

Introduction

The thesis presented will endeavour to give an insight to my Masters of Art (MA) project and evolving artist's practice. I studied a Ba in Printmaking focusing on techniques such as screen and offset printing while also testing other materials and mediums for conceptual purposes. Whether it was site specific installations, photography or screen printing the content has always revolved around the broad themes of body and architecture. Printmaking was a place to make line work more graphic and expressive. Printmaking was very seductive as the techniques make decisions bolder. The immediacy of working straight onto a plate was usually my preferred option, as the expression can be felt in the final image on paper.

Printmaking has a different emphasis in my MA project and practice going forward. It functioned as conceptual component in the making of my paintings which I will try to elaborate further on in this text. It has been my intention to bring my practice from the medium of print to the painting discourse.

The poems, which break the text, are from writing experiments conducted during the MA course. Looking at images produced I adopt an automatic style of writing drawing on memory. The importance of this thesis for me is the mapping out of developments and reflection upon tensions within my practice.

Hierarchy

The question of hierarchy within the arts evokes parallel similarities with my thoughts to hierarchy in society at large, conjuring images of class and segregation. This fuels my practice but does not attempt to define the finished work. I want to make work that can be interpreted freely without narrowing in on the contents importance. This is a tension that causes friction within the making of my images. In particular I was challenged by the dichotomy of being inspired on the one hand by people I know and feel for without it becoming the main focus of the work. How much information does the viewer need? Does background information make my paintings more or less interesting? I struggled with this idea when trying to choose titles that relate to the work. While I wanted the work to be ambiguous in its reading, this caused a difficulty to pick titles as I was mindful not to restrict the viewer's interpretation. This was the case when I picked titles that referenced the content which could be connected to the paintings visually.

The chasm between drawing and painting is something that I have always questioned and studied. I find it hard to clearly define at times what can be considered a painting or a drawing in ever expanding mediums which often use the same material, like a wall drawing done in acrylic for example, Does it matter? The art market, museums and institutions seem to strictly classify and disproportionally value painting over drawing. It seems an odd accusation when so much of paintings have under layers of drawing or use drawing for sketch purposes. Although now creating paintings my enthusiasm to the democratic and powerful tool of drawing is fundamental to the process. All my printmaking has been achieved through the process of drawing.

When living in London periodically I would visit the Tate Britain to see the works on paper by Francis Bacon or the line drawings of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska. I was surprised that they had rooms which you could visit and actually touch the work when you had an appointment. I was left alone at times with the work, it felt intimate a different world to the grand setting down stairs with halls full of precious paintings. I also regularly visited Tate Modern where you could see somebody like Franz Kline whose paintings made of large brush marks are renowned master works. Franz Kline is an interesting reference as he also worked with black and white treating the negative space with the same importance as the marks he made. This has been fundamental for me when working with printmaking.

Scale is also a point of tension within my practice and within the logic of the art market. When working with printmaking I mostly worked in small formats. Prints are usually editions and not so valuable, therefore the importance of scale is less an issue than in painting. If a painter goes large the work becomes automatically more expensive, but not necessarily better or worse artistically.



Ink beginnings

The use of black ink has been central to the development of my work over the last two academic years. Starting out with line drawings of figures I set of drawing and producing vast amounts of work. When presenting for tutorials I display them on the walls of my studio and talk about the liberty and freedom working with line work. This was natural and not too unfamiliar as I worked previously with a dry point line in intaglio and line work in stone lithography with tusche. The dry point line fascinates me because of its depth and bleed. Unlike the clean straight line you get with an etched line, it is rough and functions as an s shape or snake body under the microscope which helps to diffuse its clarity. You also have to apply more pressure to scratch straight into the plate, which encapsulates why dry point lines are usually full of emotion and personality when done by the hand. Working with the ink line on paper was more like working with a tusche line on stone litho where it guides and has a free bodily feel.

Further in the process with work, experimenting with marks, the unconscious became an important tool to begin works. Ink spills on the page shaped into bodies and architectural elements. Developments and refinements made some of the figures into silhouettes. When pushing the architectural shapes in the composition it became stronger and created a type of tension that did not exist with only the black floating figures on a white background. During the process of these works I took time to visit the print workshop to bring the developments to stone lithography. I discovered that working with the block black and white negative spaces were not so suited to the medium because the stones surface is too smooth and its technique of grease against water just doesn't allow for the same freedom.

This crossover helped in the understanding of the process in realising that the speed of working from one image to the next was having a powerful impact on my practice. Works became series very quickly. The compositions were dictated by the amount of negative space versus the black ink. I was unsure about the content but considering them as fracture narrative's driven by memory. The works later began to look like black paintings on paper as there were heavy layered patches unevenly spread across the surface. Asking myself questions like if its better to suggest something that is outside of the drawing than to show it in the image. The continued manipulation of this type of thought created the sense of ambiguity i was seeking. I wanted images that would fuel the imagination but not complete a comfortable reading.

