any of the other people who have made a significant contribution to my education over the years. The gift of education that was given was not the gift of Marcel Mauss that required reciprocation, but the free gift, one in which the giver and recipient are unaware of the gift at the time. There is no obligation to the giver in

the free gift. However, in the knowledge that comes with the free gift there is an understanding of the importance of giving lightly, without the need for acknowledgement, obligation or credit. When we share our knowledge lightly, as lecturers we run the risk of our contribution being unnoticed, however this allows the learner to own the learning. It encourages students to be active learners, to be awake to the possibility that learning happens all the time and not just in timetable slots. In the list of people who have contributed to my education – Zygmunt Bauman, Robert Neimeyer, John Dewey, Mark O'Neill, Maire Noone, Carol Shields, Samuel Beckett, Marsha Meskimmon, Tom Waits, Simon Pattison, Denton Welsh, Nanny Mulder, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – there are very few lecturers. In fact most of these people are long dead, but the gift of knowledge can survive us and impact on people in another time and place. What my lecturers gave me was the opportunity to discover the tribe of people that I needed to tap into the world of knowledge and benefit from the wealth of riches that exist in literature, art, theory and music.

Students outgrow many of their teachers, and this is how it should be. But in the process of outgrowing it is important to remember that without the encouragement and opportunities afforded by them it would not be possible to make the leaps in the present. In the current

risk averse contemporary educational landscape which encourages students to constantly evaluate and focus on concrete learning outcomes, it is increasing impossible for the slow percolation that has been my experience of learning. Contemporary forms of education required immediate impact based on proscribed learning outcomes. What it does not acknowledge are the unexpected and informal moments of insight, the epiphanies, where information acquired years before can be transformed into knowledge because the moment is right. I am not advocating a return to 'the good old days' but wondering what new strategies we need to adopt to facilitate unstructured forms of knowledge acquisition. In the commercialised education system that treats and fears students as powerful consumers rather than as powerful participants and co-creators of their own educational experience I also wonder what has been sacrificed

The obverse of my experience of assisted self-education is what I have learned by having to teach. My early experience of being judged a failed learner inspires me to try at least to see the material from the point of view of students. Despite the difficulties of the predicted-outcome-measurement system, learning can be interesting and open to unexpected insights. Praise when it is earned can be a powerful motivator. The presence of students, in class, in tutorials, in my mind,

forces me to articulate things more clearly, to see it from different perspective. While my practice – the production of academic papers – is a solitary process, it is constantly fed by the engagement with the learning of others, and the way it forces me to see the material from different perspectives. As the old Buddhist saying goes: 'you best teach what you most need to learn'.

I have not mentioned any students here because I do not know yet what impact I have had on them – percolation is a very slow process and it is too soon to tell. But I hope that I have given lightly in the spirit of the gifts I have been given.

Mary O'Neill

Angela Bartram

When I was an undergrad I had a few tutorials with Mandy Havers, a visiting lecturer, that discussed death, mortality and the similarity of the human body to animal flesh. These conversations considered, amongst other things, if it were possible for chicken skin to symbolise human skin, and whether meat from the butcher's block could ever truly be regarded as kin. Essentially, we considered if we were nothing more than animals.

mongrel (1) derogatory term for a variation that is not genuine. (2) something irregular or inferior or of dubious origin or character. (3) an inferior dog or one of mixed breed.

Andrew Bracey

Beer has a dual life. On one hand it is displayed salon style over the gallery wall, as paintings on a somewhat unusual support. The *Beer* mats are also left anonymously in pubs across England, where they have a status more akin to being a curiosity or a 'blip in the Matrix'.

When I first began teaching at art colleges in earnest I soon discovered that it can be a two-way symbiotic learning experience. Continually questioning students conversely made me question and re-evaluate my own work and caused major shifts in my practice. In *Pebbles and Avalanches* I turn the tables and become the student. I am critiqued by a mix of all levels of BA and MA students. Our conversation can be viewed alongside the work, possibly also making the viewer re-evaluate what they are seeing. As a lot of ex-students soon realise, the conversations with tutors and their peers are a very special and 'not appreciated at the time' experience. They are certainly something I miss and try to retain through regular crits in my studio.

One tutor at Liverpool always stood out: Roy Holt, whose enthusiasm, knowledge and interests were always so insightful and inspirational and continue to be. His research into The Folly; his colour theory lecture with retinal manipulation mandatory; the fact he used to be in the seminal pop group *Deaf School*

