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**Shadow into Parent Light:
Beyond Pembrokeshire, Beyond Landscape**

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**A submission presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
the University of Glamorgan / Prifysgol Morgannwg
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

July 2011

Shadow into Parent Light:

Beyond Pembrokeshire, Beyond Landscape

ABSTRACT

The critical analysis examines and positions new works I produced during my Residency at Oriel y Parc - Landscape Gallery St Davids (a partnership between National Museum Wales and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park) in 2008-9. The evaluation considers the development of subject matters together with the processes concerned in making artworks since I commenced painting at Cardiff School Art in 1982.

In order to give a comprehensive picture of my development as a painter, this enquiry includes a biographical framework, referencing progression through Christian iconography and Biblical narrative, mortality, political conflict including the unrest in Wales, England and Northern Ireland. These figurative works were superseded by a visit to New York, where the cityscapes and high viewpoints created more abstract imagery, while yet representing the urban landscape, and where colour became less expressive than in my formative years.

The Pembrokeshire coast has been my central inspiration and influence for the past fifteen years, where light, reflection, refraction, colour, journey, surface texture and the ambiguity within plan-like space, coupled with a personal correspondence with belief, identity and upbringing have produced significant work. I further consider and present a series of key critical issues that include the role of the spiritual, absence, isolation and mortality. Figuration and abstraction are also explored, as are the processes within my practice: walking, drawing, mark-making, photography and painting.

Artists with whom I have a particular affinity for their methods of painting and subject-matter are also referenced, especially Frank Auerbach (1931-), Willem De Kooning (1904-1997), Terry Setch (1936-), Peter Prendergast (1946-2007), Francis Bacon (1909-1992) and Howard Hodgkin (1932-).

The Residency presented the opportunity to pause, reflect, question and produce new work in direct response to a new location, Caerfai Bay. My relationship with the processes of photography, drawing and painting is questioned through an intensely detailed and self-critical analysis as evidenced in the comprehensively illustrated journals, which accompany this portfolio of work. The journals display both my inspiration and anxieties with the coastal landscape and its correspondence with personal beliefs, identity, upbringing and the inevitable contemplation of mortality.

The critical overview concludes with the exhibition *Influere* shown at Oriel y Parc. This extensive portfolio of new works and journals was installed alongside a personally curated selection of paintings, drawings, prints, and geological specimens from the National Museum of Wales's collection that have inspired and influenced my development as an artist (see accompanying DVDs and CD Rom portfolio).

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Accompanying portfolio of paintings, drawings and photographs

- CDs of all imagery produced during the artist's residency, indexed and catalogued.
- CD documentation and video footage of '*Influere*', the exhibition which concluded residency alongside works selected from the National Museum Wales.
- CDs of exhibitions at Oriel Myrddin and Oriel Ynys Mon.

Introduction

The Pembrokeshire coast has been my central inspiration and influence for the past fifteen years, where light, reflection, refraction, colour, journey, surface texture and the ambiguity of space, coupled with a personal correspondence with belief, identity and upbringing have created a distinctive personal visual language. The opportunity to become the first artist in residence at Oriol y Parc - Landscape Gallery St Davids (a partnership between National Museum Wales and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park), during 2008-2009, provided the quintessential arena in which to reflect, question and evaluate my work to date, as well as to produce a new series of works. The residency offered a purpose-built studio within a kilometre of Caerfai beach, as well as access to a new gallery, which presented work from the National Museum Wales' collection including work by Graham Sutherland. There were three conditions attached to the residency. I was obliged to open my studio to the visiting public for one hour each week throughout the year long incumbency, in addition to presenting three formal lectures about the development of the new work. To conclude the residency, I curated a solo show at the gallery, in the context of a personal selection of paintings, prints and geological specimens from the National Museum of Wales' collection.

This PhD research presents a self-critical evaluation, which considers the development of subject matters together with the processes concerned in making artworks since I commenced painting at Cardiff School of Art in 1982. In order to give a comprehensive overview of my development as a

painter, this enquiry begins in chapter one with a self-critical autobiography, referencing progression through Christian iconography and Biblical narrative, mortality, and political conflict including the unrest in Wales, England and Northern Ireland. These figurative works were superseded by a visit to New York, where the cityscapes and high viewpoints created more abstract imagery, while yet representing the urban landscape, and where colour became less expressive than in my formative years.

I consider and question a series of key critical issues that include the role of the spiritual in all my work to date, and explore the concept that absence, isolation, the spiritual, and also mortality underpinned the new body of work produced whilst at Oriol y Parc. All chapters in the critical evaluation are comprehensively illustrated throughout in order to allow the reader full access to the visual development and discourse within my work.

Chapter two introduces the Residency programme. My initial experiences in moving to a new studio, coupled with the challenges of being 'on view' and accessible to both the visiting public and members of staff at Oriol y Parc, are discussed using extracts from my journal. The journal contains personal reflections and decisions in relation to my residency, and is essential to the critical discourse in this enquiry. I introduce my working methods and practices, including walking, drawing, photography and painting. Consequently, this initiates a creative dialogue between the new beach at Caerfai alongside my emotional awareness and consciousness of mortality and the spiritual. As the residency proceeds, my relationship with the beach is challenged by the influx of holidaymakers which forces me onto the cliff top walks, and this in turn

generates a new relationship with photography and projection as an aid to painting.

The relationship between the figurative and abstract constituents in my work are examined in the third chapter, which also questions the balance of relationships between paint, process and subject. I consider ‘inner emotion’ and the sensed experience of the viewer, the contemplative and the experience of self-reflection. Key influences such as the work of Frank Auerbach, Titian, Francis Bacon, Willem De Kooning and Graham Sutherland are juxtaposed with my own work’s development from 1983 to 2009. I interrogate the role of ‘space’ and the absence of horizon, as well as my interest in synaesthesia. It is here that I also contextualise the concept that an artist only ever paints one picture, declared by the artist John Hoyland whilst I was studying at the Slade in 1987.

Chapter four develops this concept further and focuses on absence, mortality and the spiritual. Introducing the body of work titled *Shadow into Parent Light*, it is concerned with examining my work in order to identify my claims that it has remained fundamentally religious since my formative years. This work provided the first conscious opportunity to re-evaluate my own personal anxieties of mortality using artists such as Francis Bacon, Ceri Richards, Wassily Kandinsky and the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins. His poem ‘God’s Grandeur’ exemplifies the concept of ‘inscape’, which parallels the concept of ‘the pool-ness of a pool’ in my own work.

A small selection of work produced during the residency is evaluated in chapter five, in tandem with an historical and contemporary context which is used to interrogate my paintings further. Caerfai beach, with its

theatrical outcrop of red sandstone, comprehensively challenged my prevailing colour signature. The 'autograph' and 'signature' mark-making in my paintings is considered, using as reference artists such as Howard Hodgkin, Peter Prendergast, David Nash and Graham Sutherland.

Hence I introduce the painting *Lull*, which I believe to be one of the most significant and eloquent works I have produced. In it I am laying bare, in the most honest way I can, aspects of my personal life, alongside geology, coastal processes, light, a sense of place, paint and beauty: beauty that engages with the contemplation of being alive and being human. Here I look at what it means to claim that a painting has a deep sense of 'knowing'. Extracts from my journals present this deep sense of 'wanting to know', yet paradoxically 'wanting not to know'. It is this constant dialogue between the literary and the visual sense, the act of painting, that produces the work in order to pose these questions repeatedly.

Chapter six re-evaluates and scrutinizes my working practice during 2008-2009 at Oriol y Parc. Working in a studio less than a kilometre from the coast was inevitably going to initiate changes in my working practice as well as the work itself. The fundamental issue was to avoid deliberate change for change's sake, to reinforce an honest and sincere integration of this new experience within my existing practice. I critique the balance between the physical and the psychological, intention and accident, the intuitive and the considered, which are at the heart of my engagement with the landscape through drawing, as well as my own sense of place.

During the residency it was a necessity to enforce a far more disciplined

methodology of work, and it was natural that the long desired relationship between the photograph and the painting would become more immediate. As my journal entries display, I felt simultaneously at ease as well as deeply uncomfortable with the relatively literal translation of photograph to painting. Journal extracts reveal a dialogue which welcomes the unknown, the sense of going into the new, the debate surrounding the balance between processes and concepts in image-making, and the communication of something far deeper than the appearance of rocks and seaweed.

Lastly, in the conclusion, I underline the role of the journals in promoting an intense period of self-scrutiny and self-criticism, which has truly benefited my works' progression. I believe that these new paintings have taken me as artist and teacher, as well as the discerning audience, more deeply into a spiritual life, offering an inner wealth as well as sensory experiences.

The critical review is generously illustrated throughout, and a comprehensive portfolio of work including drawings, photographs, paintings, exhibitions as well as the journals themselves is presented on CDs. In the appendices, I also include biographical details, the audio transcript for the exhibition *Influere*, and a small selection of writing from the two journals which I maintained during the period of study at Oriol y Parc. The capacity to evaluate critically, and to question my works' progress and development cultivated confidence and a new understanding of the position and trajectory of my work since leaving the Slade in 1987. Here the selection of some of the more important and revealing journal entries are presented chronologically without a final edit.

Chapter 1

Early years

Like prolonged echoes that merge far away
In a dark and profound oneness
As vast as night, as vast as light,
Perfumes, sounds, colours answer to each other.

Correspondences: Baudelaire (1821-67)

I am unsure whether my early memories of playing in the garden in Nakuru, Kenya with a stick, are indeed true memories, or simply flashbacks to photographic documentation. But one thing is for certain, the memory of smell.¹ Stepping off a plane onto the tarmac in Turkey in 1998 for a vacation was the first time I had encountered a similar heat, and it was this combination of humidity and the smell of burning soil which was to catapult me back in time 34 years. Playing with the soil, with that stick, my first self-portraits, tasting, experimenting and mark-making in such an honest inquisitive and primeval way; on reflection, nothing much has changed. The garden is now my studio. I have made paintings, which try to take on board the *Taste of Sight, Liquid Light*, as my interest in the smell of colour and synaesthesia continues. 'Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings', said Kandinsky.² In hindsight all of this was at play when I walked in quite by chance to an exhibition of paintings by Frank Auerbach at the Marlborough Gallery in Cork Street. I was studying my Foundation course in Cardiff School of Art, visiting London for

the day. I was not at that time historically or contextually prepared to know about Auerbach before this encounter. An A Level syllabus which primarily focused on dead French 19th century artists, and a visit to the Royal Academy in 1980 to see the Stanley Spencer retrospective was never going to prepare me for the gutsy, expressive and physically painted surfaces of a series of *JYM* portraits. This was painting with a 'stick', paint as thick as mud. It was indeed the 'process' and physicality of paint itself that connected with my sensibility. These works are 'sculptural', they are indeed geological. It is not only that the surface itself references the flow of lava, but the process of layering and scraping away, the balance between construction and destruction. Yet underlying all of this, Auerbach's paintings are considered, they take time to create, and they take time 'to work'. What struck me also alongside this physicality of surface, were the remarkably descriptive qualities in so few marks. William Feather writes in his catalogue essay, 'the painting only makes sense when you follow each mark as an exploratory touch.' 'Lavish and economical, restrained and ecstatic; in these noble portraits spontaneity holds true.'³ The 'sense' of a person with appropriate attitude, mood and poise present themselves so succinctly. This experience of 'truly connecting' with painting has with hindsight become a pivotal point in my trajectory as an artist. There is a long line of influences and affinities that has stemmed from this day, which we will consider and discuss later.

Auerbach opened my mind and creative energies to experiment and question the relationship between painting and sculpture, something that has remained true to this day. In effect we also witness the opening dialogue between figuration and abstraction, which has also remained a constant

throughout numerous subject matters. The opportunity to write and present a short lecture to my fellow Foundation students led me to research the art and perception of the blind. A step uncle, blind since birth, became my subject matter. We spent many days discussing and drawing. I was intrigued how he confronted the challenges that I set him; Draw the world; Draw a ball; (what would be the difference?) Draw a house with an upstairs; Draw an escalator or lift. He was relentless in his output, never phased by any of my requests. It was the 'world' and 'ball' drawings that interested me most, (all A4 in size). Curiously, but not surprisingly, the drawing of a ball contained so many lines that the pencil began to cut through the paper, criss-crossing as he spent nearly four minutes to complete the drawing. He was not simply separating with a single line the background from the object, the 'ball', as with an able sighted person. He was indeed relating his sense of touch, his hand could feel many lines, and therefore it was these that he drew with such energy. As for the 'world' drawing, this took nearly a third of the time to draw and was somewhat confused. He was fully aware of the world being round and a big place, but it remained a concept, there was no real experience other than knowledge and what he had been told. Unfortunately the accompanying visual references have all been lost, but this experience and insight has underpinned much of my visual curiosity, especially work inspired and influenced by Pembrokeshire's Druidston, a body of work, which takes on a 'visual touch'.

The work I presented at the end of year Foundation exhibition included both sculpture and painting. I had used (a large collection of) creosote impregnated railway sleepers, which had been reclaimed from the disused lines behind Adamsdown in Cardiff. The work played with the very formal

aspects of space, weight and time. Full-length sleepers were balanced against each other in a rough helix, smaller planks were then suspended with fishing line, and gradually smaller and smaller splinters of wood ending with the dust itself, formed a dissolving timeline towards the door of the exhibition space. The unmistakeable and intense smell of creosote was integral to the work, I wanted all the senses to be activated and challenged. The small A6 and A5 sized paintings were hung around this central helix; they were thickly layered works, earth colours which referenced the post-industrial. The imagery again played with the formal; the starting points were where spaces and shapes from the disused transport network were reduced to their basic form, and re-presented as bold slabs of thickly layered oil paint.

These works were unresolved. Yet they were key to my early creative propositions and experiments; like all good art should, they posed more questions than they were able to answer. Leaving Foundation and making the decision to study upon a Fine Art course, was not my anticipated career decision. I had been driven in my school years by an ambition to be an architect, but having discovered that both mathematics and physics were primarily more important than art in that discipline, it all too quickly became a non-reality. This did not suppress my infatuation with the detailed drawing systems employed within engineering drawing, I so thrived in an environment of control, detail and accuracy. It is ironic then that my path was to become a painter / sculptor, one where the accident and experimentation would preside. It was here then that I began to see a strange balance of contradictions or opposites, in my life, many of which we will look at again in further detail as we proceed.

1982 - 1983

No one really prepares you for the transition between Foundation and the degree course. The first thing that hits you is the change of pace, gone are the rapid succession of tutor inspired project themes and workshop based introductions. These were replaced with one overall experience, which to an extent was the very beginning of what would become 'my own work'. The opportunity to begin the pursuit of your own ideas is a daunting one, one that can quickly be hijacked with grand empty statements which revolve around self and sexuality, after all what else do you know about when you're 19?



Above: 'Pigs Head', 1982
Below: 'Fridge interior', 1982

It was deemed necessary, and probably rightly so, that we as a year group required an intellectual and practical challenge. The only project formerly demanded of us by tutors such as Glyn Jones, Paul Beauchamp, Michael Crowther and Terry Setch, was a drawing only project which took the still life as starting point. This ran for nearly a whole term. It was torture. Once we had established and set up the still life, we were not allowed to move or rearrange the set. Observational and analytical drawing was the opening dialogue; we then were to develop a personal language and interpretation of the

set-up. A pig's head, knife, silver tray and an egg, this was my muse for the term. Relentless observational scrutiny day after day: quietly, honestly and naturally the imagery began to distort and experiment with composition and then my emotional response. This aspect was a key ingredient, not previously confronted in my own work. This work, combined with my job working part-time as a butcher on the high street, led me to Francis Bacon. That work had echoes of Auerbach, but without the surface relief. It was the intensity and rawness of 'Self' and the confrontation with the inner, which actually terrified me. So, this first body of self directed work took me through the classic still life, butcher shop scenes, displays of hanging carcasses, and it was inevitable that it would lead with my interest in Francis Bacon's work, to the 'crucifixion'.



'Crucifixion'. Oil on board. 1982.

I was always aware that being brought up as a Catholic and attending Catholic schooling would somehow make its way through into my work as an artist. Much has been written and attributed to this upbringing over the years and it is without doubt a critical ingredient in my make-up and thinking. I was brought up within a Catholic environment, yet coming from a home of divorced parents, a Welsh Catholic mother and an Irish protestant father; being given a Catholic forename itself during the troubles was indeed a brave decision. Travelling back and forth to Belfast from Cardiff as a young minor during the 1970s, often unaccompanied, really did set a divide in one's mind, one that only recently have I begun more closely to scrutinise in relation to my work. There are the

‘Troubled’ paintings and sculptures from the 1980s, where it is far more apparent to relate the subject matter to my upbringing. But what of the present? The Pembrokeshire landscape, tidal, abstract, painterly works? Where does this fit in? I will revisit this later.

Reading *Interviews with Francis Bacon 1962-1979* by David Sylvester, fuelled many of my paintings and ideas during this time. The crucifixion allowed me to cover numerous themes: undoubtedly it was about human suffering, death and mortality, but also separation, and isolation. Bacon claimed, “I’ve always been very moved by pictures about slaughter-houses and meat, and to me they belong very much to the whole thing of the Crucifixion”.⁴ My work as a part-time butcher allowed me access to death



‘Crucifixion’. Oil and wax on canvas. 1982.

on the high street, clinical, clean and sterile, but I was desensitised. I was fully aware of the power of using the Crucifixion, and meat, as an armature to hang my own personal subject matter upon, but I also revelled in the beauty of the corpse, the colour, texture and yes, the smell of the stuff. It was so painterly, sculptural. Working everyday in the shop, breaking down whole carcasses into compositions for a window display, was undoubtedly similar to working in my studio.

The major exhibition *Francis Bacon* at Tate Britain in November 2008 was an opportunity to revisit early influences. It was an incredibly powerful show, but one which resonated with a different set of criteria than that of 25 years previous. Bacon always insisted that abstraction was seen as an inferior language to that of figuration: ‘abstract painting is an entirely aesthetic thing,’ he said.⁵ I am now reviewing what abstraction means in my own work, reviewing my personal visual language and how it has matured over the past 30 years. Critiques, reviews and personal statements from others, and myself have been fairly consistent in their reference of ‘the balance between figuration and abstraction’. So as I stood before these works of Bacon at the Tate, I connected with the relationship of the single forms within the painted space, more than the implied narrative. I see very clear similarities between my very recent large paintings, where the emphasis is upon ‘isolation’ and tension, using very simple forms. Whilst there is no figure within my work, there are figurative elements and forms; stones, shadows, geological and tidal mark-making. So why is ‘abstract’ used to describe my work? Is it simply the absence of either the figure or / and horizon? This must be more fully tackled when discussing the Pembrokeshire-inspired work.

1983 - 1985

The summer period between the first and second year offered me a unique opportunity in the student house that six art students occupied. They all returned home, and I remained alone to look after the property. The downstairs living room was quickly transformed into my studio. Just before finishing college for the summer break, Terry Setch introduced us to his

work and working practice.⁶ He took the year group to Penarth and Lavernock Point in the Vale of Glamorgan. A short location based project developed. I must admit at the time my preoccupations with the butcher's shop and the Crucifixion veiled my sensibilities and I failed to connect with the location, the beach, or indeed Setch's work. Somehow, and I am not quite sure why, the Crucifixion and the location at Lavernock seemed to conjoin. I cycled to the beach every day of the summer and I began to build and sculpt, working with the stones at first, then assembling large planks of timber that had been washed up on the beach. It was my interest again in sculpture that was the driving force. Working with raw materials found on the shore, working with a tidal edge; little was I to know or understand at the time, how subject matters would come full circle in the next twenty years. A fairly predictable sequence of large paintings were made during this summer: for example, a *Lavernock Point* Crucifixion, which placed a single figure, centrally crucified upon a 'Golgotha' like mound of large boulders. The pictorial space was flat, the colour forced and infused with alizaron crimson and prussian blue, and the figure distorted and twisted in an embarrassingly contrived and manufactured manner. There were however a series of approximately six small paintings (A5 portrait format), that simply portrayed the cliffs. The oil paint was thick and visceral; the drawn and observed qualities were primary to the experience of working directly on location. These paintings are aware of a horizon, something that is abundantly absent from present day works.

Second year students can tend to be forgotten. It is an in-between stage, with seemingly plenty of time. It was the Miners Strike and political unrest, which was to preoccupy my initial interests and output. This was not to be a

completely new direction or subject matter, similar to Lavernock and Penarth, the Crucifixion mixed with the picket lines, protests, and marches of the Miners. A modern-day Crucifixion. These paintings were large scale,



'Riot Police at base of crucifixion'. Oil on canvas. 1984.

thus allowing for a full size figure. Police dressed in riot uniforms, helmets and visors, gathered in a cluster, playing cards for the robes of Christ. The work of Stanley Spencer and the visit I had made to the Royal Academy in 1980 soon became my point of contact. It was the development of my use of 'space' in my painting, that was crucial here, and it was to have repercussions in my work up to the

present day. Subconsciously the audience viewpoint had been raised, almost as if they had stood upon a stool. This allowed for a heightened theatrical space and lighting. Shadows of the figures were dramatic and emotive. Both Spencer and Bacon were having their influence.

In that year, without warning, a friend, fellow housemate and a fellow student on the Fine Art course, committed suicide by an overdose. There are always warning signs, but none that we read at the time. It made it even more difficult to deal with knowing that Gordon had realised his mistake before he lost consciousness.

Six very close friends of Gordon, myself included, had to escape this tragedy. His parents wanted a private funeral. We travelled to Paris. It was a personally difficult time, which simultaneously heightened our friendships, but also spontaneously broke out in arguments and Paris Café bar brawls. The galleries and exhibitions we visited as a group, seemed to act as a refocusing force a cementing as well as healing of friendships lost the night previously. We were all coming to terms with the grief as well as our own vulnerability and understanding of mortality. We happened to visit the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. A huge exhibition of monumental paintings and drawings by Anselm Kiefer confronted us. This was one of the most powerful and inspiring exhibitions I have ever experienced. It was appropriate that the overriding sense of loss accompanied me throughout the exhibition. The work was confrontational in every sense of the word, big political subject matter, big canvases with big surfaces; an incredible balance of imagery between the abstraction of detail and the surface material, gesture, mark, earthen colour, real object; and the figurative use of horizon, burnt or ploughed field and the use of history. Alongside Auerbach and Bacon, this was the most honest and confrontational painting that could secure direction and meaning for my own work going into the final years of my degree.

Fine Artists do not herd. I found and continue to find it impossible to work with others around. An educational environment of 'learning from one's peers' encourages working studio spaces that are busy. The driving ambition to be self-sufficient as an artist, and work outside of the system, focused the same small group of Paris friends to take it upon ourselves to move out of college and search for our own working spaces. The huge empty building

above the central market in Cardiff, St Mary Street, was to become our new studios. Massive pigeon infested rooms and stairwells were cleared and whitewashed. We installed make-shift electricity, lighting and new locks. We had access to the penthouse and rooftop balcony overlooking central Cardiff and St Mary St / High Street. We were back in Paris! Tutors and tutorials had to take place in our new studio complex. This heady mix of arrogance and confidence undoubtedly contributed towards my decision to incorporate Gordon's suicide and death within the work I planned for my third year's output, and consequently, degree show.



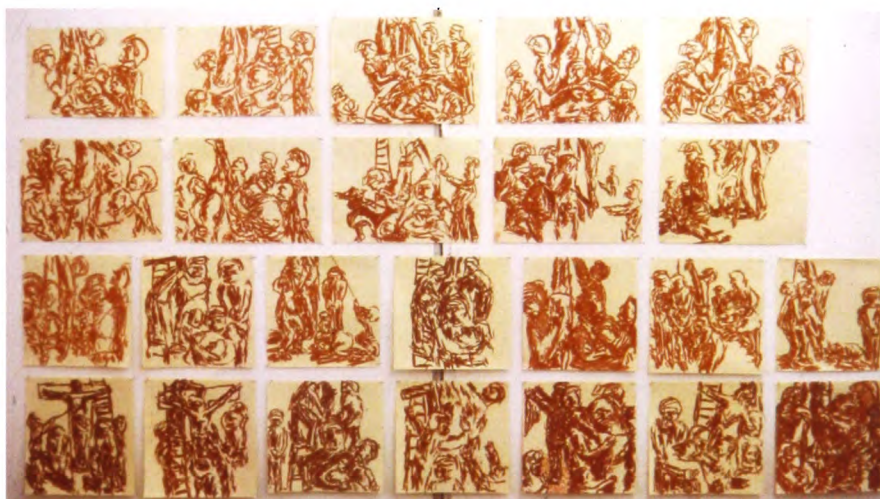
'Gordon's gloves'. 1983.

The early focus of this work was to be a pair of gloves left by Gordon on his bedroom windowsill. A series of both small-scale drawings and paintings strove to incorporate memory and loss, along with material gesture and surface. It was difficult to avoid the

sentimental and emotive potentially hiding behind what deemed to be relevant subject matter; yet being all too aware that personal suffering did not guarantee the creation of good art.

In an intense period of drawing I began to experiment with subject composition, space and the emotional balance of recent tragedy and past upbringing. Upon reflection, drawing has maintained its role as 'research scout' throughout my practice. Each time a new body of work, or change in

direction has taken place, it was and is, always preceded by an out-pouring of drawing. The surface mark-making of terracotta coloured chalk upon ivory coloured paper, enriched them with an historical significance; they did not emanate a contemporary quality at all. This was to their advantage; ambiguous figures at the base of either Crucifixion, Deposition or Burial. This was directly related to Gordon's suicide, but also to a belief system and religious upbringing / background, that was coming under greater scrutiny and doubt. The experience of my own understanding of mortality and death had been acquired through the death of grandparents, but to experience the death of a contemporary was quite different. The relentless act of drawing had almost become a surrogate rosary, or perhaps penance, for not reading the warning signs beforehand.



Studio drawings. 1984.

It was at this time that I became far more aware of and undoubtedly influenced by Terry Setch. I recall vividly helping Terry to carry a very large painting that he had just sold to the Tate.⁷ This was the time when lecturers

occupied studios within the same building as their students, even if their students were arrogant enough to seek alternative accommodation. (We had kept the St Mary Street studios on, but for the third year we primarily worked at the college.) The sheer weight of Terry's painting impressed us all; it was more like a sculpture. Setch's work at the time was firmly politicised and focused on Greenham Common, and specifically the women that had camped out in protest at the gates of this American air force base, which stockpiled nuclear weapons. It was the surface again and process of making which drew me in – that wax encaustic and thick oil paint.

With hindsight, the numerous drawings that I produced were dependent upon the development of a mark-making process which had overtones of a woodcut. The German Expressionists Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Lovis Corinth and Max Beckmann were all reference points for me at this time. The short, expressive, zigzag-like red chalk marks, were in turn to influence the painting process, soon the brush was replaced with the hand and finger. Such direct mark-making which aspired to a surface and mark, that denied its understanding of how it was made, anticipates future works. It was the combination of wax and oil here that was to firmly focus the direction of my work to date. Setch's use of encaustic and thick impasto certainly instilled the desire in my work to experiment and manipulate surface, this combined with the direction taken with my drawings, led me to experiment with a range of wax mediums that were, incredibly, both fluid and lucid. The consistency of this medium made for rapid application, which emanated the drawing process. The surface ground of the painting was also an integral part of this highly successful process, a mix of kaolin powder and copolymer. This off-white acrylic semi transparent ground allowed for pace of

application as well as an ability to cut back into the image, draw, scratch and remove with ease, error or indecision.

The most powerful influence upon my work at this time was Titian's *The Flaying of Marsyas* (1566) seen at *The Genius of Venice* exhibition in 1983. Apollo skins the flute player Marsyas who is hung upside down; the subject matter fitted unnervingly (our dead friend Gordon had played the trumpet). The surface of touch, the experience of visual touch, which seems to connect Auerbach, Kiefer, Setch and now Titian, were undeniably influencing my direction as an art student. In close up, the surface of *The Flaying of Marsyas* is rich and intensely interwoven with layers of oil glaze; the handling is experimental, playful and contemporary. It is the balance between subject matter and process that Titian attains with which I have tried to underpin my work throughout.



'Suicide'. Oil on canvas. 1985.



'Burial'. Oil on canvas. 1985.

My degree show comprised of four large paintings, (1.75 x 2.0m) a triptych, (1.75 x 4.25m) and a series of framed drawings. The titles were literal and undeniably emotive: *Suicide*, *Deposition*, *Funeral*. Noticeably, the space

within the paintings suggested the theatrical, in its lighting and composition. Both use of colour and light were reminiscent of Tiepolo and Italy, they were religious and contemplative. It was a successfully strong exhibition, a celebration of both life and paint.

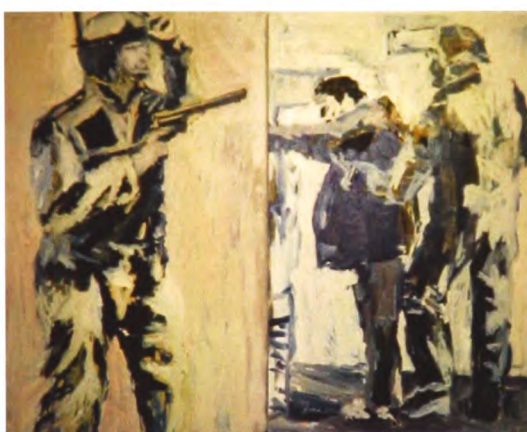
The Slade School of Art 1985 – 1987.

The Slade School of Art historically carries great weight and authority, and the opportunity to be taught by Michael Moon, John Hoyland, Bruce McClean and Tess Jaray, as well as visiting tutors such as Patrick Heron, Terry Atkinson and Declan McGonagle, was an overriding influence upon my decision to study at University College London.

Taking up residence in New Cross, on the eleventh floor of a block of flats overlooking Millwall Football Club, was some baptism to London. The stark reality of how tough life was there was evidenced in the brutal stabbing and death of a local resident in the lift, on the first night. The whole place seemed to be angry, one could sense it everywhere, these were the ‘Thatcher’ years after all: the Miner’s Strike, Scargill, the Toxteth and Brixton riots, Rupert Murdoch and News International’s move to Wapping, and the IRA. At this time the Royal Academy was showing *German Art in the 20th Century, Painting and Sculpture 1905 - 1985*, and Leon Golub and Terry Atkinson were at the ICA.⁸

Overnight, I became very conscious that my work somehow was completely out of sync with the mood and tensions of the time. Whilst I was comfortable with the subject matter and over all themes, it was more

specifically the painted surface and beautification that I very quickly wanted to jettison. Moving to a new environment and studio gave me the opportunity to re-examine and re-question the artist that I was becoming. I sensed a formulaic working process beginning to take hold, almost as if some form of security blanket was being made from surrounding my studio walls with recognisable Burns-like paintings. Riot Police were arresting protestors and picketers within Garden of Gethsemane settings; this was predictable and regurgitated imagery, and I desperately needed to move forward.



'Arrest'. Oil on canvas. 1986.

Research material, influences and information at the time, was primarily sourced from newspapers and media coverage. In order to process and take ownership of some of this material, I would draw, trace, photograph and photocopy. It was the

photographs taken directly from the television, which were to offer the greatest potential; being open to chance and accident, allowed for less illustrational imagery. However, I was by now very determined to reduce and strip back the aesthetic and focus upon content. Whilst Toxteth, Brixton and Wapping played a very big part in my work at this time, it was 'The Troubles' in Northern Ireland, which focused my interest and attentions. Here I felt 'connected'.



'Arrest'. Watercolour on cotton. 1986.

Why would 'connection' play a part in what was and remains, 'separation'? My parents divorced very soon after returning from Kenya. My mother had been brought up a Catholic and lived all her life in Cardiff. My father was brought up a Protestant and came from Belfast, before being stationed in the armed forces in Wales, then Kenya. I spent most of my summer holidays as a child visiting my father in Belfast. The 1970s were difficult times for Ireland, and I was indeed conscious of them. My father always played down the violence; my mother, rightly so, was concerned, but was keen to highlight the dangers. I remember one occasion on hearing a loud explosion in the city, my father insisted that it was the sound of bunkers being made for a new golf course. The following day's Belfast Telegraph revealed the terrible truth, the bombing of the city centre bus depot.

Why is it then that I would begin to develop sympathies for this political struggle? Was it a cheap shot at getting back at my father for the break up and consequent absence from my childhood?

I had by now had two very critically constructive and demanding tutorials at the Slade with Terry Atkinson and Declan McGonagle. Both had been of a similar mind that my work and ideas needed to be far more forceful, as well as perhaps more critical of the political landscape we were witnessing. I began reading *The IRA* by Tim Pat Coogan, *Pig in the Middle* by Desmond Hamill, *The Big Fellow* by Frank O'Connor and *On Another Man's Wound* by Earnie O'Malley. The band Moving Hearts and singer/songwriter Christy Moore filled my ears on the Sonny Walkman. I became passionately connected and far more knowledgeable as far as Ireland's history was concerned. In more ways than one, I began to feel very much outside of the mainstream at the Slade. This was no bad thing, I felt very much out of my social class at times. The majority of fellow students on the postgraduate course were middle to upper class and had come from either London or Brighton. A small group of four, myself included, formed a friendship, which contrasted strongly with the London clique. A fellow student Paul Duffy had been a former student from Cardiff and close friend, Paul Dignan was from Dundee in Scotland, and Adrian Coruthers from Bracknell. My Irish and political affinities became central and were beginning to influence even more how separated and disconnected I was from the majority of both fellow students, as well as lecturers.



'Shields', Oil on canvas, 1987.

There were two major breakthroughs in the development of this work. Firstly, the process of printmaking, linocut to be precise; and secondly, sculpture. Through drawing, photography and lino printing, research material gathered

directly from media sources was processed into my own imagery. A decision to lose colour altogether was a major one. I wanted to work as simply as possible with black and white only, with little interference from an aesthetic quality that I knew I could create all too easily, I needed to focus on content. I produced an entire book (A6 in size) of approximately sixty lino prints. In due course these found their way into large-scale paintings. At first canvases, then loose bed-sheets, were squared up alongside the lino print,



Print Book 1987.

and carefully transcribed across. The small became the large. The mark-making strove to deny the brush, and mimic the cutting tool and lino, or woodcut. These paintings were confrontational with titles that were literal, *Petrol Bomb Attack*, *Checkpoint*, *Barricade* and *Sniper*,

and confrontational in imagery that was succinct and bare. The cheapness of recycled bed linen, their found quality, their non-precious banner-poster like

look, reinforced the message and content, and began to re-examine potential audience of these works.

The sculptural element also developed as I made the connection with tin or toy soldiers. The paintings were beginning to bore me; they had become so formulaic and completely eradicated my own sense of creativity. I had

been working during the weekends for Tom Lomax, a Slade tutor and sculptor. Labouring and general building work took me to Fore Street in East London, and to A&A Foundry. At the time, Barry Flanagan, AR Penck, Jim Dine, as well as many other well-established names, were working in both studios and the foundry. I began

to experiment with wax. I had used microcrystalline wax before as a painting medium, but here was the opportunity to build and sculpt. I made a whole series of small wax sculptures, which were then cast into bronze. These small figures and

symbols were flat in form, single planes of finger kneaded bronze, reminiscent of the lino print once again. This format allowed for the assemblage of symbol and figure without the need to question space, perspective, scale and colour, as within a painting. Therefore small soldiers attached or morphed themselves into 'H' Blocks, (the Maize Prison), or



Sniper. Bronze. 1987.



'5th July Parade'. Bronze. 1987.

Union Jack Flags, crosses and 'King Billy'.⁹ One piece entitled *A Soldier and a Poet* took Bobby Sands, IRA hunger striker, politician and poet, and superimposed his body with a Union Jack, which was constructed from three British soldiers. These small bronzes seemed successful in their more ambiguous nature.



'Shields'. Oil on board. 1987.

I really do not remember any major tutor input or feedback during this time. I was very much left to my own. John Hoyland briefly commented, 'that the artist only ever paints one work... they just have to have that work within them for

anything really to come out'. At the time, this meant very little, however upon recent reflection and having worked so closely with David Alston on the book *Into Painting*, I here come to see that it was incredibly profound and accurate for my own development as a painter. The only other great opportunity was to have met Patrick Heron. Little did I know how his influence would carry so much weight in the future.

Two major exhibitions during my time at the Slade, which were to maintain a hold throughout my creative journey to date were Howard Hodgkin at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1985, *Forty Paintings*, and Willem DeKooning at Antony D'Offay. I had been so engrossed in the political side of my work at the Slade, alongside a confrontation of self-identity and absence, that I had

genuinely missed the painterly. These two exhibitions confirmed a real affinity with material gesture, the physicality of paint itself.

It was somewhat ironic that over 70% of my postgraduate painting graduation exhibition at the Slade was to be sculpture. Memories of the Foundation exhibition come to mind. I sold fairly well, especially to a private collector Tom Bendhem, who hung my work in his house next to an Auerbach. Art critic Brian Sewell selected my work for a commercial exhibition at the Solomon Gallery, pretentiously titled *Young Masters*, these were MA graduates primarily from London. *The Mail on Sunday's You Magazine* featured the exhibition and individual graduates in depth. My work was also selected for the Contemporary Art Society's annual art fair at the Smiths Gallery, Covent Garden. This was a successful and exciting period, where the Slade had indeed provided me with a platform for my work as I prepared to leave Art School.

1987 – 1991



'Gibraltar Killings', Bronze. 1987.

I returned to Cardiff within weeks of finishing at the Slade and had made the decision some months prior. I desperately needed to ground myself outside of education and begin to establish myself as an artist without the need for tutorials or assessments.

However, the need to set oneself goals such as exhibitions in order to maintain concentration and focus was key. In the meantime, I set about

returning to work at the butcher's shop, and became assistant manager. This financial security allowed for my long time partner and I to rent secure and decent accommodation outside of student life. The flat came with access to a garage, which quickly became my studio. My work continued painfully and sporadically at first, referring to the Gibraltar Killings, where the IRA were hijacked and shot dead in their car. Small bronzes continued. I exhibited primarily at the Contemporary Art Society's Art Fair each year until 1991.

I was very conscious that I needed to experience something new in order to maintain subject matter and direction. I therefore applied to the Arts Council of Wales in 1989 for a Travel Bursary, which would enable me to research religious works of art in Florence. I was successful, and spent approximately a month drawing in the churches and Il Duomo in Florence. Upon my return it was these many sketchbooks, which were to fuel and direct new paintings towards exhibitions at the Powerhouse Gallery in Laugharne, and Llantarnam Grange Arts Centre in Cwmbran. The latter was a significant one-man show which comprised a series of large canvases and many smaller studies. Whilst this body of works was initiated from the visit to Florence, the death of my grandmother in Cardiff re-evaluated once again my religious affinities, as well as re-awakening ideas first questioned during my degree. It was the 'soul' and a concept in its 'Ascension' that endorsed a transgression from the figurative to the abstracted. Surface colour, inspired and influenced by Renaissance frescoes, were generating more expressive demands of paint and surface. The whole issue surrounding 'the balance between figuration and abstraction' within my work was referenced once again in the catalogue, which accompanied the show at Llantarnam Grange. Richard Cox wrote: ¹⁰

I first saw Brendan Burns' work in his degree show when his painting "Christ's Descent from the Cross" was selected for the South Glamorgan collection in 1984. At that time it struck me that this was one of the most accomplished paintings by a senior student I had seen and that he had something interesting to contribute. It came as no surprise to learn that he gained a place at the Slade after graduation. Since then his strong commitment to painting has slowly evolved and developed into a distinctive, disciplined personal style that treads a thin line between abstraction and figuration. Like many artists the difficulties associated with maintaining the practice of painting and paying the rent can be demanding. In a country that chooses to recognise and reward only a tiny minority of its artists, other skills have to be called upon. Teaching used to be one of the main solutions to this problem (much less so now) but Brendan supports his painting by working as a butcher part-time. His dedication and considerable skill deserve more recognition and it is my hope that his days with a cleaver are numbered.

I wrote in this catalogue and referenced abstraction, colour and paint, alongside upbringing and influence.

I have always wanted to produce a different way of painting such images as Crucifixion, Deposition, Lamentation, Ascension etc., but have needed to work through the more accepted and more figurative images, in order that I can work

with a more honest response to a more abstract image. It is only in the past 8 months that my work has undergone this change. I am looking for new symbols and feelings within the paintings.

The physical qualities of paint itself have always been of major importance to me. Often I have to create some kind of orderly mess before working into the image.

Catholic images have always surrounded me, especially as a child; school life was intensely catholic.

During my upbringing there always existed a confrontation of religions. I have always thought of my work as a mirror image of this confrontation / battle.



'Cathays Cemetery'. Gouache on paper. 1986.

Experience of my grandmother's death, for the first time witnessing a dead body, highlighted again my wish to articulate visually a sense of loss, but also the pursuit of a painterly equivalent of the soul. These large paintings,

in particular, began to propose the concept of the meditative, the confrontation with what we do not know.



'Ascension'. Oil on canvas. 1989.

I seriously consider this period of work to open an ongoing dialogue with certain symbols and painterly motifs, which continues today in my most recent works. The aspiration is to paint an equivalent to an emotional or sensed experience, as opposed to the 'illustrational'. Francis Bacon in his interview with David Sylvester was asked

if he could define the difference between an illustrational and non-illustrational form; he replied with one of the most succinct rationalizations on this dilemma I have read:

“Well, I think that the difference is that an illustrational form tells you through the intelligence immediately what the form is about, whereas a non-illustrational form works first upon sensation and then slowly leaks back into the fact. Now why this should be, we don't know. This may have to do with how facts themselves are ambiguous, how appearances are

ambiguous, and therefore this way of recording form is nearer to the fact by its ambiguity of recording".¹¹

1992 – 1995

My continued interests in the concept of the 'soul' and its potential transition to 'somewhere else' initiated an application to the Arts Council of Wales for a second travel bursary which would enable me to visit Mexico and experience the festival of *The Day of the Dead*. (All souls day, November 2nd.) However, having listened to a Radio 4 documentary about the forthcoming *Matisse Retrospective* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, I switched applications. This, upon reflection, was a pivotal decision, which was to initiate a change of subject matter, and a meeting with Peter Prendergast, (artist 1948-2006) who was to become a great personal friend and advocate of my work. The application was successful, and Peter was also a successful recipient of a bursary, and planned his visit at the same time. He arranged for us to meet up at Agnews apartment where he and a painter friend, Len Tabener were staying. This was, as it turned out, his first time in New York. He suffered with a great fear of flying, which had previously prevented visits before. This Travel Bursary and the meeting with Peter Prendergast now seems to be pivotal for the development of my work. His shared passion for drawing and wrestling with the material properties of paint were undeniably significant ingredients, which underpinned a close and mutually respectful friendship until his untimely death. The large drawing *West 53rd Street* was pinned up against the windows in the Agnews apartment, charcoal dust covered every surface of the apartment; also Toulouse Lautrec original drawings were hung on every wall. Peter was

excited and in confident mood, as that morning he had built up the courage to take his first walk alone on the streets of New York, taking five consecutive right turns on leaving the lobby, in order to walk the block and re-enter the apartment. We saw the Matisse show separately, but were able to refer to this incredible exhibition for many years after. It took me nearly seven hours to see the entire show; it was indeed, a pilgrimage.

Upon reflection, ‘pilgrimage’ has become a necessary process within my practice. There have been significant journeys, both physical and philosophical, which have allowed for serious and informed questioning of the direction and development of my work. (The Death of Gordon; the Anselm Kiefer exhibition in Paris; a travel bursary to work in Florence; the Matisse exhibition in New York and meeting Peter Prendergast; Druidston; Santiago de Compostella; the position of Artist in Residence at Oriol y Parc and Caerfai Bay.)

I immediately connected with New York, it was the right place to look at De Kooning, Pollock, Newman, Rothko and Kline. Sitting with *Easter Monday* (De Kooning, 1955-56) at the Metropolitan Museum for nearly an hour allowed for a deep and sensual experience, which was also rewarded with an elderly lady in her 80s passing comment as she sat beside me, “You must be an artist. Bill was always drunk, I have such great memories as we shared a studio building together”. She was a close friend and fellow artist of De Kooning.

The Matisse exhibition was primarily the reason for my visit, but I was a tourist also. I became instantly drawn to the Empire State Building, the Flat

Iron building, the Rockefeller Centre and the World Trade Centre. I photographed extensively with E6 slide film and drew in small A5 sketchbooks. These drawings explored space, the processes of looking and selection were prerequisites for my working practice on Druidston beach some years later. Line was key, the pace and movement of the eye echoed and laid down graphic traces of the formal sculptural qualities encountered within New York street scenes, views through fire escape ladders – balconies and in particular views of the city from the skyscrapers. The process of ‘looking down’ would become a significant ingredient of future works.

The experiences, drawings and photographs from this New York visit were to take their time in permeating into my work. For the immediate period following Newport Road in Cardiff, a main artery of the city, became my surrogate New York. The processes of seeing initiated in New York further developed and I continued to explore and experiment with ‘plan views’, of signs and symbols such as chevrons and double yellow lines, alongside reflections of buildings within buildings. These formal elements were to become an excuse for a ‘way in’ for painting. These were never paintings about Cardiff or Newport Road, they were driven by abstraction, space, line, balance, tension and structure. All of the paintings produced during this series were small A5 works on board; in many ways they became the studies for the New York series which was to follow.

It had taken nearly eighteen months before I was comfortable to allow the drawings and photographs of New York to permeate into studio work and push Newport Road aside. Both large and small scale drawings on primed

paper, undertaken primarily using oil bars and paint-sticks developed. These offered immediacy in drawing which mirrored the original sketchbooks. A copolymer ground furthermore allowed for the surface drawing and movement of line and space to be infinitely erased and restructured. This simultaneous process of construction and deconstruction within a painting is an integral means in my working practice since the 'Burial and Crucifixion' series of the mid 1980s. The close relationship between drawing and painting is prerequisite throughout, something which I shared with both Terry Setch and Peter Prendergast.



'Tribeca, NY'. Oil on paper. 1994.

Memories of a cold and fog bound New York coupled with the intention to avoid the perhaps obvious zealous colouring within advertising and the typical New York neon surfaced in the series; alongside an interest in Robert Ryman's paintings; the eagerness to make 'contemplative' painting; and to utilize the photographs taken in New York which were accidentally under exposed. (I had manually set the ISO reading for 3200 in order to record the Matisse exhibition, and failed to

remember to reset for daylight exposure.) All of these ingredients fuelled with new drawings and a dissatisfaction with the 'Newport Road' works, created an energy, enthusiasm and drive to make big paintings. It was

somewhat ironic that these works, as well as an earlier *Ascension* series, were to go on to win the Gold Medal for Fine Art at the National Eisteddfod of Wales in Llanellwedd, as opposed to earlier entries consisting of Welsh landscapes and seascapes. Perhaps it was this juxtaposition that highlighted the early beginnings of ‘the spiritual’ within future West-Wales coastal painting?



'Gramercy's January NY'. Oil on canvas. 1994.

The New York series of paintings were to also introduce a specific relevance of title that earlier works had not yet considered. The emotive, ambiguous yet specific need for a title which teased the viewer into a more sensual and primordial response was already in place. The plan view allowed for a level of abstraction to take place, but the movement of spatial linear planes, where solids collided and interacted with atmosphere and space, where the close tonal colouristic relationships established common discordant ancestry, urged the viewer to let go and fall into these vertigo-esque paintings. When the auto-focus function on my camera struggled to maintain its focus upon the painted surface, I knew I was operating within desired dimensions. These works presented paintings to be sensed as

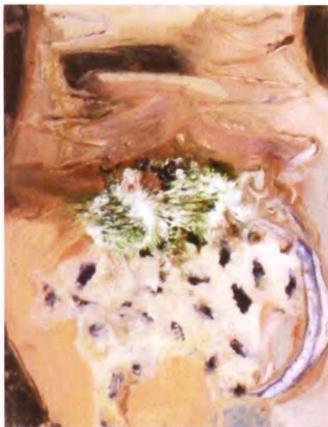
opposed to be seen, something which has maintained its grip on works to date. *NY10001*, *Gramercy's January*, are titles which either introduce a zipcode, (a postal area), or insinuate that a neighbourhood experiences time and implied aspect of light and weather.

1995 – 2000

Some art historians, critics and writers are attracted to the concept that an artist's subject matters and series of works stop and start with clear definitive edges. The transition of New York works through into West Wales and specifically Druidston spanned two to three years at least. I had indeed married into Pembrokeshire, and had made very strong connections with the Rhos and Graham Sutherland's work during my extended visits to West Wales during my Slade years. I remember being unable to return to London and the Slade due to snow and poor weather conditions, but felt guilty not to be able to return to work, so I set off for the Cleddau estuary, to walk in Sutherland's footsteps, to experience Sutherland's twisted root-forms, to connect with both the landscape and the artist. It was cold enough for the water of the watercolours on paper to freeze; when they thawed they relinquished the pigment and deposited small snowflake like patterns, fossil-like, across the paintings. I was more interested in these microcosms than the views that seemed to have polluted my initial vision. Interestingly it was inevitably the close up, the plan, the microcosm that would exert its presence and focus as the work matured and evolved during the next ten years.

Pembrokeshire and its coast has been a constant source of inspiration since the mid 1980s, but not once did I seriously consider my work could directly glean from it. I was struggling with and continue to struggle with the

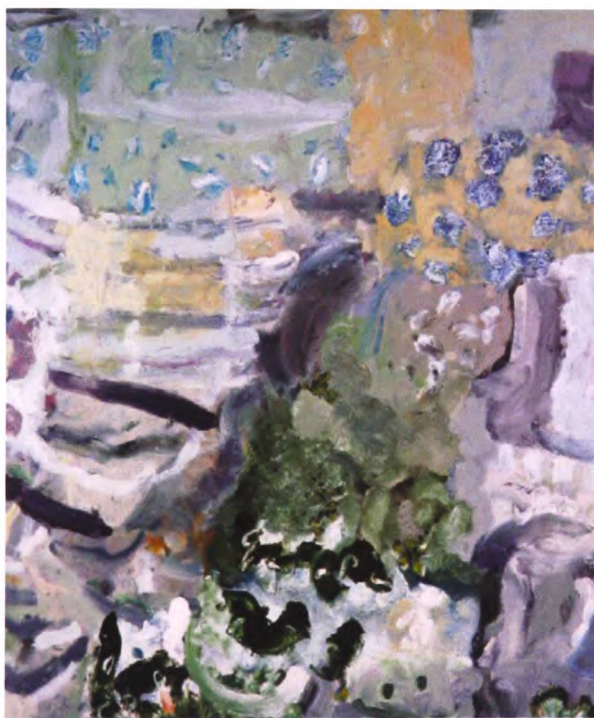
'landscape' label. Why would this be? Does 'landscape' imply 'view', 'horizon', 'literal', the 'topographical'? It certainly did for me then; that was before making work which has allowed the visual language of drawing and painting to research and question such assumptions. I remain uncomfortable with being labelled as either a 'landscape' or 'abstract' painter. The residency at Oriel y Parc has offered up an alternative, that of the 'mindscape'.



'Surge'. Oil on board. 1996.