Looking out the window

Its not Juliet that meets the eye

Three young black males

Greeted by the police and the wall

Surely not a Rodney King moment

For this is London long after the Victorians have died out

2011

The batons are present all the same

Power affirmable from the window

Guilty of nothing but potential

Certain dress brings certain possibilities



Content and paint beginnings

When satisfied with how far the ink experiments were pushed I started to use acrylic paint. The first series made had a strict logic and consists of 25 small works on paper with black ink, blue and pink acrylic. Each work was a male figure sucking its own erect penis. The works were supposed to form a type of hieroglyphics. My thoughts around the series were about expressionist artist and the male ego. Georg Baselitz works which show a man masturbating and

his much noted sexist attitude came to mind. I'm not sure if my unconscious was sending warning signs early in my MA not to go down the same road as the neoexpressionists, a male dominated genre of sellable paintings.

Can I make work that is not identifiable as that of a male? Is that important to my practice? I ask myself many questions but don't really focus on particulars when forming the content. All the same I set guidelines to make something very graphic and simple. Is there a space between drawing and painting?. This was the first series with a preconceived framework for each image. It would have 25 letters referencing the English alphabet and minimizing the colours to three.

It felt liberating to work with the sexualised figure. This helped in the decision to make a different series with a similar framework. This series would only use two colours black and pink acrylic. The inspiration for the colour pink came from the last series and because of its gender associations. I tried to subvert the use of pink and black between the gender readings. This work also goes back to use line work combined with bodily shapes and marks. The series attempts to leave lots of room for ambiguity in its reading.

An I phone drops

Screen shatters

A naked girl on screen becomes a cubist muse

100 euro the damage

Picasso must be spinning in his grave

Unable to masturbate to the visual connotations

The owner calms down but his suit showing slightly sweatier

He orders too large gin and tonics

One for the girl next to him

The content in my works is inspired from neighbourhoods I have lived in, and reflect a continued manipulation of what I see and feel. Over the past ten year I have been living in cities like, Limerick, London, Abu Dhabi, Leipzig, Oakland. They all have different cultures and histories but the neighbourhood I lived shared uncanny parallels. The people and the architecture didn't seem to belong in the same frame. For example when I lived in Mussaffa an industrial Ghetto on the outskirts of Abu Dhabi the majority of people were men who came from India and Bangladesh. I was interested how they related to the architecture and the environment. On the streets you would see what seemed like a sea of men because it was so apparent there were no women. They had come alone to build the high-rise towers or maintain the grass in the baking heat.

In Oakland the imagery was also very surreal. I was living in west, Oakland, which is predominately an African American Ghetto. There were crack addicts with shopping trolleys collecting cans and people lined the street around the liquor store at the corner of 32nd st where I lived. You would hear gunshots regularly. Visually when the sun came down it revealed a beautiful pinkie, red California sky setting, dark figures and ghetto houses. The inequality was palpable, class and segregation so strange to evaluate by just what you saw. You would have the rich people living in mansions high up on the Oakland hills and the poorer people in wooden houses of the ghettoes just below and San Francisco, the beautiful Bay City, one stop away.

Faith

The tube

The youth and pain

The union jack still vain

The brickies and beer

Expressions of a wheel

The Thames

The new face barely boned

The chartered lead roofs

The architectural abyss framing drippy head

The city that never bore souls

The idea laughable by now

The heavy hearths angry minds

The gold traded for cash

The hindered and overweight parents

The chains dangling around the necks of spotty teens

The colour s The substance





Key developments within the process

In February 2015 I went on exchange semester to Hochschule Fuer Grafik und Buchkunst in Leipzig Germany to gain some exposure to the rich history in German painting. In Bergen the imagery and content had begun to formulate before leaving. Group discussions and individual tutorials with my main tutor were invaluable in helping with clarifying my direction. Discussions about the Rorschach test also known as Rorschach inkblot test was interesting as the interpretation of the viewer can vary from person to person. The results can vary because of the surreal aspect of the images. The ambiguity in the reading was becoming an essential characteristic in the finishing of a work. I felt strongly connected emotionally to the content

which was by now becoming ever clearer in my mind, what to probe and what the implications may be if it's rigid in its viewpoint.

My work often became rigid when text remained in the finished image. It worked against the reading of the work as it would give too clear references to what and who I was talking about. I wanted work that could be read differently from people with different references and points of entry to the work. But using text and painting over the text had been something that I used early in the process and sometimes still use for building up thoughts. Text in my practice works mostly as a sketch tool to open up or help formulate my process. I don't use other people's text or images as source material within my studio practice so at times find it hard to relate my work to text. In more than one way there remains a tension between image and text in my practice.