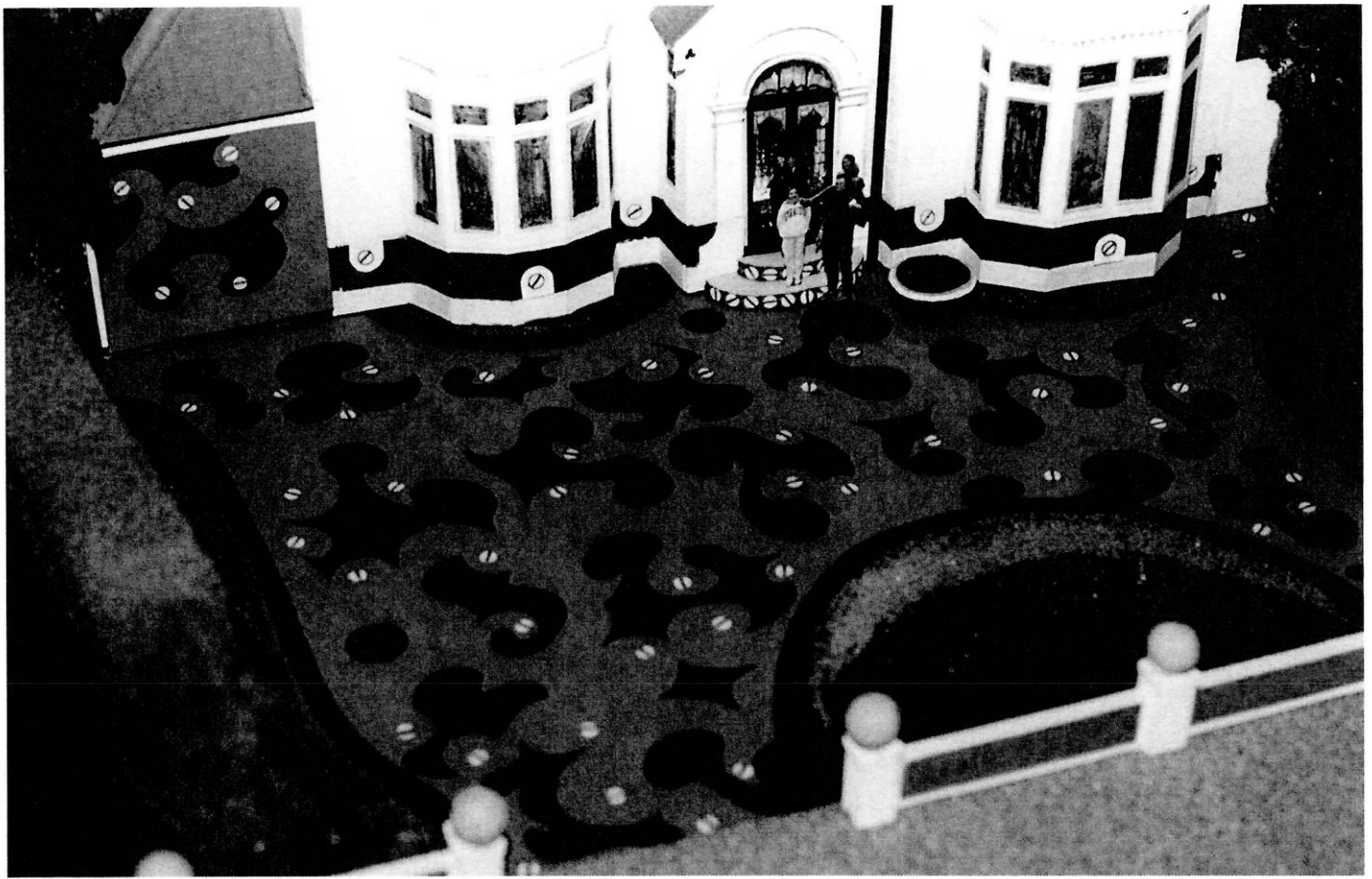
and, above all, conversations that led everywhere – will always affect my approach to art-making, teaching and viewing. Two pieces of Roy's work always inspired and captivated me when he gave his yearly staff talk. In one he painted a detailed representation of a parrot in the style of 18th century portraiture. He then painted it eight times more, exactly the same, to form one piece of work across nine canvases. The other piece was a proposed driveway for a suburban house, which Roy had made a scale model of. The imagination of the possibilities of blowing away the everyday monotony of life that the piece contained has long inspired me. There were multiple prototype models that conveyed a bizarre, eclectic and wildly variable range of designs which, when exhibited, formed an intrinsic collection of photographs [See *Drive (screwed blue)* overleaf]. *Beer* is dedicated to Roy's memory and I hope evokes something of his playful approach to what art can be.

Alongside *Beer*, Andrew is also exhibiting a video in which the work is subjected to a critique by University of Lincoln students Sam Aitkins, Tom Cuthbertson, Rose Mower, Roy Pearce, Adele Vallance and Kim Woodard.



Beer (detail) 2008

Andrew Bracey



Drive (Screwed Blue) 1999

Roy Holt

Often failed sculptures are more interesting

Catherine Burge

We were exploring the disused and damp cellars underneath the Victorian terraced houses which formed the art department at the University of Leeds. Mostly there was nothing of interest. Broken canvas stretchers, damaged mannequins, damp paper and collapsing piles of the indeterminate.

A sharp voice challenged us. I cannot remember the words. He was tall and clearly suspicious of these two students poking about. He obviously thought we were stealing; we were too naïve for that, we were looking for the back of the wardrobe, the moment beyond reality.

I shrank back, cringing with embarrassment, but my friend was bold and asked him back who he was. Suddenly, we were no longer potential thieves but guests and invited inside a well-lit and spacious studio.

The problem with writing about memory is the fix. Until it is written it remains free to change with every recall – as need demands. But here we are; and this moment, this meeting, needs to be fixed. Art historian George Kubler wrote *The Shape Of Time* in 1959 and (though I did not unearth this book until 1997) it is reputed to have influenced Smithson, Morris and Judd. It is an

Ed Allington

I still remember her at the door of the studio; and what a good day it turned out to be. All I had to do was open the door and I met a young woman who proved to be a brilliant artist, an outstanding scholar, and is now a long-standing friend. Sometimes things are much simpler than you think.

The studio had just been refurbished. I was the first new Gregory Fellow in sculpture. The Gregory Fellowships were founded by Eric Craven Gregory, who was the chair of the Bradford-based printers Lund Humphries. He set up fellowships in poetry, painting and sculpture at Leeds University. The original agreement being from 1950 to 59 with the aim “to bring... younger artists into close touch with the youth of the country so that they may influence it”. The Henry Moore Institute under the direction of the late Robert Hopper, an incredibly visionary man, had decided to reinstate the fellowship in sculpture. He asked me to be the first of the new fellows. If you look at some of the

impossible book, before one even begins to read: how can time have shape?

The General Theory of Relativity conceives the notion 'spacetime' – which has curvature. But still, shape-time, shape-time. Is there also space-memory, shape-memory??

Kubler was very conscious of the limitations of biography – of searching for the significance of art through the mysterious, lost lives of its makers. This memory is in part about a person, who introduced himself as Ed Allington, Gregory Fellow in Sculpture; but it is equally about a sculpture, a Kublerian form. So perhaps Kubler would not be too disappointed with his mention here.

