A Scope Of Human Experience and Memory

Toni Mackinnon

Attestation

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the qualification of any other degree or diploma of a university or institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgements."

Toni Mackinnon, 2006



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ABSTRACT

This project explores the notion of a world experienced and mediated through the image. The focus is on issues related to representation of that world to self through image-based narrative. Central to the creation of these worlds is imagery published in various public access media such as television, the internet, print publishing. Although filtered and interpreted personally, because of their ubiquity and familiarity, these images collectively constitute representation of our culture. Our construction of the world (the way we represent it to ourselves) is contingent on our encounter with such images.

Sited within the milieu of a media-fixated age, the project aims to deal with our desire to make sense of the litter of images that people our visual horizon. The project seeks to employ these images as objects of direct experience and to consider the subjective frameworks and cultural narratives through which they are filtered.

The work will play on the desire to make relational sense of images, often by invoking narrative. Painting will be used as a means to provoke encounter between imagery, with the performative act of painting, itself a narrative, both being and representing a process of mediation.

1.0: World Constructed

Our experience of the world is mediated by an onslaught of imagery that shapes and frames our perception of ourselves, our culture and our sense of the world. No vista or aspect of this world is free from representation of visual images, which multiply, accumulate and aggregate into increasingly complex and confused representations. New media constantly adds to an already loaded perceptual experience, a plethora of visual information from our domestic and natural environments. This complex visual backdrop shapes the interior of our immediate visual landscape and forms the visual culture in which we exist.

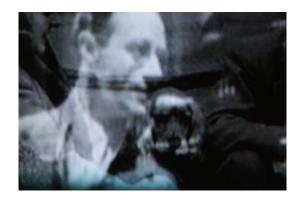
'This visual experience, one of complex, rapid and startling images, shapes our consciousness, culture and way of making sense of the world. (Mansfield, 2000)

Continuously confronted with images, unfamiliar and familiar, exotic and banal, trivial and significant, all shuffling around or across the stage of our consciousness, they mutate, disappear, reappear and either clamour for our attention or lull us into anaesthesia.

The impact of this visual torrent must have a significant impact on our personal psyche. The store of images in our subconscious is the result of chance encounters with the visual sphere that we inhabit. Embedded in our psyche, to be retrieved later, this piling up of our visual experience continues unabated throughout our lives. This extraordinary, eclectic mountain of images, a piling up of the past on the past, is filed in our subliminal being.



Mackinnon, 2006, Digital photograph



Mackinnon, 2006, Digital photograph

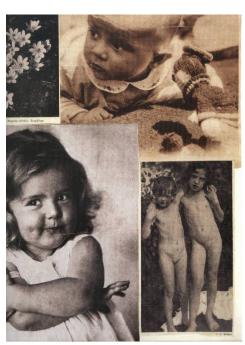
"In its entirety probable it [the past] follows us at every instant, all that we have felt and thought and willed from our earliest infancies there, leaning over the present which is about join it, pressing against the portals of consciousness that would fain leave it outside." (Cassin, 1941)

Events become perceived in part. Our comprehension of this multitude of images is encompassing but never complete. As our visual sensors flit from one object or image to another, strange juxtapositions of visual information are absorbed by our minds at such a pace that analysis is unlikely.

"Seeing is never complete...our eyes jump from one place to the next trying not to apprehend the whole. This skittish seeing has its echoes in everyday life" (Elkins, 1996)

Our way of knowing the world is influenced by juxtapositions of images. Factors of reference and association come into play in the way that we select out images from this vast landscape. For example, the lime green colour in an object grabs our attention as our subconscious makes associative connections with the green bucket that we used as a child. Subjective filters such as past familiarity constitute ways that we respond to our immediate environment. Chance encounters are brought into play by the coincidences of our perception. Don De Lillo invokes this when he describes his character's experience of juxtapositions of imagery and action in his novel White Noise:

"I twirl the garbage bags and twist tie them, swim laps in the college pool. When I go walking, joggers appear soundlessly at my side, making me jump in idiotic fright. Babette talks to dogs and cats. I see coloured spots out of the corner of my right eye." (De Lillo, 1984)



Hannah Hoch, from 'Hannah Hoch Album

How then does this collision of images impact on our interpretive process? As we endeavour to give meaning to this onslaught of signs each image has the effect of colouring or contaminating others. For example, violent acts of aggression played out on the nightly news as we eat dinner are conditioned by the story of a cat up a tree saved by a schoolgirl, which in turn becomes conflated by the image of 'The Haywain' scene on the dinner placemat. Strange juxtapositions of old, horrific, banal, heroic, sentimental or the clichéd continually reframe the value that these events have in our memory.