It was photography which initially established integrity in my decision to begin a serious working relationship with the Pembrokeshire coast. This was pre-digital, and the whole process of not knowing the image before printing was integral for a considered and structured approach to the decision making at play on location. I established a vast number of photographic images before drawing on the coast. These images did and continue to dismiss horizon, I was never interested in a space within my work which acknowledged traditional perspective. West Wales offered motifs not views. The photographic process allowed for 'journey' and 'time' to register their interests within future works. The walk and physical exploration of a sequence of forms, surfaces and structures gave rise to paintings which were conglomerates. They initially presented themselves as flat surfaces, shapes and textures which had been taken directly from the photographs. Within the context of the works' development over the past 15 years, these paintings, primarily using acrylic and watercolour, were extremely literal and predictable. Triangular,

rectangular and linear shapes played a pivotal role within my initial connections on the beach itself, as well as in 're-presenting' these in paint. It was as if the mechanism of 'seeing' New York had permeated its way into Pembrokeshire. There are indeed a number of both drawings and paintings which amalgamate the two very different worlds. A significant painting from this period is *Swish – Back – West*, bought by the Derek Williams Trust for the National Museum Wales in 1997. This painting presents a sensation akin to vertigo, a whirling rock-pool and implicit movement of tide and seaweed occupy the lower half of the image, whilst the top third of the painting significantly presents a series of building-like shapes and forms.



'Swish-Back-West'. Oil on canvas. 1997.

Consequently the space within the painting twists and transforms as the eye moves from the lower half through to the top. It implies or instils a sense of physical movement within the viewer as one would train the focus from the feet through to the sky.

Swish – Back – West was to be shown at the opening of *The Art in Wales Gallery* at

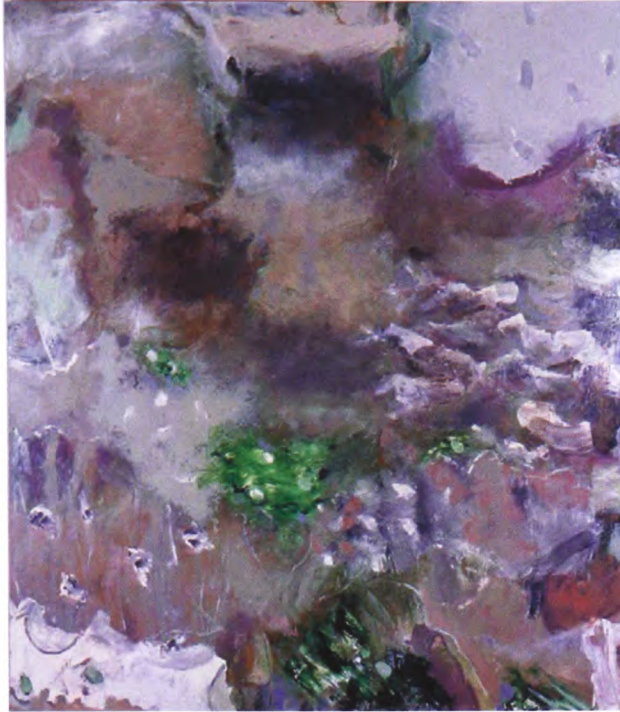
the National Museum Wales in 1998, an exhibition titled *Landmarks*, curated by the then Keeper of Art, David Alston. It was Alston who then proposed a one-man exhibition at the Turner House Gallery in Penarth, an

outpost of the National Museum Wales, for the following year. Turner House offered two floors of exhibition space, and would accommodate comfortably a number of both small and large-scale paintings. Consequently, the intensity of relationship between Druidston and my Cardiff studio increased and would lead to the production of a significant and prolific series of paintings. With hindsight, this was the beginning of a sustained relationship with Druidston that has continued. I had now begun to use wax and perspex extensively within the smaller paintings on panel. The combination of translucency and impasto that wax offered increased the sculptural wielding of material upon the painted surface, as though working with the physical processes themselves from the beach. Wax was both used as painting medium which extended and thickened the oil paint, as well as used neat, which allowed for layers and affinities with rock-pools and water.



'Edging West'. Oil on board. 1996.

David Alston titled the exhibition *As well as being...*. This was a critical juncture for the whole issue of titling paintings, it was paramount that title would avoid the specific and literal reference to place and in particular 'view'. Process was central, the process of nature and landscape, as well as process in making paintings, therefore many titles took this pre-requisite as starting point. *Blur – Blend – Rush, Blue Green – Green Blue, Swish-back* as well as *White Light Flicker, Sea-belt Shimmer* and *Edging West*, present the viewer with emotive sensations experienced in the landscape, simultaneously with experienced sensations from the painting and its process of making.



'Misty Wet with Rain'. Oil on canvas. 1998.

Tony Curtis's book *Welsh Artists Talking* in 2000, with its launch exhibition at the National Museum Wales, Cardiff.

The ongoing relationship in my practice with the photographic had been constant throughout, though the possibility of exhibiting these photographs alongside the paintings had never been raised. I had always felt very comfortable that they were part of the process of seeing and experiencing nature at first hand. But it was the exhibition *Oil and Water* at the newly refurbished Old Library, the Centre for Visual Arts, as it was to be called, (for eighteen months at least), that raised the 'educational' opportunity to show my working practice and introduce a case of photographs. I felt that this allowed the audience a quick and shortcut route into the painting, though I was concerned that it potentially cheapened the painting experience. For

Two major events were to follow on from this exhibition: in 1998 a sequence of six small paintings on board from this body of work were to win my second Gold Medal at the National Eisteddfod of Wales, Bro Ogwr, Bridgend (the only other artist to have achieved this was Brenda Chamberlain in 1951 and 1853) and inclusion in

the vast majority, giving ‘time’ to look and allow for experience, sensation and spiritual connection takes effort and commitment, the photograph had indeed prescribed an escape route. The issue of whether or not to



Photograph, Druidston, 2000.

include these photographs, would again confront future exhibitions, including *Influere* at Oriel y Parc Landscape Gallery, St Davids in 2009-2010.

2001 – 2005

The relationship with music and in particular synaesthesia was to play a large role from 2001 onwards. Composer John Metcalf commissioned a series of large-scale paintings for a performance to be held in Angel Orensanz Arts Centre, New York. The correlation between landscape and music in my work was to become more formalised. Metcalf connected with both the painterly process, as well as the references to journey and landscape, or should I say shoreline, in my work. A series of meetings and discussions ensued, which introduced me to Metcalf’s work, and in particular a piece titled *Not the stillness*. The performance would combine a quartet, which played Metcalf’s compositions alongside a series of thirteen large canvases; this was no white cube gallery exhibition. The audience, quartet and paintings were to be choreographed together within a large nineteenth century synagogue, the oldest standing building of the Lower

East Side of Manhattan. It was ironic that it was to be the influence of Pembrokeshire and Metcalf's compositions that were to be exhibited in New York, and not the previous New York paintings of 1993-94. I had read Wassily Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* during my degree years, but was to revisit and reclaim its content with a deeper respect and connection during this period of work.



UK with NY. 'Different Lights' performance. Angel Orensanz Arts Centre, NY. 2001.

September 11th 2001, the World Trade Centre, New York, put everything in life and in art into a chilling perspective. Six weeks before the performance was due to take place, the festival *UK in NY* to be renamed *UK with NY*, and the performance, *Different Lights* was to go ahead. Its whole purpose had changed. The opportunity to show my work in New York was no longer of commercial or indeed promotionally justifiable within these circumstances. This had become something far more spiritually driven and significant. The twin towers were still smouldering, streets smothered in ash, photographs of

missing persons littered every lamppost and street corner, unclaimed bicycles remained chained to railings, dry-cleaners had closed because so many suits had been uncollected. What role or responsibility did the exhibition and performance have now?

There were three separate evening performances. Of course it was quiet, yet those that did venture out found the whole experience sensitively resonate with the current situation. The opportunity for audience, quartet and painting to integrate was a pertinent one when so much deep-seated suspicion was prevalent in the city.



'Not the stillness...' Oil on canvas. 2001.

Not the stillness...
Metcalf's ensemble piece continued to influence my work, so much so that John allowed me to use the title for a touring exhibition which launched at Newport Museum and Art Gallery

in 2002. The centrepiece of this show was a large 5 metre x 2.5 metre canvas of the same title. Whilst many of the smaller paintings of the period were beginning to experiment with space and quietness, with areas of surface relatively untouched by colour, the large canvas works, by contrast, presented a complete covering of pigment and wax. This canvas was resonant of Monet's late *Waterlily* paintings, a reflective surface which presented an ambiguous space and scale.

It was both movement and stillness simultaneously, a panoramic format which enveloped the viewer. Similar in surface to *Swish-Back-West* 1997, the space within the painting aspired towards a sensuous rhythmical vertigo. Colour and painterly mark or gesture were intrinsic to this potential movement through emotion. However, the limitations of surface and edge were all too complex at this stage. I became conscious again of my degree works where surface, light and colour dangerously courted the 'decorative'. It was becoming apparent that each major one-man exhibition provided the opportunity to evaluate and question the direction and significance of my work. This is precisely what should transpire, but I was already conscious that my work with Druidston would be long-lasting and prolonged. This was unambiguously a closure of one chapter and the inception of the new.



'As well as being...'. Oil on Perspex and canvas. 2002.

Musical impact, coupled with inspiration from the coastal, would engender a painting of major significance titled *As well as being...* produced from the opportunity to respond to the work of Ceri Richards and his major retrospective exhibition *Themes & Variations*, in 2002, for the group of Welsh painters *Ysbryd-Spirit-Painting-Wales*.¹² The exhibition titled *A*

Propos Ceri Richards, presented nine Welsh painters a significant platform to make new work, and exhibit at the National Museum Wales. Upon researching Richards's sketchbooks and notes held within their collection, it was to be the combination of his series of works *Cathedrale Engloutie* and his love for the compositions of Debussy, specifically Preludes Book 1 and Book 2, which formed the premise for my response.

I had repeatedly struggled with the middle size painting in my work since moving on from the New York series in 1995. Here was an opportunity to challenge this issue, to work in series on relatively mid-sized paintings, yet assemble them as one large work. Drawings in Richards's sketchbook which



'Apropos', National Museum of Wales. 2002.

explored the sound of raindrops were to suggest his interest in sound and image, and possibly synaesthesia.¹³

As well as being... consisted of twelve separate panels of oil and wax on Perspex, approximately 80cms x 50cms. Each panel contained

5-6 sheets of oil and wax on Perspex, layered or sandwiched together, each layer corresponding to a considered visual response to one of the preludes. The perspex sheet allowed for the mark-making process to play with the balance between construction and destruction. It enabled a process of work which recognised and encouraged debate, visual sensation inspired by rhythm, sound and sentiment. Subsequent responses presented the audience with multiple, simultaneous, yet individual visual equivalents.

Ysbryd-Spirit-Painting-Wales exhibited during the decade both nationally and internationally. From its inception in 1998, launched by art writer and critic Norbert Lynton in Howard Gardens Gallery Cardiff School of Art & Design, we showed at the the Mall Galleries, London in 2001 and a series of venues in France, including *Festival Interceltique de L'Orient*, in 2002 and Le Chambre de Commerce et de L'Industrie, L'Orient.



Brendan Burns. Galicia. Spain. 2004.

Artist and writer Iwan Bala and myself took part in *VII Xuntanza Obradoiro Internacional das Plásticas*, A Solaina Pilono, Galicia, Spain in 2004. This was a ten-day residency just south of Santiago de Compostella. Sixteen international artists were invited to create new work in response to this location and region of Galicia. Artists from Brazil, Italy, Germany, Holland, Wales and Spain were thrown together in large open barn studios, wined and dined and entertained, given ample materials and access to a range of processes and necessary equipment as required. Each day all artists were toured and presented to the local mayor, poets, musicians and artists of the community. Visits to the cathedral in Santiago de Compostella, the National Gallery of Modern Art and night visits to observatories were all integrated within the experience. Certainly, serious exposure to the culinary and social aspects of Galician life took a principal position during the ten days. Our only commitment was to make a new work in response to these experiences and bestow it to the permanent collection in A Solaina.

It became all too apparent early on that many of the participating artists had already arrived with a significant concept of the work that they were to produce. Iwan Bala and I were genuinely inquisitive of the cultural, historical and geographical. It was extremely difficult to focus in the



A Solaina, Galicia, Spain. 2004.

soaring temperatures and distractions presented by Galician television crews, interviewers and language barriers. I urgently wanted to visit the cathedral; I needed to experience the sense of pilgrimage, to revisit my religious and catholic upbringing, to re-experience the works produced following many visits to Florence. Following in the footsteps of thousands of pilgrims through the cobbled streets of Santiago truly connected with my sensibility; that Catholic guilt came flooding back. I immediately responded to the shadows upon and within the centuries of aged paving. These photographs were to generate a series of drawings and consequently a series of seven paintings; one for each day of the week. Large ceramic floor tiles were used as the structural painting surface, however, sheets of Perspex were also incorporated which allowed for the layering of shadow, time and journey. Each panel presented a map-like image, colour that was evident within the gastronomic delights of our evening meals or shop window displays of octopus and chorizo, presented like Zurburan still lifes. The smell of eucalyptus was never far away because a huge forest of eucalyptus trees surrounded our open barn studios. Like some self imposed lament, I spent a three hour period working on a large ten metre drawing in the middle of this forest, alone with the mid day sun. There was something very Catholic about

his self-driven experience, one that cultivated a title for the seven panels, *Talking with eucalyptus and Santiago*. This work was a penance, a rosary.

The correlation between music and the visual act of painting had already become of significant relevance and interest during the past five years, with *Different Lights* shown in New York and *A Propos – Ceri Richards* shown at the National Museum Wales; paintings were created with music as their direct subject matter. The proposal from Oriel Davies in Newtown for a major one-man exhibition allowed for the production of a substantial series of works, and the opportunity to re-visit my interest in synaesthesia, the mixing of the senses in the brain. *Orange sherbet kisses*,¹⁴ *Concerning the spiritual in Art, Synaesthesia, The Strangest Thing*,¹⁵ and *Visual Music*,¹⁶ were important reading at the time. The most influential factor, however, in the future development of my work was something so simple and transparent, time. I had been teaching full time since 1993, and the decision to pull back partially from this heavy commitment and reduce these hours, injected a significant energy and enthusiasm for new work: time to walk and experience Druidston beach more often, time to prepare and make canvas stretchers, time to distance myself more deeply from the everyday, but most significantly, time to draw. As a lecturer, I would always stress the relevance and importance to students of drawing to explore, drawing to experiment and drawing to enquire, something, which always seemed to come under pressure in my own working practice when time fell in short supply.

Taste of Sight Series was the title for the entire body of work produced for the exhibition *Tidal* at Oriel Davies in Newtown in 2005, chosen specifically, to introduce the audience to synaesthesia. My titles had always



'Tidal', Oriel Davies, 2005.

been of significance, but this one more so than ever. The role and use of 'white' in the work had measurably allowed colour to communicate more resonantly. Sensation and the relationship between

colour, form and space were intensified; therefore the implication towards a synaesthetic response from the viewer was important. *Taste of Sight* was an umbrella title which allowed for individual works to be titled using a combination of date and six figure ordnance survey map reference numbers. *Taste of Sight series, SM858178 May 16th 2005*, *Taste of Sight series, SM861171 June 9th 2005* or *Taste of Sight series November 9th 2005* were both specific and ambiguous simultaneously. The implication of a set way in to the painting, an insistence upon the sensed as well as a fixed location or date, echoed the play between the figurative and abstract elements. Drawing had not only enabled a greater understanding of process within the coastal landscape, but had fuelled a confidence in the painting act itself. Many of the larger canvases produced during this period embraced a closer relationship between drawing and painting - drawing was painting and painting was drawing. For the first time since my degree show I exhibited drawings in their own right, not as supportive studies, but as finished works. The time to draw had established far greater sincerity and honesty within the work's direction during the previous two years; something which became pivotal in

the working relationship between the coastal and the studio, critical in the development of work to come as Artist in Residence at Oriol y Parc in 2008 - 2009.



'Taste of Sight series' SM:862173, May 9th. Oil on canvas. 2005.

2006 – 2008

The publishers Seren had expressed a definite interest in producing a monograph for nearly four years, but it had taken recent developments in my work before a publishing date was set. However, it was inevitable that anticipated planned exhibitions scheduled in order to launch the book would be missed. Opportunities to work towards major one-man exhibitions were providing an arena in which to re-evaluate and develop new work; therefore

it was always going to be difficult to settle on the ideal time for the book. I had secured in previous years the interest and commitment of both David Alston and Mel Gooding to write the book.¹⁷ Alston had curated a number of my past exhibitions, and had witnessed the many developments in my work. Gooding had shown interest in *As well as being... at A Propos – Ceri Richards* in 2000. Alston was keen to revisit early influences and college works, but as he began to research further he found what he had initially thought was going to be a comparatively straight forward critique of an artist dealing with the landscape of West Wales, to be somewhat more complex. Alston in his opening paragraph of what was to become *Into Painting: Brendan Stuart Burns*, writes, ‘I could write emphatically of an abstraction that appeared in essence to be based in a drawing from nature – extraction as much as abstraction – with the feeling that a clear experience of nature underpinned the painterly moves on canvas or board. In compiling this book, however, the easy stratagems for writing about the work have receded; descriptive surface has given way to depth.’ I had always felt a deep connection with all my past works, from the religious and political to New York and West Wales, I believed they were and are all searching for the same end. John Hoyland at the Slade had said, the artist only ever paints one idea, something at the time I was perhaps unable to take on board, but as one journeys through twenty-five years of painting, it becomes far more obvious that this was indeed a truly perceptive statement.

A move forward from the *Taste of Sight Series*, continuing my attempt to grapple with the synaesthetic within painting and experience began to witness a new body of paintings inspired by the fading light on the beach; dusk. This series of *Nocturnes*, which were to be titled *Liquid Light Series*,

kindled a new relationship with the composer Erik Satie, and in particular his series of *Gnossiennes*. It was also to be a time where the photograph and its process were to be re-positioned within my working practice. 'Liquid Light' as theme referenced strongly both painting process and the photographic process.



'Liquid Light series. Nocturne, October 29th.' 2007.

The painting ground began to evidence a transition from the pure white to silver grey, the silver as mid tone but also referencing the gelatin silver process of traditional photographic processes. I was spiritually connected with the stones and rocks on the beach, as they absorbed light throughout the day, only to release this colour, light and energy back into the night sky. Consequently colour and palette shifted within the series, new energies and relationships were established, and a significant tonal frequency were all significant in developing a far greater ethereal quality of light and space.

Into Painting: Brendan Stuart Burns by David Alston, concluded with a small selection of paintings from the *Liquid Light Series*, and Alston writes,

For Burns the beach is now his own form of endlessly mutating Zen garden (if that is not a contradiction in terms given the timeless fixity of the Japanese rock garden). Or rather, is it that what he comes to fix in the paintings, now

puts one in mind in their stillness and rhythms, their forms and their spaces, of the landscape, implied seas, metaphorical clouds, distortions of scale, and the meditative inner life, understanding and analogies to experience which you might derive in contemplating the famous 15 rocks in the raked white gravel of Ryoan-ji?

It is always extremely difficult as the artist to face the writer's interpretation of what is in essence a visual language, one that often plays upon and encourages ambiguity, one that discourages singular experience. These paintings existed well before Alston encircled them with word, but all too quickly meaning and intention began to merge, and it became somewhat troublesome to disentangle and substantiate functional processes within creativity. The monograph became a mirror in which to substantiate and evaluate my work's trajectory to date, but in many ways it suppressed potential output. Two significant exhibitions at this time in 2008 contributed towards this period of reflection and critical self-awareness, firstly *Masterpieces of Modern British Art*, a group exhibition showcasing the Derek Williams Trust collection held at the National Museum Wales, which was shown at Osbourne Samuel Gallery, London. Here *As well as being...* was exhibited alongside Howard Hodgkin, Frank Auerbach, Sean Scully, Bridget Riley and Gillian Ayres, all artists that I have a deep affinity with. During the same month, Mel Gooding had also included a series of paintings from both the *Taste of Sight Series* and the *Liquid Light Series* in a show *Refractions and Shadows* at the Lemon Street Gallery, Truro. I was in good company here with Gretchen Albrecht,

Andrew Bick, Sian Bowen, Susan Derges, Iraidia Icaza and James Gooding; it had the umbrella title *Seven Artists – Critic's Choice 2008*. Gooding writes in his catalogue essay dated 2008:

Something had haunted me for many years, and I thought here was an opportunity to begin to answer to the vague presence of an idea, to an undeveloped sense that there was an aspect to certain kinds of work to which I responded with deep feeling but without words. Every so often I have found myself saying, usually to artists in their studios; 'Something is happening, and I know what it is, but I can't say what it is...

If Mel Gooding struggles to articulate meaning into the process of experiencing art, then what hope have I in trying to reflect and critically evaluate my own work and its development to date? Certainly this juncture in my career seemed appropriate enough to undertake formal research and writing, however it was the invitation to become the first Artist in Residence at the newly built Orielly Parc – Landscape Gallery, St Davids, Pembrokeshire, that presented a more immediate opportunity. I would have a purpose built artist studio, access to the National Museum Wales's collection, a period of twelve months to create a new body of work in response to a new location and beach in the Pembrokeshire National Park; all of which would culminate in a one man exhibition presenting the new works made during the residency, alongside my personal selection of key works that have inspired and influenced me from the Museum's collection.

Notes

- 1 Maya Pines, *The Memory of Smell* (Washington: Howard Hughes Medical Institute, 2008).
- 2 Wassily Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* trans. M.T.H Sadler (New York and London: Dover and Constable, 1977), p. 25.
- 3 William Feaver, *Frank Auerbach: Recent Paintings and Drawings, January – February 1987* (London: Marlborough Fine Art, 1987), p. 5.
- 4 David Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon: 1962-1979* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1980), p. 23.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 58.
- 6 Terry Setch (artist, b.1936) was a Senior Lecturer in Painting at UWIC from 1964 to 2001.
- 7 *Once upon a time there was Oil III*. 1981. Tate collection.
- 8 Leon Golub (artist, 1922 – 2004); Terry Atkinson, (artist, lecturer. b.1939) *State of Art*. Institute of Contemporary Art, London. 1986.
- 9 King William of England. Prince of Orange. 1650 – 1702.
- 10 Richard Cox. South East Wales Arts Association. 1992.
- 11 Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p. 56.
- 12 *Ysbryd-Spirit-Painting-Wales*, co-founded by Brendan Stuart Burns and John Uzzell Edwards in 1998.
- 13 Ceri Richards' sketchbook. *Clair de Lune* 1961. NMW: A13714.
- 14 *Orange Sherbet Kisses*. Horizon 1994, BBC TV
- 15 John Harrison, *Synaesthesia: The Strangest Thing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- 16 Kerry Brougher and Olivia Mattis, *Visual Music, Synaesthesia in Art and Music since 1900* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005).
- 17 David Alston was formerly Keeper of the National Museum Wales and the Lowry, Salford, and is currently Arts Director at the Arts Council of Wales; Mel Gooding is an art writer and critic.

Chapter 2

Artist in Residence, Oriel y Parc, St Davids 2008 – 2009



Oriel y Parc, Landscape Gallery, St Davids, 2009.

The central thrust of this research opportunity was the appointment to become the first Artist in Residence at *Oriel y Parc, Landscape Gallery, St Davids*, an unique partnership between the Pembrokeshire Coast National

Park Authority and Amgueddfa Cymru – National Museum Wales. I had been selected by Sally Moss, Commissioning Officer, Amgueddfa Cymru National Museum Wales. Her decision was guided by my established professional profile, having worked in response to the Pembrokeshire coastal landscape and seascape for the past 15 years, as well as having works within the National Museum Wales's permanent collection. It was an appropriate time to reflect, question and evaluate my work to date, alongside this unique opportunity to move studio and engage with a new stretch of Pembrokeshire coastline. The residency offered the opportunity to produce a new body of work, which would be exhibited at *Oriel y Parc, Landscape Gallery*, (November 2009 – March 2010) alongside a personally curated selection of paintings, drawings, prints, sculptures and geological specimens from the National Museum Wales's collection. It was a time to critically evaluate my processes of work and my pivotal influences within a journal.

This was the first time I would be able to work in a studio in Pembrokeshire, less than one kilometre from the tide. For the past fifteen years working in my Cardiff studio, one hundred kilometres from Pembrokeshire, had played a key role in the relationship between figuration and abstraction. The process of experiencing the shoreline had maintained an intense correspondence with drawing and photography, one that would intensify during this period of work at *Oriel y Parc*.

I was both excited and fearful that moving into a new studio, being accessible and 'on view', as well as responding to a new beach, Caerfai, and the area of St Davids, would suffocate and hinder the development of an honest working relationship, and consequently produce imagery which would be forced and sterile. Complete immersion within the immediate landscape was the only genuine way to begin work. A period of intense writing in my journal, drawing, observation and enquiry, using sketchbooks, photography and rubbings would begin to establish as sincere a relationship as possible with Caerfai.



Brendan Burns. Studio. Oriel y Parc, Landscape Gallery, St Davids, 2009.

The new studio was indeed inspiring in itself, being able to accommodate a large number of large-scale works, good lighting and ample space to challenge existing processes of work. However, two large fold back glazed doors and a main door also with glass enabled clear visible access to the studio from visitors, passersby and *Oriel y Parc* staff. I have always been a very private painter, uncomfortable even with immediate family members breaking my concentration, so the last thing I needed was to become conscious of my own studio working habits and rituals. I therefore insisted that when I was working, muslin sheets were to be used in order to ensure at least some level of privacy, bearing in mind the CCTV in the corner of the studio. This stipulation was not understood by the centre manager, “You don’t mind if the public come in and watch you paint?” she said. I insisted, however, that all staff should come to the studio so that I could present my work and break down any preconceived ideas of the role of an artist in residence. I believe strongly that my work is accessible, and felt a responsibility to both staff and the public visitor to share as best I could the experience of my work. My responsibilities as artist in residence were to produce a new body of work inspired by a new location in Pembrokeshire; to deliver three formal presentations to the public throughout the residency; to open the studio for one hour per week to potential visitors; and to stage an exhibition and selection of work within the gallery at *Oriel y Parc*. However, some at the centre felt that an artist in residence’s role was to facilitate and demonstrate in workshop fashion the craft of painting. It was a difficult period of reversing such perceptions, one that management of the centre and Pembrokeshire National Parks continued to struggle with.

The large glazed doors looking out to the landscape rapidly filled with a series of tracing paper rubbings of rocks and surfaces I had taken on

numerous walks and journeys exploring and experiencing the immediate landscape; it had become a massive light-box, a presentation of fossil-like imagery. Photographs of the processes at work within the land, weather, light and its geology, rapidly covered studio walls, tabletops and any available floor space. This was the only way to set up a relationship that was critical in order to begin painting. It was two months before I was confident enough to start painting. It took time to feel comfortable in this new space, to unshackle the sensations of some social experiment or low budget fly on the wall television programme. Sally Moss (commissioning curator National Museum Wales), had always maintained I was not to become 'the bear in the zoo', but this was the first time since leaving the Slade School of Art that I lost control of my immediate working environment, especially when it came to leaving behind unfinished and problematic works in the studio that could be viewed by either staff or visitors. For all they knew, the work was either finished or going to plan as I had intended. I had never considered how it would feel to leave myself open like this. There are many journal entries, which state my vulnerability as well as my apparent upbeat confidence during the residency.

Journal 1 Page 34, 24th November 2008.
Having spent two days in residence, I'm beginning. Only beginning to feel comfortable with the studio.

Journal 1 Page 54, 9th December 2008.
Considering this is a new studio and awareness of people and vulnerability of public access, I am pleased with the potential quality and depth of recent drawings.

Journal 1 Page 58, Christmas 2008.
Having moved materials from my Cardiff studio to St Davids, I really wasn't prepared to feel so confused and separated from my studio home. I can't really describe how distant /

threatened and a sense of homelessness I feel. A short Christmas break has compounded the physical distance now involved.

Journal 1 Page 63, studio 8.1.09.

Very cold morning, left 7:15am to be on site for 10am. Upon arriving, confronted instantly by two people I spoke to last week at length. I wasn't even able to get to the toilet before being bombarded with questions. They followed me into the studio immediately giving me little chance to even turn the lights on. Can't believe I'm expected following a 2 1/2 hour drive to jump straight into 'public relations' for either art or Oriol y Parc. I found this to be extremely pressurizing and uncomfortable. Do I need this?

I continued to bury myself in drawing. Physical layers have continued to play an integral role within process and working methods and a series of larger scale studio drawings ensued.

Journal 1 Page 38, 24th November 2008.

Spent a full pm session working through 6 x A1 layered drawings. Consciously played with 'absence' and layered cut-outs. Remembered - obviously the Matisse Retrospective at MOMA in '93. Also, conscious of Fontana. There's something quietly 'aggressive' in the act of piercing / cutting. It was so good to turn around and see all the pieces left over, the off cuts, scattered across the studio floor - abandoned. Their sense of displacement / abandonment / quiet / randomness was particularly interesting.

Journal 1 Page 51, 3rd & 4th December 2008.

Two full days in residence. Icy cold and frosty journey. Again, thoughts on journey led to 'Absence', a deep sense that all was not as it should be in West Wales. Particularly heightened with staying with Betty (my mother-in-law), especially without Ruth and Caitlin. Everything seems particularly vulnerable at present. This deep sense of loss / absence / stillness and quietness of contemplation will drive my current work no doubt.

It was inevitable that my father-in-law's recent death, as well as my own father's diagnosis of lung cancer was profoundly going to steer the emotional consciousness of my work at *Oriel y Parc*. A deep sense of 'unknowing' and mortality was ever present.

This period of intense scrutiny through drawing, walking and photographing had eventually fostered the need to paint. But paint what? The red sandstone at Caerfai? Absence? Displacement? The sensations of an ache? Mortality? I began to scrutinise my upbringing and childhood memories of loss; all in all I was to engage with my own emotional identity as much as the new beach at Caerfai and new studio.

Journal 1 Page 56, 9th December 2008.

A sense of being separated, separated from one's culture / upbringing - not simply Ireland but also my own Welsh / Cardiff home, no real sense of belonging.

Painting had always preceded drawing; painting on a small scale had always preceded large paintings. But this studio offered such opportunity to work on a number of large-scale canvases simultaneously, to break the routine. I was indeed desperate to stretch up as many large paintings as possible. Scale and format have always been historically very important from early college days, for example Willem De Kooning's *Untitled IV* (1978, oil on canvas, 178 x 203 cms), and *Easter Monday* (1956, oil and newspaper transfer on canvas, 244 x 188 cms), were key formats that were to directly assimilate in both the Deposition and New York series. However, it was Cy Twombly's show at Tate Modern in 2008 that was to hold the key for a series of canvases at *Oriel y Parc*, the *Untitled (Bolsena)* series (1969), all at 200 x 240 cms, and the *Ferragosto* series (1961) at 165 x 200 cms each.

Journal 1 Page 59, 31st December 2008.
Begin to stretch two canvases 200 x 240 cms,
format taken directly from Twombly London Tate
show. When stretched connected instantly with
format. What is this connection and why is it
so comfortable?

Within many early Druidston paintings on board in particular, it was evident that a loose and perhaps tentative relationship with the golden section was at play. This was unconscious and unquestioned at the time, but it allowed for many diptych and triptych possibilities. It was clear that a geometrical relationship where form or mark abutted or broke the edge of the painting, naturally picked up within another. The compositional decision making of the eye and brain whilst taking the photograph naturally informed this process. By simply looking through a viewfinder one is forced to focus on the rectangular frame, but cannot escape what has been excluded from shot, and it is this sense of absence, hidden or neglected that is most intense in my paintings especially.

The relationship between the photograph and processes at work in the studio, have continued to question my whole process of seeing, experiencing and responding.

Journal 1 Page 33, 24th November 2009.
Is it the experience on the beach, the
photographic process that ultimately is the
catalyst for imagery being produced in the
studio? Or, is the work and its vision allowing
me to see the affinity / composition within
existing photographs? In other words, does the
work come first or the photograph?

How can I truly answer this? It is surely the co-existence of sustained processes of experience and visual response, which shepherds the act of drawing and painting in the modernist space of the studio. The analogy

might be thus - separate, but necessary boulders thrown into a river in order to build a crossing. The camera as tool to aid perception and the process of seeing is just this. With the age of digital especially, the process of printing my photographs has all become redundant, except for a small selection which act as visual prompts or indeed props in the studio, which aid creation of, or act as physical record of a journey.

The relationship with the camera and photography would intensify during the residency, not only as aid in experiencing and trying to comprehend location, but also during the latter months where projection itself of both drawings, paintings and photographs onto large scale canvases would initiate a series of works, which would emerge as significant within both the residency and my forthcoming exhibition at *Oriel y Parc* which was to be titled *Influere*.

During the early stages of my residency, the beaches and shoreline were particularly devoid of people, walkers and visitors, as well as locals. I was always guaranteed time alone, time to draw as well as photograph, something I have continued to embrace over the years. I value time to connect with the processes at work on the shoreline, time to sense place

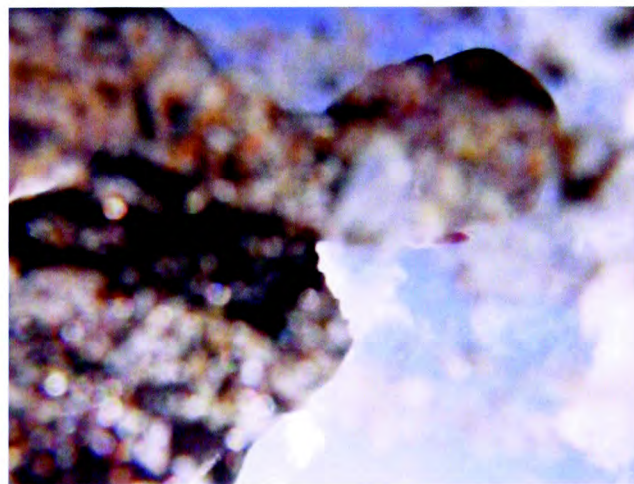


Artist's photograph. St Davids. 2009.

and mortality side by side, to evidence time itself, to observe deep time in geological terms, set against shallow time of the immediate, the now, the tidal. The influx of visitors and holidaymakers to the area during the months of June to August

forced me onto the coastal paths and cliffs in order to re-establish solitude and a trustworthy correspondence. The micro within the photographs in particular became all the more compelling. Was this evidence of a withdrawal both, physically and psychologically? Certainly it was the first time I had worked so intensely in the presence of such a monumental sky, and dramatic cliff edge, that of Caerfai Bay to St Nons and then on to Porthclais. This inevitably forced me to look ‘within’ even more closely. Lichen growth and the microscopic make up of the rocks were to captivate my focus and consequently studio output. I began to trace out the projected photographs of such detail onto large primed canvases. Initial concerns using the literal transfer of the photograph in this way were superseded with confidence as well as reassurance. Since the Northern Ireland works of 1987, the photograph had always played an integral role within my process of work, but had struggled to find a true position, independent yet simultaneously connected. Here for the first time a balance was established, the photographic image as catalyst for a painting independent of the photograph.

My journals from the residency reveal a massive output of works, which were driven knowing full well of the impending and threatening conclusion of my time in this studio. This



Artist's self-portrait photograph. St Davids, 2010.

pressure to produce potential change in my work could only have been challenged with intensity of output and experience, alongside meaningful

and revealing dialogue in these journals and sketchbooks. These journals have highlighted a series of recurrent themes and questions, which will be further discussed within future chapters. I have always found difficulty in maintaining diary and personal thoughts about my work and its development. I have in the past been able to write in sketchbooks loosely about potential ideas and future aspirations for the work, but never before in this prolonged and self-critical way. It is perhaps telling that I now celebrate and revere these journals as much as 'sculptural objects' in themselves, as well as the detailed writings and diary accounts. Perhaps this again helps to focus my understandings of my creativity and compulsion to make, to leave behind, to be in touch, in contact with others and to communicate or share. Something, which can all too easily abandoned within the commercial underpinnings of the contemporary art world.

Chapter 3

The relationship between the abstract and the figurative

Much has been written about my work, by writers, artists and critics, all of which constantly reference, 'the fine line which separates figuration from abstraction.'¹ So much so, that I have used this proposition in my own statement. But, do I understand its validity? What are the figurative and abstract elements in my work? Have they always been there? And did this reshape itself during my residency at Oriol y Parc, Landscape Gallery, St Davids?

Hodgkin is quoted as saying, 'the closer one gets to being literal, the more it all disappears'.² The point at which a painting becomes literal in my work, as I see it, it also becomes, figurative. It is this figurative component which I have struggled with throughout my career, primarily because I have taken the meaning of figurative to present a single moment in time within the painting. A static given, or still image, which, denies the viewer any sense of connection, through a more primeval human response, to paint. I would argue that my first encounter with the Frank Auerbach exhibition at the Marlborough Gallery in 1981 was exactly this. And ever since, I have been trying to communicate a sense of loss and absence, balancing the relationship between paint, process and subject. Are we then to conclude that it is 'process' that is the abstract here? My work is not abstract in the formal sense, but it has enjoyed the relationship with ambiguity; it is concerned with inner emotion and the sensed experience of the viewer; it is about the contemplative and experience of self-reflection.



Frank Auerbach. Head of Julia. 1980

The most recent works produced during the residency at Oriol y Parc, ironically, were to experiment with the most literal of all starting points in my working practice; the projection of photographic imagery onto large-scale canvases, which were then traced and painted. The following creative decisions, within the processes of painting, were to experiment and play with just how much information was required in order to transcend the literal transition of an image from photograph to painting. The decision to use one photographic image over another is in itself significant, for photographs which present the known, understood or perceived, are excluded. The representation of space and scale within the photograph dictates the ambiguous, and it is this level of ambiguity that is crucial in order to allow the viewer the opportunity to enter the painting's experience primarily through the sensed and emotive. Surface, colour, rhythm, balance, space and scale are integral communicators here.

The physical distance between Cardiff and Pembrokeshire has undoubtedly influenced and contributed to the abstract figurative relationship. My studio has always existed in Cardiff, I have always found it impossible and unnecessary to make finished paintings on location, like Sutherland, 'It was in this country that I began to learn

painting. It seemed impossible here for me to sit down and make finished paintings from nature, indeed, there were no 'ready made' subjects to paint.³ It was this distance that enabled paintings to incorporate a conglomerate space which encouraged the inclusion of weather, light, surface and above all, a sense of journey. Therefore having a studio at Oriol y Parc less than a mile from the coast would inevitably transform both process and outcome. Further influential circumstances to the residency included: being available to the public at set times throughout, studio privacy and accessibility, as well as the physical journey often on a day to day basis, back and forth from Cardiff to St Davids. The car journey itself rapidly became a special time for contemplation and preparation, as well as questioning and interrogation, in many ways, a pilgrimage.

These paintings from the mid 1980s lay bare early, politicized interests, as well as substantiate the struggle between process and subject matter. But that is the nature of the space in each painting, which seems characteristically to have remained true when juxtaposed with both *Harmony* and *Crackle*, two large-scale canvases produced in 2009, whilst in residence. The position of the potential viewer in each painting is clear, yet the picture plane moves each time. And it is this positioning and consequently relationship of the viewer to the picture plane which has been consistent throughout my practice.



Base of Crucifixion. Oil on canvas, 1983.



The Flaying of Marsyas. 1575-76. Titian.

Titian's *Flaying of Marsyas* and De Kooning's *Untitled IV* were pivotal influences in my early career. It was the subject matter and mythological narrative of Marsyas that connected with my work initially, but it was its opulent painterly surface detail, that was to truly transfix my

creative consideration. I was mesmerized by surface and process within its making. *Untitled IV* echoed this detail but magnified in scale. Here, gesture and rhythm, movement and mark-making were played with landscape, space and glimpse. Glimpse being the key word. All my



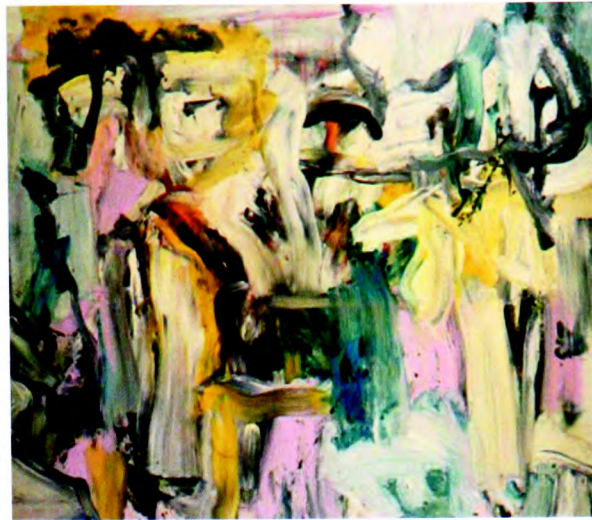
Embrace. Oil on paper. 1985.



Deposition. Oil on canvas. 1985.

work has endeavored to present the clarity, yet simultaneous abstraction of a peripheral experience: the afterimage burnt onto the retina, something which is both precise yet ambiguous, fixed yet transitory, permanent yet ephemeral.

These two works are central in direction and guidance, to presenting this long-standing relationship with the role of space, picture plane and the sculptural presence itself of the canvas, within my work. As W.J.T Mitchell states; 'It is both a represented and



Untitled IV, 1978. Willem De Kooning.

presented space, both a signifier and a signified, both a frame and what a frame contains, both a real place and its simulcrum, both a package and the commodity inside the package'.⁴ The integrity of the picture plane is supreme for Titian, to embrace the 'presence of flatness under the most vivid illusion of three-dimensional space'. 'Whereas one tends to see what is in an old master before seeing it as a picture, one sees a modernist painting as a picture first, this is of course, the best way of seeing any



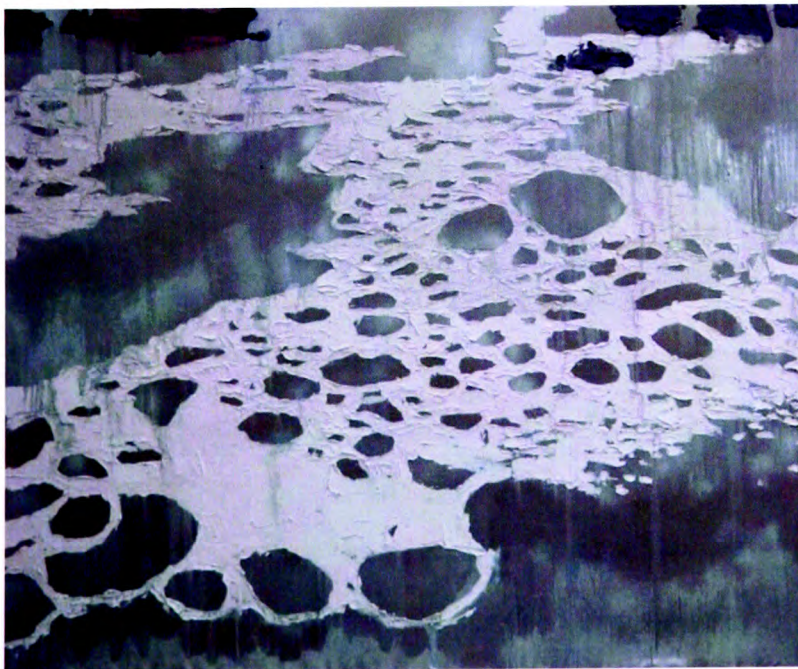
Arrest. Oil on canvas. 1988.

kind of picture, old master or modernist.'⁵ Here then, the balance between the figurative and abstract manifests itself within the balance between acceptance and denial of the picture plane.



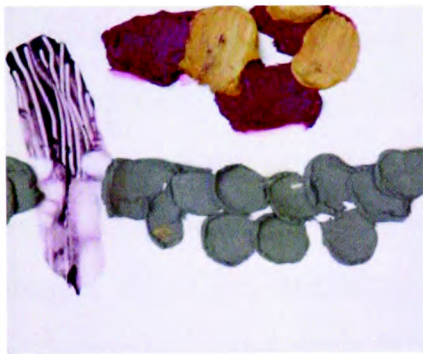
'Shadow into Parent Light series.' Harmony. Oil on linen. 2009.

Harmony and *Crackle*, are without doubt my most figurative works since the paintings of the Slade School of Art in 1987. Here both lichen, and spindrift were taken literally as starting points for paintings.



'Shadow into Parent Light series.' Crackle. Oil on linen. 2009.

Here is the principal development of my work within this twelve-month period, the confidence and need to project directly from the photograph onto canvas. These two paintings are similar, yet different, and present two contrasting aspects of space, which goes some way to epitomize the suggested balance between the figurative and abstract in my work. *Harmony* presents a space, which denies a picture plane; this painting is all about what happens on its surface. *Crackle*, by complete contrast, presents us with a traditional frame of reference, the implication of perspective.



Shimmer. 2009. Oil on board.



Bliss. 2009. Oil on board.

The smaller paintings on board present similar suggested aspects of space, however the smaller scale of these paintings, sanction a completely different response. They allow for the materiality and physicality of paint itself to take on a more significant role. The first response to these paintings is that, a physical one, the paint itself and process of its making is primary. As Sutherland says, ‘the first reaction, of course, is through the eye. Perhaps one goes for a walk. There is everything around one; but one reacts to certain things only, as if in response to some internal need of the nerves.’⁶ Space is pivotal, the positioning and relationships between forms and the white light space of the board, all contribute in establishing

the sensed experience of the contemplative, and natural energies of inherent nature.

Processes in art making, and drawing from the seen, as well as the experienced, have continued to hold the foundation within the forces at play when I make art. Only once did I make work solely referencing formal concerns such as surface, form, material, weight or indeed process. A large-scale sculpture, created on my Foundation Art course in 1981. This was a simple concept to present the process of decay, taking disused railway sleepers and presenting them from dust and splinters in linear time through to its original size. The intense smell of bitumen and creosote from this piece magnified its drama. Already in this single work, potentially we see my repetition of interest, subject matter and working process to date, something upon which I will need to expand later. Space and process therefore, are significant elements, which whilst they can also be deemed as stand alone formal components, hold common ground, experience and signature, throughout my work and its development. But it is dangerous to try and account for process too finitely; as Sutherland says, 'I cannot get much closer than that as to the process. Otherwise one risks that danger to which I have referred before of rationalizing the workings of the mind, which are often irrational and certainly mysterious.'⁷

Drawing has consistently played a significant role in my practice. The physicality of Auerbach's series of *J.Y.M. Seated* studies, which I discovered in 1981, were to epitomize my future relationship in the process of drawing. These works connected with an inner sensibility, they endorse the balance between the figurative and abstract, they discover,

they refine and concentrate, they experiment, they ask questions and they present an unknown or absence.



Frank Auerbach. Head of J.Y.M. II, 1980



Frank Auerbach. Head of J.Y.M. III, 1980

I will look again at drawing in greater depth, but here consider that my appetite for drawing and compulsion to mark-make in response to the experienced, sensed and seen world has anchored my work with intelligence, knowledge and consciousness. But in doing so drawing has welcomed the opportunity to present the known alongside the unknown, to value doubt itself. As John Berger states, there are three distinct ways in which drawing can function, to study and question the visible, to communicate ideas, and those produced from memory.⁸ All three are actively pursued in my practice. Drawing has always preceded painting, drawing from the real, actual and physical, whether it was personal possessions remaining after death, butcher shop scenes, the police and riots on picket lines, the light and space of New York, or Druidston beach.



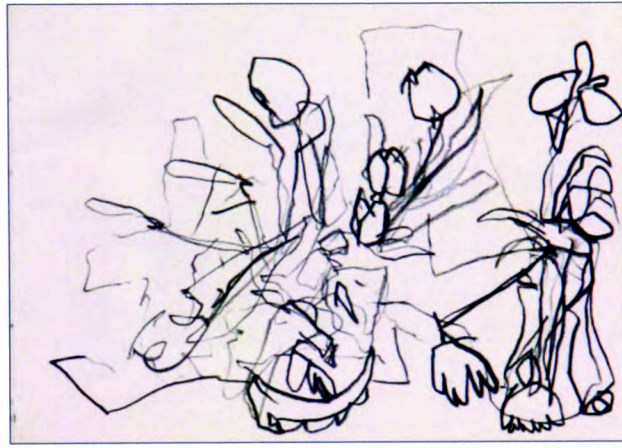
Lifedrawing sketchbook. 1985.



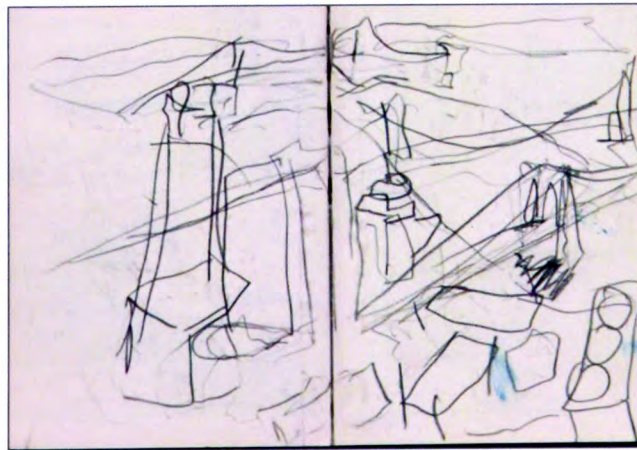
Florentine Sketchbooks. 1987.



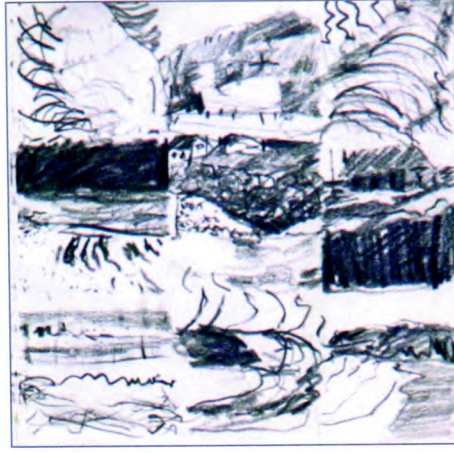
Florentine Sketchbook. 1987.



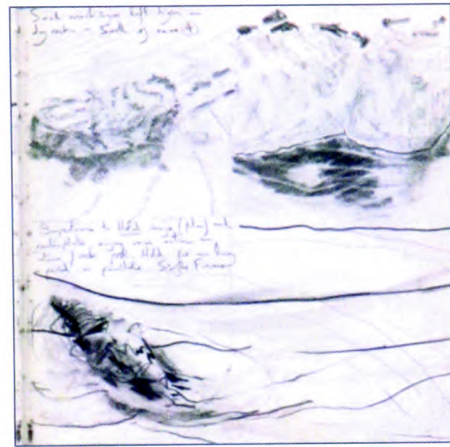
Grandmothers grave. Sketchbook. 1990.



New York Sketchbook. 1993.



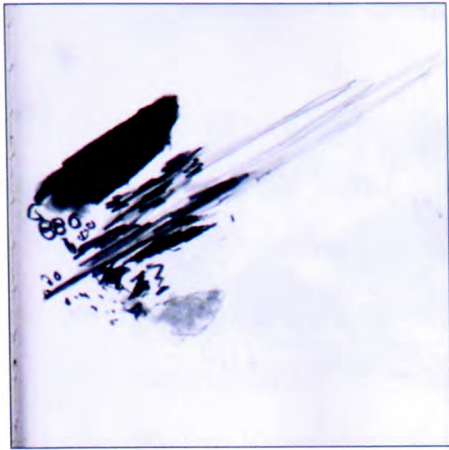
Driudston Sketchbook. 1996.