As we walked through what seemed to be a vast and luxurious studio, one piece held my attention. It looked like what you might do if you wanted to bullet-proof a dead tree. A cone of metal sliced across the tip, with metal offshoots, smaller flat-ended cones and cylinders arranged asymmetrically along the length of the trunk. It seemed very heavy and its weight was carried on three of the side branches – like the low mass of milking-stool legs. Its alligator-bulk squatted on the floor.

Among Kubler's premises is the idea that meaning and form can be distinct, unconnected. His writing was

previous sculptors who had held this position – Reg Butler, Kenneth Armitage, Hubert Dalwood, Bill Tucker – to be offered such an opportunity was a great honour. We moved to Leeds: my partner the artist Julia Wood, and I, and our two young children. My daughter was three, my son had only just been born, it was 1991.

I find it extraordinary that Catherine remembers this sculpture. I have a rule, the aim of which is to record things as they are made. Actually I am very bad at adhering to it but I continue to try; because often failed sculptures are more interesting than successful ones. Why? Because making sculpture, making art is about problems; often very small problems – as in a millimetre here or there – and problems which can't be solved are good problems. I had found a very curious piece of rolled, zinc-plated ducting in the window of a sheet metal workers shop near Bethnal Green in London.

It looked, as Catherine has described it, a little bit like a tree, or a kind of armour for a

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somewhat contemporaneous with the rise of Structuralism and Barthes's notion of the sign. But that is what I saw: a form disconnected from any meaning I could generate.

I asked about this dark thing and Ed patiently explained. I did not understand a single word of it. And so I left with the form squatting uncomfortably in my mind. Kubler identifies what he terms prime objects, 'the vital firsts' and also 'mutants' – when those first objects are not deformed – but improved...

Was this low metal beast a prime or a mutant? In all these years, I have never known.

Ed and I came to know each other as student and teacher and friend. I learnt the basics from Ed – the positive and negative of casting, how sculpture can transcend the flimsiness of the contemporary, and how to believe in a form – and the ideas from which it developed – when no-one else does.

But of that first piece, all I still know is that it failed. Shortly after the end of the fellowship it was destroyed and there is no trace of it ever having existed, no photographs, nothing. Just the memory, finally fixed.

tree. I bought it on impulse and took it back to the studio in London. I then bought two Art Deco style cabinets and cut them up. I joined two sections of one of them together and fixed it to the section of ducting. So far so good. Then it stopped. I obviously thought it good enough to transport to Leeds, and I'm also sure I took it back to London after the fellowship.

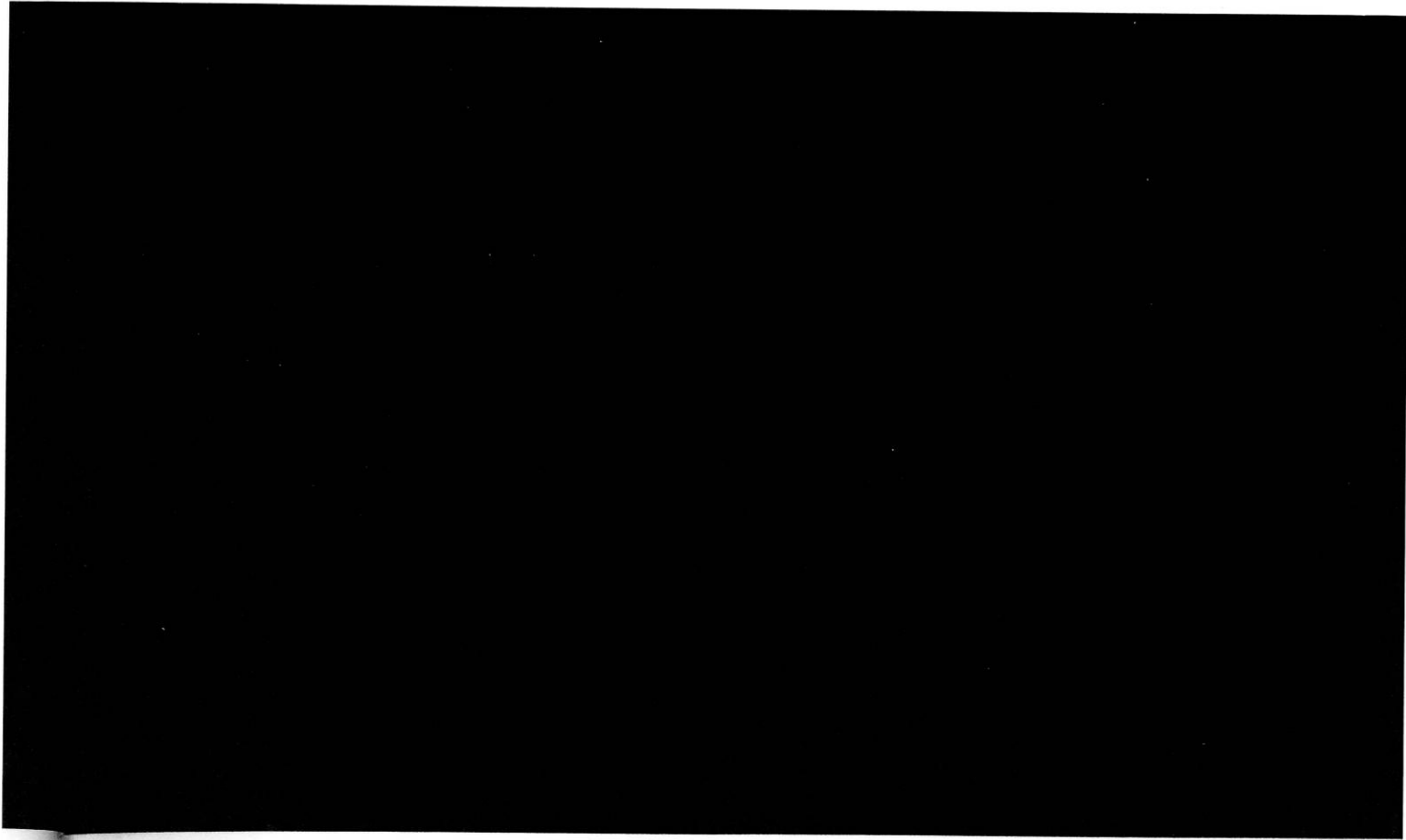
The basic form was good; in fact it was very good. But the damned cussedness of it, was wherever I took it and whatever I tried to do with it I just couldn't finish it. Finally in a fit of unreasonable and pointless tidiness I threw it away. I still think that was a mistake; and that an artist as good as Catherine can still remember the half-finished thing, makes me sure it was a mistake. All I needed to do was look at it a bit harder, but I didn't.