Without order, these images collide in our consciousness and shape the way that we order our world. Marshall Blonsky considers the potential connections of disparate visual signs in his consideration of the 'neurasthenic, prepubescent' look of catwalk fashion models in a context of African famine:

"[today's designers are] tapping into the collective unconsciousness [of a vision of the world] stalked by AIDS and ecological disaste." (Wolkomir, 1993)

Sometimes the way in which we receive this information, though not controlled by us, is manipulated by others. Images on the news are re-contextualised to give contrived meanings. A movie still of an Afghan girl crying in an emotional retreat from the taunts of her schoolmates is represented in a news item to become a story of a girl expressing anger and in a state of emotional aggression at the injustice of war.

Our view of our world and the way in which we perceive the natural order of things is dependent on the particular nuances of the visual context in which we live. Images that present themselves to us constantly frame our expectations.



Mackinnon, Studio wall, 2006



Mackinnon, Studio wall, 2006



Mackinnon, 2006, Digital photograph



Mackinnon, 2006, Digital photograph,

These fabricated constructions, for example: the American dream complete with fridges full to brimming with food and two cars in the garage, subvert our expectation of the natural order of things. The way that the world is constructed becomes contingent on images such as these.

Such aspirational images frame our perceptual and frame conceptual worlds. In a kind of cyclical process this representation of culture to ourselves describes, redefines and becomes the culture that it represents. For example, 1960's drug experiences that are rendered as crazy images of colour and pattern are normalised in culture over time and re-contextualised as playground wallpaper, advertising motifs for teenage drinks, or IPod advertisements, symbols of experiential fun.

Constituting an area of the world that remains out of our control, the question arises, just what are the consequences for us in our experience of this world mediated by a litany of images. Once experienced these images, though perhaps contained in our subconscious, remain embedded for the duration of our lives: that which has been seen cannot be unseen. Imposed on us and out of our control the impact of our existence in this milieu is little understood.

Relegated to the subconscious, it is not clear what factors are involved in the retrieval of these images to our conscious mind. Though researchers in mnemonics have postulated factors involved in the mechanisms that activate the recall and associations of images, my own research in this project explores notions of random association, and questions assertions such as that of Bergson:

"This cerebral mechanism [memory] is arranged just so, as to drive back into this unconscious the whole of the past and admit beyond the threshold only that which can shed light on the present." (Cassin, 1941)

Like messengers or harbingers from the unconscious, these images reveal themselves in strange configurations - and conflations, the iconic and the personal, the private and the public - their original form or significance masked by their place in the present. Freud's writing on the psychoanalysis of dreams offers a model of how ideas become images in their presentation to us from the unconscious.

"The dream is a manifestation of repressed or unconscious drives ... the movement from repressed drives to that which we eventually dream, is made up of a series of checks, each one adding a layer of disguise to the original material." (Mansfield, 2000)



Photo-essay, Time Life



F. H. Stires, Photo-essay, Time Life

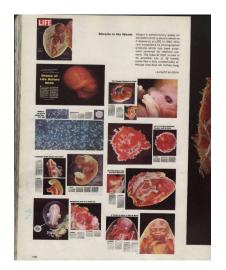
2.0: Subjective Frameworks and Filters

Visual perception begins with an image, an inverted optical image in the retina, and ends with a different kind of image, our conceptual image of the world outside (Morgan, 2003). That both of these are called images, is probably anomalous, however the fact is interpretive processing comes into play at the outset of perception.

The way we interpret these images which are admitted to the portals of the present, those that represent the past and our encounter with the world, are conditional on our personal filters. Complex in their make-up, these filters are influenced by factors such as our geographical position, our cultural heritage, our genetic predisposition or our life experiences. These and other factors are tempered by an infinite variety of influences that might be attributed to factors such as personality traits or perhaps how warm the day is.