When renting a studio in Leipzig I started to use linen instead of paper. At the start the works were heavily layered with acrylic and small in scale. They always looked better when they were half finished. They lost the graphic element when there was a heavy texture. The paintings were stronger when the linen which was prepared with transparent ground could be seen. These small works made the bin. I use to have a habit or rule that within a series some works had to be pushed to failure. This always insured I learned something or that I wasn't getting too comfortable with the achievements. This time however there were many works that failed. It was time to sit back and evaluate again. This helped create a framework that would shift the work back in the right direction.

Economy of Material and conceptual framework

The decision was that works needed air within to breathe and it dawned on me to go back to the strengths of the graphic immediacy. This was when I also moved up in scale from A3 size to 1.4metres by 2.2 metres. The preconceived framework was that I would have a black ink graphic foreground and would use acrylic washes and watercolour as aesthetic feature, to create the illusion of depth as a background. This was different way of using the negative space to the works I made earlier in ink. The coloured areas in the paintings correspond to the white spaces in the previous ink work. With white space the work has a much flatter effect. I also set a rule that the painting had to be like a performance done in one session. There would be very little working or reworking of any elements. This helped to limit the use of material. The work mostly consisted of the black ink foreground. The economy of time was also important. The large works were done very quickly. The time consuming repetition of editioning prints use to frustrate me. With painting I am free of this frustration till the technique becomes too repetitive.

His home is underdressed, under designed and date post-war.

He wakes up partially with beer sweats

his brain was seen male flesh as voluptuous

more like a bacon than a Botticelli by now

arguing with tom that its only gay if you see cocks clashing

„sword fights tom“ he

says out loud

tom reminding him that one go's in the asshole

he wakes and there's no blood in his hands

pins and needles

sensation turning its distorted head

sleep follows

the eraser head

taking a white presences

marbled eyes

deleting the physical entity of the day

disembowelling thoughts

high up in the concrete catacomb

post war architecture

yesterdays

eating tomorrows

on it go's

cells multiply



Relationship to painting history

My paint application shares similarities with the discourse of neo expressionism and abstract expressionism. There are similarities in the treatment of the paint. The intensity in the drawing of Jean Michel Basquiat or the performative gesture marks of a Jackson Pollock or the surface acknowledgement of a Francis Bacon or Leon Golub. These associations enviably bind my work to past conversations. There is always a dialogue with the history of paint that one cannot escape. I try to use and bend this conversation.

Although some of my works are stylistic related to neo expressionist painters, it differs with the attempt to avoid any concealment of the working process. The work has no underlays, no drawing behind, there is little working and reworking. The paintings are done in one take. This risky strategy helps create ambiguity in the reading. Sometimes I see these works more as theoretical objects that use the painting history for making them commutable.

Even the colour choices seem to resemble the 1980s culture. The bright colours create an aesthetic play that works on nostalgia. It tries to emulate a layer extracted from another time. This works as commentary on the repetition of yesterday to today from art to fashion to music to the dystopian. Growing up in Ireland during the 90s and the 2000s it seemed that nothing mattered, the church lost its power and the void was replaced by materialism. With another

economic crash the new layer of Ireland remained half finished. Ghost estates remain half finished, half occupied or totally vacant.

My attempt to highlight the negation of the bodies from architecture creates dystopian paintings not too dissimilar to painters like Peter Doig and Daniel Richter. They both have developed elaborate personal techniques using brushwork and colour beautifully. Their achievements are rightfully documented for their skill and style. However I would have to respectfully disagree with Richter when he says:

¹ “I don’t believe in technique. For me painting is a form of thinking, and I keep control over the things required for this form of thinking”.

I don’t separate the technique from thinking, technique usually meets content poetically and how ever personal or original there is no painting without technique. My paintings which contain raw expression rely heavily on technique. I find the possibility of combing an individual technique with thinking so much more challenging than working with an established printmaking technique. The possibilities seem endless in comparison to working with one layer of black and white in a historic printmaking technique.

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The Latest works by Daniel Richter, (accessed 15 January 2016), Available from [http:// www.deutschland.de](http://www.deutschland.de)





Concluding/Going forward

The text and my work have kept its core obsessions about body, architecture with an expressive voice and conceptual underpinnings. The techniques have limits and one that doesn't drift far from a graphic discussion. I still intend to expand with this technique by working over prints with paint for artist's books. There are several new paintings that break the rules I set on economy of material and layering process. These are successful paintings unlike the ones that ended up in an East Germany bin. I have learned a lot during the process of moving my graphic enthusiasm to the painting discourse. It's my intention to expand technically and conceptually.

² "No painting can exist without the tension of what it figures and what it concretely consists of, the pleasure of what it could mean and the pain of what it's not".

Marlene Dumas.

² Marlene Dumas, measuring your own grave, (accessed 20th December 2015), Available from <http://www.utexas.edu>

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