Clare Charnley

As a young and confused student I was exhorted by my teachers to 'push it'. I had absolutely no idea what they meant. Perhaps my experience of pushing was limited to situations where cars ran out of petrol. Perhaps the moments when art excited me felt more as if I was being pulled, rather than exerting a push. Later, when live artist Lisa Watts and I had a residency in a Sheffield gym, the concept of 'pushing it' or 'pushing yourself' was something we parodied.

from Muscles: pumping for a pleasing physique 1994

Clare Charnley & Lisa Watt



Miriam Chiara

Joan Cifre-Cerda

Lucas Delfino

Together with my Brazilian collaborator Patricia Azevedo (*writes Clare Charnley*), I set up a collaborative project between students in our two universities. Whereas we had been exploring difference through our practice, Miriam Chiara and Lucas Delfino Garcia from Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brazil and Joana Cifre-Cerda from The University of Lincoln worked together using a universal principle – though one that is more an aspiration than an actuality: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Negotiation was central to the project and led to the students examining their own positions.

A few months later Patricia and I also made work that shifted from the personal to the universal and involved much self-questioning. Like the students' project, it included making small documents for the public to download. I have no idea if we would have done this if we had not seen The Human Rights Project. Influence is sometimes so subtle that it is impossible to distinguish from coincidence.

from The Human Rights Project 2001
Miriam Chiara, Joanna Cifre-Cerda and Lucas Delfino

Article 1.

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Paul Edwards

This is a true story. In the 70s, when I was a student in Newport College of Art, drawing was the most exciting thing in the world to do. I had been drawing from a model all morning – at that time my work was perhaps rather mannered, certainly detailed and intense with as much observation per square inch as possible. Mid afternoon a tutor entered the room and slowly walked over to my easel – I smelt alcohol – he looked at my drawing for a minute or so, sighed theatrically, and picked up a putty rubber. Slowly and deliberately, he started to erase my drawing. I expected him to correct it, talk about it, but no words were said by either of us as I watched my drawing disappear. Eventually nothing much remained, just traces, evidence of three hours of connection with the visible world. The member of staff – who shall remain nameless – shuffled off and left the room, job done.

Reviewing my career as an art student, this is probably the most dramatic intervention I can recall, and the one that most pissed me off. Picasso said 'I do not create, I destroy' and now that I'm a teacher too, I can understand the frustration underlying that particular act of destruction. I now understand that to create you must destroy, that editing needs to be extreme and that marks need to be articulate, this information has been gained through the experience of drawing. In 1975 I

thought – why did he do that? In 2010 I know, but I still think – why did he do that?

That drawing from the Seventies no longer exists, either lost or destroyed. The work included in the exhibition is new work, a re-enactment of time – 30 years past, one hour erased. The drawing is by me, the erasure is by Tom Cuthbertson – one of my students.

Erased drawing 2010

Charcoal and eraser on paper. Paul Edwards and Tom Cuthbertson

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Teaching and learning, weights and wings

Medina Hammad

The relationship between art student and lecturer can be very complex – ours is, after all, a ‘studio’ based, communal, pastoral, educational environment.

There are many tricky elements that can clutter up or impact on this potentially intense, creative exchange. Be in no doubt, whether each party likes it or not, it ‘is’ about power – giving, taking, denying and, oh yes, that old chestnut transference. It is the role of the tutor in the midst of all of this to give consciously, objectively and generously. I am mindful that it can be difficult for the student, particularly the undergraduate, to also give. Often they do not think that they are ready or capable.

When are we ready? In a workshop at a recent teaching and learning symposium we were invited to write a personal association under the headings ‘student’ and ‘lecturer’. I wrote ‘insecure’ and ‘less insecure’.

In my opinion, frequently, the gifts that are placed into our tutor hands, hearts and minds by a student are often put there quite unconsciously.

A few years ago my working life took its toll (I’d been too generous) and I became ill. It was grim. Everything had

to change. Like most people I got on with gamely reassembling the pieces. My interior state was not good. There was a great underlying sadness – jaundice, a malaise if you like. A sense that I was, in fact, dead inside. Two events changed this.

One was a student thanking me, very sincerely, for some newly prepared teaching material which I was very nervous about.

The other was being addressed by a parrot. It’s such a cliché, but I cannot begin to explain what this little creature put in motion. The voice was human. I gasped. The world stopped. The hair stood up on the back of my neck, I couldn’t quite catch my breath. I looked in awe. It looked back with a steady, calm gaze. Then it repeated its greeting, this time shyly adding its name. The spell broke as I came to my senses and realised that it had been ‘taught’ to do this.

Now, when I set about applying my mind to this very interesting challenge set by my research colleagues, I scratched my head. Had a student or past tutor influenced me? You know, in a really significant way? I remembered a great deal of useful conversation both nice and nasty. It had all impacted; it has to... it is how we learn. But I was searching for something else.



Menagerie 1: Nature,
nurture and Nietzsche
(detail)

Medina Hammad

I was looking for that significant moment when there is total equality between a teacher and a student. There is no power. I am lucky. I have one.

He was a painter. A very quiet, sensitive and diligent soul, a little shy too, also a bit of a lone wolf. The moment was special because we were totally united in joy as we looked at his source material – which I have to say was amongst the most beautiful I have ever laid eyes on. He said to me “...and there’s this you see”. John had family in a far-flung place. He reached out to his table and handed me his boyhood stamp album and it all made sense. Out of those delicate paper pockets spilt dozens of minute, exquisite exotic images, beetles, birds and flora. Dizzying colour... we pawed over them and just made those funny little noises you do when you are enchanted or engrossed. It was delightful, a meeting of visual passion charged with empathy and acknowledgement. There was no creative envy on my part (I use the exotic too), just wonder. Looking back it was like some sort of omen.