Driudston Sketchbook. 1999.



Driudston Sketchbook. 2004.



Driudston Sketchbook. 2009.



Driudston Sketchbook. 2009.



Driudston Sketchbook. 2009.



Driudston Sketchbook. 2009.



Driudston Sketchbook. 2009.



Driudston Sketchbook. 2009.

I draw to learn, to get closer to the relationship with myself; it is both autobiographical, and the outer subject matter. But I am increasingly aware that the true subject matter, common throughout, is that of Absence. Even the first drawing illustrated above, from the life-room in 1985, openly experiments with what is withheld, what is missing. Only now, re-experiencing these sketchbooks from the past twenty-five years, am I consciously acknowledging this lineage.

The figure itself has been absent from my work since 1990. As for Blake, the figure represents limitations of the rational mind, “He who sees the infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the ratio only sees himself.” Recent paintings re-present as opposed to represent groupings of stones or rocks, lichen and seaweed. They stand alone. As Sutherland says, ‘People ask about my “standing forms’. What do they mean? They do not of course mean anything to me, they are monuments and presences.’⁹ My work endeavors to embody a complex relationship between edge, as in coast, personal identity and process in making, therefore the balance between the figurative and the abstract is an appropriate language. But does this find resonance in previous subject matter, such as New York, the Assumption and the politics of Northern Ireland? Deep down all my work from 1981 to the present day, whichever the umbrella theme or subject matter, deals with mortality. ‘Landscape is a medium of exchange between the human and the natural, the self and the other.’¹⁰



'Blur - Blend - Rush'. 1999.

The actual act of titling work, has always presented a considerable dilemma, in contrast to the conscious decision whilst painting to resolve the development and potential tensions within the figurative or abstract space. The

painting has always preceded its title, and on no account have I worked towards title. Titles have always been employed to establish a potential emotional state of approach to the painting, or an intimation of process in its making. *White Light Flicker*, *Blur-Blend-Rush*, *Swish-Back-West*, all suggest process within the creative act of painting as well as the processes at work in nature. The denial of an obvious horizon in all my work has consistently encouraged my titles to avoid place or locality.



'Wane - Wax - West'. 2000.

In this I am in conflict with Hodgkin's titling process. For within the exhibition, *Forty Paintings* at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1985, the works themselves touched a creative raw nerve, yet personally, the titles became a distraction in this truly synaesthetic human response. *Bombay Sunset 1972-73*, *The Moon 1978-80*, *In the Bay of Naples 1980-82*, *Small Henry Moore at the Bottom of the Garden 1975-77*. Why be so literal? Why allow words to get in the way? Jasper Johns is not referring when he says "It has to be what you can't avoid saying, not what you set out to say," to the literary here, but to that core of a work

of art that is its soul. I can go along with more emotive and ambiguous titles such as *Passion* 1980-84, *Counting the Days* 1979-82 and *Jealousy* 1977; these allow us as audience to bring to the encounter with the painting our own personal memory and experience, and avoid the potential autobiographical.



"Taste of Sight series". SM:862172. 2nd July. 2005.

During the last ten years I have used an umbrella theme, which fulfills the function of chapters in my work. *Taste of Sight series*, *Liquid Light series*, and most recently, *Shadow into Parent Light series*. They reference my interest with the condition of synaesthesia as well as the photographic process within traditional photography, and my growing realization that making paintings is, and continues to be, a relationship with my environment, my identity and personal make-up.

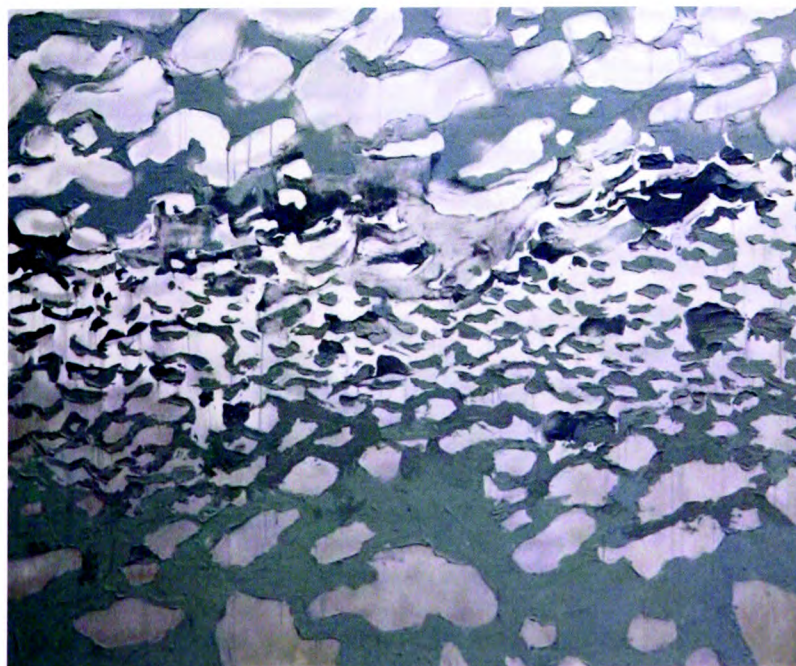
Avoiding the literal has been playful, as many works were titled within the *Taste of Sight series* using specific six figure OS map reference numbers, as well as calendar dates, days, times and tidal reaches. Literal,



'NY. 10010. 1993.'

yet misleading and ambiguous, because specific groupings of stones and rock-pools, are unable to be experienced via a set of coordinates. The New York paintings of the early 1990s used zip or postal codes, again celebrating the absence of a horizon line. The consistent absence of horizon in my work certainly aids the abstract and encourages the ambiguous. It is my interest in the plan view, which encourages again the play between surface and three-dimensional space. I rejoiced in the surface detail and plan or map like reading of Titian's *Flaying of Marsyas*.

The recent body of works produced during the residency at Oriol y Parc, demanded similar, yet far more personal references in their titles. With recent personal loss within the family, as well as impending loss of

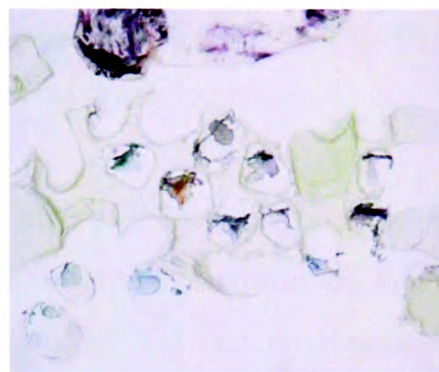


'Shadow into Parent Light series'. Laden. 2009.

my father, coupled with the opportunity to truly scrutinize and question my work through the PhD, it was pertinent and essential for me to connect current and past, deep personal and emotional consciousness in my paintings and their titles. *Grieve, Ache, Whither, Weep* and *Laden* are typical examples. Once again, these titles present an emotional way in to the painting, and continue to evade the literal, the merely landscape, an emotional refraction within the pools.



'Shadow into Parent Light series'. Ache. 2009.



'Shadow into Parent Light series'. Weep. 2009.

It was interesting and perhaps rather humorous, that in sending a series of titles via email to Oriel Myrddin for a recent exhibition titled *Shimmer* in 2010, that Carmarthenshire County Councils internet security settings denied its delivery to the gallery. Titles such as *Grind, Ooze, Seep, Throb, Ache* and *Gush* were deemed to be possibly explicit. Had it taken Carmarthenshire's internet security software to highlight a cardinal theme in my work? That of making-love with the eyes, to landscape and paint.

I would argue that my need to abstract and play with ambiguity has been driven first and foremost by the physical act and process of painting. The empathy and connection I have with landscape and processes in the natural world, has undoubtedly coupled themselves within this creative

activity, an abstract plotting of natural energies, both from within myself as artist and maker, and also in response to landscape processes. It is this bond I felt so deeply with Peter Prendergast, and yet so absent from the work of artists such as Elfyn Lewis. Prendergast lives in his paintings, the struggle with the relationship between paint, landscape and the spiritual connection as human being to the process of creativity and making paintings. Lewis's paintings fail to communicate the presence of both artist, and the emotional charge or connection with either the human soul or landscape. It is difficult to see where Lewis perceives at what point his paintings become either successful or unsuccessful works.

Landscape art is an appropriation of nature, therefore the painting will always be an abstraction. The figurative component within my practice is the process of 'learning' and 'experiencing' of our environment, the rubbings, drawings and photographs that enable an honest relationship between a human being and the natural world. 'But painting, which, though it seems abstract or partially so, is essentially bound to reality, and concerned with seeing reality in a new way. By what process, it may be asked, does a painter concerned in this way arrive at his image? The process of transfusion is so mysterious that it is difficult to be precise, one can, I think, only hint at it'.¹¹ What gets made and consequently exhibited must be something that illuminates and educates my own way of experiencing what it means to be human, as well as to communicate these sensations and experiences to others. It is significant here to end with Graham Sutherland; 'But it may be argued that their mysterious music is actually enhanced by that obscurity. So in painting it might be argued that its very obscurity preserves a magical and mysterious purpose.'¹²

Here are a small selection of journal entries, which highlight the main discussions within the abstract, figurative and the literal during the residency at Oriol y Parc 2009-2010. Most however are referenced only by page numbers which can be accessed within the appendices.

Journal 1

Page 77-80.

18th January 2009.

The figurative / abstract confrontation - conversation continues. What is this balance? Is there a balance, or is it simply trying to discover a new language, which is in fact figurative, but for arguments sake, we call abstract.

Page 95-96.

The absence of detail, texture, and the ambiguity of scale / distance - are all elements to be played with in paint. From early NY paintings, including 2nd year degree, where perspective and space implied the plan view, also 'Miners at the base of a crucifixion, also 'Swish-Back-West', identify with plan like space. Why am I drawn to plan views? Is it my geographical interests? Is it that I grew up in living spaces, which were first storey dwellings? Is it simply a device to abstract? I am constantly having to discuss the abstract within my work, perhaps I need to question the meaning of 'Figurative' also?

Page 97. (See page 201)

Page 195. (See page 223)

Page 237-238. (See page 235)

Page 277-278.

Took an evening walk to St Nons from Caerfai Bay. Reminded how dramatic walking north actually is, from the details seen here to the large vistas in my sketchbooks. This is an interesting point in the residency where I am beginning to realize my work is no longer exclusively fuelled by rock pools. Details such as lichen, cobwebs and bubbles are producing some of the most exciting - yet figurative and literal large paintings. The lichen details here

are fairly flat, others play with depth of field and peripheral vision. I have two linen paintings to complete, they are already drawn out, planning on completing them Monday.

Page 285-286.

3rd August 2009. Oriol y Parc.

As these paintings become even more literal and reliant upon traditional spatial techniques or tricks, I will need to confront the figurative issue once again.

The lichen painting is simply that - lichen! How on earth can it be anything else? So literal, so obvious. What is the difference between this painting and the lichen identification leaflet that I bought at OYP? The painting feels tremendously unresolved, partly because the surface does not communicate lichen, or form as yet. Scale of image therefore scale of the audience is unresolved.

Page 287-290. (See page 248)

Journal 2

Page 53.

Genuinely wept today, so many memories squashed into one minute - overload. How would my work develop with an extended period of work here? Would the figurative finally take hold? What role would photography take? Would I return to Druidston? Even though staying in Haverfordwest, and the tide has been low during the last couple of nights, been unable to visit.

Page 72. (See page 275)

Page 75-76. (See page 276)

Page 87-88. (See page 278)

Page 93. (See page 279)

Notes

- 1 Richard Cox, *Brendan Stuart Burns* (Cwmbran: Llantarnam Grange catalogue, 1992).
- 2 Angkor Wat and Enrique Juncosa, *Writers on Howard Hodgkin* (Dublin and London: Irish Museum of Modern Art and Tate Publishing, 2006), p. 16.
- 3 Martin Hammer, *Graham Sutherland: Landscapes, War Scenes, Portraits 1924-1950* (London: Scala Publishers, 2005), p. 70.
- 4 W. J. T. Mitchell, *Imperial Landscape: Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 5.
- 5 Francis Francina and Charles Harrison, *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (London: Harper and Row, 1982), p. 6.
- 6 Hammer, *Graham Sutherland*, p. 142.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 143.
- 8 John Berger in Jim Savage ed., *Berger on Drawing* (Cork: Occasional Press, 2005), p. 46.
- 9 Hammer, *Graham Sutherland*, p. 143.
- 10 Mitchell, *Imperial Landscape*, p. 5.
- 11 Hammer, *Graham Sutherland*, p. 142.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 143.

Chapter 4

Mortality, absence and the spiritual

At the time of writing in 2010, my father's imminent death had shadowed the past 18 months. A heightened awareness of mortality and deep sense of loss, have also remained with me since my father-in-law's death two years ago. Death in one way or another has continually been a part of my work, whether literally, or symbolically with both a physical and emotional distance experienced through the absence of my father. Travelling back and forth to the hospital in Belfast to visit him recently, has offered time in which to rake up a succession of diverse emotional memories from the past: precious, demanding, difficult and quintessentially embedded within my make-up and identity as an artist, the sense of distance, divide, separation, preoccupation, absence and mortality, have consistently been present throughout my work, irrespective of theme or subject matter.



'Shadow into Parent Light series,' Lull, 2009. (250 x 200 cm) Oil on canvas.

This deep sense of mortality has consistently been present since early schooldays. The crucified Christ's glare was ever present in the classroom, as too was the intoxicating awareness of hell, crucifixion, deposition, Ascension, butcher shop scenes, suicide, petrol bomb attacks, tar and feathering, then full circle returning to the Ascension once more. These were central themes for painting from 1982 until 1992, before moving into the coastline of Druidston and Pembrokeshire from 1993 until the present day. 'Into' Druidston and 'Into' painting. 'Into', being the operative word here. Both Druidston and the west Wales coastline around St Davids, as well as 'painting' itself, have become metaphysical mantras which are cautiously refracting and reflecting personal and emotional concerns.

The issue as to whether an artist only ever explores one central theme of work, raised in a tutorial discussion with the artist John Hoyland back in 1987, fell upon indifferent ears at the time. It is clear to me now, that it is the presence of a spiritual component in my work and its development that may indeed hold the prerequisite for the vindication of such an argument. Within the recent series of paintings, *Shadow into Parent Light*, produced whilst in residence at Oriel y Parc, I consciously for the first time began to cultivate a questioning environment in which to re-evaluate such concerns. These new works are referenced in my relationship with coastline, geology and time, but they also refract these central concerns being discussed here, that of absence, loss and consequently the spiritual.

The synaesthetic experience and response to the processes at work within the tidal-reaches, help define the spiritual within my paintings. ¹

My artist statement here has openly encouraged the audience to seek a number of key 'ways in' to my work. It suggests the need for simplicity of vision, and the potential mixing of the senses. You the viewer should drop your guard as such. 'Painting is...fusing of ideas, fusing of feelings, fusing projected on atmosphere,' Cy Twombly remarked in 2000.² This reference to fusing suggests an embodiment of spirit. It is feasible then that Hoyland was right? However, am I in danger of over theorizing? Donald Kuspit stated in his essay 'Reconsidering the Spiritual in Art', 'the idea that the spiritual has been completely uprooted and destroyed in most contemporary art,' and that 'One no longer experiences art but theorizes it.'³ I am confident however, that as I revisit key works throughout my career to date, I can see that the spiritual roots in numerous guises were consistently maturing.

Journal 1. Page 51.

3rd & 4th December 08.

Again, thoughts led to 'absence', a deep sense that all was not as it should be in West Wales. Everything seems particularly vulnerable at present. This deep sense of loss / absence / stillness and quietness of contemplation will drive my current works no doubt.

Journal 1. Page 56.

9th December 08.

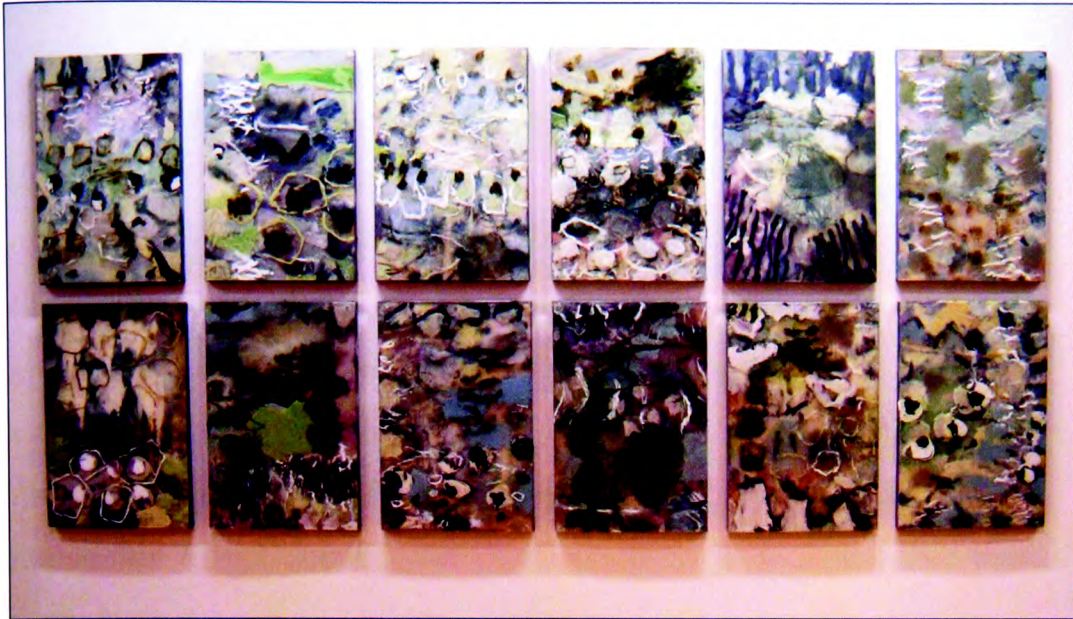
ABSENCE. It's taken until Christmas to realize that these recent paintings are working with absence. Always with a great sense of absence. DISPLACEMENT. A sense of being separated from one's culture / upbringing - not simply Ireland, but also my own Welsh / Cardiff home. No real sense of belonging. Belonging?

On numerous occasions my journals from the Oriel y Parc residency make reference to absence. It is here I see that the presence of the spiritual in my work has in many ways emanated from emotional

implications of personal loss and sense of absence, which concentrates itself within my own personal anxieties of mortality. 'The shadow of life, passing all the time.'⁴ But as I will endeavor to clarify, the act and process of painting itself is also integral. In 2005 I wrote the statement below which remains connected with my most recent output produced whilst in residence.

I believe very strongly that painting is the most primitive and central of responses I can make to the world around me. The 'spiritual' within what I do as a painter is the common denominator within my creativity. It doesn't matter, on reflection, whether the work is concerned with the urban; New York, or the rural; Pembrokeshire. These subject matters are just one of many reasons for making paintings. There has to be another response to these works other than a simple recognition of time and place. They have to be more primeval than that; they have to 'touch' you. It is our genetic make-up, being alive to the world that I wish to communicate. They are about being human and the act of creativity; they are contemplative, they have to be sensed as well as experienced, they are physical paintings. The 'spiritual' response and purpose is central.⁵

It is clear that an early exposure to Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* has influenced my writing, but do such statements truly help, obscure or confuse the creative act of making paintings? My understanding and affinity with Kandinsky's writings were deepened in 2002 when working on the painting *As well as being...* for the exhibition at the National Museum Wales titled *A Propos – Ceri Richards*.⁶



'As well as being...' 2000. Oil and wax on perspex.

Richards's love of music, especially that of Debussy and his series of paintings *La Cathedrale Engloutie*, inspired by the mythological narrative of the sunken cathedral, became my focus.⁷ It was in researching Richards that I was to discover his affinity with Kandinsky's *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, and in particular his assessment of the idea that 'Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings', that was to motivate the way forward for my work.⁸ The bringing together within a synaesthetic experience of nature, music and painting within as Baudelaire wrote, 'a profound oneness' became an even more conscious concern of proposed work for the exhibition.⁹ Taking Debussy's twelve preludes, (book one), as fundamental inspiration for a series of twelve paintings, combined with a series of drawings from the coast, I experimented with a series of physically transparent layers which separated painted responses to each experience of each prelude. The process bounced between outer and inner beauty. I am no

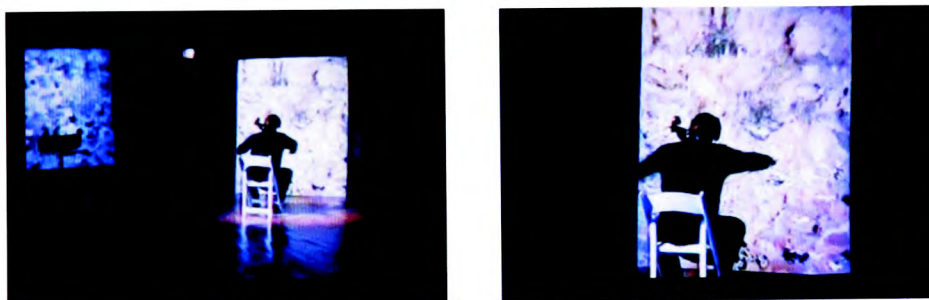
synaesthete, and was not attempting to be one, but felt strongly that there was and is an influential connection between the creative act of painting and truly experiencing the world around me, whether it is music or tidal rhythms and their consequent mark-making upon the shoreline.

Orange Sherbert Kisses a Horizon production for the BBC, screened in 1994 had forcefully argued that Kandinsky himself was a complete synaesthete.¹⁰ Personally I do not read in colour, or experience colour shape and forms as a visual response to music; but as an artist it is impossible to not connect with such research as well as agree that deep down we are all children, and if we 'let' it, we can experience the world around us with complete 'oneness'. I connect with the rhythms in nature as well as rhythms in painting just as I connect with musical rhythm: 'musical sound acts directly on the soul and finds an echo there because, though to varying extents, music is innate in man.'¹¹ Musical rhythm and sound is present with us the moment that the heart beats. We experience sympathy of meaning in all sound; it is the aim of my work to connect visually in a similar way. In other words, it is almost universally accepted that music is essentially an abstract art. 'Sight and sound afford many parallels: why should the one be bound, as art, to portrayal of objective nature, the other freed for absolute creation?'¹²

Painting is an art, and art is not vague production, transitory and isolated, but a power which must be directed to the improvement and refinement of the human soul.¹³

It was without doubt that the above reference to the refinement of the human soul found great resonance in the experience of taking part in John Metcalf's *Different Lights* performance in New York in 2001

which was shown at Angel Orensanz Arts Centre. (*UK with NY Arts Festival*). Audience, musical quartet and fifteen large-scale paintings were choreographed together within a theatrical space. The World Trade Towers were still smoldering when the performances took place and it was an entirely different experience than had been intended. The overriding state of mind for both audience and participants was melancholic and contemplative. These inconceivable events had indisputably cleared the way for art to communicate with sincerity and honesty, without interference from materialistic pressures, a true experience of 'inner life'. 'Spirit begins where materialism ends.'¹⁴ The audience had been returned almost to the turn of the twentieth century when the word 'spiritual' had been secured in religion; spiritual eyes and ears had been reawakened. My paintings were openly given the freedom to express the inner feeling rather than the outer reality.



'Different Lights'. UK with NY. Angel Orensanz Arts Centre, New York, 2001.

The sublime experience of *Different Lights* was a combination of beauty, melancholy, fear and contemplation. As Simon Morley discusses in 'Staring into the contemporary abyss', 'at the sublime's core are experiences of self transcendence that take us away from the forms of understanding provided by a secular, scientific and rationalist world view.'¹⁵ There are many connections here with the works produced for the Unilever series at Tate Modern, Olafur Eliasson - *The Weather Project* (2003), Anish Kapoor - *Marsayas*

(2002), Doris Salcedo – *Shibboleth* (2007), Mirosław Balka - *How it is* (2009), and the experience inevitably begs the question, is it easier for installations to communicate the spiritual as opposed to painting? This questions also whether my individual paintings embody the spiritual, or is it the experience from an exhibition of a number of works? Certainly this provides an explanation for my continued interest and use of either the triptych or series. It is necessary here to return to earlier influences and connections, which have maintained an authority in the development of my work.

The Leg of Mutton Nude by Stanley Spencer, caused some discomfort for the headmistress, who consequently having visited the exhibition herself, insisted that parental consent was necessary if I was to visit the Spencer retrospective at the Royal Academy in 1980. This was without question an alternative crucifixion image in my eyes. The symbolic reference to death, and reverberation of the female pelvis and leg of lamb, coupled with sexual desire, succinctly communicated an undisguised awareness of the transience of love and life. You ‘feel’ this painting quite literally with your eyes; it is sensed internally, it strips all human emotion to its core. Spencer wanted the nude section to show the analogy between the church and the prescribed nature of worship, and human love.



Leg of Mutton Nude. 1937. Stanley Spencer

My upbringing and the exposure to the work of Stanley Spencer, Frank Auerbach and Francis Bacon during formative years as an art

student, engendered the consistent underlying melodic whisper of the spiritual that was to develop in my work.

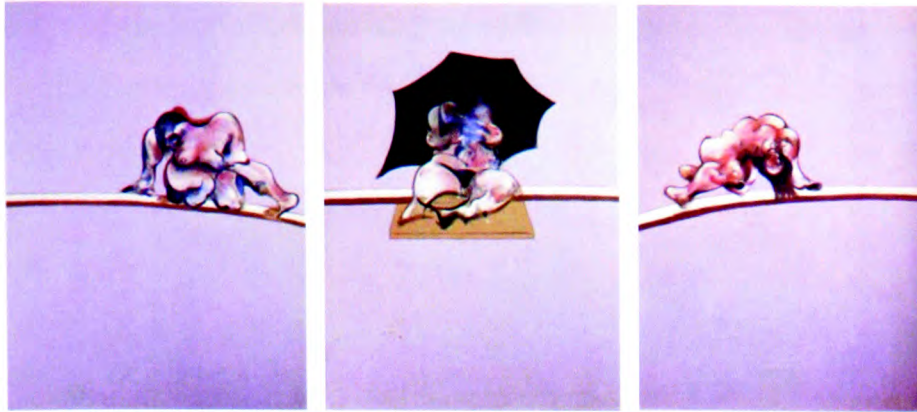


Three Studies for a Crucifixion, 1962. Francis Bacon.

My affinities with the works of Bacon in the early 1980s were primarily through Michel Leiris's book *Francis Bacon*. Because I worked as a part-time butcher throughout my college days, I had become desensitized to the smell of death, but the work of Bacon was a more powerful communicator of the transience of life, even in comparison to the great *Isenheim Altarpiece* by Grunewald. I always felt that his use of space and sense of absence in the triptychs in particular embodied resonances and tensions within my own developing visual language. I found myself almost sculpting with the carcasses, taking the window display as surrogate exhibition space, playing with alternative ways of presenting a potential sale. Was this indeed my installation?



'Pigs head', Oil and wax on canvas, 1983.



Studies of the Human Body. 1970. Francis Bacon.

An exhibition of works from the Oriol y Parc residency shown at Oriol Myrddin in Carmarthen during July / August 2010 presented paintings which had previously not been exhibited. The triptych and its ability to play with narrative and time has consistently made its appearance in my work before, but here there is a noteworthy reference to *Studies of the Human Body* by Bacon.



'Seep', 2009. Oil on canvas.

'Wane', 2009. Oil on canvas.

'Seep II' 2009. Oil on canvas.

The figure has been replaced with three stones, the tensions and dynamics of form, space and sense of absence are paramount. The physicality of the material, oil and wax, is 'of the earth' and land as well as being flesh-like; the intimation is of 'dust to dust'. This is my own personal lament, the muted sob to times lost, the equilibrium between high and low tides. Yet there is also the suspense and

tension of that impending tide, the sense of going into the unknown, the quiet contemplation of self and inescapably, one's own mortality.



'Shimmer'. Solo exhibition at Oriel Myrddin, 2010.



'Gordon's Gloves', 1983.

One's own mortality had been confronted early on when in 1983 I painted *Gordon's gloves*. (Chapter 1. p.10.) A friend and colleague from college with whom I shared a student house, Gordon had committed suicide. His personal belongings were scattered throughout the house, including a pair of his gloves left outside on his bedroom window ledge. The power of the inanimate object left behind after death became a focus of a number of paintings, which culminated in a two-year body of works for my degree show. This small still life embodies the inherent spiritual sentiment, which has so often been re-presented again and again in my work.

‘The artist must have something to say, for mastery over form is not his goal but rather the adapting of form to its inner meaning.’¹⁶ Here it becomes difficult to avoid crossing into the abstract - figurative argument, as indeed they all interconnect. We therefore witness as my work progresses through 30 years a distillation of both the figurative and literal elements which avoid the mere imitation of nature. I want to communicate the essential sentiment, feeling or spirit; in other words, the ‘Stimmung’.¹⁷

The physical act of painting is the common denominator between everything being discussed here. The process of mixing colour and mark-making, leaving one’s own mark or impression behind, is one of the most primeval activities of the human psyche. Chewing colour dust and spitting over a hand held out as template, in order to identify and present the self, an act some 32,000 years old, is essentially what I am engaged in every time I paint. I want to awaken the capacity for experiencing the material and physicality of painting spiritually, to use paint as an emotional springboard. Mark-making and painting is measuring the world against ourselves.



‘Ascension’ Gouache on paper. 1989.

Religious narrative, something, which had been ingrained since school, reemerged itself in early works after I’d left London and the Slade. I began to confront once again my own mortality and sense of being during my grandmother’s illness and subsequent death. An intense relationship

with her grave and cemetery explored through drawing began to initiate a series of large-scale paintings, which questioned the presence of a soul, and consequent rite of passage of death and the afterlife.



'Riot shields' 1987.



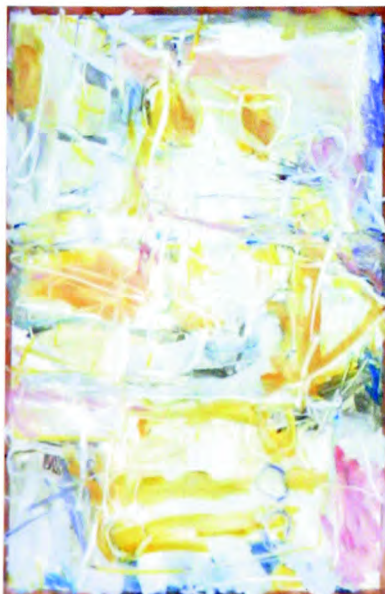
'Untitled' 1996.



'Edging West' 2000.

It is noticeable that a series of 'signature motifs' were introducing themselves as subject matters developed. The coffin shaped form is seen to repeat itself throughout numerous periods of work.

Three independent periods of study in Florence during 1989 strengthened my religious influences and intimate apprehension of mortality. These paintings are questioning my own sense of being. My themes and subject matters evolved, yet looking back, I see that they are inextricably connected. Having personally exhausted religious narrative and rapidly becoming skeptical once again of the literal, the formal and fundamental elements such as space and light became my focal point. New York served as



'Tribeca' 1993.

stimulus for a series of paintings, which experimented with subtle variations of 'white on white', and which sought to combine the process of drawing and painting more closely together. (Chapter 1. p.31.) These works deliberately played with an ambiguous surface picture plane; the ethereal and spiritual contemplation of space and light was imperative. This work undoubtedly opened up a dialogue with my relationship to the west Wales coastline. As the New York paintings began to influence paintings about themselves and became primarily about process and paint, I began to experience the realization that I needed to work directly from place.

I had known Druidston beach for 14 years before I truly registered that this was the place that made complete sense as catalyst to bring together all past subject matters and themes of work. The intensity of one location and period of ongoing scrutiny and experience initially produced fairly obvious paintings which referenced surface texture and colour solely. But steadily during the past 15 years of undeviating saturation within the location, Druidston has ceased to be just a landscape, and transcends itself as a location in which I am able to connect and contemplate the refraction of self.



Druidston. 2009.

David Alston writes in *Into Painting* about this prolonged and intense relationship, and has certainly made both perceptive and pertinent observations. However, this was prior to the work and experience of setting up a studio at Oriel y Parc Landscape Gallery in St Davids. Here was the opportunity to re-examine the correlation between Druidston and my work, by temporarily moving stimulus to Caerfai Bay and the immediate coastline of St Davids.

So, Druidston has provided the painter with a constant source of stimulus but not over time with a literal or scenic landscape prompt. The greater stimulus has been for Burns to extract from this landscape and even more so from the actions of nature's endless motion in time, weather, light and tide, some correlatives so that a painting might be made in an emulation of this more abstract sensing of the effects and forces at play.

Given the turmoil and ferocity of Burns's early works in the mid to late 1980s, wanting to deal as they did with trauma, political, religious and personal, it can appear that Druidston – his haven- in the 1990s offered an anodyne and less engaged means to making paintings but this physical and psychic experience of the beach as wondrous, changing and fragile has allowed the painter to work within both a mindscape and a landscape.

For Burns the beach is now his own form of endlessly mutating Zen garden. Or rather, is it that what he comes to fix in the paintings, now puts one in mind in their stillness and rhythms, their forms and their spaces, of the landscape, implied seas, metaphorical clouds, distortions of scale, and the meditative inner life, understandings and analogies to experiences which you might derive in contemplating the famous 15 rocks in the raked white gravel of Ryoan-ji? ¹⁸



'Liquid Light series, Swishback – SM:862171, January 3rd 2007.

There are three principal areas which are significant to the spiritual here; firstly, the proposition that the paintings need to be sensed to be experienced; secondly, the concept that these paintings are mindscapes; and thirdly that of the contemplative. All reaffirm that these paintings are more than landscapes and go some way to represent what Gerard Manley Hopkins calls 'Inscape', which is what emerges when landscape is penetrated intellectually and emotionally, his vision of something greater than himself, which he saw as God: As in the opening line of *God's Grandeur*, 'the world is charged with the grandeur of God.'¹⁹ It is 'inscape' that I connect with when looking at De Kooning's *Untitled IV* 1978, or Joan Mitchell's *Clearing* 1978 and Turner's *Sun setting over Lake Circa* 1840, to be light itself, to be nature, to be paint.

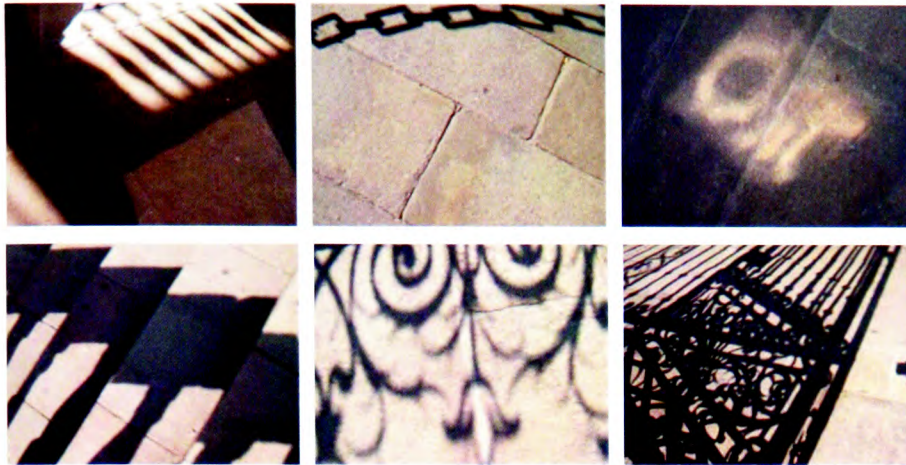
Without doubt, paint and process conspire to hold 'a way in' for all of the above as the relationship with mark-making and painting are integral: 'the materiality of a manmade work of art acquires magical, even animate, spiritual powers.'²⁰ The recent sculptural yielding of oil

and wax layered onto canvas, linen or board, wiped away repeatedly embodies a balance between construction and destruction, echoing the process of tide; artistic emotion, painting music. In many ways the spiritual in my work is related to the way I keep asking questions about paint and its process, the conversation that takes place between artist, the painting and subject, the marks laid down in response to this conversation, inevitably leading to why? Who for? What for?

Re-reading my journals, reminds me that much of my time at Oriol y Parc triggered experiences of pilgrimage. The physical journey itself, twice a week during the year, offered an abundance of time with which to mentally prepare for the day's work either on location or in the studio. Never before had I had nearly two and a half hours to consider in advance my day's potential output and this new experience and time to consider, question and set demands of my work certainly resonated with the spiritual act of prayer and contemplation. Pope Calixtus 11, (1119-24) declared that two pilgrimages to St Davids were equal to one pilgrimage to Rome. Although I no longer actively practice a faith, I experienced a significant connection with St Davids which facilitated a period of contemplation of mortality, absence and the spiritual, a searching for internal truth. My work as an artist is trying to make sense of life, a contemplation of what it is to be human.

A somewhat similar pilgrimage took place in 2005. The artist Iwan Bala and myself were invited to participate in VII Xuntanza Obradoiro Internacional das Plasticas, A Solaina Pilon, Santiago De Compostella, Galicia, Spain, a ten-day artist residency in which to make work, inspired directly from its landscape, history, religion or culture. I went with a very open agenda, and needed to respond

honestly to something I connected with there. It was the walk along the original pilgrimage route



Photographs, St James's route, Santiago de Compostella. 2005.

through the streets of Santiago and its series of shadows which were to initiate a series of seven paintings on ceramic floor tiles titled, *Walking with Eucalyptus and Santiago*. The *Way of St James* has been one of the most important Christian pilgrimages since medieval times and it has existed for over 1000 years. It was considered one of three pilgrimages on which all sins could be forgiven – the others being the Via Francigena to Rome and the pilgrimage to Jerusalem. My painting's did not take the narrative of St James the apostle and his buried bones at the cathedral as literal subject matter, but was a contemplation of the process itself of pilgrimage and journey, both physical and spiritual.



'Walking with Eucalyptus and Santiago'. A Fundacion Casa Museo "A Solaina" de Pilono, Galicia, Spain. 2005.



Working in eucalyptus forest. "A Solaina" de Pilonó, Galicia, Spain. 2005.

My period of work and residency at Oriol y Parc, Landscape Gallery, St Davids was a quintessential platform and arena in which to re-examine and appraise my work to date, it was also an opportunity to connect, question and scrutinize the production of new works in response to both an unfamiliar area of coastline, as well as a new studio for the first time actually located in Pembrokeshire itself.

Below are a small number of entries from my Journals, (Appendices iii & iv). I have highlighted those, which record my conversations with either the spiritual or the production of new work.

Journal 1. Page 52.

4th December 08. Studio

Trying to understand why I'm drawn to the land? Is it because it's more important than me? It's a relationship with the future and past, mortality - spirit. In-awe, in wonderment, humbled. This is indeed a deep relationship.

Journal 1. Page 104.

Studio. 17th February 2009.

Visited Lyn's (my father-in-law) grave on the way to the studio this morning. Focused the mind and re-affirmed the fragility and the temporary. The tenderness of being alive and

the transience of life are key to these new works, but all the time hiding behind the stones!

Journal 1. Page 125. 3.3.2009

The Irish nationality / sense of belonging, being taken away. Roots and upbringing? Perhaps I'm drawn to images such as these obviously for the spiritual transience and timeless. Soul like - been exploring the presence of the soul and spiritual since the 'Ascension' series in the late 1980's. Are these images / paintings the same after all these years?

I wanted the new work to embrace a simplicity of vision and the 'treeness of a tree'.²¹ Or more appropriately, the 'stoneness of a stone'. To confront the issues being discussed in this chapter of loss, absence, mortality and the spiritual by using colour and mark, it is possible to capture every natural impression in the simplest way, freshly and immediately. I am perhaps more confused than ever as to whether both the new work and works produced during the past 30 years have consistently been referencing loss, absence, mortality and the spiritual. It is often perilous writing critically about one's own art, which essentially is of another language, that of the visual. There are dangers in over romanticizing the literary, and conveniently making false connections in order to justify the creative act. I must be careful that words do not try too hard, to formulate an answer for a spectator; one can be too quick and ready to look for meaning, often searching for an immediate connection to obvious, literal and static figurative references. I want to encourage the viewer, and myself as maker, to go beyond the initial aesthetic connection, to see and experience a more profound, complete and human encounter with the painting. These paintings balance beauty and melancholy; their purpose is to make love with one's eyes to both painting and landscape.



'Shadow into Parent Light series' Ooze 2009

It is important here then to bring together the central issues of this chapter. It becomes clear that the process of painting and paint itself are integral to my practice. As previously stated, it's one of the most honest and connected of human responses to the world around me. But underpinning this is a series of complex and sometimes anxious personal concerns. My overriding apprehension of mortality surfaces in my work again and again; the impending loss of my father has undoubtedly raised questions about my identity, the absence of place, Ireland, what could have been had my parents remained together; being Irish. There is the absence of a father figure throughout, the distance, not only physical between us, but his inability to value my identity as an artist. Many of the paintings produced at Oriel y Parc played deliberately with map like / continent like references mediating the passage from what I know to what I don't know.

A deep relationship and connection with the coastline of Pembrokeshire is central to the development of my visual language since the early 1990s. This landscape has enabled (to use a geological term) a conglomerate of issues, relating to self, upbringing and identity to be incorporated within paintings of rock formations, tidal mark-making, the reflective / refractive, aspects of light, colour and movement. Similarly, Kandinsky's early abstractions 'improvise spirituality out of instinctively felt sensations of nature, more particularly, out of primordial sensations of naturally given colours.'²² My paintings aim to transcend the objectively material world and attempt to reach the immeasurable. As Donald Kuspit says, it's "a state of mind in which (one) ceases to sense separation between (oneself) and the whole of reality.' 'It's a state of mind in which one no longer feels determined and measured by ordinary reality.'²³ It's about being human.

The simple yet wondrous sensations experienced when the white light from a crashing wave, or ambiguity of a reflection, provides sensation, which are equivalent to breathing or eating, to nourish the soul itself. As Hilla Rebay discusses within *The Beauty of Non-Objectivity*, 'Non objectivity will be the religion of the future.'

'Non-objective paintings are prophets of spiritual life. Those who have experienced the joy they can give possess such inner wealth as can never be lost. This is what these masterpieces in their quiet absolute purity can bring to all those who learn to feel their unearthly donation of rest, elevation, rhythm, balance and beauty.'²⁴ I see the pool, I see to feel the pool, and the pool feels the pool: the 'pool-ness' of a pool. I can paint the pool as it appears to me, I can paint the pool as it feels to me; but can I paint what the pool also feels? It's this third dimension that I aspire to; this is the spiritual in my work. We

might say it is a fundamentally religious experience, a feeling of transcendent joy, revelation, uniqueness and divine. Is my work essentially still religious? I would say yes. I would argue that my work has continued to be driven by my questions about mortality.



'Shadow into Parent Light series'. Grieve. 2009. (250 x 200 cm) Oil on linen.

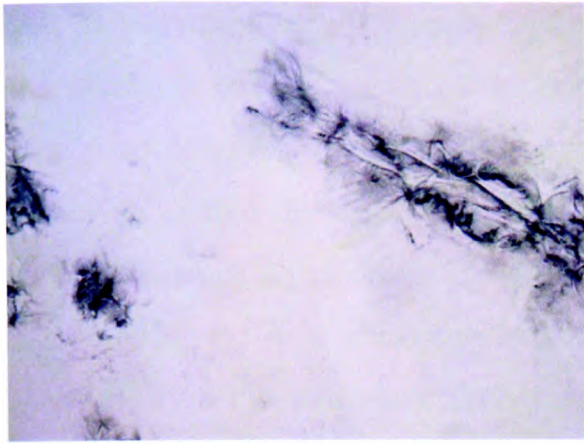
Notes

- 1 Brendan Stuart Burns, artist personal statement (2009).
- 2 David Sylvester, *Cy Twombly: Interviews with American Artists* (New York: Brant Publications, 2001), p. 181.
- 3 Donald Kuspit, *Reconsidering the Spiritual in Art*, www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v2n1/gallery/kuspit_d/reconsidering_text.htm. In the spring of 2003, Kuspit visited the School of the Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond to meet the graduate students and examine their work in preparation for writing the introduction to the MFA Thesis Exhibition 2003, held at VCU's Anderson Gallery.
- 4 Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p. 81.
- 5 Brendan Stuart Burns, artist personal statement. (2010).
- 6 *A Propos – Ceri Richards*, work from nine Welsh painters, ‘Ysbryd – Spirit – Painting – Wales’. National Museum Wales, Cardiff, 2001-2002.
- 7 Mel Gooding, *Ceri Richards* (Moffat: Cameron & Hollis, 2002), p. 136.
- 8 Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 25.
- 9 Charles Baudelaire, ‘Correspondances’, 1861, in Douglas Parmée, ed., *Fifteen French Poets, 1820 to 1950* (London: Longman, 1974), p. 201.
- 10 John Lynch ed., *Orange Sherbert Kisses*, Horizon, BBC TV, 1994.
- 11 Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 27.
- 12 Frascina and Harrison, *Modern Art & Modernism*, p. 172.
- 13 Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 54.
- 14 Frascina and Harrison, *Modern Art & Modernism*, p. 145.
- 15 Simon Morley, ‘Staring into the contemporary abyss’, *Tate Etc*, 20 (Autumn, 2010).
- 16 Kandinsky. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, p. 54.
- 17 Ibid., p. 54. *Stimmung* is almost untranslatable. It is almost “sentiment” in the best sense, and almost “feeling.” Kandinsky uses the word later on to mean the “essential spirit” of nature; see ‘Introduction’, p. 2.
- 18 David Alston, *Into Painting: Brendan Stuart Burns* (Bridgend: Seren, 2007), pp. 28-9.
- 19 Gerard Manley Hopkins, ‘God’s Grandeur’, 1877, *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 31.

- 20 Nicholas Serota, *Cy Twombly: Cycles and Seasons* (London: Tate Publishing, 2008), p. 24.
- 21 Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, translator's introduction, p. xvii.
- 22 Kuspit, *Reconsidering the Spiritual in Art*,
www.blackbird.vcu.edu/v2n1/gallery/kuspit_d/reconsidering_text.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Frascina and Harrison, *Modern Art and Modernism*, p. 148.

Chapter 5

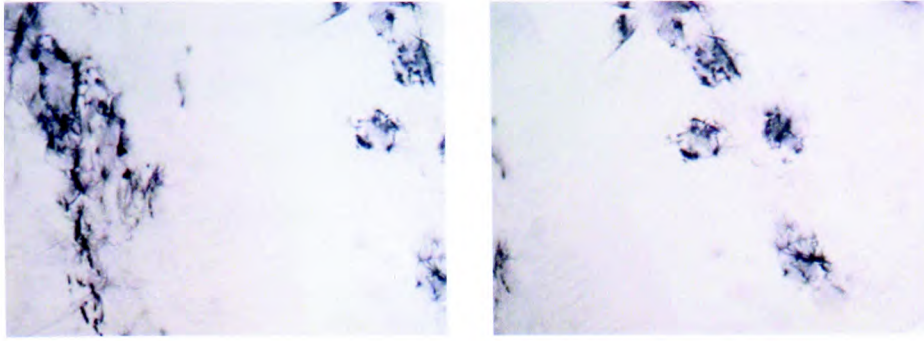
The residency and works produced



'Rock rubbing'. Graphite on tracing paper. 2009.

The series of rock rubbings illustrated above are arguably the most honest and successful images I produced during the 12 months whilst in residence at Oriel y Parc. There were hundreds of these in my studio, but what were they for? What did they present or re-present? Initially the process of taking graphite rubbings from the rocks at Caerfai beach and the immediate coastal cliff walks, opened up the dialogue between myself as artist, my location, and my studio. I wanted this to be a sincere, accessible and unpretentious preparatory process and I feel that I managed to question the integrity and honesty within the creative act of painting itself. The land and geology itself was the raw material here: still, hushed, quiet, ethereal, fossil-like, absolute, unassuming and yet so compelling, complex. Time and change arrested, abstracted, yet these rubbings are both as literal and figurative as one can get. The ambiguity between the microcosm and the macrocosm becomes clear; we see a sense of the mysterious traces left behind following the evolution of the universe.

Mark-making in both drawing and painting has always been integral to my work. But as Howard Hodgkin affirms, 'It's a major concern of mine that every mark that I put down should not be a piece of personal autograph but just a mark. I want to make marks that are anonymous as well as autonomous.'¹ The opportunity to work with both a new studio and relatively unknown area of the Pembrokeshire coast, stimulated my own questioning of 'the autograph' mark. Marks, which on the surface, within an image are successful physically or pictorially, yet do not actually mean or do anything and are decorative only. I may be guilty of this practice, but it is something which I am prepared to challenge and question. Two contemporary Welsh painters who I feel are continually dependent upon 'the autograph' marks are Elfyn Lewis and David Tress. Both use emotive marks, which masquerade as hard won, accidental and spontaneous; it is here that they disappoint and fail. For Tress, an accomplished draughtsman, is nevertheless compelled to portray marks which intimate the emotive and sensation, as well as corrections within decision-making and what I think is a fictitious history of conflict. The accident in painting and drawing has been hijacked in order to superficially present the accident as something, which is emotionally valued. As for Lewis, the use of accident has become the sole process in his work, so much so, that it becomes difficult to see where the painting could in fact fail? Where is his critical sense? My unease is further deepened when one considers his titles, such as *Morfa Gwyllt* – [*Wild Marsh*] or *Y Beddau* – [*The Tombs*]. This is why I am committed to my rubbings; they present the untouched and found quality, almost devoid of the artist's intervention and involvement in their making. They suggest a hard won juxtaposition and balance; making marks, which could be sensed and experienced as if from nature itself, to be found, and then to embody personal subject matter such as loss, absence and mortality.

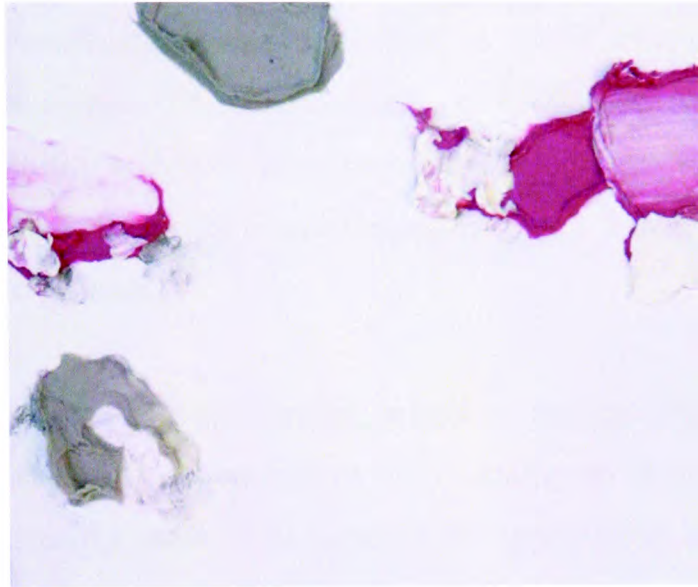


'Rock rubbing', Graphite on tracing paper, 2009.