Lechte uses an analogy of the encyclopaedia to explain Umberto Eco's theories on the way that we interpret signs. Provisional on the circumstance of the self, our interpretation of signs is as varied as the number of readers who interpret it. Associations are made through subjective filters and personal experience. The meaning inherent in a sign is multiple, like that of an encyclopaedia, rather than the dictionary in which each word has a definitive or autonomous value. (Lechte, 1994)

What images become significant for us in the way that we represent this world to ourselves? Drama, interaction, implication, intellectual or emotional connotations construct personal and associative links for us and give images significance. Other images gain significance in our consciousness without clear indication or reason. They invoke a familiarity that is perceptible but little understood. These images



L. Nisson, photo essay, Time Life

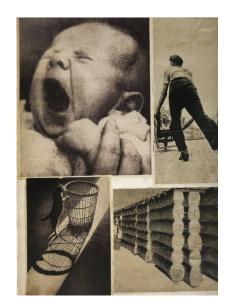
spring up from our subconscious forming part of our conscious realm and achieve significance for us by their appearance to ourselves.

Narrative has relevance in our desire to formulate an order of the world. Constrained by our ability to perceive only one instant at a time, we experience the world as a series of sensory instances. Narrative is the structure that gives these instances collective cohesion and assists us in making relational sense of each instant. Gothold Lessing pointed out in 1766 the relevance of this to the painter:

From a nature in constant motion, the artist can never adopt more than a single instant, and the painter can adopt that instant only from a single view point ... Painting in its coexistent compositions, can employ only a single moment of the action and must therefore choose the instant that is most laden with significance: that which makes most clear all that preceded and is to follow." (Nelson, 1996)

Our experience of imagery and the way we attach significance to it is contingent on narratives that we create to make relational sense of imagery. Locating even the static image in a sequence, a position within time, we fit up images with a narrative significance. For example: the cup is empty because 'he' drank it. Here, the cup is located in a cause and effect scenario and because the image of the cup is presented to us, it must be imbued with significance or consequence.

Imagery that is presented will be interpreted as significant but no matter how complete and full the information there will always be details that the spectator supplies. Roman Ingarden explained this function of the reader, by a means he calls *lacunae*. He described the *lacunae* as the gap which the reader fills in, supplementing the text (in this case imagery) or concretising. (Mansfield, 2000). The spectator becomes both reader and author in the generation of meaning in the work.



Hannah Hoch, from 'Hannah Hoch Album'

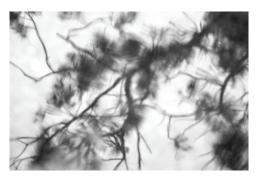
That the interpretive aspects of the narrative override the authorial concerns in the work is acknowledged. However, inherent in the representation of narratives is the emergence of the artist's ideological aim necessarily instigated by the rendering of ideas into images. In her book On Longing Author Susan Stewart states:

"Narrative is ideological both in its unsaid quality and in the fact that its descriptive power lies in its ability to make visible, to shape the way that we perceive our relationship to the landscape of action and hence to shape the way that we perceive that landscape. We cannot assume a representative aim independent of an ideological aim, for representation always strives, through manipulation and the forced emergence of detail to create an ideal that is the real."

(Stewart, 1993)



Mackinnon, 2006, Digital print



Mackinnon, 2006, Digital photograph

3.0: Methodology

In the work in this project I use the canvas as a platform in which an encounter of imagery is provoked and around which narrative accretes. I draw my subject matter from the various public access media that litter our 'landscape of action'. (By landscape of action I mean that which we directly experience). The re-contextualising of these images in the conscious mind mirrors the creative act itself as the images are reconfigured in the context of these paintings. The field against which they are framed is configured by the act of painting and the constraints of this medium. Juxtaposed on the surface of this field the images that are represented form the beginnings of a narrative with a view to making available to the viewer to construct their own narratives.