Of course, eventually he painted a parrot, as I’m trying to now.

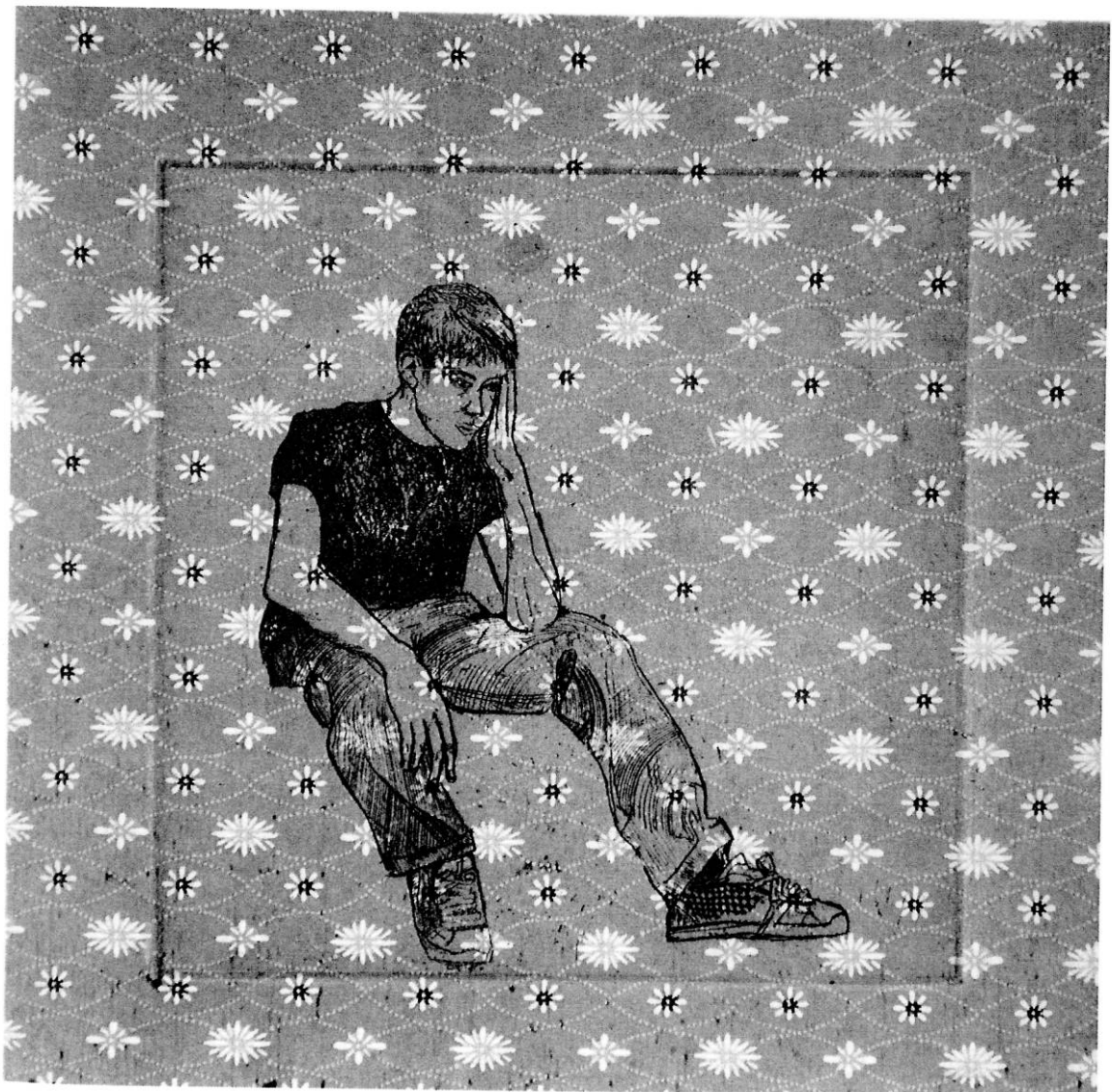
I have to be careful here not to delude myself. At the time I accepted the magic of the moment but didn’t realise its significance. But then maybe that’s how it is

with influences. You re-visit and re-discover. They lie dormant and then wake you up with a soft kiss or a whisper. Sometimes it’s just about knowing that you are in good company, that another understands. He was a bit of an exotic creature, rare and unusual. When he left, he gave me an etching. A small image of himself quite alone and lost in his thoughts. It always makes me think of the notion of the ‘other’. What do we know? Hope to know and feel? Can we? What is beauty? Where on earth do you start!!!

Painting for me is about sharing passion. To meet someone who has an identical passion but with its own lovely permutations is a great privilege. It pushes you on... gives you a fantastic, warm impetus, even if it’s fleeting and gets lost for a bit.

So I’m re-engaging with my art. The piece is called *Menagerie*. Art college is like a zoo. The work is a kind of homage to John, whom I hope is still being moved by the world; to the student who thanked me and, last but not least, to the profound memory of Charlie the cockatoo – which still makes tears prick under my eyelids and gives me a thud in my gut to remind me of how good it is to be alive.

