

Paul Critchley

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Introduction

Painters have, on the whole, a very solitary life. They sit in a room and spend their days using a stick with hairs at one end to put coloured mud either carefully or haphazardly onto a piece of cloth, a very playful and bizarre activity. But why? Why live the life of a hermit in order to express ideas and feelings in mud? The answer must be in a mixture of magic and poetry. Magic because the paint no longer looks like mud and poetry because it no longer feels like it.

Some artists change their subjects and alter their styles frequently depending on the problems provoked by them. This can be very exciting as one never quite knows what is coming next but on the other hand it can also be limiting as one is always waiting for a definitive statement. When I began painting I too did many different pictures but gradually I have reduced my subject matter to describing interiors and exteriors by using multiple view point perspective with all the distortions in scale, shape and feeling which this wider view point creates. These distortions have led me to reject the standard rectangular picture format and to work on irregular but, to me, logical shapes.

The shape is an integral part of the painting and as such is not chosen in any arbitrary manner: it is the subject of the painting which decides the shape. For example, a painting of the corner of a house does not have to remain on a two dimensional plane but can itself be a corner: a three dimensional painting. However this logic does not mean I am seeking to reproduce exactly a particular scene - a photograph can do that - but rather the feelings and colours suggested to me at first sight and so I remove what I consider to be superfluous. At times this can result in paintings with separate pieces, such as 'The Big White House', as I concentrate on the interesting features and disregard the intervening and less interesting areas. In contrast, on other occasions I introduce extra elements to help create a mood or to give a story to the painting.

Definition

When I meet people who have never seen my paintings I'm often asked to describe them; to pigeon hole them with an acceptable "-ism". Merely to say they are realistic is too vague as under the banner of "realism" come the various sub categories of Photo Realism, Hyper Realism, Magic Realism and Surrealism. I wouldn't describe my paintings as Photo Realist because they don't in any way attempt to copy the quality of a photograph; nor are they Hyper Realistic because I can make sweeping generalisations in a brush stroke; they're no where near Magic Realism and any Surrealistic mood is more in the eye of the beholder. So where do I pigeon hole my paintings? Do I call them Realistic, Naturalistic or Idealistic? Yes and No.

The difference between the words **Realism** & **Naturalism** is subtle but worth noting: **Realism** in art and literature shows life as it is; factually, in a true way, omitting nothing that is ugly or painful - idealising nothing. Realism faces the facts with a disregard of sentiment and convention. A person said to be a "realist" is one who believes himself to be without illusions and is not stirred by sentiment. The opposite of realism is **Idealism**. An "idealist" employs the imagination to portray perfection - an idea - even if this means being untrue to the facts. **Naturalism** is an adherence to nature; in art this means painting things in a way true to nature - but not necessarily realistically. For example, a tree painted by Monet could be rendered in three brush strokes, but when viewed from a distance it fits in with all the other brush marks so that one understands that one is looking at a tree, because from a distance that is how a tree appears naturally. A realist, such as Holman Hunt, would have painted every leaf on the tree because trees have leaves - a factual reality. The opposite of naturalism, and also realism, is abstraction because abstract art does not represent objects, scenes etc., in an obvious way, but abstracts, and isolates features of reality.

Why is 99.9% of painting confined to the arbitrarily imposed forms of squares and rectangles? Wouldn't it be more realistic if ones vision - ones idea - became the boundary of the painting? A boundary decided not just by observation and the logical rules of perspective but by

feeling; if something feels big or small, tall or narrow, for example, then make it big or small, tall and narrow. Emphasising how something really feels adds extra dimension to the notion of 'realism' making it **Supra-Realism**. Strict adherence to the rules of perspective can result in falsehood; perspective was devised to understand the natural world from a fixed view point so that it could be reinvented and reproduced realistically.

I have always been interested in multi view point perspective but it was only when I left the UK that I really started to work on irregular shapes canvases because I wanted to use more than one view point in order to give a better representation of my surroundings. To do this I had to stretch and distort the perspective which was devised to show space from one single view point. For me this fixed view point is restrictive because the perception of our environment depends upon our memory joining together many different views, rather like a visual puzzle. The multiple view points and the consequent distortion in perspective have forced me to reject the unnatural boundaries imposed by the more conventional squares and rectangles and have given me the freedom to describe my thoughts and feelings about my surroundings more accurately. These shapes are not determined by any arbitrary breaking up of the rectangle but by a need to bring together essential elements within the composition, by rejecting some and emphasising other forms needed to maintain the tension which otherwise would be lost in the those areas dictated by the corners. However, in order to retain a certain logic and continuity of vision, I adhere to the rules of perspective but only to the point at which these rules begin to obstruct my feeling for space. Intuition is frequently more reliable than intellect and so it is from here onwards that space is felt; one can learn the rules but not the poetry. The irregular shapes enhance the pictorial and emotional impact on the viewer whilst the multiple view points and multiple eye levels work in harmony to recreate the sensations first experienced when standing in front of the original motif.