Chosen images control the aesthetic of the overall work such as the way they disturb one another through their association. I was also interested in the way that particular imagery could be used to give variation to the narrative's cohesion. I experimented with a range of sources such as the internet, print media, television, family photographs and digital photographs from domestic and other sites. Considerations to do with the quality of the image in its original form were assessed as to the images' value. Contrasting forms, their clarity, focus, distortion, naturalism, whole or partial, colour or monochrome, sequential or fragmented, etc., all became factors in the selection of images. Trawling a range of media sites for images to trial them in consequent work, I seek to represent an encounter with the complexity of our visual landscape.

In the early stages of the project methods of key word searching imagery from the internet was used. At the time, this involved using landscape as subject matter to develop metaphor for human experience. However there were limitations in this as the search method was manipulated by a preconceived idea of the images that were rep-



Mackinnon, 2006, Digital photograph

resented under this heading. In trialling images from television, digital images and books, possibilities of subject matter was expanded, and in fact presented many more options than the search selection of subject matter by keyword searches.

Using myself as a model for the kind of personal filters that might come into play I chose images which were evocative for me and suggested a significance that begged their inclusion in the work. I determined to allow these factors to influence the selection of the work without seeking clarity around the reasons they had traction for me. Emphasis on the clarification of this would create a narrative structure that had a definitive interpretation for the viewer.

Some images simply present themselves to the viewer For example, the newspaper left on the table in the morning or an image that lingered or shocked. Images located in these situations were included in early trials and proved to have value in my intention to configure random encounters of imagery in the work. Iconographic images seemed to have significance by their repeated appearance on our visual landscape. For example I used images from television and books such as Time Life and Family of Man.

There were also images that revealed themselves to me from my memory. Louise Bourgeois has an interesting perspective on the use of memory as subject matter in an art context;

"You have to differentiate between memories. Are you going to them or are they coming to you? If you are going to them you are wasting time. Nostalgia is not productive. If they come to you they are the seeds of sculpture (Elkman, 1994)



Mackinnon, 2006, Digital photograph

3.1: Conjunction of Images

The manner in which images were selected, and then tacked onto the walls in my studio in unconsidered placements became a useful method for drawing together images and

assessing the impact of the encounters between images that resulted. This proved valuable as reference point for analysis and I used this process as a preparatory method as my practice developed by taking photos of the studio wall.

The selection of images was dependent to a large extent on their relationship to the other images that were encountered within the compositions. I was interested in how an image could disturb the sign value of others that it encountered in the context of the work. For example, the meaning of an image of a child changes when it is juxtaposed with the image of a crow or a wolf just as the value of both the wolf and child is coloured by the nature of the field in which they are placed.

The way that the conjunctions of images operated within the field of the painting was also a way that associations between them were controlled and manipulated. I explored the effect the space between the images had in disturbing the narratives in the work. Two figures that sat close to one another had an ease that would become a tension when they were placed at opposite ends of the canvas. Experimentation with this occurred in the work in the project's research phase.



Internet image, 2005

3.2: Narrative

With the use of imagery, narrative ideas accrue around them. While the inevitability of this is acknowledged I intend to leave the definitive interpretation of the narrative to the spectator.

I present images to the viewer and make them available to be interpreted through the application of narrative. In an effort to widen possible readings of the images, I investigated pictorial devices and strategies that could be employed to break down definitive interpretations.











Mackinnon, Journey 1, 2005, (Ink and media on paper 200mm x 300mm approx.)

Time, represented by sequence, operated in the work to move the viewer

through a narrative. In the work made in 2005 such as *Journey One*, this was created by sequential compositions. The images were contained in separate presentation frames or by frames within the edge of the paper; the image's encounter was dependent on their presentation as composite works. As the project developed I became less concerned with modes of presentation to frame the narrative structure. These relational connections between the images were investigated within the context of one composition.

The larger more complex compositions gave me the opportunity to explore narrative that operates in a non-linear sense. The narrative sequence operates more cyclically in works such as *Untitled One* and *Untitled Two* and thus better articulates the way that these images float in and out of our consciousness.

The idea of a multiple narrative is also present in the compositional structures of the later works. These are representative of multiple stories with each as much the ending of one story as it is the beginning of another. This quote from Michael de Certeau is a conceptual articulation of the type of narrative that operates in these works.