In this chapter I will concentrate upon a small selection of key works with which to discuss their position in the development of my own personal visual language during the residency, placing them in an historical and contemporary context. However, justification and explanation of these paintings will potentially terminate their ability to genuinely connect with the viewer. As declared earlier, I find myself torn between two irreconcilable poles; on the one hand as a painter, wanting the painting itself to stand alone, confident, unapologetic, knowing, instinctive. As Francis Bacon discusses with David Sylvester, 'but then all art surely is instinct and then you can't talk about instinct, because you don't know what it is.' 'Because if you could explain your painting, you would be explaining your instincts.'² Yet on the other hand, as the writer within the PhD's critical context, I search desperately for a verbal, literary language which describes and questions the work.

'Half my painting activity is disrupting what I can do with ease,' Bacon recognized, something I have been all too conscious of since 1985, when deliberately deciding to abandon the painterly aesthetic that had been developing within my language.³ As with the autograph mark, colour and palette have indeed become signature in much of my work. I am aware fully of this and am often deliberately attempting to scupper the security

and repetition that this potentially offers. Caerfai beach with its theatrical outcrop of red sandstone, which radiates and breathes a flushed coral light into many of its cove-like spaces, comprehensively challenged my prevailing colour signature.



'Shadow into Parent Light series.' Whither. 2009. (30 x 40 cm) Oil on board.

Whither, a small painting on board, completed during the early stages of the residency, confronts the integral influence that Caerfai Bay would have on future paintings, that of this Caerfai red sandstone. My journal makes reference to initial unease and nervous uncertainties.

Journal 1. Page 55.

9th December 08.

I genuinely feel very uncomfortable with the red / pink of Caerfai. Here I question aesthetic / primeval palette as opposed to experienced / sense of place palette.

'Aesthetic / primeval' palette? Am I to imply that in some way my palette preferences are hardwired? There are indeed recognizable colour

combinations and tendencies to reclaim distinct colour vibrations throughout the past 25 years work. Certain pistachio greens, ice cream pinks and zest lemon yellows reference again and again elements of touch and taste. 'Colour is the keyboard, the eyes are the hammers, the soul is the piano with many strings. The artist is the hand, which plays, touching one key or another, to cause vibrations in the soul.'⁴ Gastronomic descriptions of colour exposure and sensation, disclose in words what is quintessentially a visual experience. The coastal reaches of Pembrokeshire have enabled the sensual ability of colour in my painting to encourage the viewer towards a synaesthetic perception and sensation of the balance between subject matter and process.

The painting *Whither*, like many of the smaller paintings, presents this physical, seductive, almost carnal experience of both looking at nature and painting. There are tensions established between the relationship of forms and space and these heighten the sense of absence, change, and process. The tide, which simultaneously constructs and destructs, leaves behind tender and whispered traces of nature's drawing and mark-making; these are all staged within a pictorial space which simultaneously offers both a traditional western perspective as well as an aerial plan-like viewpoint. This duality of spatial sensations is a principal experience of walking the beach, the relationship between the immediate ground plane and the implied sense of journey.

It is poignant here to recount the Matisse Retrospective exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1993. This was my first encounter with *The Red Studio* (1911) and it was this play between the plan and the vertical space that excited me then, especially while I was in New York; it referenced so closely the whole experience of looking down, through, up

and beyond. Likewise, *The Painter's Family* (1911) where the draughts board and Matisse's son's hand steers the viewer's eyes to enter the painting through the single reference to western perspective in the painting. The carpet and floor plane are seen as a plan, whilst the walls and fireplace are seen from the front. In *The Red Studio*, the entire room has been rendered flat red. Yet the immediate foreground table and its contents hold the plan once again, leading the gaze through and up into the studio. It encourages the viewer to raise the head as one looks up.



'The Red Room,' 1911. Henri Matisse.



'The Painter's Family,' 1911. Henri Matisse

Whither attempts these similar sensations upon the viewer, despite the fact that it is a comparably small painting. The deliberate use of thick oil and wax is contrasted with a series of tender and subtle pencil lines; these drawn lines are considered, as well as trace glimpses of potential shadow, movement and refraction. Such lines echo in a similar way those lines scratched back into *The Red Studio*. The drawn has always remained integral to my work, not only the process by which I connect with nature's processes, but also consciously attempt to bring the process of painting and drawing together as one activity. For each 'Caerfai red' stone depicted in *Whither*, what initially appears to present a series of accidental shapes and forms is indeed very specific and considered: they are drawn, they are first hand knowledge. Each, very carefully offers both position

and scale to the viewer, alongside the potential that these marks of oil and wax are perhaps found, instinctive or innate. It is the absence of paint on *Whither's* surface and the blinding flat, surface-less, white light space which accentuates these tactile qualities of oil and wax impasto. Absence of painted form perhaps, but the white is actually also paint, white primer. Many layers were built up in succession, the culmination of which produces a surface that simultaneously celebrates the picture plane, but also enjoys a more ambiguous, ethereal space, allowing the sensual areas of thick wax and oil to float free of its physical surface. There are numerous entries made in my journals, which discuss such issues. Below are some of the more relevant.

Journal 1. Page 85.

22nd January 2009.

The surface quality of primed white canvas is very different to that of this white cartridge. I may never be able to succeed, if the surface is going to make too literal a space / plane. I will need to experiment with a ground / surface / stain which can offer a more ethereal space. I am desperate to start producing more.

Journal 1. Page 127.

Trying to push the picture plane once again. There is a 'photographic' element, which I both simultaneously enjoy and despise. Not photographic in the 'realist' sense, but more to do with light, and traditional photography, chemicals / photograms. The paper and its sheer white brilliance is a light, which is bleaching and blinding. 'Having to squint'. This soul nourishing light is key to these new works.

Using white enamel spray - coating finely the graphite powder, not working at present. Review this next week. Edge is critical with these works. I should look again at the possibility of taking image off canvas onto the exhibition wall, the gallery space.

The Matisse Retrospective shown at MOMA, New York, was the first time I met the artist Peter Prendergast, he was staying at Agnew's dealer's private apartment on West 53rd St, with his close friend Len Tabner. Prendergast was working on a large-scale drawing of the view directly from the apartment, (*Study for West 53rd Street, looking towards the Hudson*, 1993), a drawing which curiously similar to both Matisse's *Red Room* and *The Painter's Family*, bends space in order to incorporate a near plan view of the street below as well as the distant horizon.

It would be straightforward here to argue that Prendergast also incorporated the autograph mark within his process of making, but not so. On the surface, it would be easy to witness similarities in mark-making between Tress and Prendergast, however with Prendergast there is a deep sense of learning anew in every painting, Prendergast is consistently prepared to reveal his struggle with his failings in the image. Fully aware of his inadequacies, humbled by his sense of place in the landscape as well as his personal sense of worth, this physical and expressive process of questioning the world around him presented the artist as well as the landscape to his audience, whereas with Tress one only gets the autograph, which borders on illustration. As Francis Bacon discusses with David Sylvester, illustrational painting communicates through the intelligence immediately what the form is about, whereas the non-illustrational, works primarily on the senses.⁵ This is why both Lewis and Tress in contrast to Prendergast, appropriate accident, as genuine process of enquiry; unfortunately, as soon as you know what the accident will generate, you end up creating another form of illustration. The artist Ceri Richards was all too aware also of the struggles within the process of construction and destruction, as Mel Gooding puts it, 'Realising the hoped-for but not premeditated image'.⁶



'Shadow into Parent Light series.' Lull. 2009. (200 x 250 cm) Oil on canvas.

Lull is one of the most significant and eloquent paintings I have ever painted. Despite re-reading the above journal, which underlines this painting's central concerns, I feel that the painting survives the sometimes, literal interpretations and clarifications found in both the journals and this critical review. It is that this painting, more than any of the others produced during the twelve-month residency, has a deeper 'sense of knowing' than the others? It is the first painting I have made which achieves that degree of insight to which Peter De Bolla refers when discussing Barnett Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis* states, 'And this, perhaps, provides me with the first glimpse of what this painting might know, or rather what its knowing might be.'⁷ In this work I am laying bare in the most honest way I can, aspects of my personal life, alongside geology, coastal processes, light, sense of place, paint and beauty; beauty within the contemplation of being alive and to be human. I am all too

aware however, that this is not enough to guarantee the making of a painting, which 'lasts', as well as to be of deep significance in my own life's creative output.

It is the painting's scale which confronts the viewer first, not necessarily its size. It is a big painting, 2 metres in height by 2.5 metres in length. I say scale not size deliberately knowing that in comparison to a Pollock, Newman or a Keifer, this is small: I refer to its scale because of the painting's content - three stone like forms set against a blinding surface-less white canvas. It is the sheer physical sensation of weight within these forms and their scale which transcend themselves to immediately impact upon the viewer. This monumental aspect of sensed weight, the tactile quality and physicality of wax and oil, expanses of colour-taste and colour-smell bombard the viewer.

There is no human presence in any of these paintings other than the viewer themselves; just as it is when I walk and work the coast avoiding all human presence, seeking only a personal one-to-one relationship. These paintings therefore refract human presence; they make one aware of themselves, openly revealing one's own fragility of existence and sense of being human. *Lull's* 'knowing' is the 'stone-ness of a stone', the 'inscape' as Gerard Manley Hopkins described it; or as De Bolla says, 'what it is like to be, or, perhaps more accurately, helps me feel being.'⁸

Lull's 'knowing' and sense of composure within this 'knowing', for me is its triumph. This painting feels like it's always been there, I cannot remember its making; the unconscious, intuitive, decisive, spontaneous visual conversations and decisions along its way. When the painting was finished, I sensed it was 'right', but was unaware at the time of its

significance within the residency's output. There are other key works which require reference in this chapter. Works all of which in some form or other, or to lesser or greater success, have for the first time in my career consciously tried to confront and address a new understanding of my work, alongside a genuine desire to critically evaluate in a literary sense what it is that I make when I make a painting. What is its point? What does it do?

I want these works to be accessible. I have already touched upon the physicality of the medium itself, oil and wax. It is a sensuous and seductive, it allows the eyes to experience the sense of touch, to smell or taste colour. *Shimmer* explicitly connects the viewer to all the above. It is a small painting, measuring just 30 x 40 cms, but similarly to *Lull*, its scale is colossal.



'Shadow into Parent Light series.' Shimmer. 2009. (30 x 40 cm) Oil on board.

Shimmer playfully demands of the viewer two opposite points of sight, it is both microcosm and macrocosm simultaneously, it allows the viewer to

exchange their own scale; the distance established between the viewer's retina and picture plane oscillates between near and far. This whole experience enhances an important factor, that of 'time'. The narrative of the painting's making is part of the viewer's contact and I hope that these works remind you of mark-making as a child, the stunningly beautiful sensation of pushing, smudging, dragging and scraping fingers through, across and into wet paint. It is no coincidence that the palette within *Shimmer* is of the earth, Caerfai red, jade clay and ochre; it is as if I have used the land itself. Yet with all the expressive processes that have obviously gone on in the painting's making, there is an extraordinary sense of quiet, calm and stillness. Time held in suspension. The crisp white ground focuses the eye, allows for a purity and clarity of light. One can almost breathe colour and light from this painting. The clean white surface of the painting contradicts the processes that have taken place in its making, which heightens the sense of surreal stillness and contemplative force of the painting itself.

Titling paintings always takes place when the work has acquired enough time in order to ascertain for me its worth, whether in fact it actually deserves to be shown or exhibited. For the past five years I have worked in series towards titled and specific exhibitions, which in many respects has allowed my work to be presented in so called chapters. *The Taste of sight series* and *Liquid light series* were two separate bodies of work which openly courted a synaesthetic relationship and 'way in' to my work. The significant body of paintings and drawings produced whilst in residence at Oriel y Parc, however, demanded a far more personal and emotive theme. *Shadow into parent light* is the first line of a poem written by a close friend Morgan Francis after having visited my St Davids studio during the last month of my residency.

Towards Ty Ddewi.

Shadow into parent light,
Sound bundle coast
wind hedge rise
Star chandeliered sea.

My thanks beside,
herald day, fingers
sand pencil rest,
wave after wave.

Tides awaken shore
line textile of far reach.
A moment rivers
silently on canvas.

On visiting Brendan's Oriol y Parc studio. 27th August 2009. © Morgan Francis.

Shadow into parent light as a theme allows for the personal, philosophical and the emotive, as well as the sense of journey and time, within which each drawing and painting are given more specific titles which play with process in their making or an onomatopoeic cue to experience the visual. Titles such as *Grind*, *Ooze* and *Zest* encourage a dialogue with the viewer so that they may mix the senses within a visual experience of the painting. *Zest* was inspired by the pungent aroma of rotting seaweed washed up during a storm on Caerfai beach. *Grind*, makes reference to the process of erosion and the movement of tectonic plates, it is map-like and its suggestion of Pangea, Gondwana and Laurasia is conscious. *Ooze* celebrates a stone's ability to seep absorbed light, almost as liquid colour

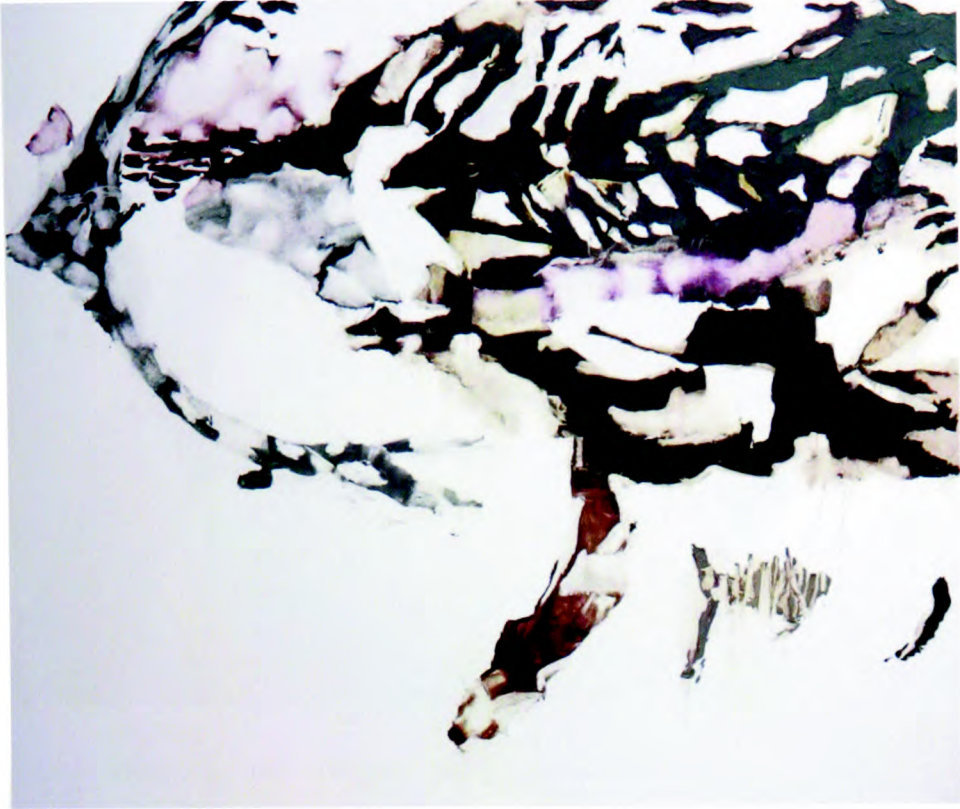
when dusk sets. Both *Ooze* and *Zest* present the viewer with the opportunity to breathe thought itself, to suspend time and nourish oneself, to feed the soul. These paintings re-present that connection with our

Journal 2. Page 119-120.

6th October 2009.

Titles:

PINE. SHUSH. STEELY. STIR. SURGE. TAIN. SPUR.
HINT. CRAVE. GROOVE. PEEP. LONG. YUMMY.
LUCID. LIMPID. WAVER. PAUSE. HUFF. WHEEZE.
THROB. GASP. PANT. ETCH. SHIVER. RECALL.
SCURRY. WINCE. CHANT. PULSE. FLOW. LURE. LILT.
SNIFF. LIMP. WITHER. REACH. LICK. GLOW. TASTE.
LIMP. GLIST. MUSE. MEEK. GLUM. GLOOM. LICK.
MUTE. WEEP. OOZE. NUMB. NICHE. BABBLE. SNUG.
NUZZLE. FESTER. QUENCH. WHISH. TANG.
WHOOSH. SWISH. DRIFT. SOB. HINT. INHALE.
SOURE. SEEP. SHIFT. GLARE. GLEAM. SUDS. SHIVER.
RELISH. FIZZ. SHIMMER. SURGE. GUSH. SETTLE.
WANE. HUSHED. WHISPER. STUMBLE. PLUNGE.
SLUMP. SQUINT. RASP. NOURISH. NURTURE. REVEL.
LESSESN. FLUSH. GASH. SPRAY. TENDER. ZEST. LESS.
INGEST. HINT. EMBRACE. CLINCH. SNARL. SPOIL.
VENT. HISS. PITH. ESSENCE. WAIL. GAZE. GLIMMER.
GLINT. DAZZLE. SLICK. SIP. GLISTEN. FUSE. DRIFT.
SKIM. GULP. SOAR. BLINK. DIM. GULP. GUZZLE.
GLOOM. ZEAL. ACHE. BLISS. SQUALL. RELISH.
SHEEN. BLUSH. TINGLE. GLUT. WEEP. CHURN.
YEARN. THROB. RUSH. SWILL. TOSS. HAZE. VEIL.
WHISPER. BREEZE. EBB. LIGHT. SWASH. SWELL.
LULL. REST. HUSH. MEEK. CRACKLE. GRATE. GRIEVE.
GRIND. ANTHEM. SOURCE. WANE. BACK. LADEN.
DUSK. PURE. LUCID. NUB. ABSENT. STILL. YEARN.
ARC. BECOMING. TRACE. TARNISH. HESITATE.
GROAN. DEN. RAVISH. SHROUD. HARMONY.
CONCERT. ROUT. WHITTLE. RAM. AROMA. GNAW.
HUSH. RISE. SHIFT. SLASH. DANK. MAR. HOE. SLIT.
TINGE. LUST. LOST. FUSE. LORE. LEAP. ETCH.
WRACK. SCOOP. HACK. NOWNESS. MOMENT. PULSE



'Shadow into Parent Light series.' Grind. 2009. (200 x 250 cm) Oil on canvas.



'Shadow into Parent Light series.' Ooze. 2009. (30 x 40 cm) Oil on board.



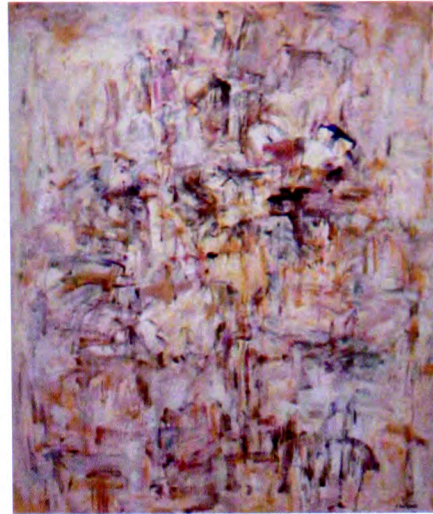
'Shadow into Parent Light series' Zest. 2009. (60 x 70 cm) Oil on canvas.

natural world, the most simplest and fundamental of human experiences: they give one time to breath.

There are few contemporary or historical paintings that have been able to offer me that transcending experience. *After Corot* 1979-82 by Howard Hodgkin, *Untitled* 1953-54 by Joan Mitchell, *The Four Seasons* 1993-94 by Cy Twombly and *Untitled IV* 1978 by Willem De Kooning are key works in this respect. The common denominator here is the sheer physicality of paint in their making; mark and gesture are integral, yet these works are not solely concerned with materials and processes, these paintings are spiritually bound into being human, they allow one to breathe thought itself.



Howard Hodgkin. 'After Corot', 1979 - 82.



Joan Mitchell. 'Untitled' 1953-54.



Willem De Kooning. 'Untitled IV' 1978.



Cy Twombly. 'The Four Seasons.' 1993 - 1994.

The sense of self-awareness and the sense of being in their presence and within their making is undeniable. However, this is not simply about the surface and painterly quality as if it were mere decoration. As Francis Bacon stated, 'the image matters more than the beauty of the paint.'⁹ All of the above paintings force the viewer to become highly conscious of the activity of looking, and therefore to become aware of oneself, one's own position in time and place, to recognize almost outside of oneself one's own presence. Hodgkin's *After Corot*, the smallest of the four, measuring only 37 x 38 centimeters, I regard as one of the most succinct paintings in this respect. A compelling wrap-around sensation, which includes a visual touch, taste and smell, is its overriding opulence.

How does the viewer come to my work? What is my painting's purpose or use? What do my paintings know? What am I conscious of when painting? Am I in the moment? How can I be honest in trying to answer these questions? Are the questions being raised in this essay part of the work itself? Will my painting and work prosper from this period of self-scrutiny, reflection and criticism? This duality of wanting to ask the right questions, but also not wanting straight and comprehensive answers, underlines my entire practice to date. Whenever answers and solutions have become apparent, my practice has inevitably led to a process of deliberate sabotage and rejection, which can hopefully avoid repetition, decoration and formula in painting. It's almost as if I do not like knowing, yet I find myself asking questions. Learning to be self critical and evaluative is a valuable process; Greenberg says 'the essence of Modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of the characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself, not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.'¹⁰ Francis Bacon also argued that the ability of an artist to be more successful than another artist

depends upon the fact that 'his critical sense is more acute. It may not be that he is more gifted in any way but just that he has a better critical sense.'¹¹ Can I equate my own modest success to my willingness to critically review my work?

The viewer who comes to my work, who knows my work of the past, and who is already primed with past experience and knowledge, is laden with greater baggage than someone who happens to stumble upon it. The set language has already been established, an awareness of my influences and relationship with Pembrokeshire are well known; talks and presentations, publications, reviews etc. can all cloud out and obscure an honest, human and instinctive experience of the work. This is why the opportunity to make new work at Oriel y Parc became so important; it offered the chance to confront such questions. Below are some examples from the two journals from the residency, (see appendices) which highlight some of the discussions and questions being raised here.

Journal 1.

Page 52.

4th December 08. Studio

Trying to understand why I'm drawn to the land? Is it because it's more important than me? It's a relationship with the future and past, mortality - spirit. In-awe, in wonderment, humbled. This is indeed a deep relationship.

Page 133.

March 13th 2009.

Absent yet present and conjoined. The process in making these works is troubling and unresolved at present though. Using small works - projected onto larger canvases and traced, this very prescribed and controlled method is extremely different. I've always maintained that I need to 'find' a composition or painting.

Page 159.

9.4.09. Studio.

And now here I am at Oriol y Parc, completely visible and on show. SPACE in myself, away from a self-conscious awareness is key here. Not to be self-conscious - to be in a place in one's head where you can take risks, to question, knowing the mistake / accident is coming. But not wanting the mistake to be public.

Page 285-286.

3rd August 2009. Oriol y Parc.

Pressure to perform!! As these paintings become even more literal and reliant upon traditional spatial techniques or tricks, I will need to confront the figurative issue once again.

Page 287-290.

4th August 2009. Oriol y Parc.

Looking at the lichen painting this morning...many probing questions - mostly about its literalness - flatness of space, lack of the abstract - lacking the newly found, lacking the accident. The eye is almost denied access.

Page 14.

Sunday 16th August 2009.

If I use silver and gold spray, will this break the emptiness / quietness and contemplative element of the linen? In contrast to the known space of the white primer, where the space is almost surface-less.

As we read from my journals there is a deep sense of 'wanting to know', yet paradoxically 'wanting not to know', and it is this constant dialogue between the literary and the visual sense, the act of painting, that produces the work in order to pose these questions over and over again. The painting below, *Harmony*, was produced during the very latter stages of the residency. It is a painting that I continue to be unsure about.



'Shadow into Parent Light series.' Harmony. 2009. (165 x 200 cm) Oil on Linen.

As the journal points out, its origins stemmed from a series of photographs of lichen growth on the cliffs at St Nons. At best, *Harmony* transcends its source and empowers itself upon the viewer with gastronomic verve. Its physical picture plane has lost the blinding white light of an underexposed photograph and taken on the more melancholic emotional impact and I think the fact that is a work on linen is crucial to this. At its worst, it either remains simply as lichen, a map of the United States of America or wallpaper. As I will further discuss in the essay regarding *Processes within practice*, *Harmony* was directly projected using a photograph onto its linen surface; this preconceived and measured beginning has undoubtedly left me with many doubts as to its success. The process of looking and experiencing *Harmony* continues to raise important questions, which in many respects return to an early infatuation of mine in the early 1980s with Titian's *The Flaying of Marsayas*. Its subject matter initially connected with my interest in the crucifixion and deposition.



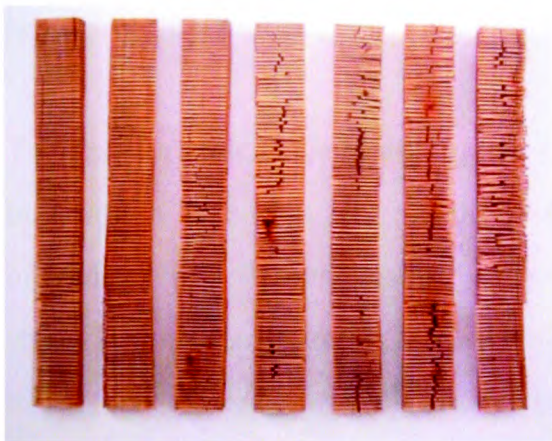
Titian. 'Playing of Marsyas.' 1575-76.



'Harmony'. Detail.

As previously discussed on page 106, it was the outer qualities of paint and surface that I was to truly identify with as a painter. Surveying the surface of the Titian up close, scrutinizing every brush mark, reminded me of my days as a butcher and the smell of flesh. I reveled in the detail, whilst the peripheral experience seduced and led one on the continuing journey across its surface, being in a world of paint. *Harmony* undoubtedly celebrates the process of its making; silver, gold and copper solvent spray paint, blends and fuses within oil and wax. Turpentine has been poured and sprayed allowing patches of raw linen to reveal themselves, having been layered previously with colour. The process of construction and destruction oscillates, tempting and embracing the potential within accident. This approach to painting is verging upon the sculptural for *Harmony* is not concerned with illusion and the breaking of a picture plane; this painting's ambition is to present itself as object, as real. Scale, unlike works such as *Lull* and *Shimmer*, is what it is, as itself; so the viewer does not transcend or experience the confrontation of having to alter their own scale or immediate space. The viewer's sense of place and sense of being there in front of the painting is the primary sensation, to 'sense' the painting. *Harmony's* "knowing" is very different than the

“knowing” within *Lull*. There is a deep sense of something else outside of *Lull*, the peripheral, and the refracted; the painting exists beyond its physical edges as well as within the inner sensation of the viewer. *Harmony*, however, simply *is*. It has the presence of sculpture. David Nash’s *Crack and Warp Wall* from 2007 operates in very similar ways; its being is of confidence and certainty. The balance and relationship between the action of its making, the heavy industrial use of a chainsaw, and the timber’s natural inclination to fracture and buckle, underlines the fact that this process continues, and is not static. Two separate visitors to my exhibition *Influere* which concluded my residency asked me when was it, that I was going to return to being a sculptor? Interestingly, I never really thought that I had ceased.



David Nash. *Crack and Warp Wall*. 2007, beech.

Harmony and *Lull* are two of ten institution-sized paintings. By this I imply that the potential viewer of these works would find themselves in a large museum like exhibition space in order to experience them. They were, after all, intentionally created for the exhibition at Oriel y Parc Landscape Gallery in St Davids, which would conclude my residency. These large paintings would challenge the viewers to scale themselves,

just as one would in the landscape itself. Yet *Harmony* presents us with little or no pictorial space in order to do this: viewed from a distance or up close, the experience is the same, that of surface, colour and texture one feels with your eyes. Looking again at this painting, I begin to realize how much it has become an icon without the figure, the only figure being you the viewer. The idol, hero, Blessed Virgin or subject of the portrait here assumed the natural wonder of something so simple as lichen. The title references the two organisms, a fungus and an algae growing together in partnership to their mutual advantage, an action which consequently forms lichen. This and other concluding paintings from the residency simultaneously implied the peacefulness, understanding and sense of oneness that I had come to experience within my own sense of place. As Peter de Bolla declares of Barnett Newman's *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, 'this is a devotional painting.'¹²

The gallery itself at Oriel y Parc had exhibited a number of large paintings by Graham Sutherland during the residency. I have an affinity with much of Sutherland's Pembrokeshire works in particular, but have continued to struggle with the large-scale finished compositions. Below are a number of journal references, which declare my uncomfortable feelings with these large paintings.

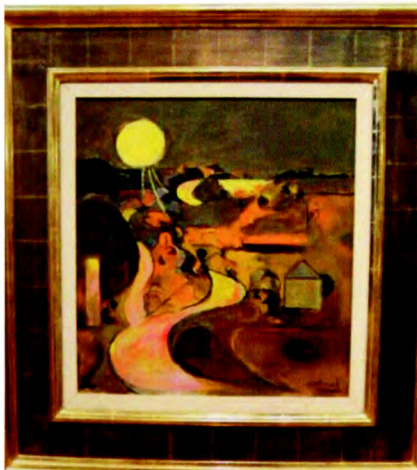
Journal 2 Page 5-6.

Looking again at the large Sutherland's, only to fully register their flatness in contrast to the exquisite drawings. They all work with a parallel 'stage like' set, and present the form - 'formerly'. The drawings however, play and enjoy space / shadow, which is oblique to the pictorial plane. Looking closely at the surface of each canvas, the paint is so dry in its application, a surface, which I find very difficult to respond to. However they echo my works from the Slade, 'Riots / Wapping protests / police horses'.

Journal 2. Page 32.

Tuesday 25th August 2009.

Plan to work on the last remaining canvas. Feel as though 'painting' itself is coming to an end. I will return to my Cardiff studio as well as Druidston. Having been at Porthclais and the harbour last night, went downstairs into the gallery to see 'Road to Porthclais' by Sutherland. It's such a powerful painting, still too flat and aligned with its outer edges, but the colour and winding road at sunset is so typical of what I have come to typify of Sutherland in Pembrokeshire, and also the bicycle rides too and from Porthclais. It was fitting then that as I worked on the last remaining canvas, that it rapidly developed into a tribute painting to Sutherland and the residency. As it was then titled, 'After Sutherland - Road to Porthclais', seems to sum up the residency so succinctly, the setting sun, a winding road going where? I've wanted to produce something directly inspired by Sutherland during the residency, and it truly held out until the final canvas. Whilst in this 'Sutherland' and reflective mood, decided to walk to Solva from Caerfai.



Graham Sutherland. 'Road to Porthclais'



Brendan Stuart Burns. 'After Sutherland, Road to Porthclais'

There is no doubt that Sutherland charged his work with both a psychological and emotional energy, 'It was in this country (Pembrokeshire) that I began to learn painting. It seemed impossible here

for me to sit down and make finished paintings from nature.’¹³ That is something I too have never attempted, it’s always struck me to be an impossibility, especially as both Sutherland and myself have avoided the scenic. Sutherland insisted that he could only express what he saw and felt by paraphrasing it, only after complete and utter immersing himself in the landscape. There are indeed many similarities with both my processes of work and certain concepts about landscape and emotion that Sutherland held, but there are also differences. He felt a deep surrealist need and affinity in European Modernism, as well as British Romanticism, and allowed his imagery to metamorphose root formations and rock structures and take on human or animal attributes. I have always maintained that a stone, pool or area of lichen growth, is just that, stone, pool and lichen. As I have previously discussed, “I see the pool, I see to feel the pool, and the pool feels the pool: the ‘pool-ness’ of a pool. I can paint the pool as it appears to me, I can paint the pool as it feels to me; but can I paint what the pool also feels? It’s this third dimension that I aspire to; this is the spiritual in my work.”¹⁴ I aspire to prompt an emotional response from the viewer without making natural forms the surrogates of the human presence.

The painting *After Sutherland, Road to Porthclais* is my only work inspired directly by another artist and painting. During the last 8 weeks of the residency, I cycled from St Davids to the harbour at Porthclais every evening to walk and draw the area of coastline north towards St Justinian’s. This repetition of experience and getting to know intimately the journey inspired my response to the Sutherland, specifically in homage and gratitude for the year long dialogue with his works within the gallery, especially his *Welsh Drawings*. Within my *Road to Porthclais* the sun has already set, I have already completed my residency. Despite the

openness of colour and form in the painting, there is a presence of an extreme emotional darkness. This painting takes on a completely different space and scale in comparison to the rest of my work. We experience a relatively traditional aspect of landscape painting via an implied presence of the horizon, which in turn offers the viewer their own sense of place and, consequently, scale. This is not an uncomfortable sensation or relationship; on the contrary, the system and arrangement of textural forms are at ease with one another; there are no tensions or confrontations here. Yet the emotional darkness is present within the sense of what will happen next, the sense of time marching on relentlessly, the sense that landscape is bigger and more important than you. I remain uncomfortable with the literary description of what is a purely visual experience and am concerned that I maybe overburdening this painting with a desire to explain meaning. As Sutherland said, “But if one duty of painting is to explain the essence of things and emotions, may not it also be a duty, sometimes, not to explain – but to accept?”¹⁵

I have attempted to discuss and present a small selection of works produced during the residency in order to challenge what it is that they do. What are my paintings for? I began this chapter looking at the series of rock rubbings and suggesting that these may well be some of the most important and honest images made during the term of the residency. They certainly opened the dialogue between the coast, the new studio, the new work, and myself; but more powerfully than this, they instantly revealed central concerns and ambitions for this body of new work. It is this sense of the mysterious traces left behind following the evolution of the universe, coupled with a compelling desire to paint, and awareness of the viewer, that is my works purpose, its provocation.

Walking the beach at Caerfai once again during a heavy tidal swell and squall last week, having had time to digest my new works in this essay, it became even more apparent to me that it was 'the breath' that my work references again and again. To feel breath, the wind and space. To be human in the primeval wind, to taste the wind, to shiver. To breathe in memory, thought, serenity, time and contemplation. When I ask myself once again, what is the point of painting? What do my paintings do? The point is quite simply to create a painting which allows thought itself to breathe.

Notes

- 1 David Sylvester, *Howard Hodgkin: Forty Paintings 1973-84* (London: Trustees of the Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1984), p. 105.
- 2 Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p. 97.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 4 Kandinsky, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, pp. 46-47.
- 5 Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p. 56.
- 6 Gooding, *Ceri Richards*, p. 135.
- 7 Peter de Bolla, *Art Matters*. (Boston and London: Harvard University Press. 2003), p. 40.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- 9 Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p. 166.
- 10 Frascina and Harrison, *Modern Art and Modernism*, p. 5.
- 11 Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p. 149.
- 12 De Bolla, *Art Matters*, p. 52.
- 13 Graham Sutherland, *Welsh Sketchbook*. (Horizon, April 1942), pp. 225-35.
- 14 Martin Hammer, *Graham Sutherland: Landscapes, War Scenes, Portraits 1924-1950*, (London: Scala Publishers, 2005). p. 70.

Chapter 6

Processes within practice

Process, materials and concepts inherently drive creativity within my work. The year-long residency between 2008-2009 at Oriel y Parc offered the opportunity to re-evaluate and scrutinize this working practice, to introduce a journal and the process of critical evaluation, something which had always been present in sketchbooks, but never before to such a consistent and intense degree. There are five processes, which simultaneously work alongside and through each other: walking, drawing, photography, painting and self-criticism. All have become extensions of childhood innocence in order to physically engage with and explore nature's elemental forces, a constant sequence of processes, which both measures the world against me, and me against the world. Children are passionate mark-makers, 'as any parent knows, a child is happiest when playing with surfaces that record its passage or presence'.¹



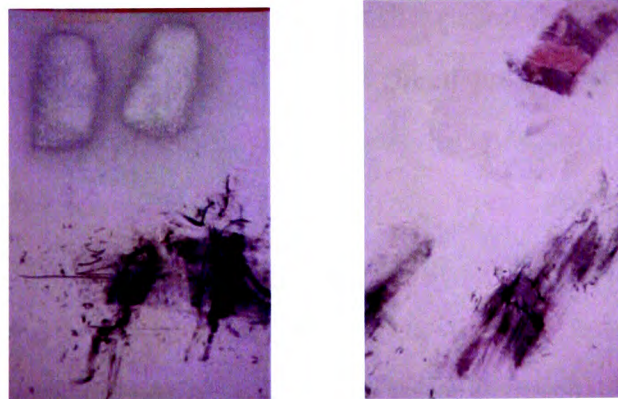
Brendan Stuart Burns. Nakuru, Kenya. 1964.



Brendan Stuart Burns. Pembrokeshire coastal path. 2009.

Forty-seven years on, fundamentally little has changed from my experiences of digging in the garden in Nakuru, Kenya, other than the development of my critical ability. The residency presented a period of time in which to question this progression as well as my relationship

between the location where I am intensely connected, and the studio; up until this time, my studio had been 120 miles from the specific locations of my work's influence and inspiration. Distance between the two had often been used to present the argument for abstraction in my work, deliberately exploiting the opportunity to play with memory. My working practice of the past had been similar to that of Graham Sutherland, who said: {It's been} 'impossible here for me to sit down and make finished paintings from nature. Indeed there were no ready made subjects to paint. The spaces and concentrations of this clearly constructed land were stuff for storing in the mind. Their essence was intellectual and emotional, if I may say so. I found that I could express what I felt only by paraphrasing what I saw.'² Working in a studio less than one kilometre from the Pembrokeshire coast was inevitably going to initiate change in my working practice as well as the work itself. The fundamental issue was to avoid deliberate change for change's sake, to reinforce an honest and sincere integration of this new experience within existing practice.



Studio drawings

Journal 1. Page 77-80.
18th January 2009.

At the moment I'm excited but anxious also, potentially understanding that they are indeed 'going nowhere'! It was an intense period working on them, but I question how honest I was being? The relationship of the stenciled patches to that

of the drawn / sets up an interesting tension, which I do not understand yet. If that's the case, then at least I might be going somewhere new? I was working on these drawings to take on board the rubbings.

They needed to incorporate the 'found' or absence of making and process. However, once the stenciled areas had been added, they changed. They themselves looked more 'found' than the drawing / mark-making itself. Curiously it is almost the most figurative element also. The figurative / abstract confrontation - conversation continues. What is this balance? Is there a balance, or is it simply trying to discover a new language, which is in fact figurative, but for arguments sake, we call abstract. I can't believe it's nearly a week since working on these drawings. I'm worried that when opening the studio door tomorrow, they will not 'connect' at all. 'Connect' with what?

There are many journal entries, which discuss honesty within drawing and painting, whether it was on location or in the studio; there are also entries, which recount the problems I had with access and personal visibility. This was after all the first time that my studio practice was made visible to strangers; visitors to Oriol y Parc that were in pursuit of tourist souvenirs, or to watch an artist at work. There was the pressure to work within a semi public arena, losing control over access to my studio whilst I was not in residence, knowing that the unsuccessful or unfinished paintings and drawings were on show, accessible; this would inevitably focus and influence my working patterns. But the most influential and far reaching transformation in my working practice to date, was driven by photography.

Journal 1. Page 159.

9.4.09. Studio.

Thursday before Easter. Many more visitors, as to be expected. What's summer going to be like? Just

knowing that the building is teeming with people - completely changes my sensibility. I so wish this place (OyP) was open late nights. Not only do I find great difficulty in working on a beach with other people present, but all my professional working life I've resisted a studio, which has been accessible. And now here I am at Oriol y Parc, completely visible and on show. SPACE in myself, away from a self-conscious awareness is key here. Not to be self-conscious - to be in a place in one's head where you can take risks, to question, knowing the mistake / accident is coming. But not wanting the mistake to be public.

Journal 1. Page 292.

6th August 2009.

Open studio, Thursday once again. Holidaymakers. What is my role today? Tourist attraction - educator - enabler - artist? At the moment I'm holding back, not wanting to begin work on my final large canvas, feel the end very close. Yet still searching for something new.

It would be misleading for me to suggest that individual processes of my working practice exist separately as they are all heavily integrated, influencing each other as the work proceeds. Despite this, it would be beneficial within this critical framework to examine each individual activity under their own heading.

Walking.

Time as a fourth dimension is key within the work of Richard Long, and it was indeed timely that his *Heaven and Earth* was exhibited at Tate Britain during the year whilst I was in residence at Oriol y Parc. The landscape itself is Long's art object, but he refutes that he is a 'Land Artist', Long also disassociates himself from 'walking' as a cultural, meditative or philosophical act. Long says, 'My work is real, not illusionary or conceptual. It is about real stones, real time, real actions.'³

Walking has always been very much part of the process of gathering experience in my own work since 1989, when working in Florence, or in 1992 drawing the streets of New York and experimenting with journey in Santiago De Compostella in 2005. The drawings gathered predominantly play with ‘the plan’ view and movement through space; only occasionally does the sketchbook reveal an awareness of horizon, avoiding the static, embracing a state of continuous and relative movement. ‘What time is to the musical composer, space is to the painter’; space and time are the fundamental components in my working practice; pictorial and musical rhythms experienced on coastal walks find their way onto paper.⁴



Brendan Stuart Burns. Walk from St Davids to Solva, 28th January 2009.

The very need to experience location necessitates the walk as a means of exploring, but it is the consciousness of being alone in the landscape, of feeling intensely alive to the elements and oneself that is central to my work as an artist. To reference myself within Chapter 2, *The Residency and the work produced*, ‘To feel breath, the wind and space. To be human in the primeval wind, to taste the wind, to shiver. To breathe in memory, thought, serenity, time and contemplation.’

Drawing.

‘Spontaneity, creative speculation, experimentation, directness, simplicity, abbreviation, expressiveness, immediacy, personal vision, technical diversity, modesty of means, rawness, fragmentation, discontinuity, unfinishedness, and open-endedness’ for Michael Craig-Martin, these are the central characteristics of drawing, however the one integral component missing, which is key to my own working practice, is that drawing enables learning and experience.⁵ Drawing is thinking. There are three distinct yet consistently intertwined ways in which drawing can function; those which lay down and communicate ideas, those which study and question the visible and those produced from memory. My own drawing practice embraces all of the above. There are also three distinct processes at work; the taking of rubbings and surface impressions, recording experience, sensation and the seen on location, and the experimentation of ideas in the studio.

I have already discussed my need to experience the new location of Caerfai by means of taking literal geological graphite rubbings. I wanted this to be a sincere, accessible and unpretentious preparatory process. To bring the land inside, inside the studio without having to resort to the physicality of rock samples. One of the most intimidating aspects of Oriel y Parc’s inaugural exhibition was the inclusion of Graham Sutherland’s studio objects collected by him on location; rocks, root forms and rusted chains presented with studio furniture and a palette. I have consistently avoided the need for such practice, concerned that the literal interpretations of such objects would constrain the possible ‘sensed’ experience of landscape. These collections also inferred a human presence, which I avoid at all costs. The rubbings were simultaneously

direct, literal and yet also ambiguous, especially as I presented them in my studio pinned to large windows, backlit, almost taking on the presence of photographic detailed scans or transparencies. The process of taking a graphite rubbing brings one closer to the subject, having to touch and connect physically with the land, its history and deep sense of time. This 'sense of touch' has always been integral in my work, the child in the artist compels the tactile response as primary. These rubbings directly communicate the rhythmical energies of the landscape; they are objective in the sense that they gather information and experience from physical things. They focused the opportunity to question not only my relationship with drawing, seeing and experiencing, but also painting.



Graphite rubbings, Oriol y Parc studio, 2009.

Sutherland acknowledged that it was impossible for him to make completed paintings on location, but his drawing practice kept him 'on good terms with nature'.⁶ A series of fifteen Welsh landscape drawings by Sutherland were exhibited in the gallery at Oriol y Parc during the first three months of my residency. Whilst I knew I had a deep affinity with his drawings, from this point they began to influence my process of mark making as well as subconsciously influencing me to seek out Sutherland-esque natural forms and darkened spaces on location.

Journal 1. Page 122.

Sutherland Suite of drawings, first hang.
I've become so attached, but also so frustrated with this suite of drawings. They've got under my skin, and are without doubt beginning to influence my own drawings on location. Not in the acknowledgement of a horizon, but mark making. I'll be both saddened and relieved almost when they move on. I'm sure their replacements will burn into the soul in just the same way. Why am I threatened by them?

They threatened my working practice because they offered an answer; they potentially offered a recognized process of drawing and seeing, as well as a 'signature' mark and formula, which promised the historical stamp of approval. It is incredibly difficult to walk the landscape of Pembrokeshire and not 'see' Sutherland, and there is the danger that such experience could have led to familiar pictorial convention and complacency in my work.



Graham Sutherland. Oriel y Parc. Welsh Drawings. 2009.

Using sketchbooks focuses my submersion in nature's rhythms; it facilitates an empathy and absorption of energies, which is inherent in a first hand experience of the environment. Unlike Hodgkin, 'who doesn't draw, photograph or do anything obvious to commit to memory the scene

or an interior, a view or a face, instead trusting what will happen when the sight of something has burrowed itself deep down in memory, when it has accumulated emotional and pictorial gravity,' memory is embedded with sensation and experience through drawing.⁷

Journal 1. Page 267.

26th July 2009.

Drawing at Caerfai tonight in a small sketchbook set aside for 2 min drawings and journeys. The whole point of these drawings is to push a confidence in less mark-making, and to capture an energy, which is at the essence of the place.

Journal 1. Page 273.

27th July 2009. Evening.

Enjoying small sketchbook with 2 min drawings. Love the immediacy, losing my inhibitions, being prepared to lose the 'view' - space that restricts potential abstraction. Feel I'm drawing like a sculptor? Feeling my way around, across, through. Manipulating a line, which re-enacts the process of formation. The energy within these works really needs critical review; I think they hold an important clue as to the nucleus of my work.

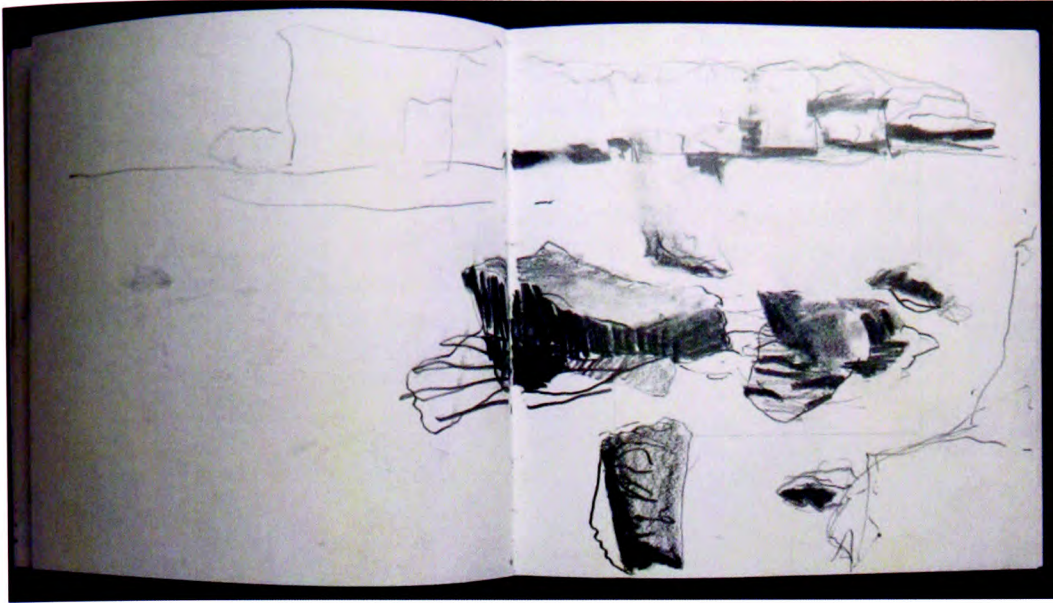
The process of drawing in the studio is far more difficult to pin down. In many respects it presents an arena in which to allow for a more intuitive, expressive and creative leap from the experience of the shoreline to the process of painting. It is an important environment in which to experiment and take risks, an opportunity to build and construct a potential conglomerate of experience, surface, form, colour and space. It is critical that this presents the opportunity to produce something new, something that I doubt, something which inevitably will allow me to re-experience, see or sense the landscape differently. Consequently it is where failure itself is most prominent.



Brendan Stuart Burns. Rubbings / Sketchbook. 2009.



Brendan Stuart Burns. Sketchbook. 2009.



Brendan Stuart Burns. Sketchbook. 2009.

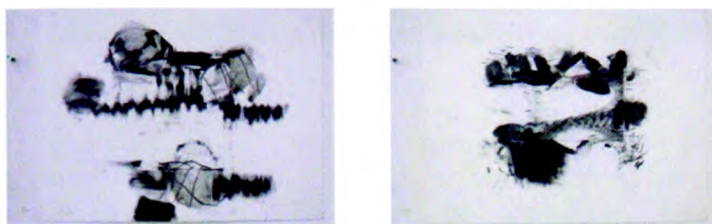


Brendan Stuart Burns. Sketchbook. 2009.

Journal 1. Page 178.

Studio drawings. Thursday 23rd April 2009.

The process of drawing in the studio has undoubtedly developed over the past 2 months. These are bolder works, sometimes using a photograph inlay or textural element. What is abstract here? The sense that these images are questioning mark making firstly - process comes first. Space and form secondary. Playing with the cutouts, an incised form - suggestive of the real - space / shadow. This questions the drawn. Layering - Expressive - Illustrational?



Stone poem drawings

Potential failure and repetition of experience came to fruition once again when I attempted to combine drawing and walking. Using a 10 metre length of paper, I attempted to take a direct geological rubbing from a fault line south of St Nons. This was not the first time I had set myself such a confrontation, I produced a similar drawing in a eucalyptus forest in Galicia during a residency with Iwan Bala in 2005.

Journal 1. Page 294.

10 metre drawing.

Why do I want to work on this 10m drawing so much? Why am I drawn to this process and format? Planning on going out tomorrow between Caerfai and St Nons, will use rubbing, watercolour and drawing. Possible text?

Journal 1. Page 295-298.

Large 10m rubbing. Caerfai - St Nons.

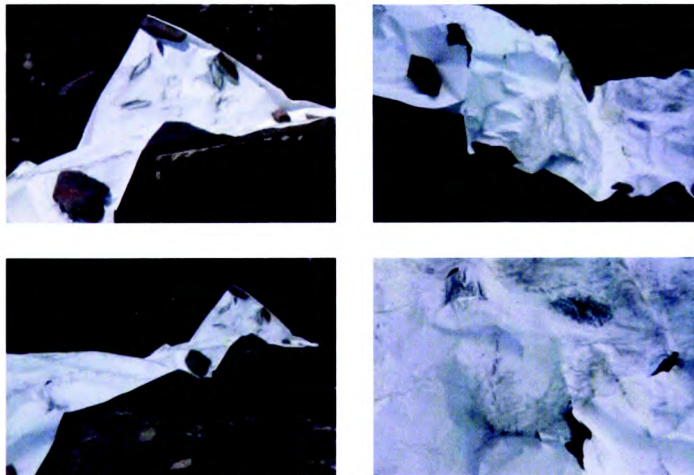
7th August 2009.

Deep down, very suspicious of my aims and ideas for this drawing. Too many questions and unresolved criteria - why? Location? Decision to take sample rubbings as apposed to all over. Why select one area over another to take rubbing from? All too random.