Over the years in order to develop my ideas I have pursued various themes such as:

Interiors. 'Interiors' are paintings of the interior of a room or rooms where the perspective has been stretch to show the entire space.

Exteriors. 'Exteriors' are street scenes where the boundaries of vision are dictated by the architecture.

Day & night. 'Day & night' are paintings in which time is an important element; either day and night represented in the same painting or two different paintings of the same scene - one during the day and the other at night.

Corners. 'Corners' are paintings which either fold into or wrap themselves around a corner; they are sculptural paintings. They portray a corner, either of a street or in a house, and are constructed in such a manner that they hang in - or on - a corner.

Mobile doors & windows. 'Mobile door & windows' are paintings where the door and window panels are hinged and so can be closed but although physically they may be completely closed or completely open, due to the fact that they are shaped in perspective, they still appear to be either partially open or partially closed. Many of the windows also have a day view when open and a night when closed and vice versa.

Separate pieces and individual objects. When we look around us we only really see what attracts our attention so why not just paint those parts which are interesting and leave the rest out. The space in between the painted pieces - the negative space - is just as important for the whole as it completes the story. The most recent paintings are of individual objects such as pieces of furniture which when arranged together furnish an interior.

The Chain of Events

1976 School Days

Everyone paints at school, it's part of the curriculum. It was part of the curriculum at home too since both my parents were art teachers and my two brothers had been through art college. Every summer during the school holidays we used to go off round Europe visiting galleries, museums, churches, sights and ruins; you name it and I saw it. It was on one of these trips in the summer of 1976 when we saw an exhibition in Nuremberg about shoes. Paintings, sculptures,

installations and photographs about shoes. I remember being impressed by a photo realist painting, I couldn't believe it was just paint; coloured mud. "I want to paint like that!" I declared. No disrespect to my father but when I was a child in the 1960's and he was painting abstracts; black on black, red and green should not be seen; Reinhard, Burri, Tàpies etc., they did nothing for me, "Dad, what's that, what's it supposed to be?" However that photo realist painting of a pair of shoes was magic - I was inspired, and although it was not the first time I had put oil on canvas 'Pumps' was my first serious attempt. Then, at 16 years of age, my heroes were those who painted details like Van Eijk and The Pre-Raphaelites. Never mind the Pollocks and Picassos.

It was quite a busy summer that year. On a camp site I met a Danish girl, Anna, she was wearing a bikini and I didn't know where to look - I was only 16 remember - so cunningly I took out my sketch pad and spent many hours drawing her. What a tremendous excuse for admiring the view!

Back home I did a drawing of my bedroom to show her where I lived. This drawing had a wide perspective but it wasn't distorted because the bend was hidden in the blank part of the paper which represented the door. By accident I had stretched perspective and got away with it. This drawing was the basis, the starting point, for all my multi-view point perspective paintings which I have done ever since.

1977

Anna in her blue striped bikini must have made a big impression on me because the next drawing I did was 122 x 244 cms. I sketched it out on little pieces of paper adding more as the drawing grew. I was learning about the limits of perspective which is, I found out, a lie. It's fine for organising space when all you want to do is concentrate your vision in a narrow direction. However the moment you try to encompass just that little bit more then distortions creep in. The foreground looks and feels huge and what was once the focal point of the picture is lost as the edges of the picture take over and dominate.

1978 Foundation College

In 1978 I left school and went to Foundation College for one year. Students on the foundation course study a bit of everything: painting, print making, textiles, ceramics, graphic design, photography and art history. It was here that I painted my first shaped picture, 'Plush Tourist', because in between leaving school and starting college I was learning to drive and this meant looking all around me, a 360° panorama was a perfect subject to draw. In this painting I tried to control the distortions in scale which I had experienced in the wide perspective drawing of the previous year where the corners of the picture were 'filled in' simply because they were there - but why fill them in if they don't feel right? This was the motivation for the irregular shape and so in order to retain the feeling for space I simply cut out those unnecessary areas. The shape is an integral part of the composition and echoes the shape of the actual car, a Citroën DS 23 - what a cool motoring car.