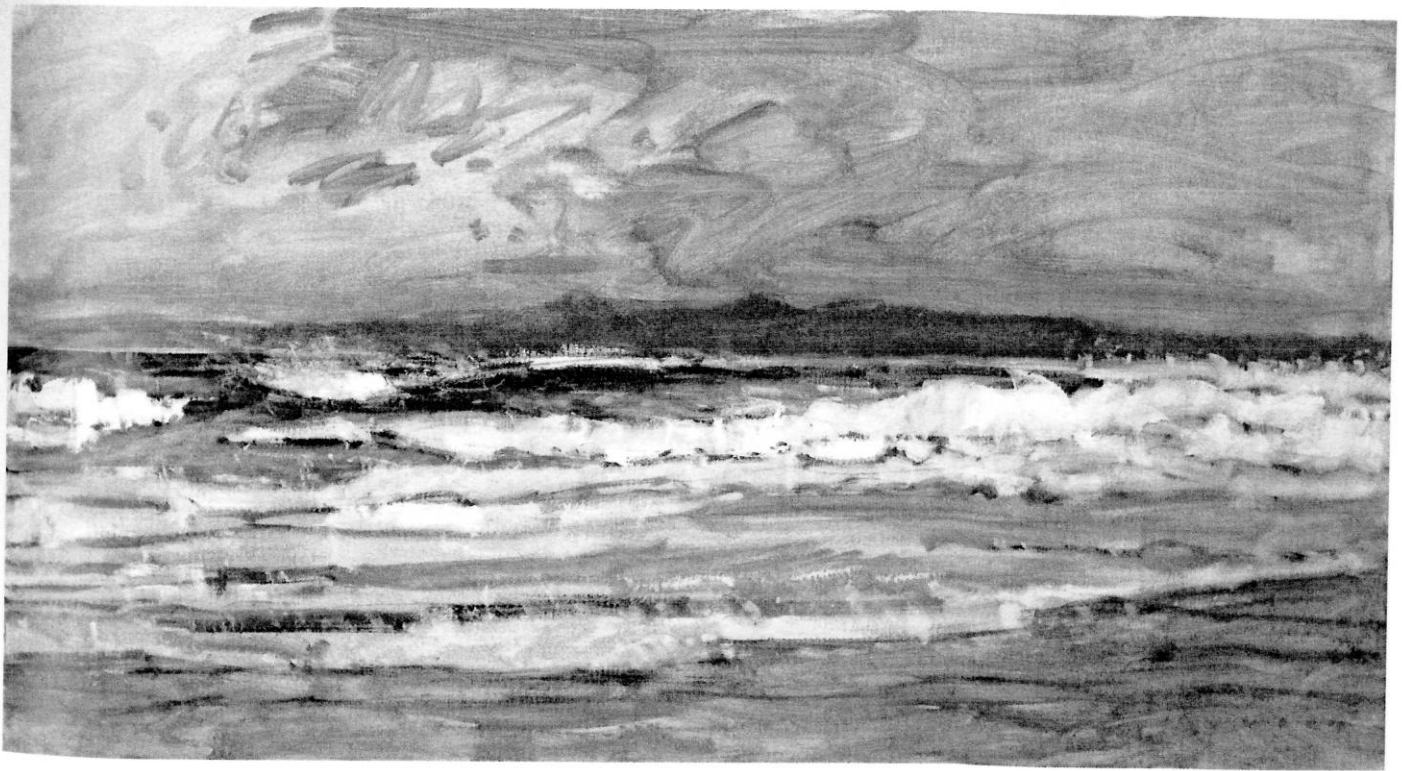
Untitled 2005
John Rowen O’Neill



Michael Healey

“Big John” Cunningham died in the 1990s. He was my art teacher both at school and later at art school (Glasgow School of Art). I was at his funeral. We both went to art school together. He went as a tutor and I went as a student. I was blessed with having artist teachers at school and at art school. I was always told that the difference between students and tutors was only experience. Passions and skills often interrelate and overlapped and then went different routes.

In the beginning it was “Big John” Cunningham who fired my imagination. I was 13 when I met him. He was the first artist I had ever met. He painted in our class. Big John looked like a proper artist when he worked. A dentist should look like a dentist and a car mechanic look like car mechanic he told us. He drove a big French Citroen estate car. He had a French wife called Michelle and he smoked Gauloises cigarettes. Big John said if you ever went to an artist's home you would find it always interesting. It was never dull he said. You always knew what Big John had had for lunch by looking at his ties and shirt front. Because art seemed so much fun, and had a dress code, and some kind of interior design code, a transport code and a marital code I decided that it was for me. Everything he said turned out to be true.