10m drawing Caerfai Bay

The photographs after the event were always destined to be far more interesting and successful than the rubbing itself. Once I had begun to mark the surface, became clear that the result was going to disappoint.



10m drawing. Caerfai Bay

The balance between the physical and the psychological, intention and accident, the intuitive and the considered are at the heart of my engagement with the landscape through drawing as well as my own sense of place; it's about being in the moment, of 'now-ness', a concept of Zen Buddhism.

Photography and Projection.

I do not take photographs to make art. The process of using a camera aids the act of seeing and experiencing. The frame establishes an awareness and potential of the outer boundaries of drawing and painting. Curators and galleries have consistently overlaid the photographic in my work during the past 15 years used for educational motives, it has seemed an easy way 'into' the paintings for the potential viewer. Despite this initial confident comprehension of the relationship of photography in my practice, there is also something which is extremely problematic about how I personally feel when reviewing my photographs themselves. (see below).

Journal 1. Page 127.

8th March 2009.

There is a 'photographic' element, which I both simultaneously enjoy and despise. Not photographic in the 'realist' sense, but more to do with light, and traditional photography, chemicals / photogram's. The paper and its sheer white brilliance is a light, which is bleaching and blinding. 'Having to squint'. This soul nourishing light is key to these new works.

Journal 1. Page 157.

6th April 2009.

Since the accidentally underexposed photographs taken from the World Trade Towers back in 1993, I've always been 'bleaching' deliberately. These images are indeed clichés of sort - images burnt onto memory - but nonetheless are part of a process in the studio. Absence...



Brendan Stuart Burns. Photograph. Caerfai Bay. 2009.

As previously stated in my biographical narrative, which underpins this critical analysis, photography became a huge catalyst for a series of paintings concerned with New York. The formal elements of space, light, scale, form and colour in painting which followed were born out of what actually was an unfortunate error in shutter speed setting. Consequently the underexposed series of photographs taken of predominantly ‘plan – like’ views from the main tourist attractions, allowed for the development in painting, of a series of ‘white on white’, quiet, muted and contemplative works. I still see it as ironic that the city of New York would go on to stimulate a search for the contemplative on a shoreline in Pembrokeshire, which has held my focus for the past 17 years. The camera has maintained an integral role in my creative practice since; it is as important and necessary as charcoal, graphite and oil paint. It is not, however, a tool or process which produces imagery which is viewed as anything other than supportive to painting. These photographs are not my work; they are part of its process only.

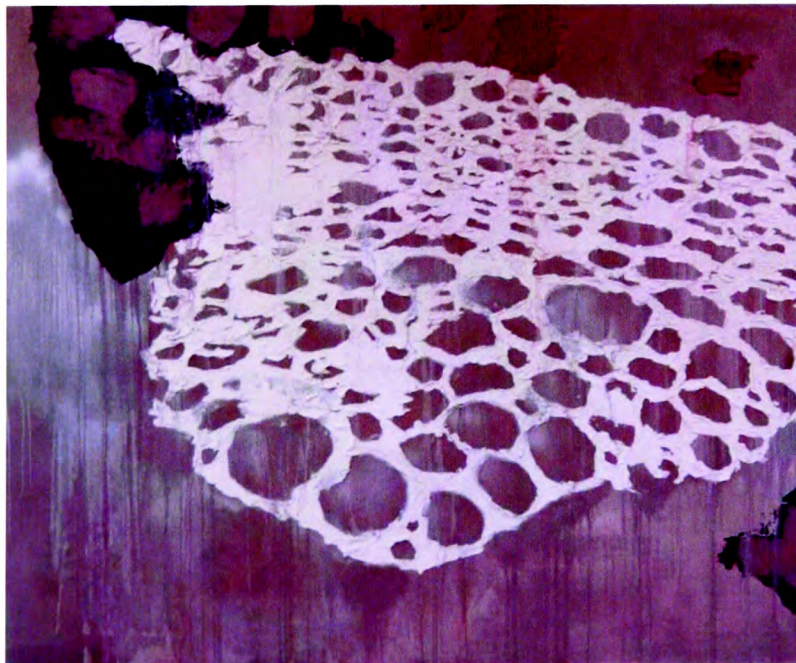
When I began to research and experience the beach at Caerfai, photography worked alongside as an equal to drawing. It became an immediate and essential way of bringing the outdoors indoors, furnishing the new studio with as direct a contact as possible with past experience and potential future ideas. Both the Wales First Minister Rhodri Morgan and the King of Lesotho visited my studio and were taken with these initial photographs, Rhodri Morgan asked if I had hand coloured them. He thought the red sandstone of Caerfai was too intense a believable colour to comprehend as factual. The limitations of the photograph to present real colour back in the studio are well understood; quality of camera, pixel count and printing equipment all contribute to the untruth, which is photography.

But what does the photograph bring to my practice? Why do I take photographs? It is primarily to aid the realization of the alternatives within composition, scale and space in order to nourish and stimulate painting itself. The experience of taking photographs was once sufficient in itself, the camera became a tool in order to experience, an aid to seeing; to the point where it was unnecessary to even print or review these images. However, during the twelve months in residence a new process began in my work, which was to project these photographs onto large-scale canvases in order to trace off an image and starting point for painting. It is well documented in art history that a lens or small piece of glass, and then the camera lucida contributed to a way of seeing the world, which influenced the position of the picture plane and space within painting. The journal entries below give some indication as to my decisions and problems experienced at this time.

Journal 1. Page 191-194.

Studio. 14th May 2009.

These details and underwater camera photographs / views are traced using the projector directly onto canvas, before I use thick impasto wax and knife to layer the image. I've been able to mix a microcrystalline wax formula which dries / cures / hardens within the week. This allows reworking of the surface, and leaves a trace element of mark within the tooth / weave of the canvas / linen. Colour is extremely important. Subtle colour variations within large sections of wax, play with light / space and sensation. The tactile and sense of visual touch remains crucial. The scraped / wiped areas play with process / geological time / rubbings and surface - texture / micro - macro. The high contrast and tonality at present defies pictorial space - and does not break the picture plane either way. These are paintings of the surface. They are sculptural statements almost, not interested in illusion / space of a traditional sense using perspective tricks. The painting above enjoys a relationship, which is becoming both important and interesting - maps.



Swell

Journal 1. Page 195.
Studio. 20th May 2009.

This is one of the most figurative and literal paintings for many years. (Swell) I am aware fully where the image has transpired from, question is, how is this painting viewed without an awareness of the original photograph? The space respects a western perspective with circle / bubble motifs gradually receding within the picture plane. Is this the only figurative reference? This painting has not been 'found' like the majority of my large paintings. Is this method of work 'appropriate' for the task of this residency only, working in St Davids for the year?

Journal 1. Page 197-198.
3rd June 2009.

I'm excited that the potential within the photograph has now been exploited. It will be challenging and difficult whether to reveal the 'process' at work here? How much? How little? What is the role of the abstract here? What is being presented in paint? What is the contemplative - and potentially where has it gone? Is this a new language for me as such? Where are the well-trusted and exploited motifs or signatures? Are these paintings truly new developments for me? Or are they extensions and natural paths I was travelling on. Where is the 'Zen'? Where is Landscape? Where is process? Where is Burns?

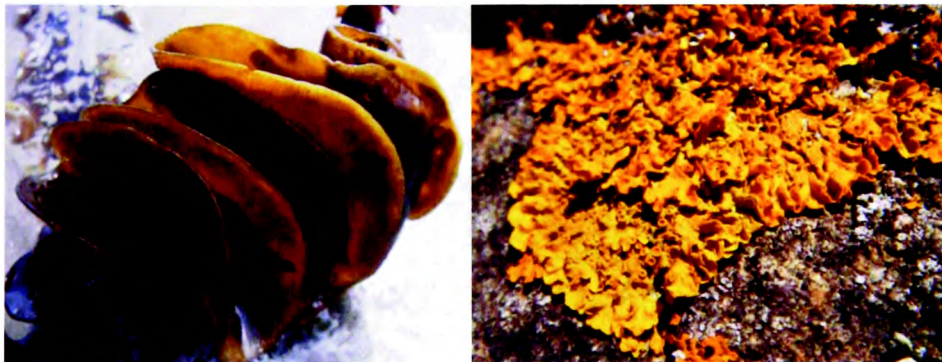
Journal 1. Page 287-290.
4th August 2009. Oriol y Parc.

I think what's really difficult is witnessing such a dramatic and obvious change in my work. Has the whole essence of my painting, of what it has tried to deal with, changed?

Undoubtedly the constant travel back and forth from St Davids to Cardiff each week, having to leave paintings unfinished, knowing that it may be five or six days before I would be able to resume working, involuntarily imposed a tighter schedule in my practice. I needed to enforce a far more disciplined methodology of work, and it was natural that the long desired

relationship between the photograph and the painting would become more immediate. As my journal entries present, I felt simultaneously at ease as well as deeply uncomfortable with this relatively literal translation of photograph to painting.

However, it is important here to stipulate that this process was only a means to a starting position in the painting; once the process of painting had begun, the photograph had served its purpose, to aid the development of space, composition and scale. At that point the creative act of painting and discovery in material processes and concepts within abstraction, figuration, landscape, loss, absence, inscape and the contemplative takes over. It was not only photographs that were projected; sketchbook drawings, rubbings, studio drawings and small paintings were all instrumental as catalyst for larger scale paintings. Illustrated below are some of the photographs used during this period.



Brendan Stuart Burns. Photographs, Caerfai Bay. 2009.

Journal 2. 12th / 13th August 2009.

Page 7-8.

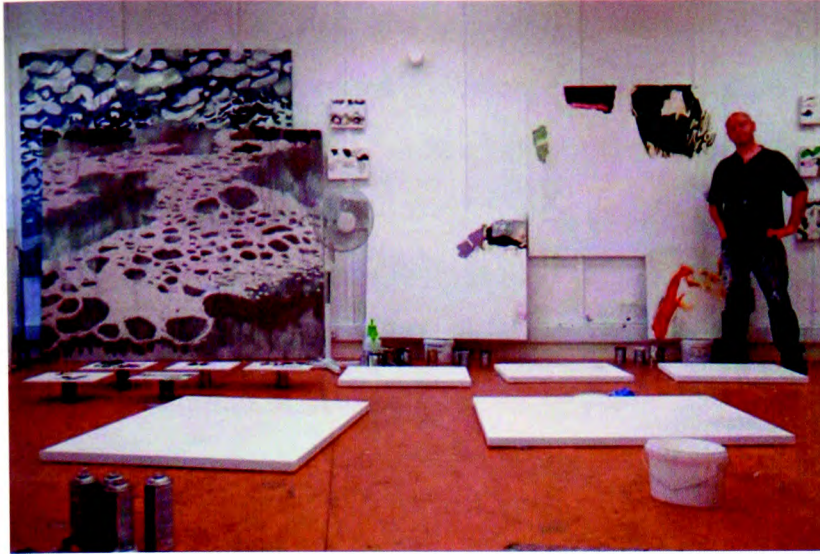
Realized that the process of projection and using the photographs is going to play more important role than usual. Must now take photographs for the actual painting, whereas in the past, this has been the opposite way around.

(although the underexposed photographs have been deliberately taken.) Therefore the process of looking and photographing has potentially changed. Will need to either make small paintings and project up in scale - or simply make more conscious decisions to use the photograph as a decisive starting point for the painting.



Brendan Stuart Burns. Photographs, Caerfai Bay, 2009.

This has all stemmed from the need to work within a public viewed and perhaps impersonal space to avoid the painterly 'squabble'. Where does the drawing process fit in now then? Why am I really pushing myself with $\frac{3}{4}$ sketchbooks on the go at this moment?



Studio, Oriel y Parc, Landscape Gallery St Davids, 2009.

Why draw at all? Do they simply train the eye? do they rehearse the mark-making process? Do they themselves become projected onto canvas? The studio drawings have in the past, so why not direct from the sketchbook to canvas?

Painting.

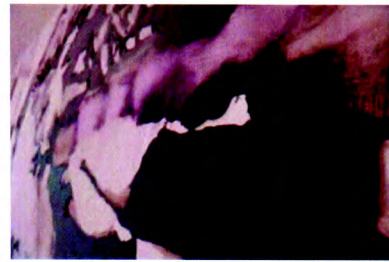
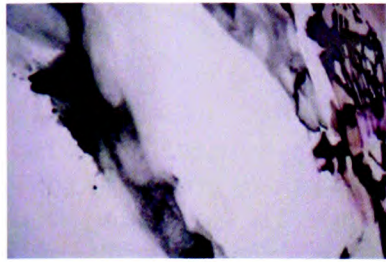
It is fitting and appropriate to underpin this section with my early connection and response to the Frank Auerbach exhibition at the Marlborough Gallery, London when I was studying on my Foundation course in 1981. That initial connection with his sculptural wielding of paint has been an ongoing infatuation in my own work's development, which has also been influenced by the artists with whom I have developed an affinity during the past 30 years: Titian, Auerbach, DeKooning, Hodgkin, Lanyon, Heron, Turner, McKeever, Porter, Setch, Prendergast, Ayres and Scully, all painterly painters who celebrate the physicality itself of both the material and process of mark making with paint. They all play with the ambiguity of image anchored in the fact and within paint itself. 'The dynamism of these painters seems to come from a dialect between

the image realised and the paint giving a “for-its-own sake” pleasure’.⁸ It is their connection with Hopkins’s ‘Inscape’ which emerges here; the ability of each of these painters ‘to see the pool, to see to feel the pool, and the pool feels the pool: the ‘pool-ness’ of a pool.’⁹ They paint the pool as it appears to them, they paint the pool as it feels to them; but they also paint what the pool feels.’ It’s this third dimension that I aspire to also; as I have stated in chapter 4 *Absence, Loss and the Spiritual* this is the central issue in my work.

The magical balance between construction and destruction in painting has consistently driven my ambitions as an artist. Oil and wax have remained a constant medium for questioning within changing and developing subject matters during the past 25 years. Wax’s tendency to solidify oil rapidly, concentrates and makes permanent, as well as focuses time and space in the image. The more recent paintings have tried to empathize with the gastronomic, to communicate the taste of sight and the taste of colour. It could be argued that the artist and tutor of mine, Terry Setch, had a profound influence over my technical demands and interests in the use of wax. However, I am not truly sure how influential Setch was here. The medium itself was readily available in art school, and we were as students fully aware of Setch’s work, but Setch’s influence upon me was far more profound; it was his readiness to take on ‘big’ subject matter such as the conflicts seen at Greenham Common with the CND protests. Paintings such as *People stand – together Greenham*, which was shown alongside Terry Atkinson at the ‘British Art Show’ 1984 and *Eviction Greenham* which won third prize at the John Moores Liverpool Exhibition 14, gave me the confidence to tackle both the miners strike and the suicide of a close friend as subject. The fact that both Setch and myself have worked predominantly with the beach over recent years is coincidence; he

is questioning a completely different strand that is the residue of modern civilization. Setch has consistently welcomed human presence in his work since 1993 I have championed the opposite. I use the beach as catalyst to the self and 'inscape', as my journal shows:

Journal 1. Page 191-194.
Studio. 14th May 2009.



Grind. Details.

What is figurative about it? Having been in residence since November, I have gradually become adapted at bringing a different working practice to the larger paintings. I no longer can afford to engage with large works unless I have a very specific concept / drawing / small study or photograph to act as inspiration or starting point.



Shadow into Parent Light series. 'Grind'. 2009. Oil and wax on canvas. 200 x 250 cms.



Pulse

Journal 1.

Page 233-234.

Concerned these small paintings look too controlled and prescribed - danger of becoming almost pastiche of my own work perhaps? However - may well not be this at all? But work that is an honest response to the residency and processes at work whilst back and forth in such a prescriptive way? I've already become aware of the specific nature and process of painting, which has evolved during the past 6 months, which avoids almost 'argument' or discussion.

These journal extracts reveal a dialogue which welcomes the unknown, the sense of going into the new, the debate surrounding the balance between processes and concepts in image making, and the communication of something far deeper than rocks and seaweed.

Peter Prendergast explores with Sister Wendy Beckett in his Agnew's catalogue *Paintings from Wales* his direct link with his materials such as charcoal and paint with the land. Prendergast was a painter with whom I immediately connected. We shared similar Catholic and Irish backgrounds and upbringing; we certainly shared similar fascinations with the relationship between drawing and painting, drawing to learn and experience the landscape as well as unearth an understanding of self. Painting for Prendergast was a physical, passionate, temperamental and

testing process. He would virtually sculpt his way through, across and within his subject matter; pulling, pushing, wiping, scraping his way through form and space. That critical process and balance between construction and destruction was integral to his searching: 'Reaching beyond the appearance to the essence'. 'For Prendergast the essence is a very physical thing, and resides in the underlying structure.'¹⁰ The underlying structure of humanity, the land itself and expressionism in painting. It is however to the spiritual that Prendergast connects us in his work, "the craving to find in nature a consolation for our mortality".¹¹

My own processes in painting also embrace the physical, the opportunity to play with colour and reflect the processes found within geology, rhythms of tide and meteorology; as well as connecting with one of the most primeval aspects of being human, to make a mark which declares presence and poses the question who? And why? 'A painting is a horde of destructions' said Ceri Richards, something I have always maintained; that willingness to wipe away or paint over that which begins to become a signature.¹² Bacon insists 'Half my painting activity is disrupting what I can do with ease'.¹³

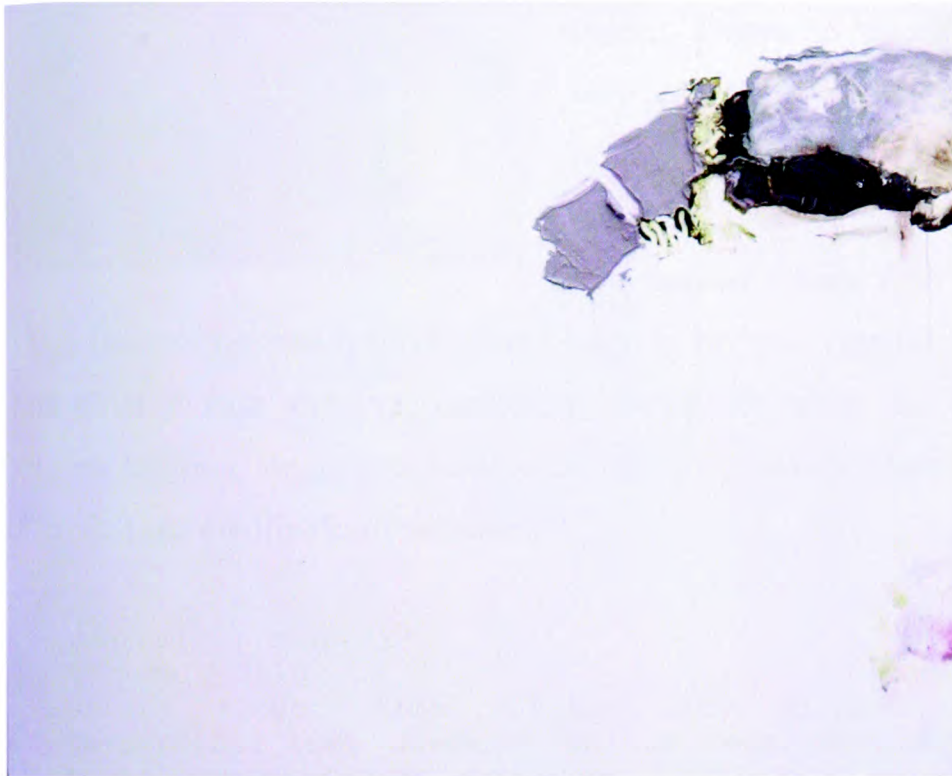
Since graduating, I have been very conscious of my ability to 'beautifie' painterly surface, always aware of the dangers within decoration. During the Slade, I deliberately simplified my palette, painted large-scale linocuts and sculpted in bronze, always trying to push and develop into the personally unknown. Oriol y Parc forced me to confront a new beach, and enabled a continued development and questioning of my visual language. I needed to confront the 'signature' marks, beginning to develop once again in my work.

Working with paint helps me to realize sensations in nature, and vice versa, to search out an emotional truth via an outdoors / indoors duality of process. Ceri Richards said, 'I paint using shape, colour and composition to accord to a feeling I have for something and I get a similar sensuous pleasure from music...There is certainly a deep link between music and painting – the proportions of time, the geometry of rhythms and division of spaces'.¹⁴ Painting is visual music, and I have been able to consider not only the musical in both painting and the landscape, but also that principal ingredient which intensifies the tension and emotive in both music and painting, 'the pause' and 'the awareness of silence'. I aspire to 'Paint that comes across directly onto the nervous system,' just as music does.¹⁵

Painting has always been a balancing act; to make the material of oil and wax unlike, but also miraculously like; to remain as paint, but to transcend and become space, and sensation; to encourage the accident, but avoid the decorative; to encourage instinct, yet remain connected with experience and meaning; to question why some of the more involuntary marks become far more revealing. How is it that when consciously I do not know what I am doing, my painting is stronger? And that as soon as I try to follow an idea more closely, it becomes illustrational? The key is in the signature mark once again.

The painting process is mysterious; the simple movement of paint can radically change the implication of image and sensations experienced by the viewer. I have radically reduced the surface coverage of paint during this current period of work, the tensions between extremely thick oil and wax and large expanses of open canvas or linen are heightened, almost sculpturally so. I consider that the development and use of photographic projection have been the most significant development during this

residency and has intensified the sculptural presence and process in my work. I am not simply aligning the physicality of the paint here, its texture and density, but quite the opposite, the use of illusionary as well as real space.



Shadow into Parent Light series. 'Seep', 2009. Oil and wax on canvas. 92 x 115 cms.

The journal.



During the Oriol y Parc residency self-critical writing in my journal became even more significant and embedded within my practice than ever before. Writing in sketchbooks, documenting weather, walks

and journeys, descriptions of colour, surface texture and the sensations experienced on the shoreline in order to re-read and ignite memory on my return to the studio, has always been integral to my work. But I have in



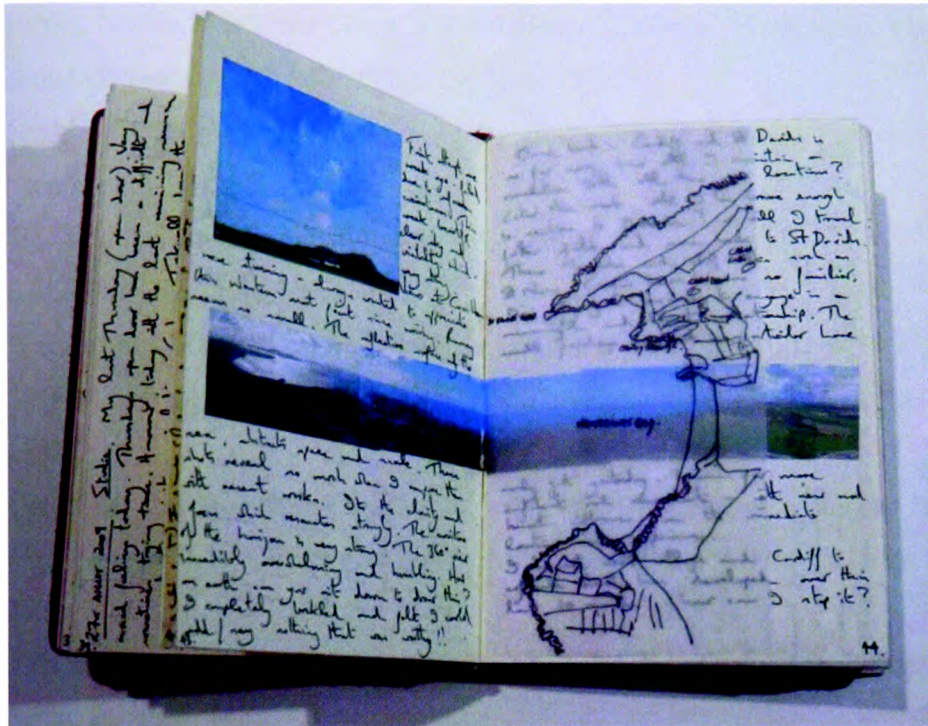
the past struggled with an ability to write down the more challenging and questioning. Indeed, I have in the past been very conscious of the potential reader, neglecting the true rationale of such a process, which is to converse back with myself.

These journals became a fundamental hinge in my two year relationship with Oriol y Parc and the coastline of St Davids when the distance between location, studio and home were cemented and scrutinized. One of my last and emotive entries reads:

Journal 2. Page 218.

17th July 2010.

Return flight from Belfast City Airport to Cardiff. Dad very unstable on his legs. Enriching visit. Dropped his guard at last. It's always been about absence, distance, separation, otherness, conflict, (inner), withdrawal, (emotional) the inner sob, having to leave, having to adapt. Distance and separation has always presented the opportunity to scrutinize your parents. The physical map of separation presents two distinctive land masses - rocks / stones / space / grieve - for lost opportunities. Lifting out of the dark grey clouds over Belfast, that amazing nourishment - that light - sun, above the clouds gives. Conflicting emotions. I have multi-personalities - where do I belong?



Notes

- 1 Robert MacFarlane, 'Five, six, pick up sticks', *Tate Etc*, 16 (Summer 2009).
- 2 Hammer, *Graham Sutherland*, p. 70.
- 3 MacFarlane, 'Five, six, pick up sticks', *Tate Etc*, 16.
- 4 Patrick Heron, *Painter as Critic: Patrick Heron: Selected Writings*, ed. Mel Gooding, (London: Tate Gallery Publishing, 1998), p. 73.
- 5 Michael Craig-Martin, *Drawing the Line: Reappraising Drawing Past and Present* (London: South Bank Centre Publications, 1995), p. 10.
- 6 Sutherland, *Welsh Sketchbook*.
- 7 Wat and Juncosa, *Writers on Howard Hodgkin*, p. 104.
- 8 Stephen Spender, *Frank Auerbach*. (New York: Marlborough Gallery Publications, 1982), p. 9.
- 9 Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'God's Grandeur', 1877, *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. W. H. Gardner and N. H. Mackenzie (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 31.
- 10 Taylor, J. R. et al, eds, *The Painter's Quarry: The Art of Peter Prendergast* (Bridgend: Seren, 2006), p. 14.
- 11 Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), p. 15.
- 12 Gooding, *Ceri Richards*, p. 135.
- 13 Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p. 91.
- 14 Gooding, *Ceri Richards*, p. 139.
- 15 Sylvester, *Interviews with Francis Bacon*, p. 18.

Conclusion

This research process has enabled a period of self-scrutiny and self-criticism which has truly benefited my progression. It has provided a platform from which I have already initiated new exhibitions as well as enabling me to publish my journal writings alongside the writings of Tony Curtis and Mel Gooding. The title of this book is *Glimpse* and its publication is expected in September 2011.

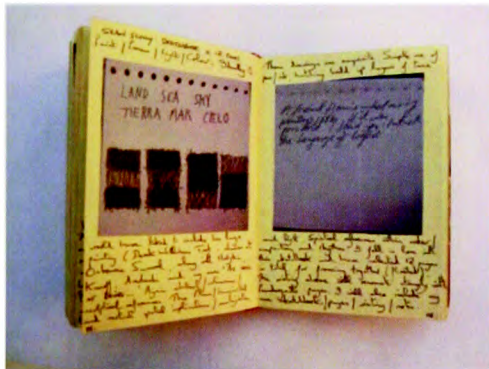
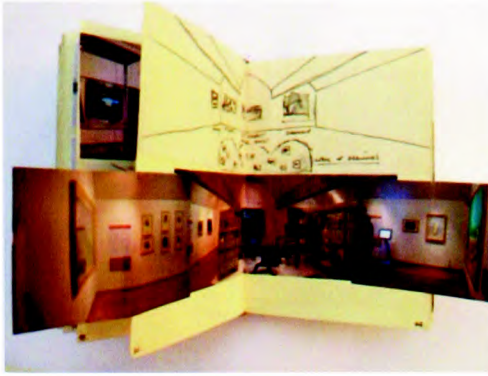
The primary conclusion to this body of work and experience however was the solo exhibition *Influere* shown at Oriel y Parc 2009 – 2010 (see Appendix ii, CDs and DVD). Certain restrictions and parameters influenced my selection of works from the National Museum of Wales' collection. Many artists included within my theses do not have a representation of work within the National Museum of Wales, and when they do the works the Museum has may not include the example I would have wanted to use. Some works, including the small Paul Cezanne watercolour, *Diver*, were deemed too fragile for travel, whilst an Anthony Caro sculpture had already been scheduled for another exhibition. I specifically wanted a selection of works that would initiate, reflect and refract dialogue with that of my own *Shadow into Parent Light* series.

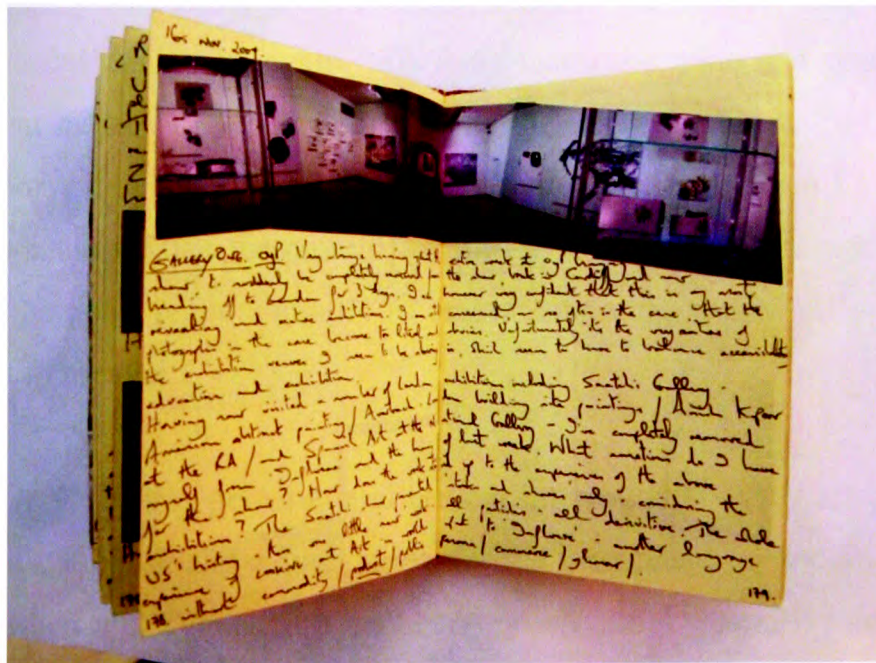
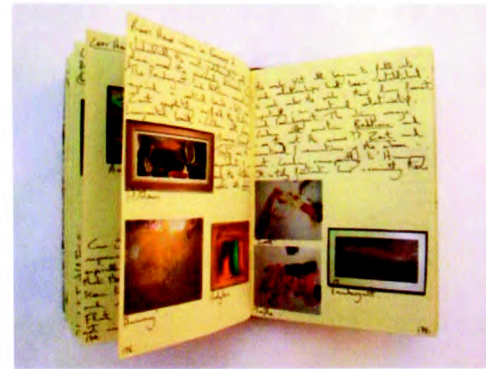
Throughout the residency, process, mark-making, absence and the spiritual had driven my own work, therefore it was appropriate to hold this thread and illustrate this lineage in my selection from the National Museum. The balance between the figurative and abstract was highlighted with the inclusion of artists such as Frank Auerbach, Graham Sutherland, Terry Setch and Eugene Boudin. The synaesthetic including rhythm, sound and smell prompted me to include in my selection works

by Ivon Hitchens, Sean Scully and Ceri Richards; absence and the spiritual was exemplified by Howard Hodgkin and Ben Nicholson. All of these artists however could so easily cross-reference each other within these categories. Sketchbooks by Peter Prendergast, Ceri Richards and Sean Scully presented the audience with the artist's honest relationship with drawing but also the dialogue of self-criticism.

This exhibition emphasized my initial questions in chapter one, reinforcing the argument that my work, both past and present, is indeed underpinned by the central themes of absence, isolation, mortality and the spiritual. It is the balance between paint, process and subject matter that has maintained my visual language and its development through what on the surface may seem to have been differing themes; I have argued within this thesis and the exhibition that they are intrinsically connected.

The residency enforced a far more disciplined methodology of work, and focused a new relationship with photography, enabling the development and use of projection as a starting point on large scale paintings. The discourse, which encouraged the simultaneous confidence and insecurity of using this process of work, highlighted the invaluable role of my journals throughout this research. It is clear that throughout I am grappling with the concept of hæcceity, inscape, thing-ness, essence and the ontological in the way I see a stone, rock-pool or lichen growth. The challenge is then using paint and charcoal to communicate this experience to the viewer as well as incorporating my own refractions of self, identity and awareness of mortality and the spiritual.





Journal 2. Brendan Stuart Burns. 2009-2010.

Since *Influere* I have exhibited works from the *Shadow into Parent Light* series in one-person exhibitions at Oriel Myrddin and Oriel Ynys Môn. A series of five paintings has been purchased for the National Museum of Wales for their permanent collection, and large paintings have been acquired by the Contemporary Art Society of Wales and the Retreats Group Ltd., Pembrokeshire. Far more importantly, I have also begun to piece together a clearer comprehension of my work and its potential development. I believe that these paintings have taken me as artist and my audience more deeply into a spiritual life, offering an inner wealth as well as sensory experiences.

Returning to Pembrokeshire regularly presents the dilemma, 'Which beach to visit?' At present my capacity for exploring Caerfai more deeply continues to hold me. It is the catalyst to continue asking questions through paint. It is, as previously stated, 'the breath' that my work references again and again. 'To feel breath, the wind and space. To be human in the primeval wind, to taste the wind, to shiver. To breathe in memory, thought, serenity, time and contemplation.' When I ask myself once again what is the point of painting? what do my paintings do? I see that the point is quite simply to create a painting which 'allows thought itself to breathe.'

The result of this personal and critical interrogation of my art signifies a climax, a pause and a foundation for the next phase of my work. I have described and evaluated a career of nearly thirty years. By considering this large body of work and by articulating the development of my philosophy, practices and processes as a painter I have established the personal, critical and practical basis for the next phase of my work as an artist and as a teacher.

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Appendix i

Biography

Brendan Stuart Burns was educated at Cardiff College of Art 1981-1985 and was awarded a First Class BA (Hons) Degree in Fine Art before studying for his postgraduate diploma in Painting at the Slade School of Art, University College London 1985–1987. He has twice won the prestigious Gold Medal for Fine Art at the National Eisteddfod of Wales, 1993 & 1998, as well as winning Welsh Artist of the Year in 2000 and 2003.

Burns has exhibited both nationally and internationally, including America, France, Belgium, Australia and Spain. His one-person exhibitions include *Tidal* Oriel Davies Gallery, Newtown, (2005); *Not the Stillness...* National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth, Oriel Clwyd and Newport Museum & Art Gallery (2002); *As well as Being...* National Museum Wales, Cardiff (1999).

Burns has exhibited widely in group exhibitions, including *Masterpieces of Modern British Art*, Osbourne Samuel Gallery London (2008); *Refractions / Shadows 7 Artists*, curated by Mel Gooding, Lemon St Gallery Truro (2008); *VII Xuntanza Obradoiro Internacional das Artes Plasticas*, Museo Municipal Ramon Maria Allen, Spain (2004); *Places*, National Museum Wales, Cardiff (2003); West Wales Arts Centre, Fishguard (2003); *Affordable Art Fair New York*, Gordon Hepworth Gallery (2003); *Painting Ysbryd / Spirit Wales*, Festival Interceltique de L'Orient, France; National Eisteddfod of Wales, St Davids (2002);

Different Lights, UKwithNY Festival, Angel Orensanz Arts Centre, New York (2001); *Welsh Artists Talking*, National Museum Wales, Cardiff (2000).

Burns's work is held in numerous private and public collections including the National Museum Wales, the Derek Williams Trust, the Contemporary Art Society of Wales, A Fundacion Casa Museo 'A Solaina' de Pilonos, Spain, the University of Glamorgan and Contemporary Art Society of Great Britain (Tom Bendhem Bequest).

A monograph of Burns's work and practice was published by Seren in 2008, *Into Painting*, written by David Alston (Arts Director, Arts Council of Wales) and Mel Gooding (International Art Critic and writer).

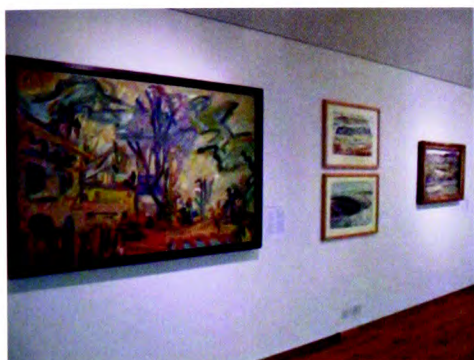
Burns will be publishing his journal entries from his experiences as artist in residence at Oriel y Parc, in 2011. Contributors to this book include Mel Gooding and Tony Curtis.

Appendix ii

'Influere' Oriel y Parc 2009 – 2010.

Thoughts on works / artists selected from National Museum Wales.

Audio guide transcript.



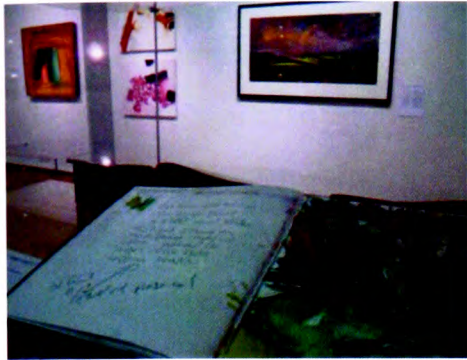
Frank Auerbach: I was studying on my Foundation course in Cardiff School of Art, visiting London for the day, and walked into the Marlborough Gallery. I was completely blown away. I was not at that time historically or contextually prepared to know about Auerbach before this encounter. An 'A'level syllabus which primarily focused on dead French 19thC artists, and a visit to the Royal Academy in 1980 to see the Stanley Spencer Retrospective, was never going to prepare me for the gutsy, expressive and physically painted surfaces of his work. This was painting with a 'stick', paint as thick as mud. It was indeed the 'process' and physicality of paint itself that 'connected' with my sensibility. These works are 'sculptural', they are indeed 'geological'. It is not only that the surface itself references the flow of lava, but the process of layering and scraping away, the balance between construction and destruction. Yet underlying all of this, Auerbach's paintings are considered, they take time to create, and they take time 'to

work'. What struck me also alongside this physicality of surface, were the remarkably descriptive qualities within so few marks. William Feaver writes in his catalogue essay, 'The painting only makes sense when you follow each mark as an exploratory touch.' He goes on to describe Auerbach's work as both 'Lavish and economical, restrained and ecstatic; This experience of 'truly connecting' with painting has with hindsight become a pivotal point in my trajectory as an artist. There is a long line of influences and affinities that has stemmed from this day.



Howard Hodgkin: Hodgkin since the early 1980's has continued to inspire and motivate me. The analogy of these paintings for me, is like a fine sauce, the more it is boiled down and therefore condensed, the purer and more poignant it becomes. The many hours/days/years of working these surfaces, and yet to remain so fresh and intuitive. You cannot hide as an artist when working like Hodgkin, you reveal everything, the soul laid bare. A common thread running through both Hodgkin's work and my own, is perception, memory and of course painting itself. Contrary to Hodgkin, though, I draw, I take photographs, I take rubbings direct from the landscape, I rehearse and try to commit to memory sensations, emotions and experiences. I see to feel, and feel to see. As with both Hodgkin and someone like Paul Klee, I strive in my work for an initial response, which is immediate and instinctive, almost physical. These paintings have to be sensed and experienced, they benefit from an urge to investigate and decode, they are indeed 'slow' paintings, contemplative and

meditative. The 'aesthetic', the paint itself is the primary hook which draws you into a deeper conversation / engagement.



Peter Prendergast: He was a father I didn't have in many respects. (don't quote that though!!) From my very first meeting with Peter Prendergast in New York when we both visited the great Matisse retrospective at MOMA, we enjoyed a great friendship and mutual admiration for

each other's work. I was always envious of his 'comfortableness' with the presence of a horizon in his work, and I think he was envious of how I relinquished horizons in my work. It was his process of work through drawing and the hard won experience from the landscape itself that I connected with. 'Learning the land'. To be completely immersed within your inspiration. Each of his paintings inspires me to inhale deeply and fully experience what it is to be human within the landscape. I also love the way his drawings and paintings grew naturally, physically, as panels were often added. Physical painting and drawing which almost sculpts the land. It was important for me to also include one of Peter's sketchbooks, artists write notes to themselves in these books, and exhibited here is a poignant one.



Terry Setch: Terry taught me during my degree at Cardiff. It was however his Greenham Common paintings

though, which were to inspire me firstly when I was working with subject matter including the Miners Strike / Toxteth Riots and Northern Ireland. It was his ability to be 'political' and stunningly beautiful simultaneously. Of course wax and process were inspirational. Surface and light within layers of wax. Then came the beach, but unlike Terry, I avoid people and detritus in my work. My works are more formal I think. Again like Peter Prendergast's, drawing and the process of research actually on location are key. *There is something uniquely 'feminine' about Terry's work, (meant in the most sensitive and complimentary way of course)*



Ceri Richards: In 2003 I was commissioned to make a painting inspired by the work of Ceri Richards for an exhibition at the National Museum Cardiff, it was Richards's deep associations and connection with music and painting that remained with me, as I have for many years now identified with painting as visual music or sound. Richards' love of the piano music of Claude Debussy in particular, and his Cathedral Engloutie series, have initiated many works and studies.



Eugene Boudin: This painting by the French pre-impressionist Eugene Boudin is probably the only painting in the show with people!! But this painting has been one, which I have

always tried to visit when coming to the Museum. I love the play of light on form, the beauty in the mark itself. But it is its small scale that is undeniably its prime power. To be so tiny and delicate, yet reveal such a big space.

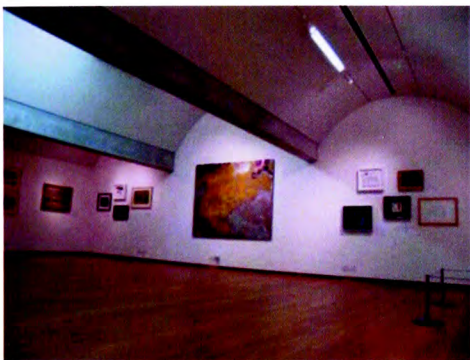


Sketchbooks / Drawing / Photographs / Process

Drawing has always played a vital role within the way I research and work. Sketchbooks offer a place to take risks and experiment, as well as ‘rehearse’. When I say ‘rehearse’, I mean ‘to learn’ what it is that I’m looking at, or feeling. I will spend hours walking the beach or the coastal paths drawing to understand, and to question; never to simply portray. Taking direct rubbings from rocks will generate very literal almost fossil like drawings. These are perhaps the most magical, yet most simply produced drawings. When drawing and working with an oncoming tide, which is almost reclaiming a rock pool, I try to play with the process of ‘time’. Something, which a single photograph cannot. The camera is also a vital part of my walks. But I never trust the colour reproduction, whether viewing them on a computer screen, backlit, or in print form. Colour knowledge has to be ‘learnt’ the hard way, on location itself. Of course when you take a photograph, you become instantly aware of the rectangle, the picture frame. So composition, and decisions about ‘what not to include’ in the shot, become more obvious, something I try to use in my drawings.



I've taken over 5,000 photographs during the residency, some will have been printed to act as potential starting points in drawings or paintings, or to pin on the studio wall, building an environment inside. But the vast majority will never be seen or shown, emphasising that it's the process of taking the photograph itself that really matters for me.



Harmony: Many of my large paintings such as this one, Harmony, were made during the latter stages of the residency. I'm very reluctant to give a specific way in to these works, they demand time and contemplation, something that we in our 21st Century techno world are perhaps not used to doing. To spend some time 'looking' and to 'allow' the paintings the opportunity to reveal themselves and to tease out meaning and content. There are no obvious horizons in my work, I am more often than not concerned with 'the plan' view, that of reflection / refraction / shadow / the ambiguity of space and form / edge and surface. Harmony is a painting on linen, which is chosen for its colour ground, not for its expensive weave or quality. Harmony is inspired by the Dusk, the point at which the light begins to disappear, and suddenly there is that moment when all the surfaces that have absorbed sunlight throughout the day, begin to discharge and release their colour back into the atmosphere.



Lull: In direct contrast to ‘Harmony’, this painting is concerned with absence. Placing a rectangular frame around a grouping of stones is simple enough. Making a painting of this same set of rocks is potentially laden with failure. The open and quiet

space, the stillness, the sense of what’s not included within the painting, hopefully adds to the tension and almost Zen like qualities found in Zen gardens. This, for me, is as much about the possibilities within the sculptural as it is about paint and process.



Crackle / Swell: ‘Crackle’ is a complete mystery to me. It presents a fairly obvious ‘space’ and consequently ‘scale’. It’s as near to using traditional western perspective that I have been since probably the mid 1980’s. Of course the subject

matter is obvious, but it’s the thick wax and oil that are key to the sensations being aroused. For example, ‘Crackle’ a word that communicates a sound. The titles within this exhibition, are emotive, they act as a catalyst, a sensation, a potential way into the work. Titles are very important for all of my works, I like to avoid literal titles, such as place names. In my previous bodies of work I have incorporated sensations or processes at work in the landscape itself, as well as within the painting process.



Shimmer and the smaller paintings on board / process:

Shimmer is an example of one of my smaller paintings which I generally make on wooden panels. Painting on panels as apposed to canvas, offer the sculptural a greater chance of success

I think. I very much appreciate the differences in working between two extreme scales, these small paintings offer the potential of being reworked many times, being able to wipe back again and again, just as the tide levels the sand each day. Wax and oil paint are layered and sculpted, conscious of the potential shadow they will cast. In contrast to these densely built up areas, there are expanses of clean white board. This emptiness, or absence is so important, it's what's not included in these works that somehow is their subject. These spaces are solid, active and meditative.



The Rocks. At first, it seems crazy to include examples of rocks in the gallery, when you only have to step outside and walk the coastal paths or beaches to see them in their natural habitat. Many artists, including Sutherland collected for the studio

many examples of rocks, root forms, natural and manmade objects. I have always found great difficulty personally in doing this. I was always disappointed when I brought the rock or pebble inside and placed it on the

studio bench. It had lost its initial charm, its colour, its friends and relationships, all the things why I chose it in the first place. But these rocks are different. Trawling through the National Museum's vast geological collection, I suddenly realised how much I remembered and recognised specific samples from very specific locations that I have been working in during the past year. St Nons / Whitesands / Solva / St Davids Head and of course Caerfai. The Caerfai group in particular have initiated and influenced my whole colour palette this past year. The red sandstone of Caerfai, what an incredible experience, walking around the corner on Caerfai beach at low tide, the 'light' itself is infectiously magical, something that you cannot help re-experience again and again, once you know it's there, almost like eating your favourite food, it's both nourishing and satisfying simultaneously. I hope that I can present these rocks somehow slightly differently, than if the exhibition was a geological or natural history show. Seeing them first of all in their drawers and white cardboard specimen boxes, presented themselves in a way, which resonated with the pencil rectangle so often used within my drawings. The boxes become their frames, they accentuate the sculptural quality, their surface / weight and form. But they are of course first and foremost rocks, brought in from outside, and by doing this alone sets them out to be 'seen' in a different way. They are part of a 'whole' which they have been removed from, similar to my work, they too are concerned with a bigger whole, whether we're talking about landscape / climate change / geology or what it means to be human in all of this – but also Painting, and the process of making.

The Residency

Taking up the role of Artist in Residence at OyP was going into the new for me. This was an amazing opportunity, to make new work in response to a new beach and coastal region. I have worked with Druidston beach for the past 15 years, so I felt I was beginning to know what drew me to make paintings inspired by Pembrokeshire.

I was also very aware that change needed to happen naturally, if at all? This was the first time I had ever worked in a studio environment in Pembrokeshire, the modernist studio space had always been in Cardiff, 120 miles away. (something which had become an integral part of the process in my works). Not only this, but to be able to view works from the National Museum's collection in the gallery space, on the way to lunch, to spend time with a Sutherland sketch, Rembrandt etching, a Piper drawing, or Picasso vase, was truly a magical time. This residency not only offered up the potential to produce a new body of work, but also to re-evaluate and question why, who for, and what for. Sure enough Pembrokeshire and Caerfai are integral to my working processes during the last year, but I have to acknowledge the possibility that these works are about much more than this. If my works were to be exhibited in the mid west of north America, outside of Pembrokeshire, how does one view them then? What's in it for the audience? Surely they have to resonate something deeply spiritual and primeval almost??

Appendix iii

Journal 1

Page 35.

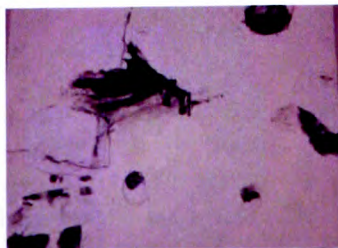
24th Nov 08. Having seen this image (below) and producing AI sequence in studio, began to question, Is it the experience on the beach / the photographic process / that ultimately is the catalyst for imagery produced in the studio? OR, is the work and its vision - allowing me to see the affinity / composition within existing photographs. In other words, does the work come first, or the photograph?



Artist Photograph. Newgale.

Page 36.

Enjoyed working with the large block of graphite. Immediate and intuitive. Must further pursue the issues within extending the image, either paint or drawn onto the wall / exhibition surface. Probably haven't worked on this scale of drawing since New York series. Felt remarkably comfortable and appropriate in the new studio.



Studio drawings. 2009.

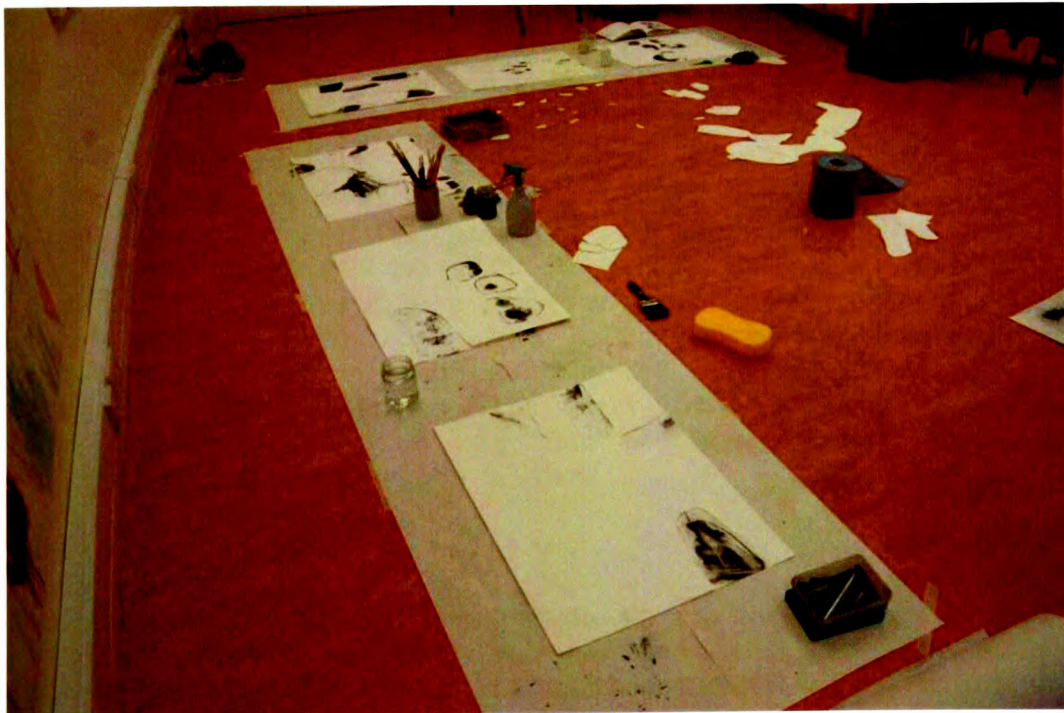
Page 37.