"Their story begins on ground level, with footsteps. They are myriad, but do not compose a series ... Their swarming mass is an innumerable collection of singularities. Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together, in that respect, pedestrian movements from one of those 'real systems whose existence makes up the city. They are not localized; it is rather that they spatialise." (Certeau, 1984)

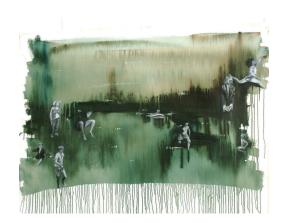
Varying the scale of the images helped the images to 'spacialise'. With variance in their relative scales they inhabited different planes in the picture, which inter-



Mackinnon, 2006, Digital photograph



Mackinnon, 2006, Digital photograph



Mackinnon, Untitled One, 2006



Mackinnon, Untitled Two, 2006

ested me as it referenced multiple worlds. This served to emphasise the disjointed nature of any perceived narrative sequence on the part of the viewer.

In the larger works *Untitled One* and *Untitled Two* ambiguity is created for the viewer in terms of where they position the narratives with respect to specific time-frames. Each image, object or encounter between the images represents a single instant. How does this series of instances or events position themselves in terms of the past, present and future? Do they have a chronologically referenced time frame? And are they located in time in a collective sense or do they relate to time in isolation from each other? This is a formulation of a world where the individual objects might exist in the present; equally however they may appear from the past or suggest a future. Images of objects were used to signal a view of a potential future. Equally relevant is the concept that many of the images used are based on found photographs, and as such represent our memory of the past. Compounding this ambiguity is these images in the paintings are experienced and interpreted in the present.

3.4: Approach to Painting

The largest amount of time during the research phase has been given to resolving the nature of the field in which the images were placed. This is largely because the field was potent in establishing relationships between images and between the images and the viewer. In the production of work this year, mostly painting based, I am trialling different approaches to the field in which the images are placed.

Untitled One and Untitled Two were milestones in the project in that they

were the first works to resolve a single compositional field in which the figures could be placed. I was interested in the liquid nature of the runs and drips and the way they dissolve and destabilise the images.

These works drew on notions of interior/exterior worlds and a sense that our act of being is mediated by our experience of the exterior world. This is created through the use of a frame within a frame. Here the relationship between the viewer and the image is mediated through the white edge of the canvas.

The work in this final exhibition, not unlike the painting of Franz West, employs flat colour and signals a shift from the earlier more transparent surfaces. This approach emphasises the materiality of the painting and acknowledges the edge of the canvas as the framing device for the narrative within it. I am interested in the way the field encloses the images and creates separation between them and their relational encounters. In this way I aim to disturb the viewer's reading of the images as narrative sequence.

3.5: Substrate and Media

During the project the methods and techniques I have employed for rendering the images has undergone significant development, including experimenting with cropped images to deliberately reference the removal of the image from its original setting, printed media. I have also referenced this through the black and white rendering of the images which might originally have been in colour.

In the research phase of this project I have trialled technical approaches that endeavour to play on this idea. The work of Jan Nelson and Gerhard Richter has been of relevance here.



Franz West, Ohnetitel, 1986

My resolve has been to focus less on illustrative techniques and to utilise more photographically based approaches. Richter articulates a rationale for this when he says:

"Painting apprehends the object, photography sees it." (Storr, 2001)

In other words the objects physical truth is marginalised by the nature of the rendering. Richter renders his painted forms with a photographic appearance so that they are devoid of any style or gestural subjective quality that would assist us in our attempt to link these objects with nostalgia or sentimentality. In the work of Hannah Hoch, collage is used as a technique to give something hand-made the appearance of something that is machine-made. Collage methods have been trialled in the research stage of the project. In the work in this exhibition I have chosen to render a second generation of the original material in paint. The gesture of the author is accepted and apparent in these works.

The work in this final exhibition is presented on single landscape canvases. Two metres wide, the format of these works is designed to act as metaphor for the landscape of action. Images are positioned in an arranged litter across the surface of the painted field. In the presentation of the final works in the exhibition, encounter is provoked within the composition and between the various works.