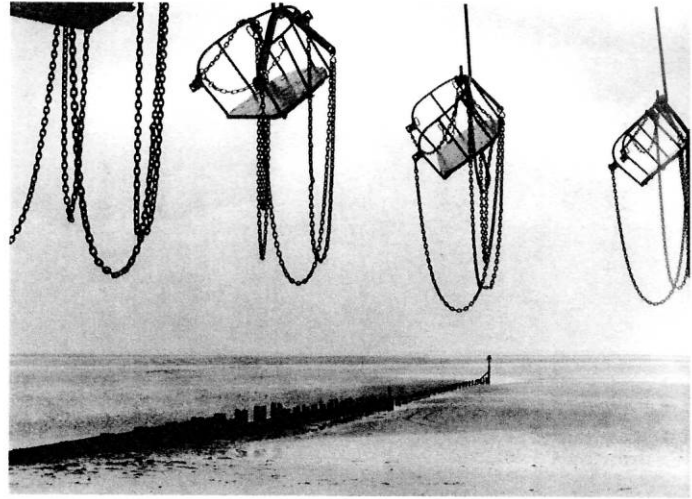


Westerly Gale, Westport Beach, Kintyre 2009
Oil on Canvas. Size 20 x 36

Keith James

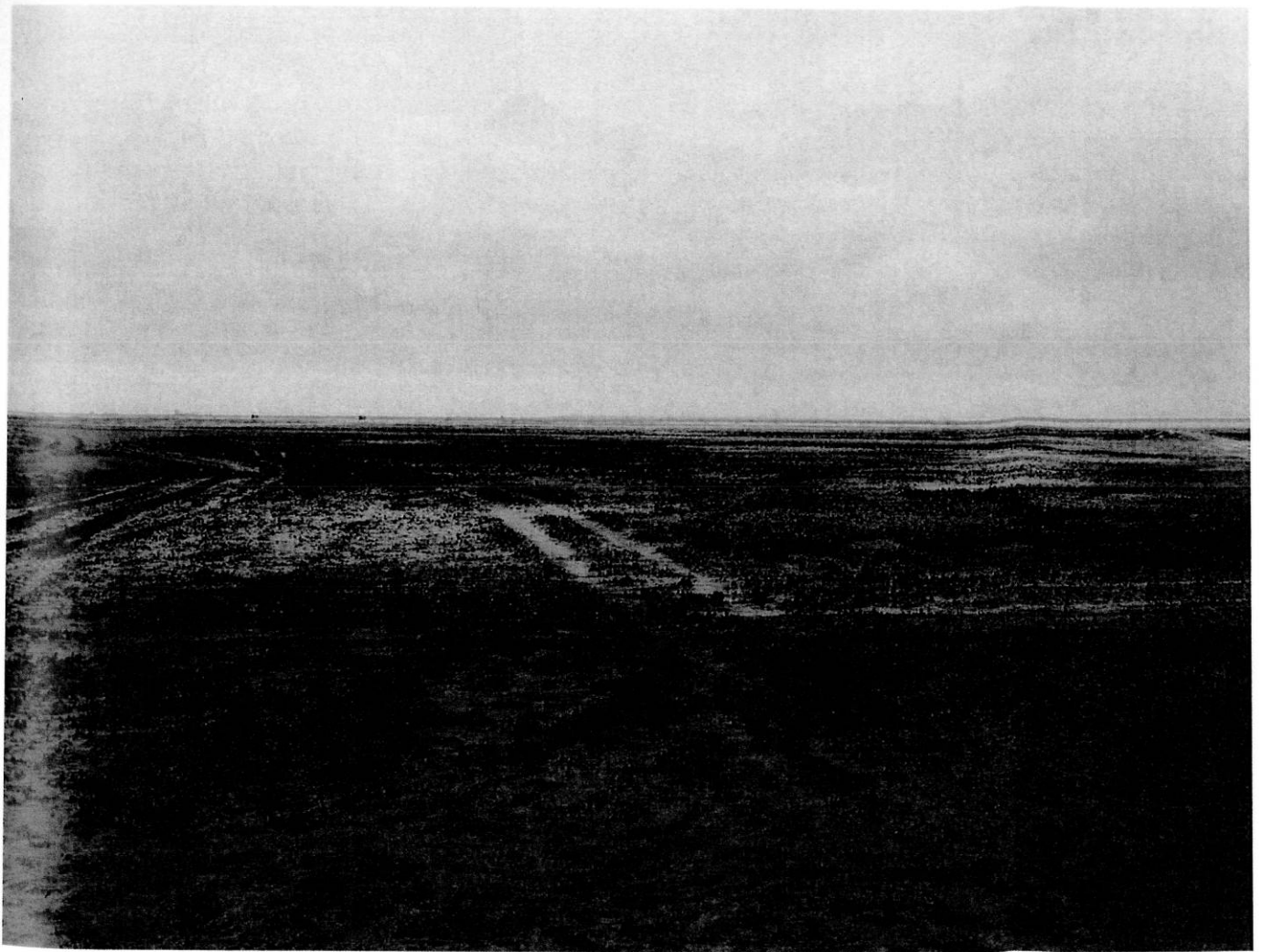
In the Nineties I developed a brief for a project for photography students called *The Last Resort* in which they documented the seaside resort of Mablethorpe, out of season. Returning over and over again each year, the students would photograph the resort, its inhabitants and sometimes isolated, desolate, environment.

The brief was to become a pivotal point in my own approach to landscape. It lingered in my consciousness and returning again in 2005 I produced a series of 20 landscape photographs titled *Sea Level*. The two series – my students' and my own work – utilise the same or similar locations. However the students' work tends to focus on abandonment. Mine, a decade later, engages with ongoing debates regarding global warming and environmental/ climate change, in particular coastal erosion.



Untitled. Circa 1996

Robert Cross



Sea Level; Donna Nook 2006
Keith James

Yuen Fong Ling

In *Attici Amore Ergo* (2010), I commissioned a series of commemorative plates to mark my performance as the life model. The plates are a product of my shaping and influencing the structures of art production of others in creating the artwork, including collaborating with designers, photographers, and inviting other artists to respond to my concepts through discussion. I began this process by adopting the role of the model in the life class in order to actively have other participant-artists make representations of my 'self'. This entailed devising model set-ups, drawing exercises, discussing ideas and concepts, and challenging the silence and separation between model and artist in the conventional life class. Through this empowering of the model as artist and tutor in a reconfigured life class, I navigate through the hierarchies of power that pervade the interactions of the conventional life class by usurping each role at certain points within the performance workshop. Hence, my acting as model, artist and tutor enables me to actively challenge the notion of an authentic sense of 'self'. In this instance, I've used this methodology to question the heritage site Rufford Old Hall, Ormskirk, where William Shakespeare is believed to have performed. By re-staging the event using Nicolas Hilliard's *Portrait of an Unknown Man Claspng a Hand from a Cloud* 1588, also speculatively believed to be connected with the image of the young Shakespeare, the performance workshop aims to fictionalise event upon event, myth

upon myth, to transpose the representation of my body into the mythology of the site and the portrait to speculate upon the nature of interpretation and the creation of the myth. Therefore the re-materialising of the art object as commemorative plates, by the means of my performance and the participation of others, becomes a document of this process of slippage.

Attici Amore Ergo, Life Class: Rufford Old Hall 2008

Documentation of the performance/workshop with participants from LAN:
Lancashire Artists Network and MAP: West Lancashire Artists' Network



John Plowman

I graduated from Leicester Polytechnic in 1980 where the rigid dogma of British formalist abstract sculpture was perceived to be the centre of the universe. I moved to London immediately upon graduating from Leicester and struggled to develop a practice outside of these formalist confines until I embarked on postgraduate study at Goldsmiths College. The veracity and confidence with which Gerard Hemsworth pronounced “NOTHING TRANSCENDS LANGUAGE” at my first MA Fine Art seminar has been lodged in my mind ever since. It continues to inform the development of my own practice and my teaching.