London exhibitions which have resonated an affinity with these new works include; British Museum / early Greek sculpture and the archeological presentation of these broken torsos etc. The Francis Bacon show at Tate Britain / space within the triptychs in particular.

Page 38.

24th Nov 08.

So pleased to get the studio up and running. Spent full pm session working through a sequence of 6 A1 layered drawings. Consciously played with 'absence' and layered cutouts. Remember the Matisse exhibition at MOMA in 93. Also conscious of Fontana. There's something quietly aggressive in the act of piercing / cutting. It was so good to turn around and see all the pieces left over - the off cuts. Scattered - abandoned across the studio floor. Their sense of displacement / abandonment / quiet / randomness was particularly interesting.



Artist Photograph. Newgale.

Page 41.

British Museum. Greece, Parthenon (room 18) 447-432 BC) Dedicated Temple to Goddess Athena, white marble, Parthenon fragments. These fragments deeply resonate with earlier ideas, which would play with broken paints fragments and include paintings, which would spill into the exhibition space.

Page 42.

Tabletop sculpture; remember earlier influences during Foundation course, Caro. Couldn't believe how day was unfolding. Having stumbled across Parthenon fragments - only then to experience the large Caro's, remember 'Archisculpture' show at Tate Britain. All of these works experience a physical journey / walk. Great potential here to experiment with physical journey.

Page 44.

Tate Britain. Francis Bacon exhibition.

I was deeply pulled to Bacon's work during my Foundation year. It was his use of the triptych which seemed to connect most. The lone figure, isolated within a lilac pink space, confronted my most recent ideas about self or landscape?

Page 46.

Tate Modern. Rothko exhibition.

Wow! Never prepared for a series of small pencil / wax studies / Marquette's which play with compositional possibilities for the Seagram sequence.

Page 51.

3rd & 4th December 08.

Two full days in residence. Icy cold and frosty journey. Again, thoughts led to 'absence', a deep sense that all was not as it should be in West Wales. Everything seems particularly vulnerable at present. This deep sense of loss / absence / stillness and quietness of contemplation will drive my current works no doubt. Spent all day on Caerfai beach, light was crisp and focused. Shadows were deep and long. Stunning sequence of photographs. Very strong series of drawings also.

Page 52.

4th December 08.

Couldn't resist a trip to Druidston on the way to St Davids this morning, even knowing that the tide was high. The swell was fierce and wind strong. Snow white light engulfed pebbles edge. Felt good to be back home. Heavy rainfall last night, whiteness of light is so cleansing and nourishing.

Page 52.

4th December 08. Studio

Playing with cut out layers once again. Went remarkably well - very suspicious - need to re-evaluate next week. Began small paintings with conscious decision to use the red sandstone colour found on Caerfai beach. Find this

very difficult, stepping outside of a preferred palette; have always found difficulty using red, why? Is it simply feeling comfortable with an established palette? Trying to understand why I'm drawn to the land? Is it because it's more important than me? It's a relationship with the future and past, mortality - spirit. In-awe, in wonderment, humbled. This is indeed a deep relationship.

Page 54.

9th December 08.

Considering this is a new studio and awareness of people and vulnerability of public access, I am pleased with the potential quality and depth of recent drawings.

Experimenting with physical layers - tracing transparencies / cut outs / have inspired a sequence of 4 small paintings. Remember Arp. Can't believe I'm revisiting 1980. What are these drawings about? What are they for? How to recognize repetition - new work - new chapters? What is the balance between formal / process and beach?



Whither.

Page 55.

9th December 08.

I genuinely feel very uncomfortable with the red / pink of Caerfai. Here I question aesthetic / primeval palette as opposed to experienced / sense of place palette.

Page 56.

9th December 08.

ABSENCE. It's taken until Christmas to realize that these recent paintings are working with 3 components / ingredients. Myself / Ruth / Caitlin or Myself / Mum / Wendy. Always with a great sense of absence. Who's that I wonder? Distance - tensions of absence, sensations of another presence.

DISPLACEMENT. A sense of being separated from one's culture / upbringing - not simply Ireland, but also my own Welsh / Cardiff home. No real sense of belonging. Belonging.



Numb.

Page 58.

Christmas 2008.

I really wasn't prepared to feel so confused and separated from my Cardiff studio. I can't really describe how distant / threatened I feel. A short Christmas break has compounded the physical distance now involved. I must admit I feel a greater affinity with Sutherland as a real person, not simply the artist. How descriptive / poetic Sutherland writes, "It was in this country that I began to learn painting. It seemed impossible here for me to sit down and make finished paintings from nature. Indeed there were no 'ready made' subjects to paint. The spaces and concentrations of this clearly constructed land were stuff for storing in the mind. Their essence was intellectual and emotional. I did not feel that my imagination was in conflict with the real, but that reality was a dispersed and disintegrated form of imagination."

Page 59.

Studio, 31st December 08.

Begin to stretch 2 canvases 240 x 240 cms. Format / size taken directly from Twombly, Tate Show. When stretched, connected instantly with format, What is this connection and why is it so comfortable?

Page 60.

Studio, 3rd January 2009.

Hung two 240 x 240 cms canvases, very positive energy from these formats.

Page 70.

These stunning icicles made reference to me of McKeever's recent works. Composition within are incredibly rich. It's the sculptural / formal that pulls me here, also the transcendental / ethereal light. Edges / form / transparency / volume / rhythm / space and light.

Page 71.

Druidston, 11th January 2009.

It's way too much to think my work at St Davids is going to move away from the influences of Druidston. Ok, the colours, sand patternations, light, geological nature of Caerfai is quite remarkable, but the spiritual magnetism is missing.

Page 72.

Studio, 14th January 2009.

Began working on two large 2m square drawings, floor based. Superficial start, looking forward to developing these tomorrow. Conscious of time, (4.30pm close).

Page 73-76.

Studio, 15th January 2009.

So want to get somewhere with the 2 large drawings today. Begun to experiment with stencil and spray can, it's the photographic process all over again! Liquid light. These stenciled edges / stones are really 'arguing' with the drawn elements. Dialogue is of real / illusion / past / present / shadow / form / presence. Also very aware now of the influence of Calder at the Royal Academy - see earlier photographs. I want these large drawings to look 'undrawn', unconstructed, like rubbings themselves, found like fossils.

Page 77-80.

18th January 2009.

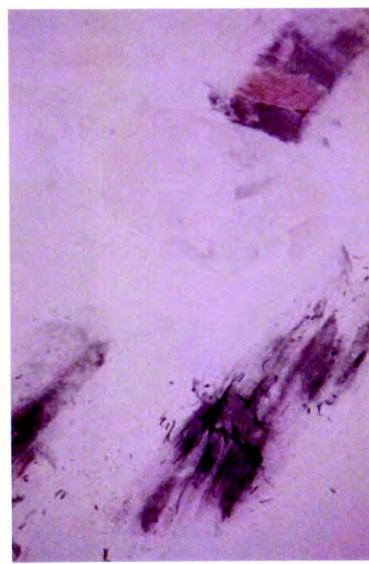
Had a couple of days in Cardiff away from these two large drawings. If they were in my studio here (Cardiff), I would have undoubtedly been across to measure their success or not by now. All I have though are the photographs. At the moment I'm excited but anxious also, potentially understanding that they are indeed 'going nowhere'! It was an intense period working on them, but I question how honest I was being? The relationship of the

stenciled patches to that of the drawn / sets up an interesting tension, which I do not understand yet. If that's the case, then at least I might be going somewhere new? I was working on these drawings to take on board the rubbings. They needed to incorporate the 'found' or absence of making and process. However, once the stenciled areas had been added, they changed. They themselves looked more 'found' than the drawing / mark-making itself. Curiously it is almost the most figurative element also.

The figurative / abstract confrontation - conversation continues. What is this balance? Is there a balance, or is it simply trying to discover a new language, which is in fact figurative, but for arguments sake, we call abstract.

I can't believe it's nearly a week since working on these drawings. I'm worried that when opening the studio door tomorrow, they will not 'connect' at all. 'Connect' with what?

Aware of Calder's shadows and Matisse's cutouts.



Studio drawings.

Page 85.

22nd January 2009.

The surface quality of primed white canvas is very different to that of this white cartridge. I may never be able to succeed, if the surface is going to make too literal a space / plane. I will need to experiment with a ground / surface / stain which can offer a more ethereal space. I am desperate to start producing more.

Page 87.

28th January 2009.

Driving to St Davids early. The mist in the valleys was incredible, as I reached St Davids, the two volcanic peaks were submerged in mist / fog. I can't believe how much the drive here echoed the recent small paintings - peaks surrounded with white light - emptiness. From the initial journey here, with valleys filled with mist, to the beach at Caerfai, where it rolled up the beach with the incoming tide - to the drive back to Haverfordwest. From Turner to McKeever, I couldn't escape meaning / sensation so powerful.

Page 91-92.

28th January 2009.

Walking on cliff from Caerfai to Solva. These shapes seen in most recent works are those, which my eye is continually drawn to. Lichen growth, rings, wind formed sculptural grass clefts. These forms and shapes are crucial to my work, but I need to confront whether my work stands alone from these, or are they referencing them? Am I responding like Sutherland? I so want my work not to be limited to landscape. "One cannot really say it - one can only paint it." Barnett Newman.

Paintings - "The space between words" Ian McKeever. (Four Quartets - Martin Craiger Smith.)



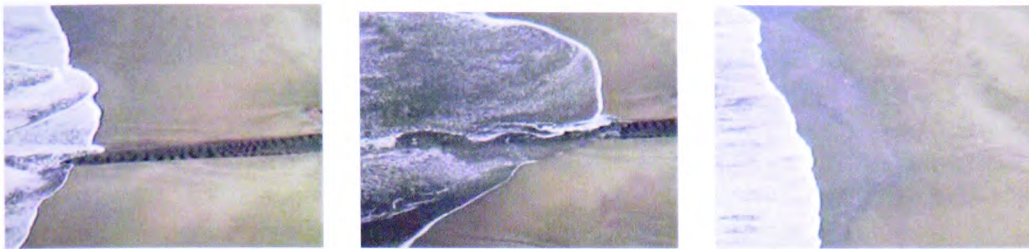
Artist Photograph. Lichen.

Page 93-94.

Walk from Caerfai beach to Solva.

The path gave me numerous plan views of Caerfai, a beach I'm only beginning to get to know. The sequence of images (below) truly reveal the 'abstracted' that I enjoy. This sequence of oncoming tide shots, swallowing up the small rippling stream off the land. This state of ebb and flow,

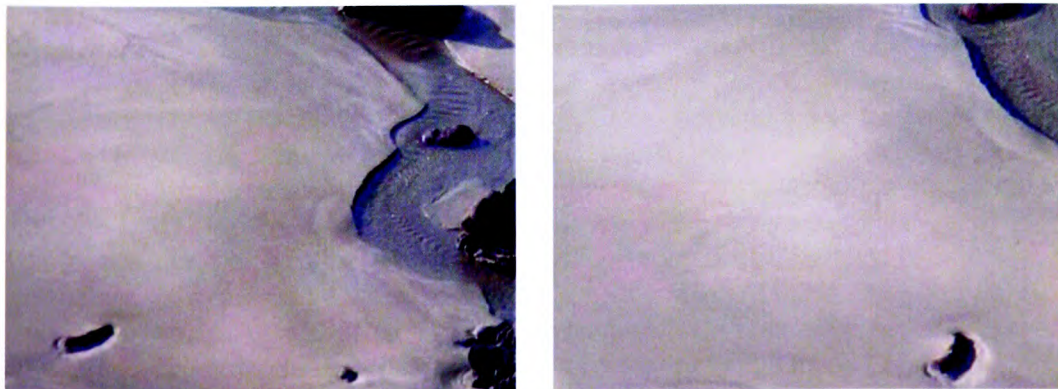
balance of construction and destruction, is an energy I last felt / experienced in Richard Serra's show at the Gagosian Gallery last November. Simple architectural forms, sheets of iron, finely balanced, almost untouched by human hands. The un-human, found quality is essential in new works. The space seen in these photographs play with the tension of vertigo / plan. They could have almost been inverted?



Artist Photograph. Caerfai beach.

Page 95-96.

These natural 'Zen' like gardens, created by nature, not man. Are my own compositions formulated with the accident, or are they taken from the camera? The absence of detail, texture, and the ambiguity of scale / distance - are all elements to be played with in paint. From early NY paintings, including 2nd year degree, where perspective and space implied the plan view, also *Miners at the base of a crucifixion*, also *'Swish-Back-West'*, identify with plan like space. Why am I drawn to plan views? Is it my geographical interests? Is it that I grew up in living spaces, which were first storey dwellings? Is it simply a device to abstract? I constantly have to discuss the abstract within my work; perhaps I need to question the meaning of 'Figurative' also.



Artist Photograph. Caerfai beach.

Page 97.

McKeever says, " I like to go places where I do not understand the language...there is a freedom there, somehow the world is anew". *Four Quartets - Martin Craiger-Smith*. I so connect with this, its so often what I do not understand that truly makes a good painting. To go somewhere new can be exhausting, it's how to recognize the new? How do you know it's new? How many times have I regurgitated something, which has lay dormant, something seen, often experienced many years prior? John Hoyland not only said that you paint the same painting over and over again, he also said that each artist had their own distinctive / personalized SPACE. This seems to become more apparent as I get older. I still don't understand it, where it has come from? Why it happens? Why I feel connected / comfortable with it? Maybe it's because I always want to be somewhere else? (Wherever I am). I always want that other place. Does this hark back to early childhood? With the separation of my parents, living apart, two spaces? Always felt I was missing out on something. A constant dilemma of personality, never quite getting there, never quite achieving, never really connected to the present. Here comes the love / hate relationship with the abstract / figurative.

Page 103.

Studio. 12th February 2009.

At one moment it feels like I have been damming the creative energy required to work on these large canvases, but on the other hand I question whether I'm ready?

Page 104.

Studio. 17th February 2009.

Spent most of the day preparing large canvases once again. Am I avoiding starting work on these large paintings? Confronted, yes that's the word, confronted the 2 large 240 x 240 cms canvases. Scaled up two drawings and fairly confidently drew out compositions. So pleased just to start, began to use thick wax layers which have become 'Islands' or 'headlands' in a map like way. Couldn't resist then viewing the Sutherland drawings in the gallery. Remember - Mark-making / variety. Visited Lyn's grave on the way to the studio this morning. Focused the mind and re-affirmed the fragility and the temporary. The tenderness of being alive and the transience of life are key to these new works, but all the time hiding behind the stones!

Page 106-107.

19th February 2009.

I am all too conscious now with the residency, that this is the first time I am on show to the public literally. For the first time since college, I'm allowing works in my studio, unfinished / successful or unsuccessful / complete failures, to be seen whilst not here. I have no control; I am usually in complete control as in when I let them go into the public arena.

Page 108.

21st February 2009.

Spent a couple of hours projecting and transferring a number of small paintings onto larger canvases. Becoming more evident that mapping and aerial views / ambiguity of scale and space are integral. I must look at the possibility of transferring specific map / Google map profiles / land masses / edges / coastlines. Even raise the possibility of using my background / upbringing - i.e. Nakuru - Belfast - Cardiff - West Wales.

Page 109.

22nd February 2009.

Having to return to Cardiff is becoming a nightmare. Went straight into Google maps. I cant believe how detailed the photographs are of Caerfai Bay. How flat it all looks, no shadows. Should some of my compositions take literally the headlands and mapping features? Could a sequence of images lend themselves to a particular walk? Would it become too obvious that the shapes and forms had begun to be taken directly from the map? Is there a balance between the figurative and abstract here?

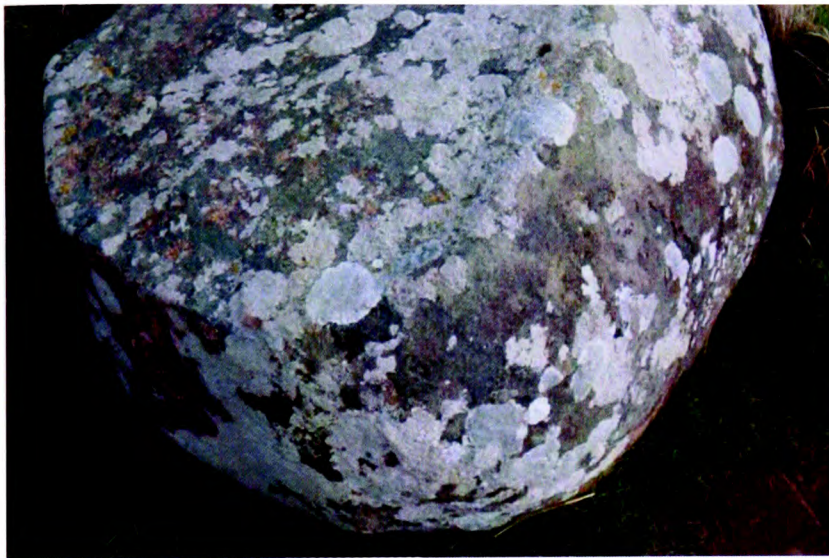
Page 112.

I've always wanted to fly around the coast of Wales. I remember planning to ask Dave Rowntree (Drummer - Blur), to fly me around the coast so I could plan an Arts Council grant. Ironic now then that my work is once again pushing towards the map / plan view. Must look again at Lanyon!! I really think it's something to do with being here in St Davids - the light and openness, a sense of peninsular - of being at the end of a land mass - the edge of Wales - forces it to become more self aware that it's a map / plan. It's like flying without actually flying. One has a complete sense of that. Remember flying over Druidston on the way to New York in 2006? Is it memory or sensation?

Page 115.

Walking from Caerfai towards St Nons, these large stones with much lichen growth on them are very prominent,

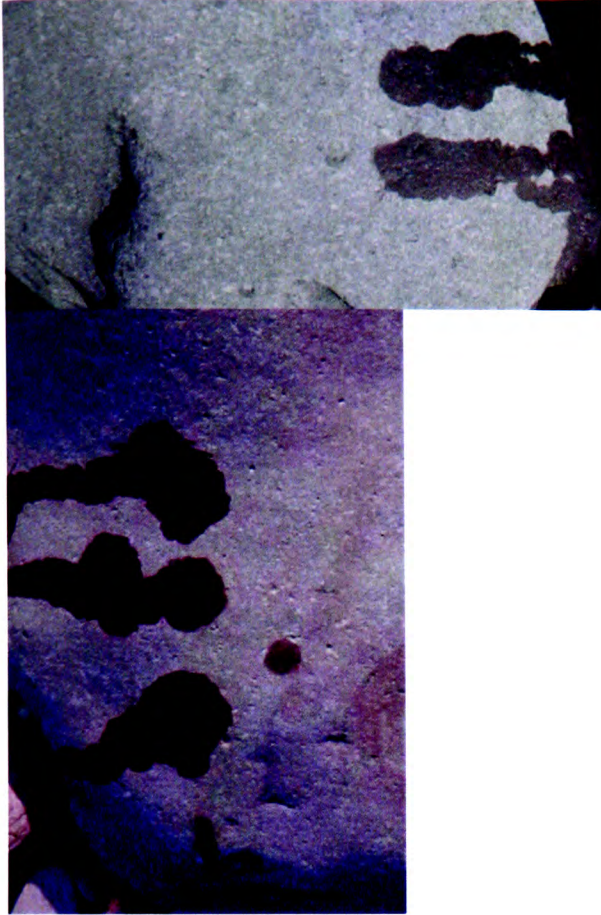
something that visiting Druidston doesn't give. I'm not often walking the path really. I used to when I first worked with Druidston and Pembrokeshire - perhaps its almost revisiting the early influences, learning to see all over again?! These natural shapes intrigue and inspire, I want my large-scale works to have this natural / found like quality. It's above all the stunning subtlety of colour that draws me in. These accidental shapes and marks, which are Hodgkin's! sum up my aspiration for a mark which finely balances the found / natural / real - with the abstract - ordered / controlled.



Artist Photograph. Caerfai.

Page 116.

Stating the obvious here - remarkable how a few raindrops can completely transform colour of rocks / pebbles. It is the accidental shapes created within the dribble that invite curiosity and questions. Not all dribbles, bleeds, runs, stains are successful. What measures and how do you measure interest / success here? What are the criteria? Not all accidents are interesting. I want my new work to finely play with this balance between accident and calculated / pre-determined. The shapes above, and colour will percolate into the work I'm sure. Why am I using / finding compositions with 3 areas of interest / focus / detail? Noticed this before.



Artist Photograph. Caerfai beach.

Page 117.

Unable to project the chosen drawing compositions forced me to transfer via overlaying. I so want to leave these intuitive and honest works as open as possible. To avoid the re-visit and re-negotiation that so often confuses and distorts. All too quickly breaking a rhythm of open space. I must keep these paintings open and sparse, quiet. As the paint dries, I will soften the picture plane.



Studio. Oriol y Parc. 2009.

Page 118.

I need more time. Being here for the week reminds me how it should be all the time. The studio is finally beginning to generate a body of new work. However - the idea of NEW WORK is a problematic one. How new will new be? At what point in this residency will I be able to judge these works? Will they resonate / challenge / question and reveal? The graphic and 'drawn' elements are dramatic and outwardly confident, - but are they?

Page 120.

25th February 2009.

Left a damp overcast Cardiff only to arrive in St Davids to an incredibly beautiful day. The light here is truly magical. I know I've been coming here for twenty years, but today really was stunningly magical. The light here truly enriches the soul. There was no way I was going straight into the studio, I kept driving on to Caerfai knowing it was a particularly low tide. It was 10:30am and I was the first on the beach. How nice to be back. It's been 2 days and I was already missing the connection. It was noticeable that there was a significant new deposit of sand - stones that I was beginning to recognize - had disappeared. The stone beach was smaller. The light was so crisp - the only way I could manage to begin to capture it was to deliberately under expose the photograph. Remember NY?

Page 122.

Sutherland Suite of drawings, first hang.

I've become so attached, but also so frustrated with this suite of drawings. They've got under my skin, and are without doubt beginning to influence my own drawings on location. Not in the acknowledgement of a horizon, but markmaking. I'll be both saddened and relieved almost when they move on. I'm sure their replacements will burn into the soul in just the same way. Why am I threatened by them?

Page 123.

"It was in this country that I began to learn painting. It seemed impossible here for me to sit down and make finished paintings 'from nature'. Indeed, there were no 'ready made' subjects to paint. The spaces and concentrations of this clearly constructed land were stuff for storing in the mind." I felt as just as much part of the earth, as my features were part of me".



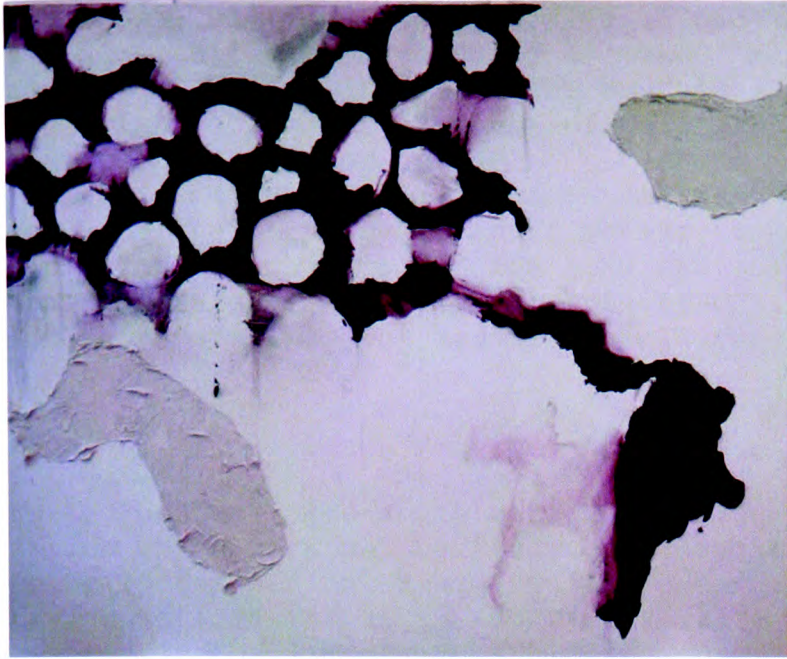
Graham Sutherland. Welsh drawings. Oriol y Parc. 2009.



Graham Sutherland. 1943.

Page 124.

I knew the 'Pembrokeshire purple' and map like features would develop into the large scale. The volcanic like / erosion of pitted surface, plus underwater bubbles are used as a starting point. The elongated form stretching out bottom right resembles South America - without doubt the pitted surface morph into a map. These are new Islands - three once again! The one breaking away from the parent, the other half in the painting and half out.



Scoop.

Page 125.

3.3.2009

I wasn't planning on using these pages other than to discuss the 'underexposed'. These clichéd images fading away - seem ironically apt to accompany the news that my father has been diagnosed with lung cancer today.



Artist photograph. Caerfai beach.

I'm completely engulfed with diverse and testing emotions. All the phone calls avoided / missed, conversations and distance that has set in. The Irish nationality / sense of belonging, being taken away. Roots and upbringing? Perhaps I'm drawn to images such as these obviously for the spiritual transience and timeless. Soul like - been exploring the presence of the soul and spiritual since the 'Ascension' series in the late 1980's. Are these images / paintings the same after all these years?

Page 127.

8th March 2009.

Worked on two large-scale drawings. Using projection and images which were deliberately underexposed, traced initial composition. Really pushed the markmaking - trying to lose the known - the mark which becomes descriptive of its making / process. Used graphite powder, fingers and brushes. Working powder into the paper with an eraser. Trying to push the picture plane once again. There is a 'photographic' element, which I both simultaneously enjoy and despise. Not photographic in the 'realist' sense, but more to do with light, and traditional photography, chemicals / photogram's. The paper and its sheer white brilliance is a light, which is bleaching and blinding. 'Having to squint'. This soul nourishing light is key to these new works. Using white enamel spray - coating finely the graphite powder, not working at present. Review this next week. Edge is critical with these works. I should look again at the possibility of taking image off canvas onto the exhibition wall, the gallery space.



Artist photograph. Caerfai beach.

Page 131.

9th March 2009.

The complete accident in photocopying the small drawing opposite (where the ribbon has fallen across the image) has indeed highlighted the play between the real and illusionary in my work. I initially wanted to examine the relationship of Sutherland's drawings to this particular sequence of mine. But the strap or ribbon has captured my thoughts. The picture plane is broken by the real, yet the real is not real, it's a photocopy, an illusion. Having been looking and reading about Hodgkin again, it's all rather coincidental - Hodgkin's use of the frame, that edge where illusion gives way to reality.

Using a water-soluble ink-pen has been a conscious decision to take ink from Sutherland's drawings and experiment. This process is different, it is more distant from and not an immediate or connected as charcoal or graphite.

Page 133.

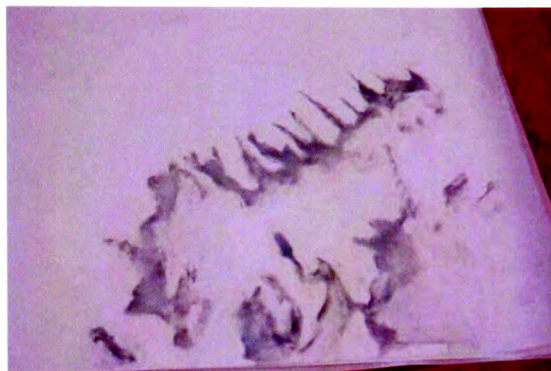
March 13th 2009.

Worked on this 165 x 200cms canvas. Very much aware, that I'm now pursuing and I think, beginning to accomplish, the small painting as large painting. These forms are without doubt now 'Islands' and Google earth like landscapes. Made up lands. Again 3 forms - 3 Islands - 3 people - 3 identities. Separate yet connected. Absent yet present and conjoined. The process in making these works is troubling and unresolved at present though. Using small works - projected onto larger canvases and traced, this very prescribed and controlled method is extremely different. I've always maintained that I need to 'find' a composition or painting. However, working on the premise that these works need space / light and an atmosphere of calm, not struggle. It's critical that the white primer / base remains clean / pure. I cannot enter into a conversation that I know not where it goes. I will undoubtedly begin to subtly play with colour pencils - drawings - markings. Possibly using watercolour or solvent lift from photocopies of thread / stitch / shadow / cut out forms. Possibly photographing the layered drawings / playing with scale and solvent lift. Ambiguity of scale / process / solvent lift the direct rubbings? Recycle and question illusion / reality by processing the existing drawings! ABSENCE - main theme throughout.

Page 135.

Layers.

I've already found reasonable success playing with cut outs and layers in the drawings. The question now - to transfer and question this process of layering within the large works - including canvas. I would hopefully play with physical separations / divides which secured to the stretcher itself will enable a new 'skin' of canvas / fabric / transparent layer - with image - either drawn or photographic / solvent lift. Solvent lift the rubbings in particular, solvent lift from stitch?



Studio drawings.

Page 136.

Studio 13th March 2009.

White primed surface is a 'considered' and 'appropriate' white - not just any white. This surface light / white will be questioned when moving onto linen. First time I've worked on linen - the colour is very specific and will be kept using clear acrylic sealer / binder. The way white pigment and colour will sit will be very interesting. I hope a series of Nocturnes will begin. Watercolour pencil drawing and line will also open a dialogue with this new surface. The linen surface and colour itself is potentially emotive here already.

Page 138.

I find myself wrestling with a number of large canvases simultaneously. Having left two of them for over a month, I have reached a point where 'arguments' must take place. The picture plane in both works needs to be consciously pulled forward, allowing these forms to push back. Tonal re-adjustments and placing singular areas of thick gestural white have - I think, succeeded.

I moved onto smaller canvases. This was also an intense period where the bottom most form became far more distant / beyond. One of the large 2m x 2.5m drawings also

developed into a layered work. Physically cutting through large apertures. Expressive marks taken from the rubbings then began to reclaim a single work even though layered.



Sob.

Page 139.

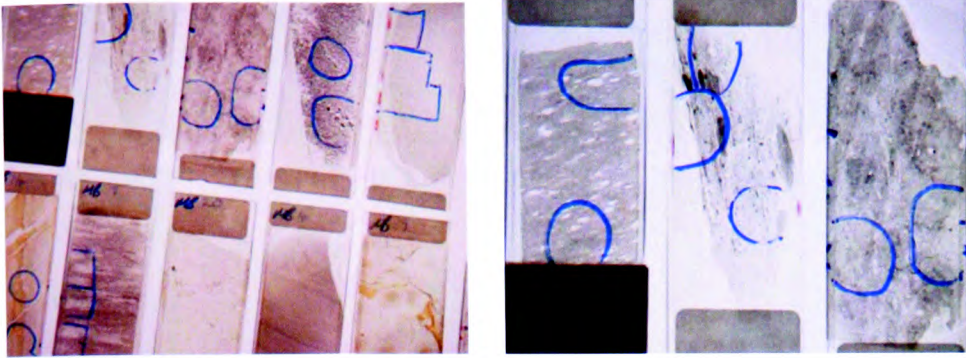
Studio 26.3.09

Drove down in terrible conditions. The journey (especially travelling both ways in one day) is beginning to exhaust me. How can I trust my decisions when painting?

Very disappointed to find the linen has not lost the initial primer stains. The surface is way too busy! May need to rethink primers / application / process. Rabbit skin size or spraying acrylic instead of using brush?

This was indeed a painful day. Too many squabbles going on in the large painting above. The last hour began to present something different. The pink band at the top infuses a positive and negative form simultaneously. The scratched and scraped areas of white, back to deep scarlet / van dyke brown - act as threads.

Page 141.
Cross-polarized slides.

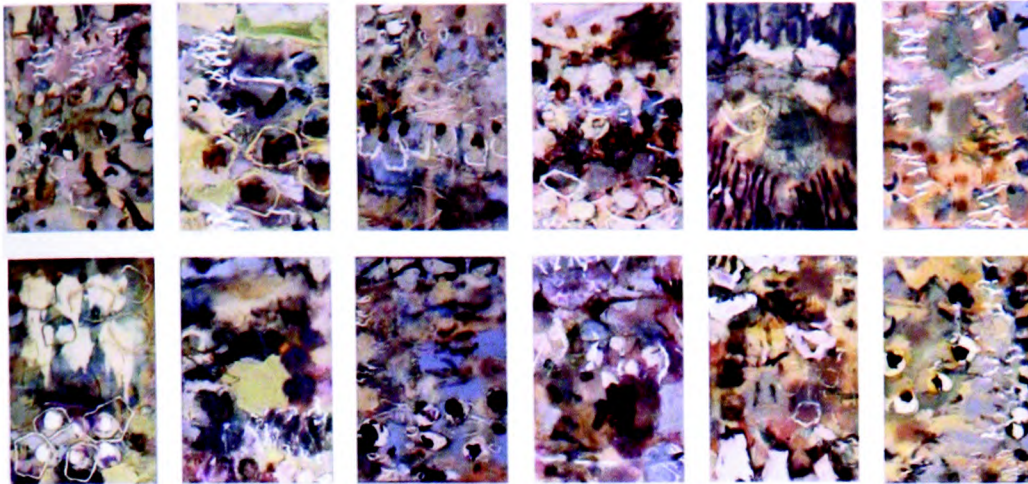


Cross-sections of volcanic rocks from Abereiddy. Placing these slides onto a lightbox allowed them to work as panels - in sequence. The circular highlighted areas have resonance with the circular motif that I consistently call upon. As within my paintings space, the motif on these slides break the 'picture' plane and challenge or set up discourse between the real / illusion / drawn / surface space / picture plane. Remember 'Taste of Sight series' Oriel Davies exhibition sequence of 5 panels?



Tidal 2005.

Page 143.
Need to view these slides under polarized light, these amazing shapes and at present subtle colours will come to life. Some of these molecular structures are begging to be painted. Looking at these slides once again, they certainly remind me of the Perspex works, especially 'As well as being...' The circular motif / marked off areas on the slides, break the edge of the image - something I reluctantly do. Remember, the picture / paintings edge is its most vulnerable - that edge where illusion breaks into the real! When I get to the studio tomorrow, can't wait to question the picture plane.



As well as being... 2002.

Page 148.

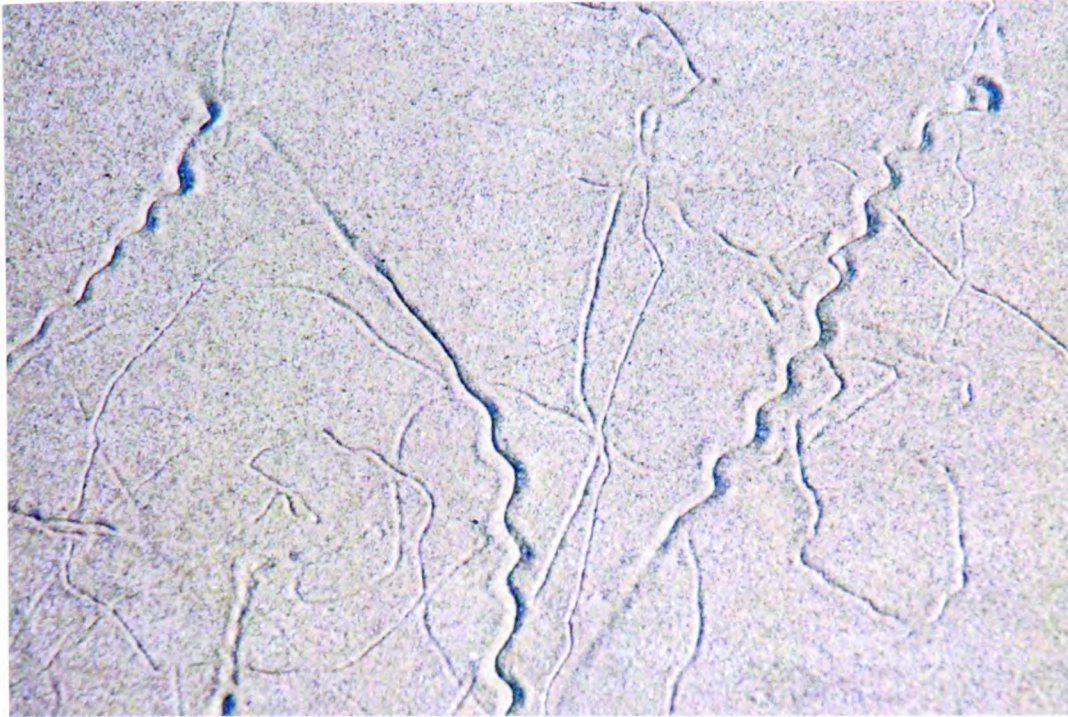
April 1st 2009.

Need to produce significant small paintings - ready now to begin working on linen, but really need to look at the surface and the areas of acrylic primer that have already broken the picture plane. Need good session on the beach with sketchbook and camera, good weather and visibility forecast, as well as low tide. My relationship with everything from the separations from Ruth and Caitlin / the physical journey / staying in Haven road with Betty / passing Lyn's grave / St Davids / Solva - is becoming so intense. What am I going to do when I have to finish? The regularity and systematic revisiting each week has now fully sunken in. It's what I do.

Page 149.

2nd April 2009.

Got up early to get down to Druidston. I can't remember the last visit. Walking down the path I couldn't believe how nervous I was. It was like visiting a long lost friend of which I hadn't seen for a stretch - Almost apologizing not keeping in touch. Details on the sand with low sun and crisp light. Wonderful erratic - yet organized paths must feed into the large paintings.



Artist photograph. Caerfai beach.

Caerfai 5:35pm.

Spent all day inside - why? I've argued with the middle size again today.

Page 150.

6th April 2009. Cardiff.

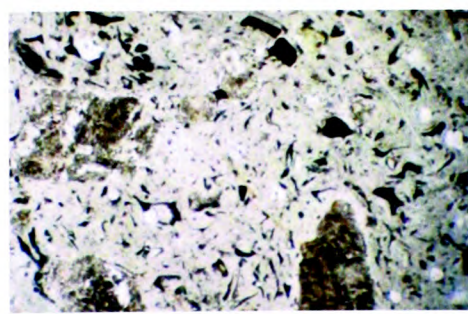
When I look through these photographs I remember that low sun, low tide, early morning. The thousands of tiny trails made by hungry crustaceans, the tidal edges glistening. There were absolutely millions of them, all criss-crossing each other, hovering the beach for food. This abstract yet coordinated and almost magnetic lay line image as indeed powerful. I tried to photograph them, but the light, openness of clean pure focus and chill, alongside taste and smell, will never be rendered in these images. I plan a large painting with only these subtle lines drawn onto perhaps raw linen. Very subtle, only upon greater inspection does the surface reveal its intensity of activity. Use colour pencils on unsized linen.



Artist photograph. Caerfai beach.

Page 152.

The NAZCA lines, whole sense of scale and proportion is questioned when looking at these images. This is no doubt an immediate sensation / reaction. However - is this the case in painting? Can I achieve this ambiguity in my work? Mark Francis does. But in this you immediately respond to a recognized molecular world / scale. The images below are polarized images / slides of igneous rocks. Are you aware here of your scale / proportion to this world? We see them here in reproduction yet still we are definite. I cannot envisage a small painting working successfully with the drawn lines. It has to be large scale - human scale.



Polarized rock scans.

Page 157.

Since the accidentally underexposed photographs taken from the World Trade Towers back in 1993, I've always been 'bleaching' deliberately. These images are indeed

clichés of sort - images burnt onto memory - but nonetheless are part of a process in the studio. Absence..

Page 158.

Inversion is a common device to abstract, but it's the absence or ambiguity of gravity in an image, which interests me most. The sense of falling into the painting has been an element within my work since the 2nd year of my degree - the painting 'Figures at the base of a Crucifixion', where the small child's legs in particular form an intriguing space - something I witnessed again today in the studio, working on a sequence of small drawings. I will need to carefully consider and question SPACE within my work, with sincerity and evaluation.

Page 159.

9.4.09. Studio.

Thursday before Easter. Many more visitors, as to be expected. What's summer going to be like? Just knowing that the building is teeming with people - completely changes my sensibility. I so wish this place (OyP) was open late nights. Not only do I find great difficulty in working on a beach with other people present, but all my professional working life I've resisted a studio, which has been accessible. And now here I am at Oriol y Parc, completely visible and on show. SPACE in myself, away from a self-conscious awareness is key here. Not to be self-conscious - to be in a place in one's head where you can take risks, to question, knowing the mistake / accident is coming. But not wanting the mistake to be public.

The drawings produced today begin to revisit the possibilities within a photographic collage element. (Slade). These are hidden with tracing paper and layers of primer. Worked on 7 square drawings, definitely pushing into a new direction.

Page 162.

Ogof Golchfa.

Following the path from Porthclais, approximately 10 mins walk west; this place truly challenges all senses of space and scale. The linear quality and strained appearance of what I presume to be igneous rocks is stunning. The diagonal twists and magnetic sensations truly confront sense of being and presence. This must be a special place - both geologically in time but wouldn't be surprised to discover lei lines in the area.

Page 163.

14.4.09. Studio.

Planning to start large canvas today. However will give one last attempt at disastrous middle size from last weekend. Using canvas layer, began to cut stone like shapes, only to fully accept that all this painting was ever going to be if I kept going, was 'a parody' of success of the past, never going somewhere new. I must confront this 'game' - to realize earlier! Those new successes of the past were struggled, - not knowing, and new. Must look at the new drawings again, these seem to be taking a new direction - incorporate a drawn within small paintings. I must not get myself into these 'squabbles' again.

Page 164.

Cy Twombly - The Rose - Gagosian Gallery.

21.4.09.

A truly magnificent encounter. 5 massive plywood panels. The blue / turquoise pulsates. The softness defies its material, surface and weight. These are confident and demanding paintings. Each Rose (3 within each painting) touches each other, the fourth panel incorporates the text from 'Rilkes' poem cycle 'The Roses'. The touching roses seem squashes and clumsy to begin with, they break rules - i.e. touching each other as well as the sides of the paintings boundaries - yet they work - why? Why are they so powerful? The acrylic surface and colour identifies strongly with a silkscreen base - resulting in a digital print / photographic element on close inspection. The transluscancy and light pulsating from each painting is staggering. Space within the works is not an issue; these are in your face 'outside' of the picture plane.

Page 174.

It was fantastic to walk through Tate Britain following the disastrous 'Triennial' show. Especially seeing the Scott, Heron and Lanyon again. Felt connected with these painters whilst at the Slade in the mid 1980's - before landscape? Why? Lanyon's space, which is a denial of horizon - ground plane. Is it the paint / process and sensations of the actual making of these works, my first and foremost connection? You have to work at these paintings. The heroic - treading the lonely path - a sense of being alone - is this why I connect, because I too am romantically driven?

Page 176.

Remember my first encounter with Kiefer in Paris in 1984, Musee d'Art Moderne de la Ville. Following Gordon's

suicide, a group of close friends now in our second year of degree, headed off to Paris. This was an emotional and testing time. The stumbling across the Kiefer show was indeed fortuitous. Powerful use of paint - politically charged and historical sense of guilt - something we all resonated with - guilt over Gordon's death.

Page 178.

Studio drawings. Thursday 23rd April 2009.

The process of drawing in the studio has undoubtedly developed over the past 2 months. These are bolder works, sometimes using a photograph inlay or textural element. What is abstract here? The sense that these images are questioning markmaking firstly - process comes first. Space and form secondary. Playing with the cutouts, an incised form - suggestive of the real - space / shadow. This questions the drawn. Layering - Expressive - Illustrational.



Studio drawings. "Stone poems".

Page 180.

Oriel y Parc - Showcase, 2nd display during residency. It's all rather strange - placing work, especially paintings inside these glass showcases. The space - gravity - light - the painting as a painting - seem to be reduced to an illustrative / educational object only. Even my own decision to include remnants and dust from the drawings, with a caption 'it's what I leave out that's important' all seems rather too obvious and predictable. I honestly think that being aware of the audience here is rather limiting where I can go with this. Is it the showcase itself and what it stands for? - Or is it the work? I'm feeling more uncomfortable by the day.



Studio drawings.

Page 181.
Studio. Thursday 23 April 2009.



Studio. Oriol y Parc. 2009.

Large painting above has been taken compositionally from a small panel on board, projected and traced directly onto canvas. This process has been used previously - 'Taste of Sight series' - it's a process which avoids indecision / mistakes / respecting the white ground picture plane, potential space of the painting. Perhaps it's also critical in this environment to use such methods and processes, which limit potential failure, especially when working here only 1 or 2 days per week. Travelling from Cardiff each week - cannot afford the energy or emotional struggle it would require if I was to have to travel back, knowing that the painting was unresolved. I cannot afford to set up a situation of

struggle, a dialogue where change on the canvas is a painterly or expressive one. The 'design' of these paintings is different than before this residency. It's tighter and more controlled, but it's appropriately with the works current direction. The desired sensations are of found / not struggled / balance / space / quiet / tidal recession / ABSENCE. This work below is an example of potential dangers especially with the middle-sized works where I am searching for the painting whilst painting.

Even drastic decisions to collage another larger canvas with cutout forms, was always going to be a disaster. The painting was consequently binned.



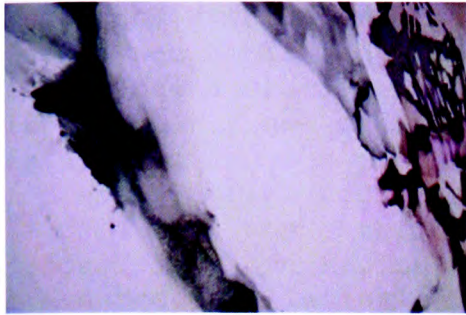
Destroyed painting.

Page 185 - 186
Personal visit to Ireland

Page 188-190
Giants Causeway. Saturday 2nd May 2009.
There is symmetry and asymmetry, which is so powerful. What is my practice as a painter all about? Why am I fascinated and compelled, attracted to stones / rocks? Why am I drawn to reflective surfaces? (Even in school / Foundation work). Is it the formal elements which then release / or act as catalyst for paint? Are my most recent works pushing towards a more formal interest? Leaving behind Landscape? Can they still be described as Landscape works? What is my relationship with the camera and photography? How important and real are my interests in drawing conclusions / questions / affinities with the emotional understanding - discoveries of my own identity

/ awareness / mortality? What it is to be alive. What does this really mean in my work? What it is to be Human. Process - painting - process?

Page 191-194.
Studio. 14th May 2009.



Grind. (Details)

Anxious to revisit this large canvas. What is abstract about this painting? What is figurative about it? Having been in residence since November, I have gradually become adapted at bringing a different working practice to the larger paintings. I no longer can afford to engage with large works unless I have a very specific concept / drawing / small study or photograph to act as inspiration or starting point. More recently the photographs have now begun to translate directly across into such large paintings. (Below)



Grind

These details and underwater camera photographs / views are traced using the projector directly onto canvas, before I use thick impasto wax and knife to layer the image. I've been able to mix a microcrystalline wax formula which dries / cures / hardens within the week. This allows reworking of the surface, and leaves a trace element of mark within the tooth / weave of the canvas / linen. Colour is extremely important. Subtle colour variations within large sections of wax, play with light / space and sensation. The tactile and sense of visual touch remains crucial. The scraped / wiped areas play with process / geological time / rubbings and surface - texture / micro - macro. The high contrast and tonality at present defies pictorial space - and does not break the picture plane either way. These are paintings of the surface. They are sculptural statements almost, not interested in illusion / space of a traditional sense using perspective tricks. The painting above enjoys a relationship, which is becoming both important and interesting - maps. The world continents as they were! Pangaea. Is there a relationship to the Slade lino-cuts and process? The limited palette also?



Swell.

Page 195.

Studio. 20th May 2009.

Returning to the studio, I was initially heartened by the large painting from last week. (above). As the morning went on, I remained positive, but am aware I need to re-work areas of subtle colour and possible colour pencil detail. This is one of the most figurative and literal paintings for many years. I am aware fully where the image has transpired from, question is, how is this painting viewed without an awareness of the original photograph? The space respects a western perspective with circle / bubble motifs gradually receding within the picture plane. Is this the only figurative reference? This painting has not been 'found' like the majority of my large paintings. Is this method of work 'appropriate' for the task of this residency only, working in St Davids for the year?

Page 196.

Series of Nocturne images beginning to evolve on a large scale.



Gleam

The combination of linen and silver ground is beginning to generate some intriguing paintings. Possible titles? Nocturnes?

Page 197-198.

3rd June 2009.

Sally Moss (commissioning curator) telephoned to say how struck and excited she was to see the two new large linen paintings in the studio. She was absolutely thrilled to see such a dramatic change in the works direction. This was so what I needed, a curator to witness a natural development and redirection of existing ideas. The light / scale / colour / space / texture and relationship to the photograph are key shifts, which I'm so challenged and keen to further question / develop.

So looking forward to next week when the students finish. To fully focus on St Davids, knowing that an honest development / unforced, is beginning to take place. This is where it starts!

I'm excited that the potential within the photograph has now been exploited. It will be challenging and difficult whether to reveal the 'process' at work here? How much? How little? What is the role of the abstract here? What is being presented in paint? What is the contemplative - and potentially where has it gone? Is this a new language for me as such? Where are the well-trusted and exploited motifs or signatures? Are these paintings truly new developments for me? Or are they extensions and natural paths I was travelling on. Where is the 'Zen'? Where is Landscape? Where is process? Where is Burns?

Page 199-202.

Studio. 11th June 2009.

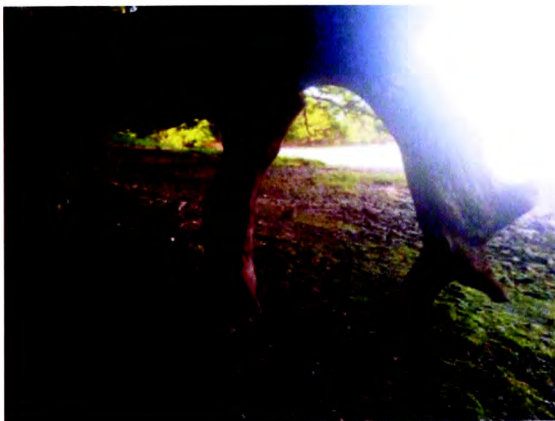
Really looking forward to seeing David Alston later today. Sally Moss also coming over. Going to find it impossible to work today, other than prime canvases and look. During my one-hour meet and greet with the public between 10am and 11am, a couple from Swansea visited. An architect and teacher. They were genuinely enthused and 'connected'. On their way out, they commented, "you've made my holiday". This is why I have to look closely at why I'm here.

