

## Some Notes For Dark Spring

I sometimes lie in the bath, looking up at the mirrored cabinet doors veiled in condensation; smeared gestures, fleeting attempts to banish fingerprints and other incidental traces. Here vapour conjures phantoms, and in flickering candlelight mysterious and otherworldly forms. Gazing at them I am thirteen again sitting in the back of my parent's station wagon, driving through mist towards Apollo Bay. The view from the window fractured glimpses, the radio buzzing in and out of reception. As we emerge from the forest, I see a lone hang-glider floating high above the cliffs. An angular bird of prey dancing colours against brilliant blue, it dives and momentarily hovers above the shoreline then disappears into the sea.

This recent series of works extends my exploration with concept, material and 'matter' in relation to (and sometimes independent of) 'form' in painting. In particular they draw on many techniques and processes that have associations with both traditional (analogue) photography and printmaking. Reprographic processes; 'developing fluid', 'masking out', 're-touching', 'lifting impressions'; terms relating to traditional photography and various print-making disciplines; have relevance to processes involved in making these works. Each image is developed through the careful application of paint added in layers to interim surfaces such as sheets of glass (plates) and a range of malleable and static plastics. These are often wrapped around the intended support to imprint upon the final work the warp and weft of the linen fabric as a supplementary layer of information. These works are created as a series of 'substrate' layers, a kind of 'reverse archeology'. When dry, and with great care, the painted impression is 'pulled' from the surface and the image is 'magically' revealed. The resulting 'skins' may then be attached to prepared linen, or further altered with supplementary collage elements that interrupt and confound the spatial reading of the image. The term 'impression' refers to both the painted imprint formed as the 'skin' is lifted from its matrix and content expressed as gestural mark making. As the experiments with materials have evolved the repertoire of surface treatments have also become more complex – extending some works into the realm of shallow relief; evoking textures that suggest natural and manmade forms with uncanny verisimilitude. The work is ultimately assembled with the spirit akin to a delighted child covering their schoolbooks with new vinyl "contact" – a devilishly tricky procedure fraught with countless mishaps, as surface tension causes the 'film' of paint to stick to itself – and to attract all manner of grit and foreign bodies.

Traditional painting methods may involve selecting a support, preparing a ground, and 'laying down' an under-painting before building up successive layers of paint, background to foreground, lesser to greater detail. In my recent paintings, this conventional process is reversed. Details that might otherwise be final embellishments are inscribed as initial gestures; the background that is usually an initial 'wash' becomes the final unifying film. It is a process that changes the method of production as well as the physical and conceptual space of the painting entirely.

A kind of mirroring occurs through the painting process that directly impacts the content and potential readings of the work; the painting is made with my dominant right hand – however when the image is finally revealed – it is reversed.

The emphasis and direction of the gesture now appears to be made by a left-handed person. As a consequence the paintings seem strangely alien to me, it feels as though 'another' hand has influenced the outcome of the work. One that is 'mine' – but might not be 'me'. This sensation is welcomed as a spontaneous chance element, something that is both within and outside my conscious awareness and control. It suggests ideas about the necessarily 'performative' nature of 'painting'; painting as 'act'.

Mirroring as a term also extends to the metallic/ iridescent painted surface effects used in some works to create ‘alchemical’ reflective surfaces. The word mirroring can also mean to copy – to ‘mimic’ – as an echo or parallel, one to another. Placing images that are similar (but not the same) in proximity to one another may create the visual equivalent of a refrain (in musical terms) – a reiteration that suggests to the viewer a feeling (or gesture) that is sustained and is unfolding materially and in time. Forming multiple dialogues: with each other, with the space around them and also with the viewer.

I like to imagine that when I’m painting, I might be transmitting latent images from favourite artists (known and unknown) lost to time, and in doing so challenging accepted notions of authorship and perceptions of ‘reality’. As such, these works operate as fields of reflexive and subjective potential; and have shared affinities with many of my favourite ‘artworks’, from history. These forms may not have originally been intended as aesthetic works of art. Many of the mysterious sculptures, objects, paintings (and archeological sites) that I have researched throughout my adult life, have been created to function on a number of potential levels. Oscillating between the conceptual, spiritual, Shamanistic, and animistic; embellished by mythology and legend, their formal functions may fluctuate with mystic or otherworldly concerns, in ways that may have bearing on the reality of our contemporary existence.

The objects, sculptures and sites that I have investigated (most recently in January this year) are also united through qualities of concept, form, surface, colour, physicality and perceived atmosphere; (intellectual, aesthetic and intuitive considerations) including a black granite sculpture of an Egyptian Late Period Pharaoh; curving parallel lines a sheer pleated sheath wrapped high around his thigh, another supplementary skin. (British Museum). A plaster-cast 1:1 sculptural model of a set of Norwegian carved wooden church doors; smooth black tubular entangled forms snaking their way to enrobe and distinguish a threshold. (The V&A Museum). The Meso-American origin black obsidian mirror thought to have been used for conjuring spirits (necromancy) by Dr. John Dee, mathematician, astrologer, occult philosopher, and advisor to Queen Elizabeth 1. (British Museum). The monolithic stones in a circle at Castlerigg, Cumbria; an Amphitheatre emerging from a white blanket of snow in early morning sunrise; cutting through the whiteout I glimpse the surrounding mountains. Their profile echoed in the contours of each stone monolith, positioned to bring the mountain into closer proximity and ‘intensity’ (visual and spiritual?) to the viewer.

Singular juxtapositions of form and content – texture, gesture, mark making, colour, and sensation. The ‘sound’ of crashing seas in Turner’s late paintings, the soft tufts of a sheep’s wool caught on brambles, the melting snow cascading in sheets of icy water down a mountain. The imagined sound of ‘bluebells’.

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