Drawing (detail) 2008

From a work made in collaboration with John Plowman

Fabiola Paz



Alec Shepley

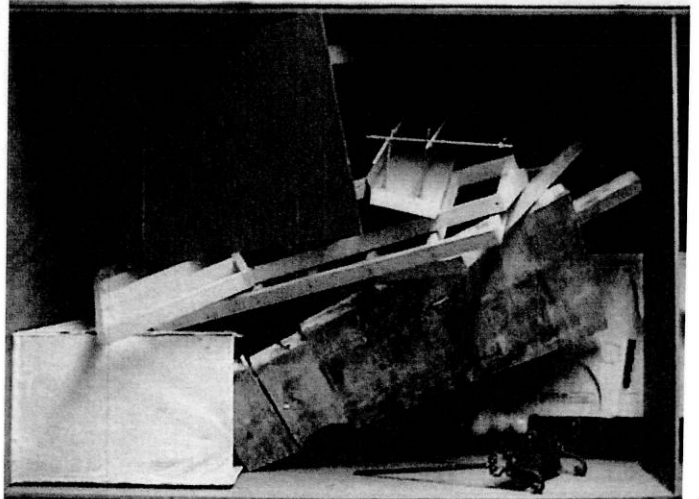
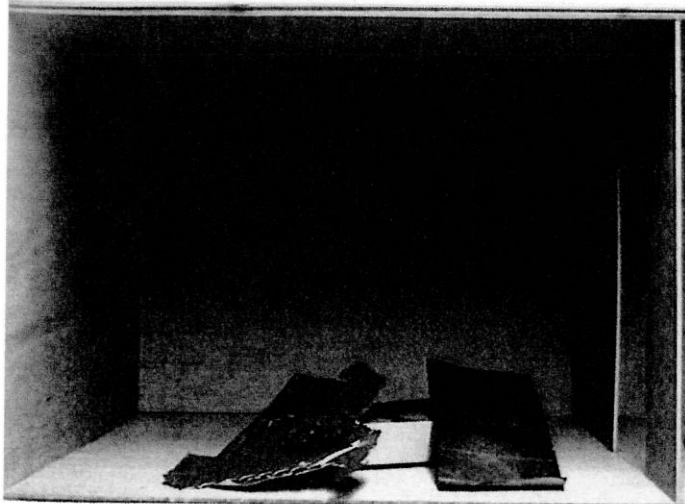
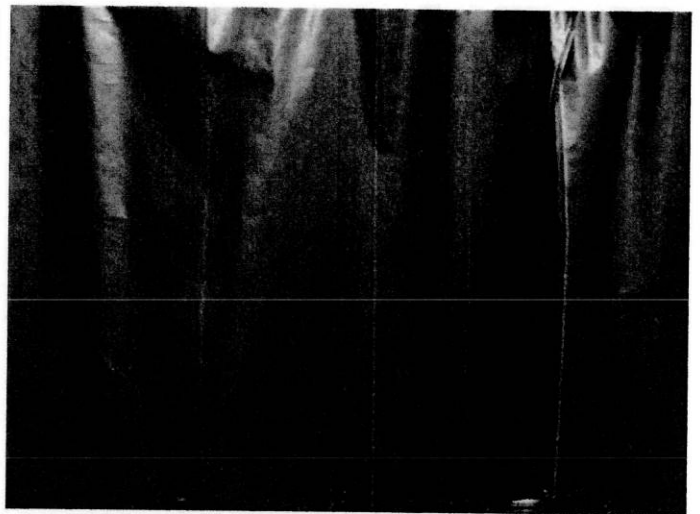
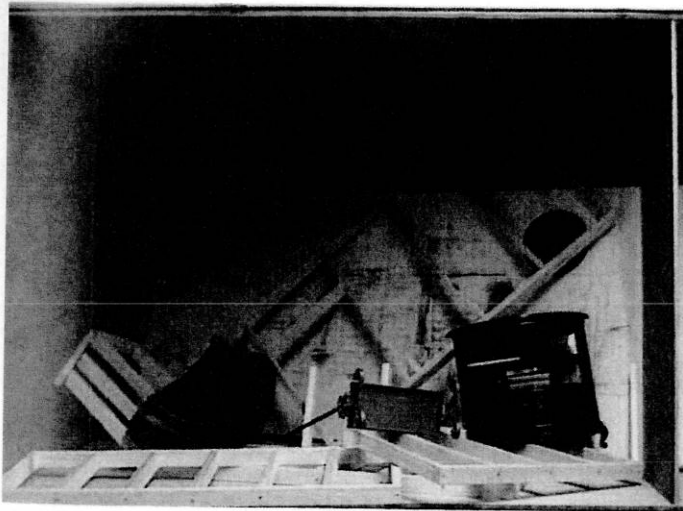
'Domain of formlessness', inspired by Steve Dutton whom I met whilst doing my Masters, relates (quite literally) to the notion of 'avalanches' in the title of this exhibition. My film stems from a conversation that started between Steve and myself (and continues to this day) about the catastrophes that result from trying to deal with landslides of material from abandoned artistic activities which often end up strewn chaotically across the studio. Dutton and Peacock made a film called *Plague-Orgy-Time* in 1997 and I first saw it in their exhibition *Apocatropes* at the Mappin Gallery in the same year. I was taken by their approach to a 'series of accretions of things in a space punctuated by scattered evidence of artistic activity' (Glover, I. 1997). My film deals with a similar aesthetic but in this case the studio is reduced to a model and artistic activities are miniaturised in a series of 'Gulliver-esque' tableaux or enactments – each one punctuated by the close of a stage curtain. In a way my film consciously tends towards the constructed stage, film or theatre set in its depictions of a series of avalanches and visually references old slapstick humour films in a sequence of 'vignettes'. To me there is a kind of beauty in this apparently absurd process – I actively engage with it in my studio and hopefully it remains faithfully foregrounded here.

References

Glover 1997 'Musée Imaginaire' Frieze Issue 34

Domain of Formlessness 2006

Alec Shepley



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