David and Sally arrive 11:30am. David immediately homed in on the large painting with three large forms and white latticework. He was so genuinely excited about the conquering of the relationship between the small paintings and the large. A new confidence working on this scale! David kept returning to this painting. He also

loved the drawings. Sally commented again that she was heartened that the residency was now developing NEW WORK.

Following lunch, the three of us went for a walk on Caerfai beach. Following yesterday's non-stop rain, the air seemed pure and focused. The intense clarity of light and shadow today was particularly special. Unfortunately the red sandstone was not as spectacular for David's first visit as I would have hoped. There was at least 1m of extra sand depth on the beach today, which covered a vast amount of the stones / rock forms and details. It all seemed rather flat. David remained very connected none-the-less, and we both respected each other's silence.

Driving back to Cardiff, we had to stop off at the Rhos. (Sutherland territory). It's been probably 4-5 years since my last visit, it seemed so right to visit with David. He has a truly unique take on Sutherland, his influences and work. Walked for about 30 minutes north, along the root and tree forms that were so inspirational to Sutherland. Really felt as though we were visiting his soul. The low tide, still atmosphere and low sun were all 'right' for today.



The Rhos

Page 204.

Meeting with Bryony Dawkes, National Museum of Wales. First meeting to discuss initial thoughts and selection of works, for exhibition in November at Oriel y Parc. Unfortunately the Cezanne landscape is currently on tour in the States. At the moment, Bryony assures me that I can include Hodgkin / Auerbach / Boudin / Setch / Prendergast / Richards. At present my selection is driven by the obvious - influences and affinities - processes. Want to hang much less than currently on show.

Page 205-206.

17th June.

Looking at this tree form again from last weeks visit, remembered this particular tree when I was at the Slade, coming down to West Wales to visit Ruth for the weekend. I would often delay my return to London, and paint on location in the rain and frost at the Rhos. Having re-read Martin Hammer's book on Sutherland over the weekend, these tree forms, morphing into figures and animals really annoy me. Why can't they just be tree forms? Sculptural - formal - shape - trees - roots surface, why do we have to project an animal or human image/form onto them to give them meaning or relevance / credence.

Page 207.

Looking again today at the two large linen paintings with silver ground, I remain excited and challenged by the 'bubbles' painting, however the 'reflection' painting troubles me. Comments from some of the National Museum of Wales's Trustees such as 'reminds me of Monet'. Compliment or criticism? Rings warning bells in my head! Do I want it to be so obvious? It also creates a problem with my request to hang the Monet waterlilies in the exhibition. Do I need a Monet? Is it too close? All of this forces me to reconsider whether this painting is finished as I had initially thought it was?

The light - nocturnal sunset / reflection on wet sand works well. The space and scale is suitably emotionally charged. ABSENCE.

Page 208.

21st June 2009.

Having to consider very carefully now the selection of works to include in the exhibition at the end of the residency from the National Museum of Wales's collection. At present I can only secure the definite artists such as: Prendergast, Setch, Richards, Hitchens, Hodgkin, Auerbach, Boudin, Cezanne. Will also try to include St Ives artists such as Heron, Frost, Nicholson, Lanyon. Will also try for the Hepworth and small Caro.

Page 209-210.

I've now finished college and am both excited and concerned that the long summer period of work in St Davids is about to begin. Concerned because I'm aware that it is quickly drawing to an close, as well as frustrated that I will not be able to produce radical enough work to justify the residency.

I still want to work on a 10m drawing on Caerfai beach.
I still want to walk and produce 'journey' based drawings
/ photographs / rubbings from as much of the coastal path
as I can.

I still want to go on location with a parks ranger to
learn more about the geology that so fascinates me.

I still want to include 'music' / rhythm somehow.

I still feel that my small paintings are not as
adventurous or mysterious as they could/should be.

I still need to confront the many middle-size canvases
laid out in the studio since October, these are rapidly
becoming an issue. I still want to draw more on location.
Sketchbook work has been thin during this past month. I'm
aware of the impending influx of visitors and holiday
makers, this very special quiet / contemplative /
spiritual pilgrimage, because that's almost what it has
become for me travelling each week - will soon transform
itself into a 'holiday' destination. Am I mentally
prepared for this invasion? Just an awareness will
transform the serenity of my studio space. Feels like the
whole tempo - finale if you wish is gathering pace. So
much expected and still so many unchallenged, unresolved
paintings.

Page 211-212.

24th June 2009.

Plan to spend as much of today out drawing as possible,
only concern is the intense heat. So aware that I need to
touch base with the beach so to speak. Having found
difficulty, due to teaching commitments, to get out more
frequently of recent, re-affirms how important and
necessary it is. Will I use the drawings back in the
studio? Probably not, but will the process of learning,
looking, experiencing filter through - yes. Of the studio
is a curious one. It has heightened how important it all
is when I've been unable to work on location for a
period. It took me some time today to feel my way back
into drawing / looking.

At times I felt as though I was paying lip service to the
process. Drawing for the sake of it, and not looking for
something new - something that could begin to fuel studio
works. However - stuck with it, going back and forth to
the studio for cooling breaks, worked in this way all
day. Caerfai beach - an incredibly low tide allowed me to
walk north towards St Nons. Seaweed varieties amazing,
like a seashore dictionary.



Artist photograph. Caerfai beach.

The red dulse filled the stranded pools - still - swollen almost - like gelatin. The intense smell across the bay announces the season. So many visitors already - how much this changes the whole spirit of this place. Treated myself on the way home, dropped in to Druidton for an hour. Are these drawings any different than those of Caerfai? Would you be able to tell?

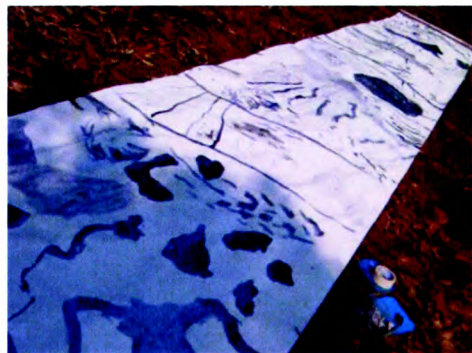
Page 214.

Studio. 25th June 2009.

Sitting outside for lunch today. The whole feel of the place reminds me of the residency Iwan Bala and I did in Santiago de Compostella, nearly 5 years ago. It feels foreign, isolated, and special.

Page 216.

Need to get around to working on the proposed 10m roll of paper on location - obvious memories and connections with Santiago, "Walking with Eucalyptus and Santiago".



Brendan Burns. Santiago De Compostella. 2005

I have 4 more large canvases to produce, plus a range of middle-size canvases, which have been troubling me since November. Going to use projection as way in.

Page 219- 222.

National Museum of Wales Stores.

Intriguing juxtapositions of works, completely unrelated. No reason works were stored with each other, other than size and availability of space on the wrack. A potential exhibition in its own right!

Real pleasure seeing Prendergast's 'Orange sunset' in the flesh. A blaze of orange light, so optimistic and confident - open - honest - fresh. The Auerbach and accompanying suite of drawings - Ceri Richards sketchbooks, especially short series of drawings experimenting with the theme 'sound of raindrops'. The Sean Scully sketchbook so powerful. Terry Setch sketchbooks in particular, beautiful, sensitive and detailed, envy his draughtsmanship.

Page 223.

Whilst it is all very well selecting works which obviously have an affinity or have had an influence over / upon my work, I need to confront and contextualize exactly what the thread of thought / or key issues which hold it all together actually are. It's all very well to pick out Auerbach, Hodgkin and Setch, but what is and what was their influence? What will this exhibition at Oriel y Parc present? I'm obviously concerned that a thread will be evasive and perhaps 'imagined' or worse still, 'constructed' simply for the PhD. Key area to look at then must be PROCESS - DRAWING - ABSTRACTION - SPIRIT - SPACE. How does one relate Nicholson to Hodgkin or Auerbach. Scully to Richards, or Turner to Caro?



Initial selection for 'Influere' from NMW.

Page 224-225.

Travelled early to catch the low tide. Determined to draw in sketchbooks all day. Also determined to begin 'why' confront the drawing process on the beach and begin to

look deliberately for another way into drawing, which would generate more radical decisions in the studio. Intensely hot / humid day, colours at low tide on rocks and edges around the red sandstone are beautiful, crisp and fresh. Took many photographs, keen to use the 'photographic composition' and selection process within drawing space. At last, also began working in studio on 3 middle-sized canvases. Projected - drew - and used silver / gold spray in preparation for an intense day tomorrow.

Latter part of the afternoon, walked towards Solva, climbed down the cliffs beside the old fort on the headland. Realized that whole series of 'lichen' paintings could work, especially using macro-photographs (projected) Began to look at lichen growth that spread itself between two planes, with a corner almost. Possible corner piece painting / sculptural? Two canvases placed in corner.



Artist photograph. Lichen.

Page 226.

3rd July 2009.

Reviewing photographs taken during last 2 days. It's the lichen details, which propose a whole new series of paintings. Following the large linen painting of bubbles, am confident such photographs could be adapted. Excited because offers opportunity to work with an intense cadmium / orange / yellow. Need to review earlier photographs from same location, headland between Caerfai and Caerbwydy. Must question this process, this is the first time where I know my next move!

Page 227-228.

There were a number of small lichen, which nestled between two edges - a corner. Began to consider the possibilities within producing a piece of large-scale work that also positions itself in a corner. This diptych would be two very different compositions - avoiding - yet playing with a butterfly print experience - subtle variation only.

Beginning to realize how many exciting new opportunities and possibilities are pushing themselves forward now, facing 6 weeks intense work. A lichen series would be very challenging - and for the first time in 15 years, potentially produce work outside of the tidal zone.

Page 229-230.



Graham Sutherland works at Oriel y Parc.

This is the second display at OyP. These drawings of Sutherland's are the remaining 'Welsh' inspired works from the NMW collection. They have most certainly inspired as well as threatened me during their presence here. To be honest, I have avoided viewing them too often, aware that a powerful influence may take root so to speak in the location based drawings in particular. I envy his use of colour and brush in these works. One aim I have from their influence, is to experiment again with colour on location myself. Range of markmaking in these works is stunning.



Graham Sutherland.

I think it's his ability to abstract directly on location that I really need to pursue. To trust making intuitive decisions, to respond as honestly as possible to the location. To test and experiment more questioning ideas and take more risks. If I look at the decisions being made back in painting back in the studio, why can't this happen on location?

Page 231.

Looked again at the Lowry on display, found the single island very moving.



L.S. Lowry.

Page 232.

Last weeks sequence of small paintings suggest larger canvases. Interesting that the smaller works seem not to be as strong so far during this residency as previous. I suppose my emphasis to date has been with the larger works. Interesting juxtaposition of this recent small painting with the above Lowry!



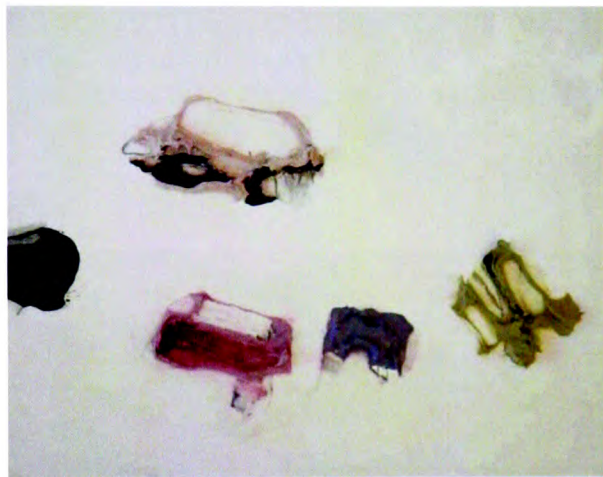
Soar

Note also the mid right hand light blue form in relation to Sutherland below.



Graham Sutherland.

Page 233-234.



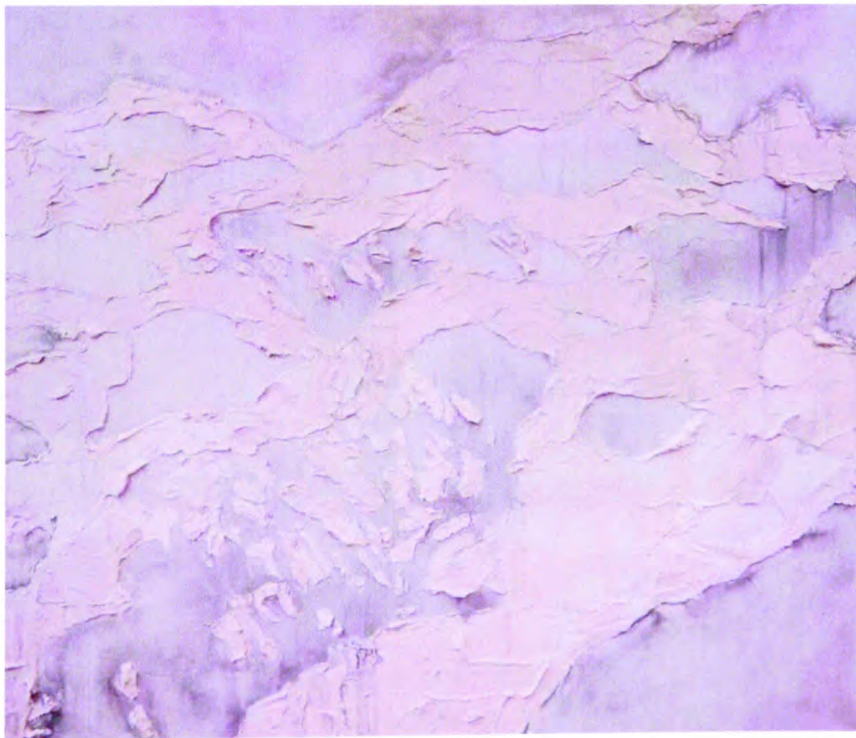
Pulse

Concerned these small paintings look too controlled and prescribed - danger of becoming almost pastiche of my own work perhaps? However - may well not be this at all? But work that is an honest response to the residency and processes at work whilst back and forth in such a prescriptive way? I've already become aware of the specific nature and process of painting, which has evolved during the past 6 months, which avoids almost 'argument' or discussion.

These paintings - especially the large canvas and linen works - are produced in 1 - 2 days, with little if any modification the week after. Are these small paintings genuinely any good? Will they have staying power and become special works this time next year? I expect not. Therefore I seriously have to

challenge with greater courage and willingness to experiment and take more risks. During the next couple of days, I've set out to work on the middle-size canvases.

Taking 3 photographs of spindrift, used the projector to transfer across with watercolour pencils onto white acrylic primed canvas. Began almost immediately to destroy or cover these drawn elements with silver and gold spray. Using thick white oil and wax, used knife to layer the spindrift area. So wanted to produce a truly white light, the white light that nourishes and feeds the soul - white light of snow or a crashing wave. You can sense it nourishes at the time. The combination of wiped silver background - plus a series of about 5 or 6 differing whites, has really begun to emanate a quite unique quality of light. This is going to be a painting, which is impossible to reproduce in print. The surface detail is completely lost and light, which 'breathes' from its surface, is non-existent. Very excited as I then began to use watercolour pencils, drawing directly across - referencing both stitch and tidal edges.



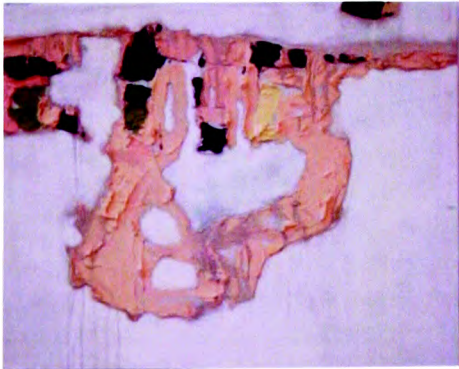
Creep

Page 237-238.net

6th July. Oriol y Parc.

Here Monday and Tuesday this week which has completely thrown me. Met with Bryony to further discuss exhibition. Assured I can have the Auerbach and the Hodgkin, but the Monet and Cezanne too valuable to travel. If the Boudin comes, must be presented in case not on the wall. The Heron and Caro are being used in an Abstraction show at NMW. All other works have been okayed. Must now sit down and thin down selection.

Concentrated on middle-size canvases. Intense period of work - unfortunately began to struggle and consequently found myself very unhappy and perhaps vulnerable, questioning direction and meaning. I'm aware having re-read the Bacon interviews how important 'accident' is, but also intention and the necessary balance. At present one of the paintings is struggling to decide whether a flat or traditional perspective space is required. The mark and gesture does not yet communicate either grouping of stones or indeed something more spiritual. Reworked the painting upside down, to lose the preciousness that was beginning to creep in. Decided to push towards the figurative and transposed across the bubbles from previous paintings. Drawn elements with colour pencils, then wipe with turpentine to highlight. The space truly became representational. Hints of Doig and Porter.



Lucid



Glimmer

Page 240.

Studio. 8th July 2009.

Having spoken with Bryony about possible titles for the exhibition including 'Influere - influences', will need to review my initial selection of works. Whilst there are connections to the Boyle family, William Nicholson, Vlaminck, really feel they need to be excluded. Conscious that previous two hangs have been fairly busy dark as a space. Aware that I need light and space for my own works

Hung a large painting outside my studio in foyer space. It looks appalling. Claustrophobic and compromised. Concerned also for its safety. Not sure at all what this does?

Page 241-242.

14th July 2009.

This is the last week I will be travelling to St Davids from Cardiff for the day. As from next week, will be in residence for the remaining 6 weeks living in St Davids. Can't believe it will suddenly end in 6 weeks time. To add to this stressful period, discovered that my father is planning surprise visit when we're due to travel down for the summer here in West Wales. I'm emotionally totally confused, having what I thought, compartmentalized the whole issue of his approaching death. I feel very distanced and cold - this itself makes me feel unnerved. I was fairly comfortable with how we left Ireland back in May. I wanted a completely focused and intense period of concentration on the residency.

Page 244.

17th July 2009. Train journey to London.

Really excited about the five new large canvases going to start in next couple of days. (3 165 x 200cms and 2 250 x 200cms). Think I've found a way around sizing the linen without staining them. Beginning to get anxious about just how much work I still want to produce. Already concerned about packing up and moving the studio back to Cardiff. Spent the day yesterday with my father, took him to the National Museum of Wales. Became all too apparent that he looks at nothing.

Page 245.

Tate Modern. Per Kirkeby.

Drawings and collages, resonate particularly with the gouache and ink works on tracing paper. Must try to tackle colour in drawing on location in next few weeks. Experiment with tracing papers, water-soluble pencils and rubbings. Use photographic collages also - assemblages. Combine the figurative elements. Figurative - abstract balance.



Whilst many of Kirkeby's figurative paintings on board do not connect with me, the freedom and natural balance between the painterly / stenciled abstract - figurative reference is powerful and 'complete'.

The square blackboard paintings beginning to play with space and transience. Space and light within take on board ethereal / melancholic properties. 4 large-scale canvases in Room 7 operate within tradition of landscape, but not painted after nature and do not depict actual vistas.

Colour here is dark, heavy atmosphere with flashes of brilliance and semi transparency. When trying to use colour myself on location, must remember essence of space and mark-making. Room 9. 'There is no single answer to a particular painterly question'. Rather the answer is presumed to lie in the variation on a theme. PHILIPP OTTO RUNGE. (German Romantic painter). Who's dictum that 'everything thrives towards landscape' resonates.

Room 11. Landscape remains an important reference point, which is not to say these paintings are direct results from observation in nature. Rather they respond to the exterior world in a way that is determined by Kirkeby's own specific painterly logic. Recent works vacillitate between representation and an insistence on paintings independence from the world around it.



Per Kirkeby

Page 249.

Tate Britain. Richard Long. Heaven and Earth.

'I see it as abstract art laid down in the real spaces of the world'.

'It is not Romantic, I use the world as I find it'.

'To walk across a country from coast to coast for example, is both a measure of the land itself, its size, shape and terrain - and also of myself, how long it takes me and not somebody else'.

Nothing prepares you for the large open gallery space containing six large floor works. Awesome - magical - energy is tremendous - ley lines!! Tensions are incredible, weight / presence / energy. Feeds the senses.

'Over the years my landscape sculptures have explored some of the variables of accessibility / solitude / isolation / permanence / visibility / recognition.

I have used stones as markers of time or distance'.

'My stones are like grains of sand in the space of the landscape and I can find them almost anywhere. My work is about movement and stillness'.

'The world is full of relatively permanent things, like rock strata or the sea, but also transient things, like the life span of a butterfly or the endlessly changing patterns of seaweed on a beach. I would like to think my work reflects and uses this complexity and reality'.



Richard Long. Heaven & Earth.

Page 257-258

The Kirkeby exhibition has made me realize just how little I have travelled, how can you compare West Wales with Greenland? The watercolours from location were exhilarating and somewhat consoling, that the abstract works were / have / can develop from figurative observations. Much to learn from these watercolours - for my own location drawings. Colour - openness - abstraction - playfulness - experimentation - mark-making. Avoid getting caught up within a figurative space. This is the key, especially having read Greenberg on Modernism last night.

Page 259-260.

22nd July 2009.

Living in a small bungalow for the summer, literally 5 mins walk from both OyP and Caerfai beach. Since October 2008, I've been driving from Cardiff every week, what a contrast. Past 2 days been sizing and stretching 5 new large canvases. Cannot describe how wonderful it is to be

now truly here and 'in residence'. Being able to pop back and forth in-between coats of primer, out on the beach drawing, walking, lunch, back to the beach, priming, gallery, walk, beach, drawing, supper, cycle to beach to draw. To fully comprehend this for the next six weeks is almost impossible. Began working in a small sketchbook, which will challenge and experiment with a whole series of 2-minute drawings. Evening walks and journeys in particular.

Having my father visit last week has been emotionally draining. I am completely confused as to his true emotions through this illness that he faces. On the one hand to organize a surprise visit, and then on the other to state that if he had remained in the army that I would have received a better education in boarding school, seems to be completely opposite. I can only surmise that the education statement sees the ART in me as failure.

This all focuses my questions on to how I communicate this hollow and ABSENT energy - missing component, into the work over the next month?

How can I inject the melancholic the absent? What is the role of the abstract? - The photographic has certainly played a pivotal role during the recent large and middle-size canvases.

Page 261-262.

Thursday 23rd July 2009.

Hope to complete priming today. Took some incredible photographs yesterday on Caerfai beach. The red dulse is so similar to the red sandstone.



Artist photographs. Caerfai beach.

Spent all day walking and chatting with Jeff Wallace (PhD supervisor) He describes one of the paintings as monumental? He also cited materials and processes as key.



Lull

Page 263.

Friday 24th July 2009.

Should I really consider the lichen series? And yellow? Yellow itself as a sensation is without empathy for me, so how do I tackle this awkward feeling / connection? Could not commit to yellow today, will need to review possibilities beyond the photograph. Latter part of day found myself walking towards Solva experimenting with the acrylic water-soluble pencils - drawing directly with colour, on location, for the first time in probably 10 years. Did not put myself in a position of producing the 'whole', only details - allowed the abstract.

Page 263.

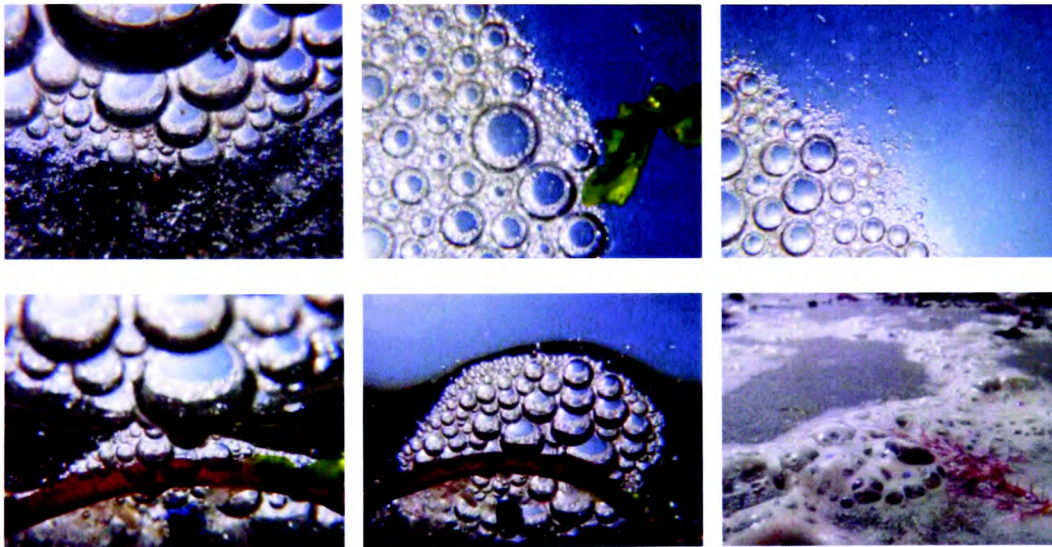
Saturday 25th July 2009.

Will need to confront the min issues and questions within my most recent works as soon as possible. Beginning to worry and perhaps fear this confrontation for numerous reasons. Firstly - I do not know what they are? Will I be able to critically evaluate and write to an acceptable standard? Will the writing de-mystify the visual? Do I have to come to a conclusion? When does the painting ever come to a conclusion? As Jeff said, maybe it's about asking the right questions, not so much the answers.

- o Does my upbringing and family experiences find its way into my present work?
- o Is my work Landscape?
- o What role does 'abstract' play in the work?
- o ABSENCE - is this simply a romantic idea, or is it seriously a component within my work?
- o Human condition? How?

Page 265-266.

How exciting it always is to photograph beneath the surface in a rock pool. No matter how many times I take images of the floating bubbles on the surface from underneath, I'm always as excited as the first time. These are quiet, dormant, contemplative spaces, awaiting the next tide. The colour reflects and refracts, light is pure and clean, everything is temporary, everything is vulnerable. It is their ambiguities, which intrigue me. Their ability to stop you and question you're scale, position. Each bubble contains many inner reflections or personalities. Reflections of sky and space made spherical. I've spent many years, from New York onwards, looking down, now I'm looking back out! These bubbles are air, but also carry a solid like sensation, like that of mercury.



Artist photographs. Caerfai beach

Page 267.

26th July 2009.

Drawing at Caerfai tonight in a small sketchbook set aside for 2 min drawings and journeys. The whole point of these drawings is to push a confidence in less mark-making and to capture an energy, which is at the essence of the place. The intensity of colour, which seeps out from the red sandstone as dusk approaches is amazing. Must try to emanate this colour and seepage in the large linen paintings.

Page 268-270.

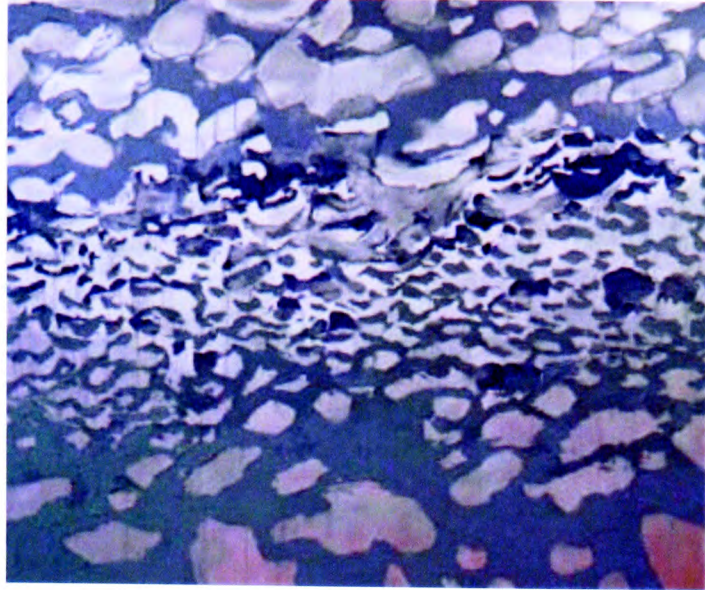
27th July 2009.

Stunningly beautiful day, but I've promised myself to work in the studio today on 2 large canvases previously mapped out. Is it all becoming too well planned and executed? Has the sense of discovery and magic disappeared? Or is it now the role of the small paintings and photographs to go somewhere new? Then allow for the large works to follow - avoiding the agony of mistakes and squabbles. What role do these squabbles have? Are they important / necessary? Has the process of work simply had to change for the residency, and the way of work needed whilst 'on view' so to speak? Does this process of projection serve a purpose for now only? Or has it begun to produce significant paintings? And a process for the future when I return to my Cardiff studio? Both David Alston and Jeff Wallace were very taken by the large paintings.

What is the process of critical - self-critical evaluation? Does this not occur all the time when painting? How do I measure success or failure here? Is it only using established historical / contemporary models?

I understand that taking from the photograph offers a sense of mystery, a sense that a role of going somewhere new is still very much possible - the creative act of making something new. However, taking a small already existing painting and making another - larger, is still dubious / suspect for me. However, this so far has been a successful way of producing significantly 'empty' and immediate, instinctively looking paintings.

After such a good morning, the pm session was disastrous. The 2 x 1.63 m canvas with the underwater bubble image did not come off. Too flat to the picture plane, and dare I say it, too similar / close to Kyffin (Williams). I've come to acknowledge that a certain perspectival space is necessary, or at least hinted at; even if it's simply to do with the relationship and scale of set stones. The previous bubble painting on linen implied space through shape and form. This current painting, leaves nowhere for the eye to go. You are denied an entrance or indeed engagement! (Modernist painting!) Grey and silver is its only reprieve - will need brave decision - either to draw over the top, enhance space - shape - bubble, or start again. Should have upon reflection used white pigment for the image, not grey. Haven't left the studio this troubled for some time.



Laden

Ironically the photograph of the painting is more successful as a photograph - ironic that its genesis is from a photograph in the first place. The bubbles seemed to have disappeared this afternoon in the studio, but now looking at the photograph - it's far more obvious where the image has derived. The sense of being underwater is strong in the photograph, will need to confront seriously tomorrow - really not sure where to go.



Slick 11

The space in this painting is far more expansive than anticipated, reviewing it away from the studio, again in the photograph of it. It accompanies an earlier canvas - but I question my motives for producing another similar

painting. Should I consider a diptych? Is it all too easy? Squaring up and projecting an existing painting - changing scale alone - is that good enough a reason? Page 273.

27th July 2009. Evening.

Having spent all day in the studio, feeling confused as to whether I'm treading familiar ground, or really going somewhere new?

Really enjoying cycling to St Nons in the evenings.

Enjoying small sketchbook with 2 min drawings. Love the immediacy, losing my inhibitions, being prepared to lose the 'view' - space that restricts potential abstraction. Feel I'm drawing like a sculptor? Feeling my way around, across, through. Manipulating a line, which re-enacts the process of formation. The energy within these works really needs critical review; I think they hold an important clue as to the nucleus of my work.

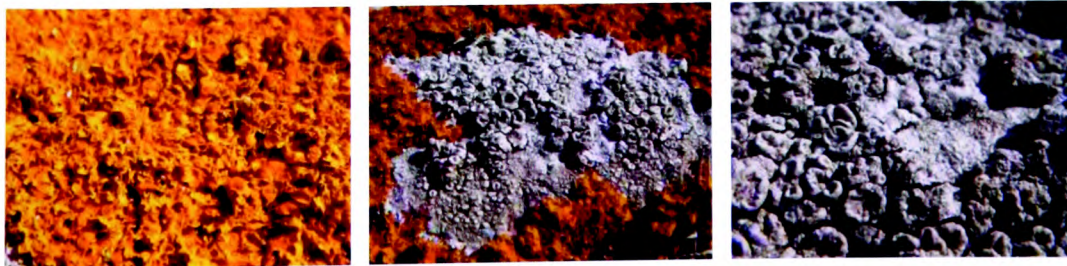
275-276.

28th July 2009.

This was always going to be a difficult day, need to confront yesterday's problem. Centre buzzing with people because of the rain, had to keep all doors closed, so very bad headache from all the fumes. Very nearly decided to go home when I begun to 'play' with the centre section, soon became all too evident that the eye was held static within what was an empty unknown, unresolved area. Using smaller marks and developing the bubble shapes, gradually became a crucial part of the painting; a centre distance had been established, as well as a major sense of movement. This is a very sad, melancholic painting, in direct contrast to the large openness of the 3 stones yesterday. Feel in a foreign environment, in a recognizable space or indeed light. 'Nocturne'.

Page 277-278.

29th July 2009.



Artist photographs. Lichen.

Took an evening walk to St Nons from Caerfai Bay. Reminded how dramatic walking north actually is, from the details seen here to the large vistas in my sketchbooks.

This is an interesting point in the residency where I am beginning to realize my work is no longer exclusively fuelled by rock pools. Details such as lichen, cobwebs and bubbles are producing some of the most exciting - yet figurative and literal large paintings. The lichen details here are fairly flat, others play with depth of field and peripheral vision. I have two linen paintings to complete; they are already drawn out, planning on completing them Monday.



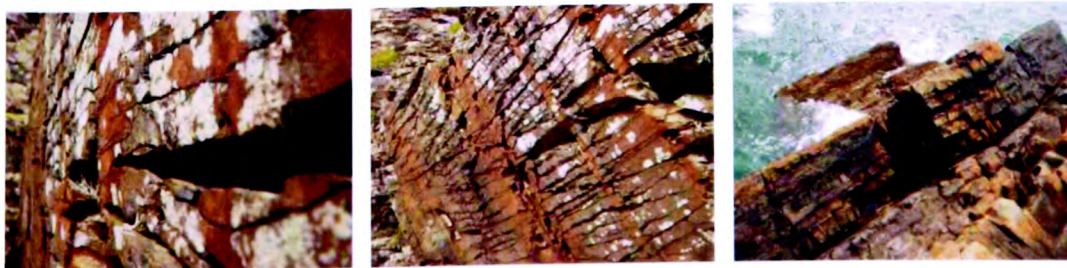
Artist photographs. Lichen

Page 279-280.

SM:756241. 2nd August 2009.

Spent a couple of days away from the studio, feeling if I'm not careful, I would produce and complete a number of paintings that would be too close in series. Aware that time is ticking, and do not want to produce too similar paintings. Therefore had to remove myself, walk, photograph and draw out on location. Beginning to work directly in colour. Using water soluble colour pencils, drawing directly with colour line.

Without doubt the Kirkeby show at Tate M, as well as the book I'm reading about him has influenced my 'seeing' during this particular walk. Aware that there are only 4 weeks remaining, there are so many unfinished projects that I had set myself. The 10m rubbing / drawing. The stretch of coastline between St Nons and Caerfai offers many potential cliff faces where I could experiment with fault lines and areas of rapid lava cooling. I want to play with rubbings / drawings / and watercolour as well as direct sculptural references.



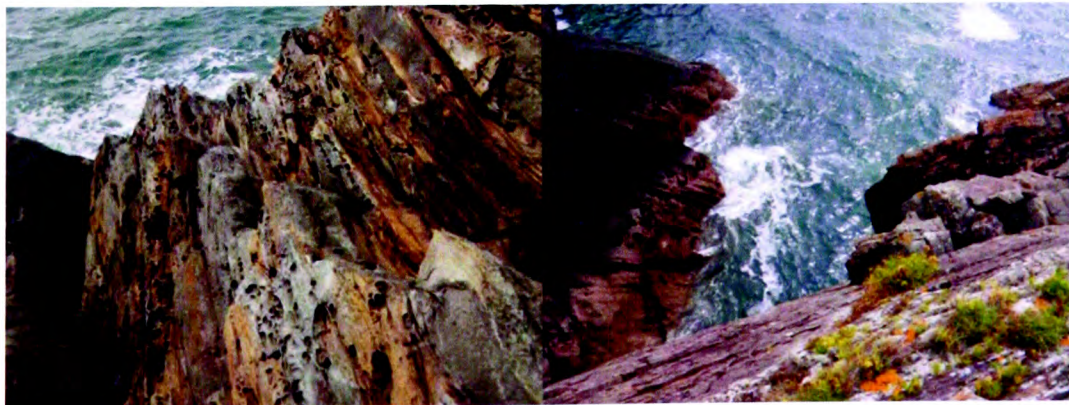


Artist photographs. St Nons.

Page 281-282.

The Richard Long and Per Kirkeby shows have certainly trained my eye in particular towards experiencing the landscape in a more all-embracing way. As the beaches are now busy with holidaymakers, I'm pushed towards the quiet cliff walks and areas where you can drop down towards the sea. These areas offer a far greater geological awareness, rawness and physicality more akin to the sculptor's sensory awareness. What is the sculptor's role within my seeing, experiencing and consequently work?

The photograph below suggests a series of areas possible for the 10m rubbing. Wish I were able to rock climb and hang the paper over a vertical face and work my way up the roll as I climbed the cliff. Presenting a space, image, surface that is inaccessible, a conceptual image? Interesting possible departure in my work, a sculptural re-presentation of a vertical drop.



Artist photographs. St Nons.

Page 283-284.

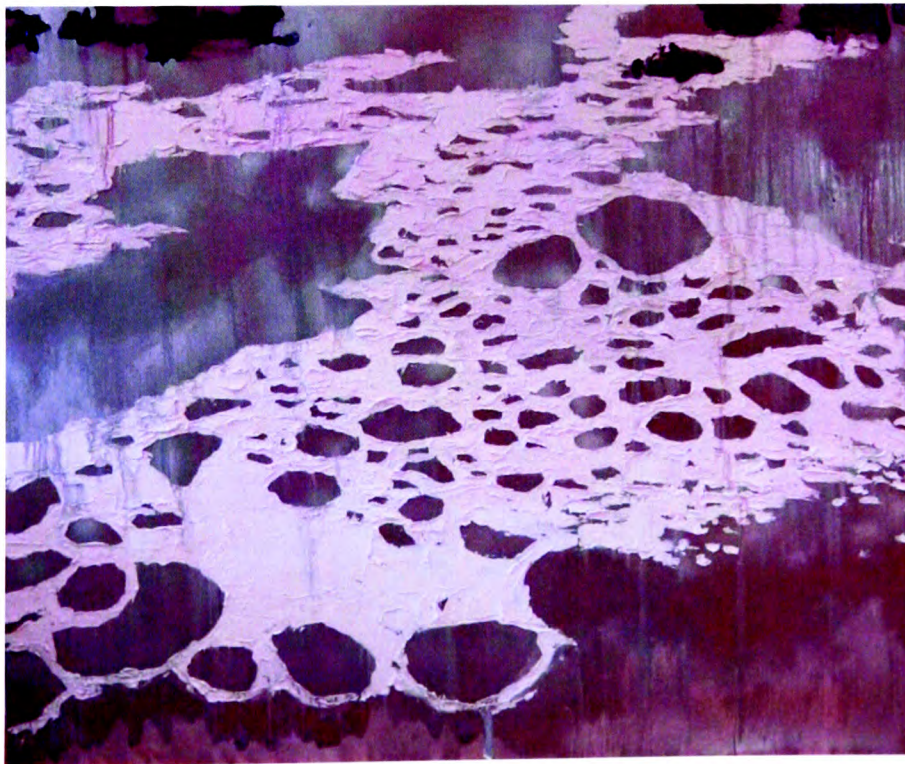
Getting really concerned and unsettled about how quickly time is passing. Can I try other ways in which the residency could continue? Even if I do not physically have the studio?

Spent the afternoon working in colour on location. Too many times have I tried to pictorially represent a space / view in a figurative way as soon as I introduce colour. Confidence growing now though. It's interesting that every time I begin to work directly with colour on location, I think of Sean Scully? Why? Perhaps I should ask the more relevant question here though, how big a part does Sutherland play in my experience during this residency? Why was I 'frightened' off when I began to use ink wash on location? Why have I now begun to avoid going down into the exhibition space at OyP? How can I go somewhere new in this already experienced and well-trodden place?

Page 285-286.

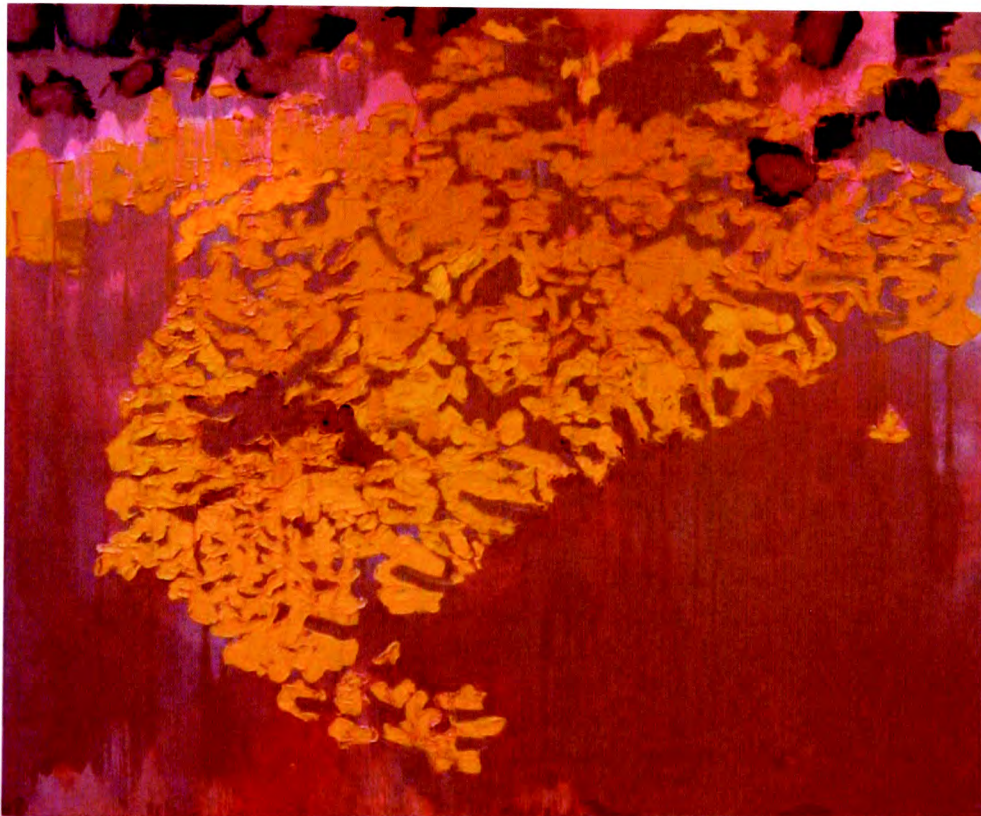
3rd August 2009. Oriel y Parc.

Pressure to perform!! Having spent the weekend out on location away from the studio, I have set myself 2 large paintings to work on today. Very aware that the painting below employs the most literal space I can remember using. The perspective is quite clear and possibly too obvious. Need to review. The use of rose madder within the bubbles has given the painting a Caerfai identity that I was after. As these paintings become even more literal and reliant upon traditional spatial techniques or tricks, I will need to confront the figurative issue once again.



Crackle

An even bigger confrontation awaits with the painting I worked on during the afternoon. The lichen painting is simply that - lichen! How on earth can it be anything else? So literal, so obvious. What is the difference between this painting and the lichen identification panels I bought at OyP? The painting feels tremendously unresolved, partly because the surface does not communicate lichen, or form as yet. Scale of image therefore scale of the audience is unresolved. Your experience of this painting is at present confused! The yellow and copper within are lush and rewarding, but I am not sure whether the overall is too disjointed. However, once again, it's the photograph of the painting in reproduction, which begins to reveal - landmass - cloud systems - USA - continent - Greenland? Tectonic plates - continental drift - Pangaea?



Harmony

Page 287-290.

4th August 2009. Oriel y Parc.

Looking at the lichen painting this morning...many probing questions - mostly about its literalness - flatness of space, lack of the abstract - lacking the newly found, lacking the accident. The eye is almost denied access. Wallpaper? Anaglypta velvet wallpaper, just like the walls of an Indian take-away!

Surface pattern, decoration. Was it simply an idea? Beware of ideas! The outer form takes on a USA map like form, breaking up of the ice fields - Greenland - Satellite image where yellow is highlight - either weather system or ice flow. Or am I clutching at straws here? I think what's really difficult is witnessing such a dramatic and obvious change in my work. Has the whole essence of my painting, of what it has tried to deal with, changed? The obvious or literalness that has developed - is that within me only? I know the origins of these paintings, their processes of making, and their photographic beginnings. Therefore is it just me? They are my photographs, and I have always wanted to use my photographic work more closely. They are still paintings. The surface colour and painterly quality almost denies, or challenges the heavily dependence upon a tight figurative image. But the figurative would never exist; I'm sure, within the minds of the audience looking at these works.

Worked on a middle-size canvas, horizontal tidal bands, pink on white, reflective beach. Remembered the small Mondrian paintings of beach and waves in NY's MOMA. Problem here that a member of staff at OyP needed access to the studio, and immediately commented that he liked it. Why do I have a problem with this? Am I a complete snob wanting people to not get it? Has my work become too accessible? Whatever that means? Even the education officer likes my work. Why should I be concerned? Is it because it references the landscape more now? What will happen to my working practice when the residency finishes?

5th August 2009.

Only one large linen painting remaining, plus a possible 4 middle size. The impending close of the residency is having an effect on how adventurous and how many risks I'm taking. Am I now beginning to batten down the hatches? So want still to produce a large 10m x 1.5m rubbing down the side of a cliff. Can I incorporate the sculptural? Would also like to walk for a whole day producing 100 small drawings every 100m?

Page 291.

5th August 2009.

Very excited with the developments within the small watercolour drawings on location, St Nons in particular. They seem to be challenging the drawn / painted issue. It's interesting drawing with these acrylic pencils, the markmaking feels more appropriate / sculptural / felt and

connected, as opposed to that of the brush. As Matisse said about collage, area and line simultaneously.

Page 292.

6th August 2009.

Open studio, Thursday once again. Holidaymakers. What is my role today? Tourist attraction - educator - enabler - artist? At the moment I'm holding back, not wanting to begin work on my final large canvas, feel the end very close. Yet still searching for something new. Must seriously consider the sculptural. Must remember also to collect geological samples in order to have the Museum create some polarized slides / photographs for the exhibition.

Page 293.

Worked on the lichen painting, it needs either a more painterly abstracted signature motif, would could reclaim its literalness, or a hinted gestural area - markmaking which is about the rubbing - found - unknown. THAT'S THE BIG PROBLEM AS FAR AS I CAN SEE AT THIS MOMENT; THERE IS NO UNKNOWN WITHIN THIS PAINTING? WHERE IS ABSENCE HERE? EVERYTHING AT PRESENT IS KNOWN? WHICH BORES ME. However during this working session, made a paper stencil, using projection of the white ring lichen, felt an affinity with Matisse. Been thinking of this for a couple of days looking again at the series of small paintings - motif of palm / seaweed which hints at the paper cutouts seen in MOMA in 1993. Used silver spray, then destroyed crispness / sharpness of motif with turpentine spray. Pleased with the result - gives composition needed support - helps take eye around the whole painting.

Page 294.

10 metre drawing.

Why do I want to work on this 10m drawing so much? Interesting that the last residency in Santiago de Compostella I worked in a similar way in the Eucalyptus forests. Why am I drawn to this process and format? Planning on going out tomorrow between Caerfai and St Nons, will use rubbing, watercolour and drawing. Possible text?

Page 295-298.

Large 10m rubbing. Caerfai - St Nons.

7th August 2009.

Having preselected site - potential fault line earlier this week, I completely altered plans having reviewed the position this morning. Deep down, very suspicious of my aims and ideas for this drawing. Too many questions and unresolved criteria - why? Location? Decision to take

sample rubbings as apposed to all over. Why select one area over another to take rubbing from? All too random.

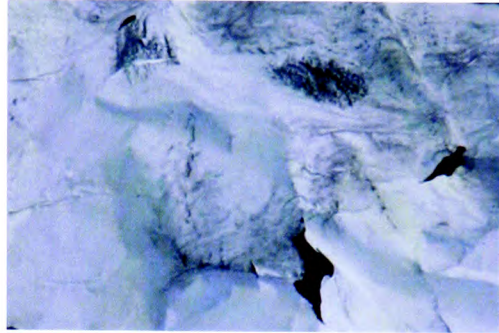
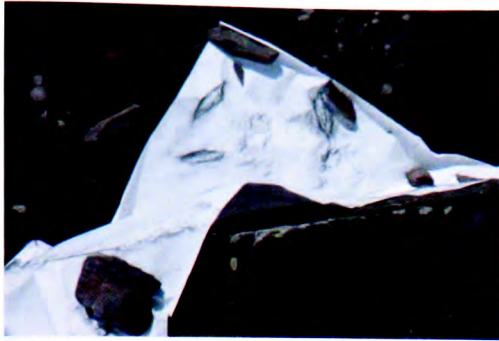
The photographs after the event were always destined to be far more interesting and successful than the rubbing itself. Once I had begun to mark the surface, became clear that the result was going to disappoint. Most interesting results were rubbings using a stained hand only - gently manipulating the paper and embossing almost its surface. The scale of the paper was extremely demanding, it felt intimidating and huge, yet obviously when stepping back to take these location photographs, you begin to realize just how vast this space is.

Obvious!

At least the rubbing from the cliff has revealed how much is needed from me - the artist - to make anything of interest. This was primeval, yet not enough, an idea only!



10m drawing. Caerfai - St Nons.



10m drawing. Caerfai - St Nons.

Page 299-300.

Still trying to understand why I'm drawn to this idea of the 10m drawing - Santiago / St Davids - PILGRIMAGE? When I think about it, my Santiago drawing has never been unrolled since it came back from Spain. How will I use this new St Davids drawing? If ever? (3rd July 2010 - as yet the drawing has never been unrolled). It would probably be more interesting re-presented as A4 sheets - either bound in a book, and given SM map references.

Saturday 8th August 2009.

Off on a boat around the Island of Ramsey today. Totally awesome experience. Geology of Island stunning. 3 depths of lichen. Black tar lichen, one, which grows nearer salt line, then yellow. The green only grows on north facing surfaces / cliffs. Biggest impact today was the shear weight and thickness of the sea - especially as the boat hit the open unprotected, unsheltered water northwest of Ramsey. This is an ancient island. The Bitches were fascinating, 2m difference in tide between the north and south side.

Page 302.

This is the first journal I've ever kept and completed. Of course this will continue for the remaining weeks of the residency. Whilst this journal has begun and tried to cross-examine many of my decisions, interests and works produced during the residency, I'm fully aware that I

need to become far more demanding and confrontational in my questioning if its going to aid my PhD. The reading, exhibitions, self-analysis will need collating and structuring. This has, and is still, for another 3 weeks, been the most magical experience for my work and its development. Today for example, 9.08.09, I went to the studio for 3hours, worked on 2 canvases, then drew on location beyond Porthclais for the remainder of the day, before heading back out towards St Nons for the evening session. A fantastic and inspirational day!