The acrylic fields surrounding these images exploit the liquid nature of the paint. They do this to acknowledge the act of painting and the historical and theoretical contexts of painting as art practice. In the creation of these works

the performative act of painting becomes a factor in the formulation of narrative.

The images are at first configured on the canvas as cut-outs, and it is here that relational values are considered. The collage nature of these images is abandoned for their rendered representation. Though collage is a possible way of working in the future, at this stage in the project it seems appropriate to acknowledge the authorship of the work and thereby acknowledge the personal nature of the filters that are operating.

Concluding Commentary

Situated within the milieu of a modern age, the project aimed to open up issues around our image-mediated and image-saturated world. During the project a number of possible options for lateral exploration presented themselves. For example, investigating subjective and cultural filters other than my own, or exploring some political implications of this project, or exploring performative aspects of painting arising from the project.



Mackinnon, Detail of 'Small World' 2006



Hannah Hoch , Strange Beauty, 1929

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Documentation of Work 2004 - 2005

These works are representative of a series of 4 works. The backgrounds were found objects from the internet. The bird images are in acrylic.



#1/4

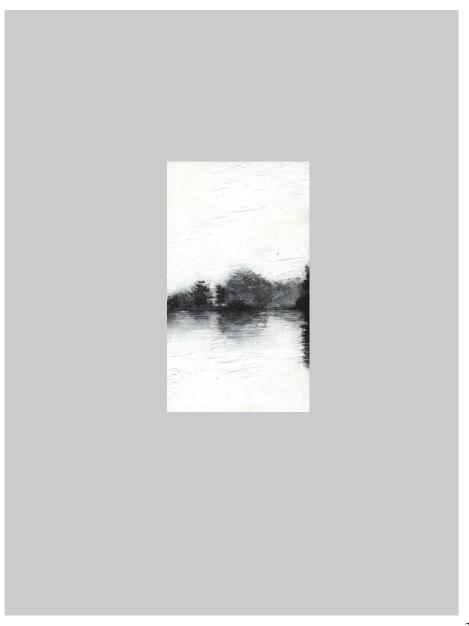


#3/4



All works right:
Acrylic on laser print
210mm x 290mm

#4/4





These works are representative of a series of 3 works. All based on images sourced from the internet.

#2/3

Above left: Landscape 2/3, 2005 Acrylic on board 70mm x 15 mm

Left: Landscape 3/3, 2005, Acrylic on board ,70mm x 15 mm

These drawings were produced between December and January 2005.



Far right and bottom: 210mm x

290mm

Top and middle: 290mm x 210mm



#2/6



#4/6







#6/6

#3/6















These drawings represent work produced between December and January 2005.



Top: Untitled 3/14,

Acrylic and ink 290mm x 210mm

Bottom: Acrylic and ink 210mmx 290mm

#4/12

Experimental drawings based on internet imagery.



#4/9



#3/9



1/9



These are images from a series of three. All images ink, acrylic and collage.









3/3

The works on this and the opposite page are painted on stretched canvas. These were shown in sequence as a series.



1/6



2/6



3/6



#



Acrylic medium , ink and gesso on canvas 210mm x 290mm $\,$



6/6





All works:
Ink and media on paper 200mmx 300mm approx.



1/5



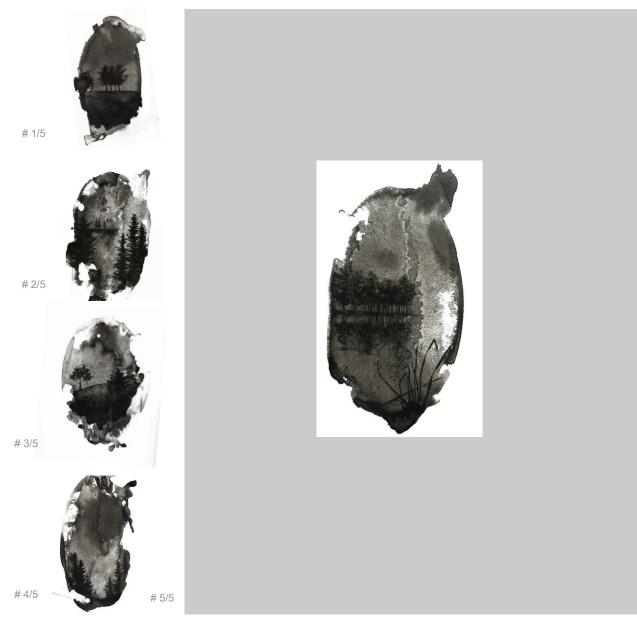
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3/5



4/5

5/5



Ink and media on paper 200mm x 300mm approx.