Appendix iv

Journal 2

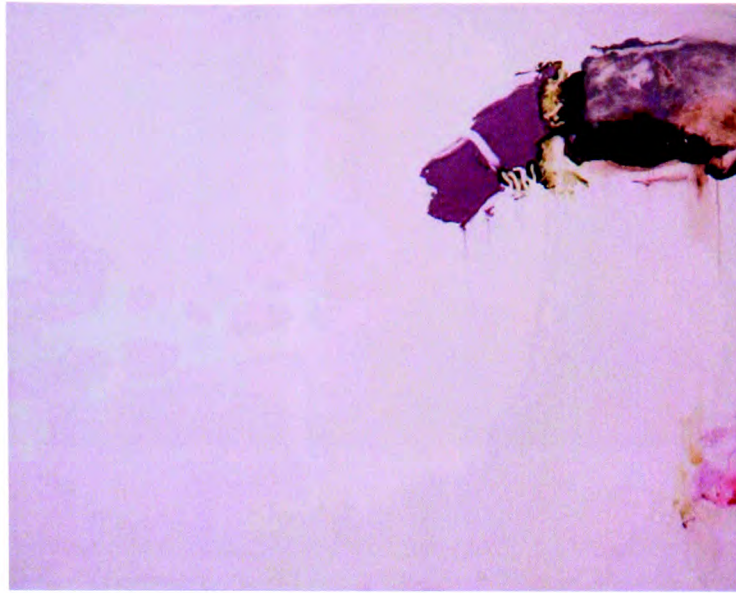
9th August 2009. Studio.
Page 1-2.



Zest

Really not sure about this painting. Began by using the deep orange seaweed photograph from Caerfai beach. Size of canvas is 60 x 70cms, an awkward demand of a fairly flat image. Once I began to wipe and remove / reduce areas, the painting became more ambiguous. However it was the thoughts of artists such as Neil Canning and 'Pizza Express' painting that begun to undermine my initial confidence and excitement for this work.

Painting below is far more successful. Larger scale approximately 100 x 120cms. The single landform / rock top right, plays with an interesting perspective, creating an entire space of the white picture plane. The middle left of the painting (too subtle for the camera) is a white on white pumice like eroded form. This balances well the whole composition. Very pleased with the development where the large-scale paintings are now influencing the middle-size rather than the small to large only.



Seep

10th August 2009.

Page 3-4.

Met with curator of Oriel Myrddin, Meg Anthony, today. She was very excited about the new works, but reserved towards the use of silver in particular on the linen paintings. Stepped back and realized just how much I've produced since November. Going to take many months to readapt to Cardiff studio. Interesting how the studio space has provided 'hot spots' for working, only able to work in the far right hand side of the space, never let behind the window.

The middle-size paintings have undoubtedly become more confident and successful, so much so that surprisingly, I've worked my way through 8 canvases with 3 weeks remaining, have ordered 4 more.

Page 5-6.

Whilst waiting for Meg Anthony, went downstairs into the gallery to look again at the large Sutherland's, only to fully register their flatness in contrast to the exquisite drawings. They all work with a parallel 'stage like' set, and present the form - 'formerly'. The drawings however, play and enjoy space / shadow, which is oblique to the pictorial plane. Looking closely at the surface of each canvas, the paint is so dry in its application, a surface, which I find very difficult to respond to. However they echo my works from the Slade, 'Riots / Wapping protests / police horses'.



Wapping riots. 1987.

Need to re-examine this painting and discuss its importance. Whenever I find a painting not to working, it's usually because it's too flat, formerly, front on, parallel. Where does this leave Bacon's work then?

Having to return to Cardiff for a couple of days. Do not want to go. I honestly haven't been able to work so intensely since leaving college. It's almost a sabbatical! How am I going to go back to Cardiff? Teaching? The intensity is quite magical. The balance between working out on location and the studio, as well as actually living here in St Davids. Worried that this might be the pinnacle of my career. Working on the PhD also tends to emphasize 'the end' the retrospective, 'the finale'. Where will my work be in 10years time? Can I honestly maintain my artistic integrity here?

12th / 13th August 2009.

Page 7-8.

Having 3 115 x 92cms and 4 smaller 60 x 70 cms stretchers made up to work on for the remaining 2 weeks. I'm confident as well as hopeful that working on these smaller canvases within the current 'process' of work, I may be able to balance producing paintings that I'm genuinely challenged by. Need to lift the intensity of work once again to complete these new paintings and sizes, as well as complete 2m x2.5m canvas.

Spent all pm stretching and priming new canvases. Managed to coat and prime all 7 canvases. Suddenly the studio looks incredibly busy. Realized that the process of projection and using the photographs is going to play more important role than usual. Must now take photographs for the actual painting, whereas in the past, this has been the opposite way around. (Although the underexposed photographs have been deliberately taken.) Therefore the

process of looking and photographing has potentially changed. Will need to either make small paintings and project up in scale - or simply make more conscious decisions to use the photograph as a decisive starting point for the painting.



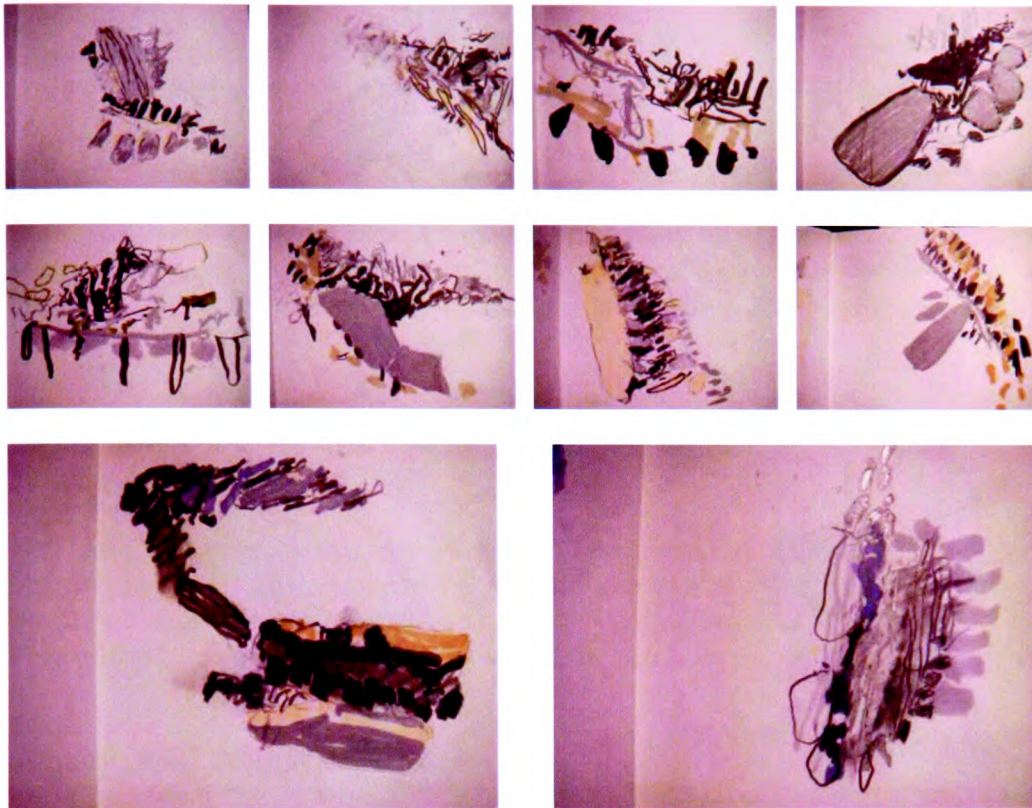
Studio. Oriol y Parc. 2009

This has all stemmed from the need to work within a public viewed and perhaps impersonal space to avoid the painterly 'squabble'.

Where does the drawing process fit in now then? Why am I really pushing myself with $\frac{3}{4}$ sketchbooks on the go at this moment? Why draw at all? Do they simply train the eye? Do they rehearse the markmaking process? Do they themselves become projected onto canvas? The studio drawings have in the past, so why not direct from the sketchbook to canvas?

Wanted to experiment with marker pens in sketchbooks. A water-soluble black marker has begun to work well, so will try with a series of colour markers specifically for a whole sketchbook series. Walked to the cliffs facing north, looking across St Nons and Ramsey Island. Initially very disappointed with the way these drawings have begun. All too 'unforgiving', as well as predictable. Great difficulty in finding variety of mark, a smudge - graded line or intuitive like mark. They are removed almost. Perhaps they would be better suited on a

photographic print or greaseproof paper? Auerbach's pen/ink drawings quickly spring to mind.



Sketchbook drawings

These are far more successful, as they openly accept the line and its quality - continuous - flowing - fluid - unchanging and intuitively gestural / sculptural.

I will need to build self-confidence and become more the surface. Colour is questionable, whether necessary or indeed appropriate?

Page 12.

Saturday 15th August 2009.

Dreadful misty wet day. Need to go out today with camera specifically looking for images for the newly stretched canvases. Whilst the paths and cliffs have given me the solitude and contemplative space to work since the beaches have been invaded by holiday-makers, when I look seriously at the resulting photographs, they are very 2 dimensional in many ways for projection and painting, Danger of Sutherland's 2 dimensionality. Take for example the lichen painting, it was an extremely difficult painting to 'further develop' - must look at actually what to 'further develop' means? The drawings present either details of geological formations, or vistas. Why draw? Why the evening walks? - Drawing in colour now, how

does this all help or fit in? I need to look closely at these works, of course recognize them as works in their own right, but more interestingly - works that could be taken directly into painting.

Page 13.

Love the buzz from the balance of being able to go out on location and then return to the studio with ease. This has been a most special opportunity and experience - the intensity and prolonged period of work has certainly focused and channeled an incredible development. Sitting each evening, another day away from Cardiff, living in St Davids, has given me the space and time to scrutinize how I work and where they come from.

Have to clear studio up in 2 weeks. It's of huge importance to me now, what's it going to be in the future?

At last - been able to put two small blackboards (that I bought) into the exhibition case outside my studio door. Want to confront visitors about the Picasso vase and Rembrandt etching on show in the gallery.

Page 14.

Sunday 16th August 2009.

Really need to confront the last remaining linen canvas this week. Found this photograph taken at Caerfai in July. This painting needs big stones, which will force the space and scale into the audience. 'Monumental' in scale and ambition. If I use silver and gold spray, will this break the emptiness / quietness and contemplative element of the linen? In contrast to the known space of the white primer, where the space is almost surface-less.



Artist photograph. Caerfai beach

Page 15-16.

All of these photographs offer potential for the sequence of middle-sized paintings. What constitutes to a successful photograph here? Able and capable of acting as catalyst for a successful painting? The under-exposed photograph reduces detail and simply presents composition alone. The energy - dynamics and natural arrangement of sets of stones. My own personal compositional / editorial decisions take on an important role here. (REMEMBER HOYLAND - the artist only ever paints one painting - if he's got that one painting inside of him?) Looking through my photographic archives, very noticeable (something noted and exploited in much earlier Druidston works) that compositional elements left one image, and were often picked up in another. Offering potential diptychs / triptychs. Very strange not having visited Druidston since February. Beginning to see just how much I'm not going to be able to achieve during this residency.

Page 17-18.

Monday 17th August 2009.

Worked ambitiously on large linen painting. Initial excitement - confidence - used sprays - decided surface needed breaking, to confuse it, give me something to work against. Problems - the openness of the anticipated space in the painting is not as obviously powerful as hoped. This painting in danger of either becoming the most predictable and 'staged' painting - or indeed the most powerful and monumental. Pleased with colouring of each stone. More drawing into and wiping away needed - find a space / gravity / weight beyond the initial photograph.

Main problems include:

- o Two forms touching - top right of painting.
- o Left hand blue stone touches edge of picture plane - flattens potential space.
- o Bottom right hand green form - shape presents a front on, as opposed to a plan like space.
- o Silver spray background surface - need to wipe back.
- o Bottom left Caerfai red sandstone - needs redefining and avoid directional point.
- o Top right form - predictable - well used formula of wiped stripes.



o



Grieve

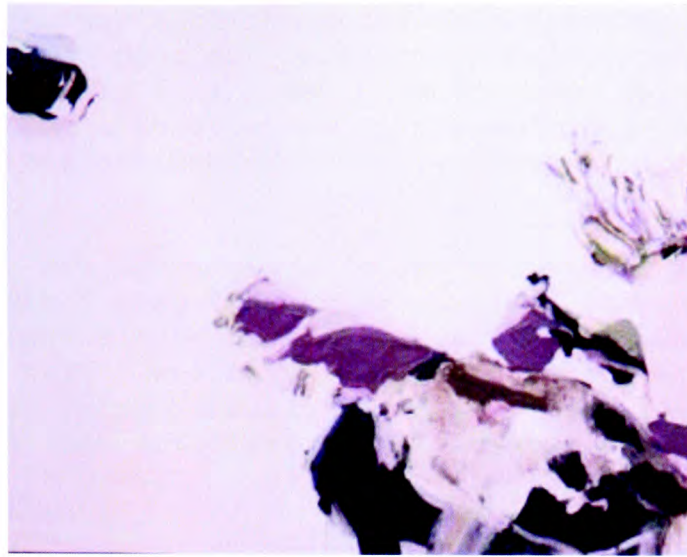
Page 20.

18th August 2009.

Determined to resolve the large linen painting today before it dries too much. Wiped back all silver / gold spray residue, began to see an openness of space begin to evolve. The large green form, whilst its surface texture / mark and gesture were successful - the position / scale / angle and presence, were disabling the plan / vertical space - which is far more ambiguous. Cut back into top right hand form - and re-aligned - cut off joining / touching forms. Extended blue / grey form towards top of canvas.

Page 21-22.

Looking at the painting again in the photograph, it's not as powerful or monumental as actually in the flesh. (Something opposite to what has been happening!) Pleased with the middle-size paintings here. It's what is not in these paintings that is crucial, the tension and dynamics of space, the magnetic, invisible, ley lines almost. The photograph is playing key role here in their production, but also a 'photographic' almost digitized printed element is emerging. Photographic as in surface and clarity of edge. Goes far beyond the obvious reference to photography. Finding great difficulty sleeping at the moment, always in the painting. Difficult to switch off. Most intense period of work ever.



Seep 11 and Wane

Page 23.

Began working small canvas today. Using a phone camera photograph taken of seaweed washed up at Caerfai. Stunning orange/red pimples. Very conscious that these marks already take on Hodgkin motif, need to re-work. This is a detail in fact, as apposed to a plan, or beach. Really not sure how to view this one at the moment.

Page 24.

20th August 2009.

Need to resolve painting above, as well as begin a number of other small and middle size canvases. Why is it that whenever I receive a compliment about my work, that I'm deeply suspicious and skeptical about my work?

Lucy (Education Officer at OyP) made special trip to the studio to say how much she loved this painting. Does this confirm that it does not work? and simply operates on a decorative level, Ikea like? I don't know. Is it because I have an unhealthy attitude to the everyday person outside of the art world? Is it because my parents don't get it?

Immediately set about changing and re-working the painting. Wiped away the centre cores of seaweed form, and re-defined a more plan-like space, using Caerfai red slabs. The gold - well even Caitlin my daughter said she disapproved! Turned the canvas and kept rotating to re-work, which then redefined and structured an uncomfortable gravity / weight. Seem to have resolved it for the present.

Page 25-26.

Pleased that I kept the deep pink spots, even though the obvious Hodgkin reference is there. Wiping back again into the painting, plus played with slabs of landmasses, which created scale, openness and an emotion, rather than simply just space.



Tingle

Second small canvas worked instantly, using photograph of lichen, close up root structure. Only concern is the angular spaces, which are geometric and hard. Very excited with third painting today, a middle-size canvas which plays tenderly with scale and space. Cannot believe how the photographs here echo the forms and spatial relationships in these recent paintings. Late afternoon

worked out on location north of Porthclais. These cliff structures buried beneath such huge surf and swell, echo and resonate so succinctly what I've been trying to achieve all day!! (Reference previous statement, does the painting or photograph come first? Which help see in the landscape?)



Studio



Grind



Artist photographs. Porthclais.

Page 27-28.

21st August 2009.

I've 3 middle-size paintings remaining, and I'm concerned that my reasons for working them are now becoming too influenced by the impending end of the residency. Forcing a situation where I am clutching at photographic images, which, offer potentially immediate solutions.

The state, at which the painting below finds itself, after its initial dialogue, is one that I seem to consistently put myself into. Is this a real and necessary process?

The tease of a beginning, which, culminates in dissatisfaction and annoyance. It's where it goes now

that matters, and is also the position where real and significant decisions need to be considered and taken. The 'look' of this seaweed root form is not the interest here; it's the 'feel' - its physicality - the translucent and transparent visual touch like quality. The main problems again, with this painting, are its fullness, all overness, its denial of space, and its literalness. The diagonal composition is interesting, but the filling form from corner to corner is flattening and limiting.

Am I getting close here to understanding where the emotion /emotive breaks through? Never when flat only. Space of some form needed which implies scale and potential visual movement through the painting. Modernism reference Greenburg.

The technique of projection seems to push the paintings into high sharpness and deep contrast mode. These 'object' paintings are so different, they offer the object as sensation / emotion beyond the beach.



Artist photograph



Swell

22nd August 2009.

Evening working at Porthclais. Having real trouble with the felt pens, drawings feel Sutherland like. Will persist and try to become more sensitive and experimental.

Page 29-30.

23rd August 2009.

Working on spiral seaweed painting. Can't have it ending up as a thing only, need it to be a sensation as well as space / form. Still very confused by this painting. Using the lime / yellow green here, gave me the confidence to introduce it onto the large linen painting which I thought was finished. Using the heavy French-blue base as a ground to the green-yellow, undoubtedly helped the

melancholic and dusk like light, which allows form to emanate from the light absorbed during the day. Pleased I made the bold move to rework this painting. With the impending completion date of the residency looming next week, finding it a little predictable knowing what I'm doing for the remaining canvases. I've hardly used a paintbrush (accept priming canvases) during the residency. Living in St Davids for the past 6 weeks has been fantastic, being able to go out drawing every night, working the evening light, dusk.

Page 31.

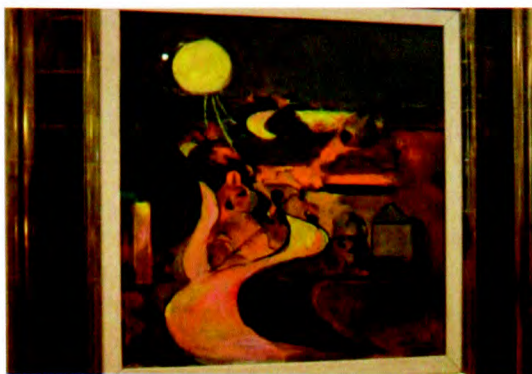
Monday 24th August 2009.

This is my last week officially in residence at OyP. Personally feeling very vulnerable. So many unanswered questions about the deadline for vacating the studio, tidying up, packing it all away, as well as questions about the progress and development of my work. Feel completely lost.

Page 32.

Tuesday 25th August 2009.

Plan to work on the last remaining canvas. Feel as though 'painting' itself is coming to an end. I will return to my Cardiff studio as well as Druidston. Having been at Porthclais and the harbour last night, went downstairs into the gallery to see 'Road to Porthclais' by Sutherland. It's such a powerful painting, still too flat and aligned with its outer edges, but the colour and winding road at sunset is so typical of what I have come to typify of Sutherland in Pembrokeshire, and also the bicycle rides too and from Porthclais. It was fitting then that as I worked on the last remaining canvas, that it rapidly developed into a tribute painting to Sutherland and the residency. As it was then titled, 'After Sutherland - Road to Porthclais', seems to sum up the residency so succinctly, the setting sun, a winding road going where? I've wanted to produce something directly inspired by Sutherland during the residency, and it truly held out until the final canvas. Whilst in this 'Sutherland' and reflective mood, decided to walk to Solva from Caerfai.



Graham Sutherland. Road to Porthclais



Brendan Burns After Graham Sutherland. Road to Porthclais

Page 33-34.

Amazing how many elements I struggle with in this painting. The full sun, horizon, flatness of helix road, flat side elevation of house, yet I'm deeply moved by it. The colour balance, that acid yellow - mustard - green, juxtaposed with the deep orange fiery earth and road, all resonate acutely. Titling this painting will present an awkwardness for me, seeing as it will instantly locate itself too rapidly with Porthclais. Decisions romantically being driven by this painting and Sutherland at the moment.

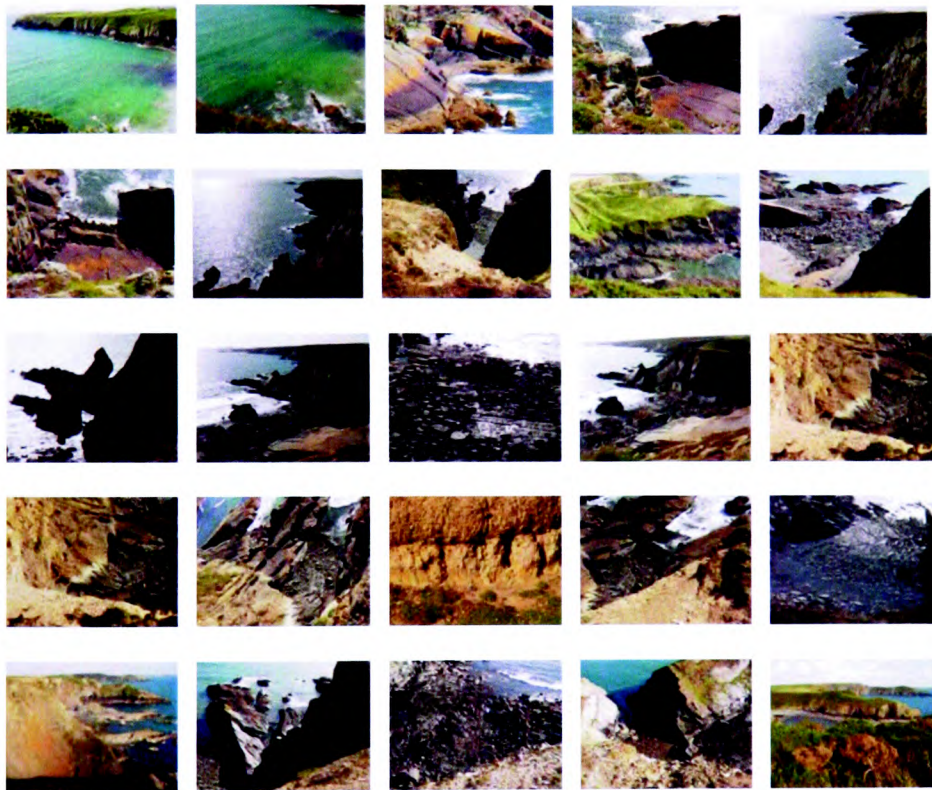
Page 35-36.

Walk, St Davids to Solva, 4.5 miles.

25th August 2009.

Been at least 10 years since I walked in this opposite direction, usually walk Solva - St Davids. Psychologically, even walking eastwards rather than west or north seems to be either secondary, or not as potentially exciting. Turned out exactly the opposite

today. Sun extremely hot this afternoon, took nearly 5 hours to walk the 4.5 miles. Worked on 16 large (A3 size) watercolours along the way. Took many photographs also. So much potential. The sheer height and series of dramatic vertical drops over the cliff edges, which completely threw me. So many variations in rock and soil colours. With the heavy rains of previous nights, many edges were new and untrodden, and vulnerable. Colour particularly rich. So many natural arches along the way, one that 'whistled' in the wind. Scree's were huge. Beaches were similar to those seen last at Ramsey from the boat. Felt very much part of Sutherland today. Shadow of end looms once again. Walking to Solva, without having to turn back (catching the bus for the return journey) was liberating.



Artist photographs, walk from St Davids to Solva.

Page 39-40.

Studio. 27th August 2009.

My last 'open hour' studio day. Mixed feeling today. Thursday's open door hour has been a difficult and sometimes trying time. However, many interesting visitors today including a journalist from The Financial Times. He was truly connected to the work.

Spoke with Bryony Dawkes at the National Museum, she confirmed that no immediate plans to use the studio, therefore I can continue to work on for the immediate anyway. Discovered later though, that centre manager has already plans for series of lifedrawing classes in studio from early September onwards. Can't bare thinking of the studio being used as anything else - it's my personal space now. Probably best to begin to wean off slowly, begin to distance myself both physically and spiritually, work less indoors and more on location.

Became clear today as I was showing the work to many visitors, that there are 3 main categories of work produced during the past 10 months. The drawings and rubbings, the clean open and sculpturally emptiness of the white ground paintings, and then the linen works. Definitely experienced the most intense and concentrated period of work since college days.

Worked on a series of small painting during the afternoon, really enjoyed the freedom to experiment and play again. Went out drawing during dusk to conclude the day.

Page 41-44.

29th August 2009.

Went to the studio first thing this morning. Beginning to wind down production. Only working on small paintings, but deeply concerned about the large linen painting. Something is not working. It is certainly big, but that's all it might be, physically, but not big in its statement or indeed its presence. Some of the smaller paintings on board are 'bigger'. Began to photograph and document all the small paintings produced since November 2008, there are 50 in total, plus 29 paintings on canvas and at least 70 drawings. Begun the emotional journey to remove myself from the studio, so much miss- and non- communication from all concerned at the moment. Life classes have been booked apparently in two weeks time, which if that is the case, I will need to pack up by the end of the week.

Been planning on so many adventures this summer, but at least succeeded in one this afternoon. To climb Carn Lidi. The immediate views southwards across Ramsey Island and towards St Justinian's were spectacular. They immediately connected with my recent paintings, as well as the photographs beyond Porthclais last week in the storm. Had planned to take rubbings and draw from the top of Carn Lidi, but found the whole experience too powerful to even attempt either. Genuinely felt unable to deal with such an overpowering connection with its vast

expanse of space. The wind was deafening and embraced everything. Thought best to leave before obviously 'failing'.



Artist photographs from Carn Lidi

Always wanted to experience this western most point since arriving, but so conscious of work. The reflective surface of the sea, abstracts both space and scale. These photographs connect so much with recent works. It is the clarity and focus, which resonates so strongly. The curvature of the horizon is so evident. The 360-degree views are incredibly overwhelming as well as 'humbling'. How on earth can you sit down to draw this? I completely buckled and felt I could add or say nothing that was worthy.

Once back to the Cardiff studio, will I maintain the relationship with all of these new locations? Or will I simply return to working with Druidston? These cliff walks and beaches, St Nons, Caerfai, St Justinian's, Porthclais have all become so familiar, only now beginning to engage in an honest and meaningful relationship. The small paintings in particular have only yesterday become more confident and immediate - with new

and honest influences from the immediate locations and experiences.

I do not want Cardiff or college to suffocate what has developed over this past 10 months, how?

Page 45-46.

30th august 2009.

Pouring with rain, every single Sunday since July it has poured. Today certainly feels like the end. Documenting all my work and space itself. Over 2000 visitors today through OYP. How many look at the work in the gallery? How many are just sheltering from the rain? How would Sutherland respond to this place? Ended up tidying up a small corner of the studio. Tidied up my drawing table, felt horrible, cannot contemplate the end. This is my personal space where so much has been made and so many questions been raised. A whole year since my work was initially hung in this studio. This is the last night staying in St Davids, wet, misty and cold - unable to go out drawing; unable to connect with so many places I've taken for granted.

Page 47-48.

31st August 2009.

My final day. Still many unanswered queries as to whether I need to pack up today. Found studio door left open this morning when I wasn't here, is this how it will be treated when I finish today? Security of my work of big concern. Very moving experience-saying goodbye to center staff, except one! Who had already made her exit.

Page 48-49.

1st September 2009.

First day in studio with soul intention of packing up. Quick trip to Caerfai, wept. Oncoming squall. Felt removed and suddenly like an outsider again. How suddenly and drastic the emotional connection has altered over the past couple of days.



Artist photograph. St Nons.

Page 50.

3rd September 2009.

Taken a couple of days adjusting and distancing myself from the emotional separation. Even finding time and a special space to write up the day's thoughts in this journal has been suddenly challenged. Looking again at these photographs makes me realize how special this has all been, those evenings, being able to escape every night, cycle off and draw. I have the drawings, I have the photographs, I have deep memories, but yet it seems like it never was, like it wasn't me! Staying in Haverfordwest, 15 miles down the road from St Davids, but it may as well be 1500.

Page 51-52.

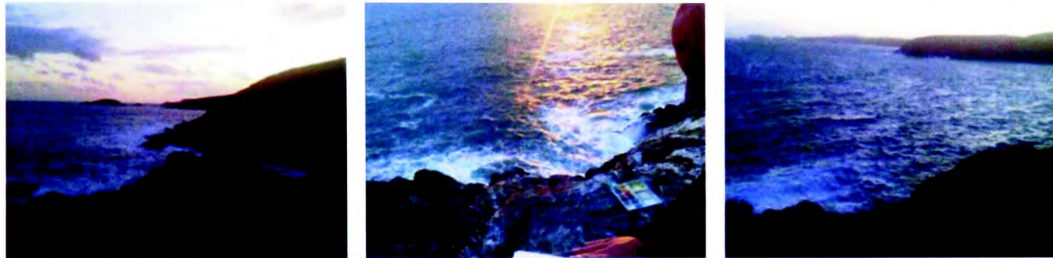
Can I believe I witnessed this burst of light? The last breath of light before nightfall as I was working on Caerfai. What a privilege, to have been able to sit alone each evening for nearly 7 weeks. Only 2 nights was I prevented by heavy rain. I will never be able to re-experience what I have had this summer. It really feels like the pinnacle of my career! How can I ever follow this? What could ever better it? I've been able to

completely immerse myself in my work. Without Ruth's help and understanding, this would never have been possible.



Artist photographs. Caerfai bay

Photographs below, unknown at the time, turned out to be my last evening on location drawing during the residency. The moon, tide and wind. Porthclais became a very special place. Immersed myself, and tried to hold on to every moment, but still I find myself beyond the moment.



Artist photographs. Caerfai bay

Page 53.

Genuinely wept today, so many memories squashed into one minute - overload. How would my work develop with an extended period of work here? Would the figurative finally take hold? What role would photography take? Would I return to Druidston? Even though staying in Haverfordwest, and the tide has been low during the last couple of nights, been unable to visit.

Page 63-64.

Caerfai point. 4th September 2009.

Ruth and Caitlin have returned by train to Cardiff. I'm finally packing studio completely away. Sitting in glorious sunshine at Caerfai point before returning myself. Windy and choppy seas, red dulse continues to occupy the tidal breakwaters, giving each breaking wave that pink tinge that so beautifully accompanies the red sandstone of Caerfai. September sunshine typical of this period, autumnal yet is clinging finally onto the grips of summer. How fantastic to have to squint once again. The hedgerows and paths seem to have been cut back ready for winter. My studio is also completely ready for

something else. The paintings are all stored in the corner; I will take the drawings with me.

Page 66.

I suddenly do not know this room / space. Same smells, same light, different sounds, but it's not mine, and I no longer feel welcome. It is any other room, not my studio; it was such a personal space, place.



Studio on completion of residency.

Page 67-68.

I have had to cope with varying struggles, revealing when actually I didn't want to. Opening myself, and mistakes up for view. Having to discuss with complete strangers my work. Having to deal on a day-to-day basis with a manageress at OyP, that couldn't wait to get shot. Having to give up the beach that I came accustomed to having all to myself. Having to be nice all the time. Having to

smile. Having to open my door when I felt vulnerable and threatened. Having to travel back and forth each week, (34,000 miles in total), Having to deal with the centre manager. Having to work when I didn't feel like it. Having to be inside when I wanted to be outside. Having to start work at 9.30am and finish work by 5.30pm. Having to hide. Having to allow the studio door to suddenly open to the public. Who now cares, I have all these new paintings and taken an incredible personal journey. I'm so indebted to Sally Moss for commissioning me. I can now draw in colour on location, something that I have never been able to comprehend. I have still so many decisions ahead, the curatorial responsibility of hanging works alongside that of Hodgkin, Auerbach, Boudin, Hitchens, Nicholson, Richards, Prendergast, Scully, Piper, Spencer and Setch.

Page 72.

13th September 2009.

I really need to confront the issue of 'titles' for my paintings. As for an exhibition title itself for the show, 'Influere' as in 'influences' seems to carry the most potential. I need titles, which reference the development witnessed in my work over the past 12 months, where perhaps a more figurative reference takes place? However, I feel very uncomfortable still with place names, even 'Caerfai group' (Collective geological group of rocks), still feels too literal. I need also an overall umbrella theme such as 'Liquid Light series' - 'Taste of Sight series' of the past. Tidal heights and associations with time and weather may provide a key? 'Caerfai exposures'? - As in photographs. Geological terms? Time - Sedimentary - Volcanic - Journey - St Davids - Mapping - Map references - Musical terminology/compositions - Numbers - Compositions as in chemical/geological make-up - Arrangement - Adaption - Meditation - Zen - Lunar cycle???

Page 73-74.

National Museum of Wales selection of works for 'INFLUERE'.

- Frank Auerbach, Park Village East.
- Eugene Boudin, Beach at Trouville.
- Ivon Hitchens, Arched Trees no.12.
- Howard Hodgkin, Bedtime.
- Thomas Jones, View in Radnorshire.
- Ben Nicholson, Painting 1944-5.
- John Piper, The beach at Llantwit.
- John Piper, Coast of Pembrokeshire,
- Peter Prendergast, Orange sunset.

- Peter Prendergast, Sketchbook.
- Ceri Richards, La Cathedrale Engloutie.
- Ceri Richards, Music and sunlight in a room (Sketchbook).
- Ceri Richards, Piano studies, (Sketchbook).
- Ceri Richards, Debussy, (Sketchbook).
- Ceri Richards, Clair de Lune, (Sketchbook).
- Ceri Richards, Poisson d'or, (Sketchbook).
- Ceri Richards, Dylan Thomas, (Sketchbook).
- Sean Scully, Sketchbook.
- Terry Setch, Beach Detritus ll.
- Terry Setch, Sketchbook.
- Stanley Spencer, Snowdon from Llanfrother.
- Graham Sutherland, tbc.

Page 75-76.

13th September 2009.

Continuation of research for titles and themes for exhibition. 'The sound of colour series'? Colour sound correspondences? 'Colour sound series'. Of course the titles could reverse and become apparently more obvious and literal? Beach - Sea - Stone - Rock - Seam - Sandstone - Edge - Layer - Lichen - Foam - Spindrift - Bubble - Under ? Perhaps need to reference the sculptural more fully? Title must incorporate the international. The drawings could be seen / presented as poems? Colour smell - the smell of colour. Drawings could be 'rock or stone poems'? Zen Buddhism - 'NOW-NESS', being in the moment, configuration, seeing through painting, 'Performance', 'Symphony', remember 'Orange sherbert kisses'? synaesthesia.

I am really struggling now with the overall umbrella theme - title for the residency. 'Influere' will be the title for the exhibition, obviously able to pick up on 'influences', from Hodgkin to Auerbach.

Will definitely run with 'Stone poems' as title for the series of drawings. Very interesting looking through artists such as Joan Mitchell, titles which relate specifically. Her use of 'Wet orange' comes closest to what I'm trying to reach for. Twombly's use of Italian/Greek Gods. Gillian Ayers's use of Indian references. Per Kirkeby references Greenland openly, or his hometown. Why have I a problem with Caerfai then? Because its not a feeling / sensation! I would like to reference pilgrimage somehow also - religion / spiritual also alongside physicality of the journey undertaken each week travelling to St Davids. 'Stone - Sand - Sea'. 'Symphony'. 'Poems and correspondences - Caerfai'.

Page 77-80.

17th September 2009.

Decided to return all the small paintings back to Cardiff studio today for titling. Was hoping to lay them out in OyP studio, but genuinely feel removed and alien now. Meeting with poet friend Sunday, Morgan, he's very sensitive to aspirations of the work in the contemplative sense. (He's recently taught me how to meditate, finding it incredibly nourishing).

Oriel y Parc.

Walking back in the studio - like a divorced partner that you knew intimately but no longer desired to touch. Huge distance, energy-less space of echo in empty studio. The smell had ceased, known but strangely unknown at the same time. Dead but living, silent and disused.

Just went down to the gallery to review the Sutherland's on show. Looks like I'm stuck with the large paintings. If I could I would completely re-hang with small drawings only.

Page 86.

Oriel y Parc.

My entire works on canvas are now stored in the gallery storeroom downstairs. The studio will now become a meetings room. History / Welsh and creative writing classes will be held here next week generating £6 re hour for the hire of the room. Management has learnt absolutely nothing from this residency have they?



Works in storage



Studio?

Page 87-88.

Met with Morgan Francis, poet and friend to discuss the work and possible titles. His spiritual understanding of my work in particular, as well as the way he constructs his poems, with an almost abstractness similar to my own, will certainly benefit my indecisions. His recent visit to my studio at Oyp in August, transpired a beautiful poem called, 'Towards Ty Ddewi', and its opening line - 'Shadow into parent light...' touched a massive raw nerve. Discussed current dilemma whether or not to become more specific and more literal with my titles? - Lichen - stone - foam - rock etc. Talking this through made me come to realize just how static and cold these suggestions were. We talked about 'pilgrimage' and 'pilgrims', both agreeing that their meaning was more important than its associations with religion - which with St Davids was always going to be.

"The unreal has no being, the real never ceases to be".
From the BHAGAUD GITA - Lord Song.
IN-NESS - AM-NESS - MY-NESS, without attribute,
becoming a being. Existing state of the now.
Possessiveness.

Looking once again at Morgan's poem 'Towards Ty Ddewi', reconsidered using 'Shadow into parent light' as umbrella theme for all of the St Davids residency works. As Morgan says about the first line of this poem, "the commentary becomes meditative without mentioning the word".

I'm then content to follow on with a title such as date, map reference, emotive play on process, or indeed form / object. I really now need to confront the selection of my works for the exhibition.

Towards Ty Ddewi

Shadow into parent light,
Sea bundle sound
Wind hedge rise
Star chandeliered sea.

My thanks beside,
Herald day, fingers
Sand pencil rest,
Wave after wave.

Tides awaken shore
Long textile of far reach.
A moment rivers
Silently on canvas.

On visiting Brendan's Oriel y Parc Studio 27th August 2009
Morgan Francis.

Page 91.
21st September 2009. National Museum of Wales.

Confirmed that the Sean Scully sketchbook will be presented a series of 12 drawings within one frame. Saddened we can't include the Caro sculpture.

Page 92.
National Museum of Wales.

Delivered the selected drawings to museum. 'As well as being..' currently being hung in exhibition titles the 'Sound of Sight'. Hung alongside Bridget Riley and opposite Ceri Richards' 'Cathedrale Engloutie'. Sent Bryony email of all works produced during residency. Reply came back, "Gordon Bennett, you've been busy. Beautiful - Beautiful - Beautiful". Couldn't have asked for better response.

Page 93.
25th September 2009, National Museum of Wales.
Very decisive period selecting drawings to be framed. Requested if we could include some geology within the exhibition, will meet up with Tom Sharpe at later date.

Want to include Caerfai sandstone and perhaps series of polarized slides from section of the Caerfai group.

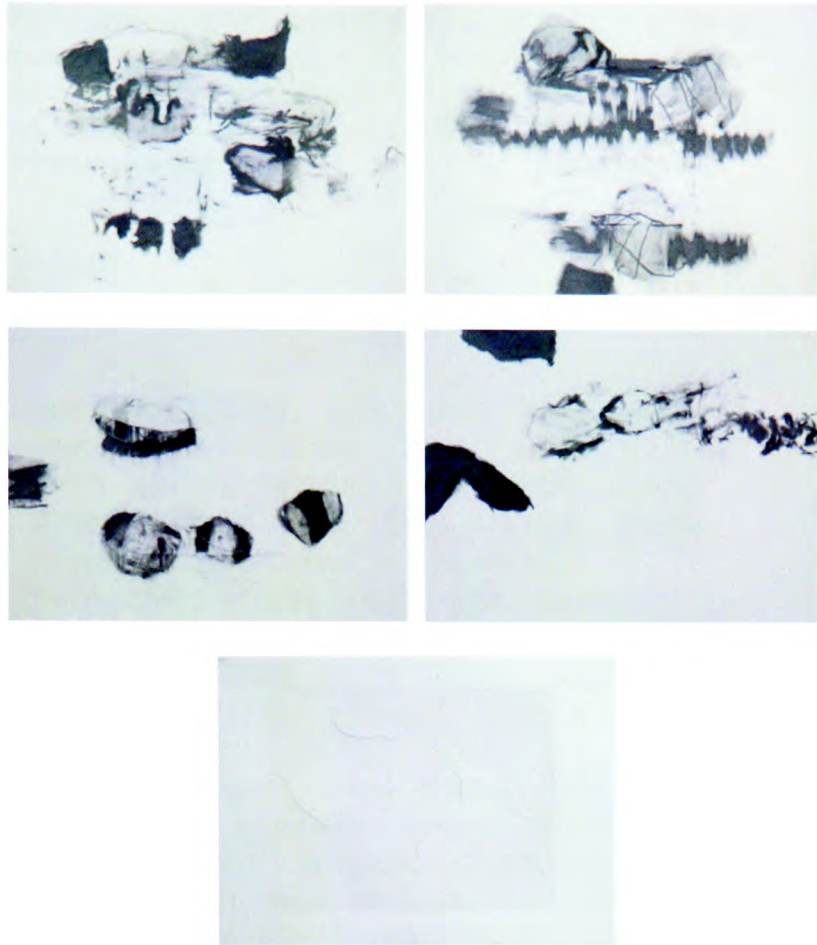
Having previously exploited date, time, tidal range, map references and process, I was reluctant to repeat and recycle. I will use single, (more often than not), words, which 'feel' and communicate a specific emotion / sensation / experience. Such as, 'Hush'. 'Swell', 'Grieve', 'Grind', 'Lull', 'Crackle'. These will act as catalyst for sensation as well as hint at the image / paintings subject matter. There are two subject always within these works, Sensation and inspiration, whether its lichen, rock erosion or tidal process. These titles avoid the literal, yet are specific as well as being emotive. The word 'Grind' makes one want to wince. 'Whisper' is tender and sensitive, beautiful and calm. 'Crackle' is a sound as well as a word.

Page 95-98.

Stone Poems - selection.



Stone poem drawings



Stone poem drawings

It was incredibly difficult to select down from nearly 30 drawings, (already selected from over 70). I honestly do not see a lineage or criteria for the selection at the moment, other than simply to exhibit a range of works, which play with space, mark, figurative, abstract. One addition, which does stand out as conceptually very different, is the cut line drawing. A flat pumice powder ground, which is dead and flat, with 2 edges, which reference tidal edge and reach, the waters edge. This is a quite direct and physical act.

Will these selected drawings succeed in showing how critical the drawing process has been during the residency, in fact how important it has been over the past 5 years. I'm sure the display of sketchbooks will help.

'Stone poem' as umbrella title is an appropriate one, I want these drawings to celebrate the romanticism as well as the spiritualism within groups of stones, ordered and eroded by time itself. Working black & white allows the freedom to experiment with space and form, the experience

of taking rubbings directly from the cliff faces, have all inspired these studio drawings. These in turn have fed directly into the small paintings on board. I'm still unsure of the use of photographic print directly collaged within the drawings.

Page 119-120.

6th October 2009.

Titles:

PINE. SHUSH. STEELY. STIR. SURGE. TAIN. SPUR.
HINT. CRAVE. GROOVE. PEEP. LONG. YUMMY.
LUCID. LIMPID. WAVER. PAUSE. HUFF. WHEEZE.
THROB. GASP. PANT. ETCH. SHIVER. RECALL.
SCURRY. WINCE. CHANT. PULSE. FLOW. LURE. LILT.
SNIFF. LIMP. WITHER. REACH. LICK. GLOW. TASTE.
LIMP. GLIST. MUSE. MEEK. GLUM. GLOOM. LICK.
MUTE. WEEP. OOZE. NUMB. NICHE. BABBLE. SNUG.
NUZZLE. FESTER. QUENCH. WHISH. TANG.
WHOOSH. SWISH. DRIFT. SOB. HINT. INHALE.
SOURE. SEEP. SHIFT. GLARE. GLEAM. SUDS. SHIVER.
RELISH. FIZZ. SHIMMER. SURGE. GUSH. SETTLE.
WANE. HUSHED. WHISPER. STUMBLE. PLUNGE.
SLUMP. SQUINT. RASP. NOURISH. NURTURE. REVEL.
LESSESN. FLUSH. GASH. SPRAY. TENDER. ZEST. LESS.
INGEST. HINT. EMBRACE. CLINCH. SNARL. SPOIL.
VENT. HISS. PITH. ESSENCE. WAIL. GAZE. GLIMMER.
GLINT. DAZZLE. SLICK. SIP. GLISTEN. FUSE. DRIFT.
SKIM. GULP. SOAR. BLINK. DIM. GULP. GUZZLE.
GLOOM. ZEAL. ACHE. BLISS. SQUALL. RELISH.
SHEEN. BLUSH. TINGLE. GLUT. WEEP. CHURN.
YEARN. THROB. RUSH. SWILL. TOSS. HAZE. VEIL.
WHISPER. BREEZE. EBB. LIGHT. SWASH. SWELL.
LULL. REST. HUSH. MEEK. CRACKLE. GRATE. GRIEVE.
GRIND. ANTHEM. SOURCE. WANE. BACK. LADEN.
DUSK. PURE. LUCID. NUB. ABSENT. STILL. YEARN.
ARC. BECOMING. TRACE. TARNISH. HESITATE.
GROAN. DEN. RAVISH. SHROUD. HARMONY.
CONCERT. ROUT. WHITTLE. RAM. AROMA. GNAW.
HUSH. RISE. SHIFT. SLASH. DANK. MAR. HOE. SLIT.
TINGE. LUST. LOST. FUSE. LORE. LEAP. ETCH.
WRACK. SCOOP. HACK. NOWNESS. MOMENT. PULSE

Page 121-122.

8th October 2009. National Museum of Wales.

Met with Tom Sharpe (Geology Department) to discuss the possibility of having a series of thin rock sections cut from a sample of Caerfai stone that I had collected. Very possible to slice and adhere thin section to slide in order to take series of magnified polarized light photographs.

Searched through 5 large cupboard like cabinets of geological samples from Pembrokeshire alone. Each cabinet contained approximately 30 drawers. I specifically wanted the examples from the Caerfai group, Solva, Porthclais to Whitesands.

So pleased as well as relieved that I was able to select these samples without reading the labels. I knew the stones well, and recognized specific colour-ways and patterns. Selected 61 samples, aware that we have a large glass case available to show them in the exhibition, but anxious that we avoid 'single' specimens with huge amounts of information and text. Want to exhibit them in an unusual way as well as sensitively alongside my work. I very much like the small white card boxes that they are stored within; I may try and use these. Will display them in groups, Solva / St Nons / Whitesands / Caerfai etc. Wonder whether to display them on shelf or plinth instead of glass cabinet? Or even the wooden drawers from the cupboards at NMW themselves? This would be far less pretentious and natural.



Stones from NMW

Page 125.

14th October 2009.

Stress of teaching alongside heavy schedule in preparation for the exhibition has forced me to take a couple of days leave.

Spent the last 4 days meditating, or should I say learning to meditate. Beginning to feel confident enough to carve out time to withdraw. Can't believe how clean I feel. I knew I wanted this sensation in my work, but now I'm beginning to see the profit of incorporating it within every day life.

Page 126.

20th October 2009.

Extremely busy with teaching and preparation for the exhibition. I'm aware that it has now been nearly 6-7 weeks since I last drew, painted or photographed. Quietly desperate for Caerfai. Next week!!

I have managed to begin to copy photographs into a 'to print' file for the exhibition cases. It's been difficult to find a balance between a photograph that operates successfully on its own, or becomes part of the paintings inspiration. I still question their inclusion within the show?

Page 127-128.

26th October 2009.

Recording the audio guide for the exhibition today. Decided finally to use the Latin word for 'to flow into', 'Influere' as title of the exhibition. Audio guide - What a challenge to find the right balance between how much information to reveal and withhold! Is this simply an educational aid? Or something else? What is an audio guides role here?

Page 136.

28th October 2009.

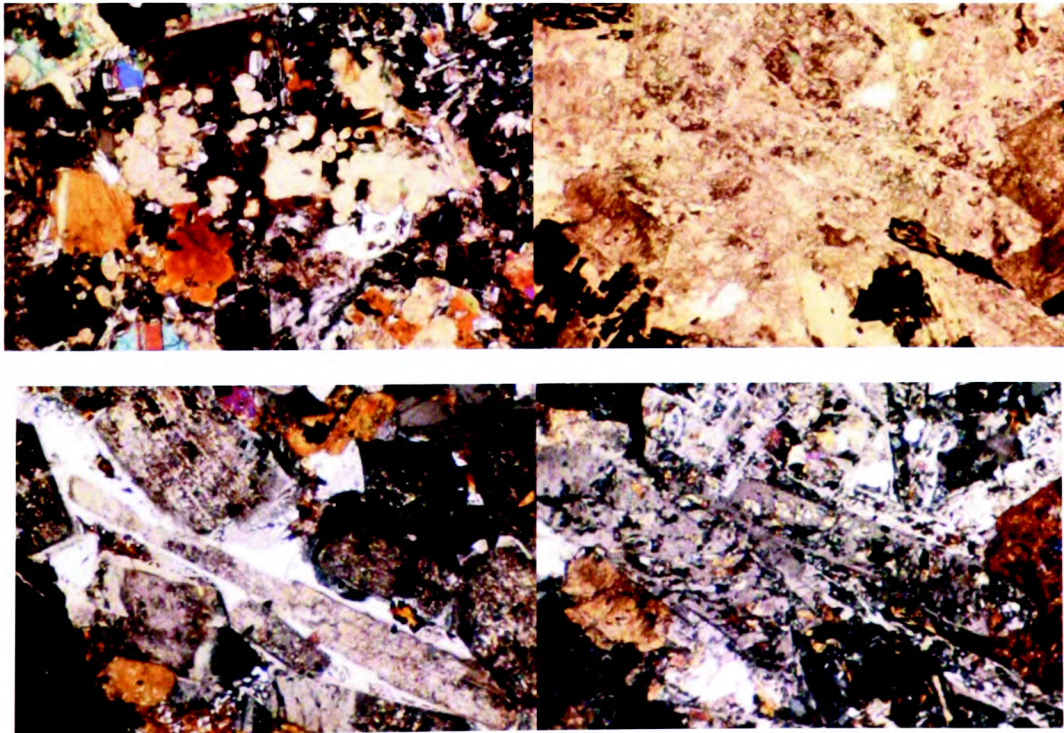
Two weeks remaining until the hang. Everything is ready, the small paintings are framed, and the drawings are with the National Museum. The Private view card is promised for delivery by the end of this week. As regards to the hang itself, I'm keen to experiment with the possibility of a wall of drawings, mixing my own with that of Auerbach, Richards, Scully, Sutherland and Piper. Not sure there will be enough though to make a big statement. I think because PROCESS and drawing have been so important within my selection, as well as my own practice, the drawing wall may work? As long as it is not read as a separate ingredient. At the moment I think 'Harmony' will hang centrally over the window, and both

the Auerbach and Hodgkin will play left & right in the far gallery.?

Page 139-140.

1st November 2009.

Received these scans through from the geology department at the National Museum. I must admit, I'm slightly disappointed, (although I'm still waiting for the Caerfai red sandstone thin section). As Tom has selected these from stock so to speak, I have lost control. On computer screen they are layered and 3d in feel, printed here for the exhibition they are flat. However, as I look at them, I genuinely feel I know them; they too have an affinity with our own make up. Worlds, which happily exist beyond the naked eye. Did the scans open up a new way of presenting in paint? - Or were the paintings always going to 'reduce down'? Are the scan happy accidents which cement critical understanding? Or, am I clutching at convenient relationships simply to uphold argument within a PhD framework?



Polorized rock scans