1/4

This is a mock up of a possible installation format for the end of year show for 2006. In the actual installation the framed work was on the wall and the ceramic pieces were on the floor in stack.

These images are taken in the studio.



2/4



3/4



4/4



Twigs: ceramic, various sizes

Framed works: 2 Ink and acrylic medium

248mm x 350 mm

These pages represent a total of 25 pages made for a book that was based on Umberto Eco 's interpretation of sign model. The pages came from a 1950 's encyclopaedia.

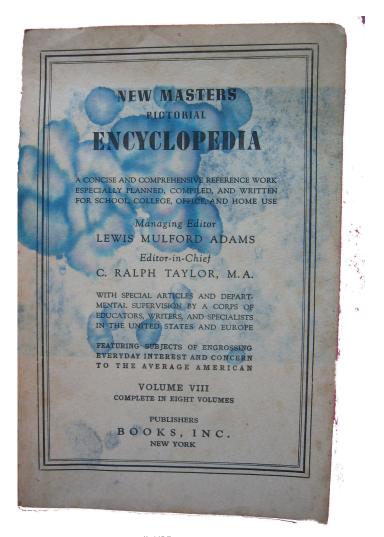


1/25



2/25





4/25



All pages: Acrylic and ink jet print,

150mm x210mm

Documentation of Work 2006



'B oy Chasing ',
Oil on Canvas,
1200mm x 1700mm

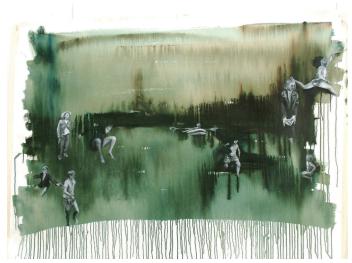


'Found Objects',
Oil on Canvas,
1000mm x 400mm









Above: 'Untitled Two', Oil on canvas, 1200mm x 1900mm

Left: 'Untitled One', Oil on canvas, 1200mm x 1900mm

These paintings are details of works that were separated from the original and made into smaller works.

1/2, Oil on canvas, 800mm x 1500mm





1/1, Oil on canvas, 800mm x 1500mm



1/2, Oil on canvas, 500mm x 250mm



#2/2, Oil on canvas, 300mm x 250mm



Right: #2/2, oil on canvas, 800mm 1900mmm







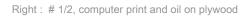
Right: 'Horizon', Oil on canvas, 2000mm x 1500mm

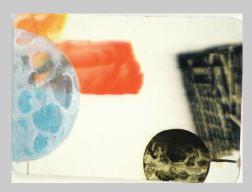
Above: Details of 'Horizon'





From a series of digital drawings these works were made for computer printed painting. Two of these were painted over and included in the installation overleaf.













2/4



All works this page:
Oil and mixed media on canvas,
750mm x 1100mm

#3/4



Left; 'Untitled', Oil on canvas,

1200mm x1200mm.

Below: Detail of 'Untitled'



These works were made to trial their presentation in an installation format.

Unspecified works are detailed on previous pages.



Left to right:
Installation on level four AUT.

' Home ', Oil on canvas, 1200mm x1000mm

' Portrait', Mixed media on plywood, 200mm x 500mm





Documentation of Masters exhibition 2006





This page and opposing page installation views of exhibition







Detail, Number 1



Number 1, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 200mm x 950mm, 2006



Number 2, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 200mm x 950mm, 2006



Detail, Number 2



Detail, Number 5



Number 3, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 200mm x 950mm, 2006



Number 4, Oil on canvas, 200mm x 950mm, 2006



Detail, Number 4



Detail, Number 4



Detail, Number 5



Detail, Number 5



Number 5, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 200mm x 950mm, 2006