1979 - 1982 College Years

In the first year I divided my time between the painting, photography and sculpture departments. In the painting department I was Mr. Serious Art Student and so I wasn't going to allow myself frivolous solutions to badly drawn perspective. Get it right! There had to be a way to control these distortions within squares and rectangles - or so I thought at the time. Most rooms in a house tend to be either rectangular or square. Sometimes they can be as tall as their length and breadth making them a cube. Cubism has always fascinated me; the idea of seeing one object from different view points. How does one show all six sides of a cube simultaneously? (I know this isn't the strict meaning of cubism, but it's a good literal connection.) In the painting 'Afraid of the Dark' I've painted the inside of my rectangular room in such a way that the painting can be rotated - as though one is turning around to look at each wall straight on, it was awarded first prize in The Stowells Trophy, a major national student competition in 1982.

Black and white photography taught me a lot about composition, it also taught me to recognise in an instance the potential for a good image. This was a very important lesson in trusting ones gut instinct; there's something there so quick press the shutter! At the time I had two themes to my photographs: 'Couples' and 'Photographers Photographing', and when you're

photographing someone taking a photograph you've got to be faster than they are. However, I gradually moved away from photography and by the time I left college all I ever photographed were my paintings - which is all I use it for now.

Sculpture was great. I learnt more in the sculpture department than any where else in college. Perspective maps out things on a two dimensional plane so the mind can imagine it in three, but until one understands and can feel the volume of what one is looking at then ones imagination remains shallow and two dimensional. Suddenly life drawing made sense, now I knew what I was looking at and why, but by which time three years had passed college had finished and so had my grant.

1983 - 1985 The Doldrum Years

Vacuum. After college, now what? What exactly does a degree in Fine Art mean, and what can you do with it? How does one make a living as an "artist"? If I was going to do anything then I would have to move to London but instead I went back home and got a part time job teaching art. What did I know at the age of 23? Absolutely nothing. In fact I'm sure I learnt more than the students I was supposed to be teaching. I simply had to get away and see something of the real world, but to do so I needed money and so I taught for two years and saved. During which time I continued to paint.

1984

The college where I was teaching had a collection of shop mannequins, the figures you see in shop windows displaying clothes. The only problem with them was that they were broken. Arms were missing, legs no longer fitted, hands had been stolen by previous generations of students leaving a macabre bag of body parts. Fascinatingly grotesque. What was curious about them was that one figure was just a dummy but two or more together became a relationship with the possibility that they could come to life and create a story. At the time Bacon and Beckmann were the artists who interested me the most. Bacon because of the worrying unease and Beckmann because of his story telling, composition and colour.

1985

What is the difference between teaching art and teaching mathematics? Answer: opinion. Mathematics is fact but to teach art you must have an opinion. And in my opinion when one comes out of art college at the age of 22 ones opinion counts for little more than nothing. Art is one of those subjects where experience counts. I have to be honest I didn't enjoy college once the Faculty of Fine Arts had been invaded by the fashionable 'Lenin's' and 'Che Guevara's' who came from the Faculty of Social Studies. The Fine Art department became the playground for these new rebels, all with green hair, who claimed to be non conformers. I think that all art students, and also some of the professors, should be obliged to watch Tony Hancock's film 'The Rebel' before enrolling. I remember well some advice from a teacher, given in all seriousness, that I should make an effort to dress like an artist (to conform to the image of being a non conformer). She didn't make a good impression on me with this attitude. I needed space and so in 1985 I packed my bags, looked at the map, and left. Ideally I wanted to go to London, the Mecca of the Art World, but two things prevented me: Firstly it was too expensive and secondly it would have been too easy. Earlier in the year I had shown the figure paintings in London in an exhibition which I shared with Mike Downs. I realised there and then that if I was to do anything serious I would need complete isolation in order to develop my own voice. In the footsteps of Beckmann and Bacon I went to Berlin.

1986

Berlin was a new start for me and so the first thing I did in Berlin was to strip off and paint a self portrait. It was a new start, I was naked in front of a naked canvas. Later I painted on the towel but now my wife wants me to return it to it's original glory!

Berlin at that time was an island-city behind the Iron Curtain. Not knowing a single soul and even less of the language I spent a year in splendid isolation there. I was free from both the fetters of obligation and the expectations of others, it was ideal for me: the new start I felt I needed. At the time I even toyed with living in East Berlin but the bureaucracy and my limited

school German made it impossible - plus the fact that nobody ever went to live in the East. I did, however, visit East Berlin a few times crossing at Check Point Charlie, walking down Untere Den Linden, across Alexander Platz. It's a bizarre feeling to know that simply because I was carrying a piece of paper - a British Passport - I could come and go as I pleased, a privilege denied to the locals. One day whilst I was listening to RIAS I heard about the imminent exchange of spies across Glienicke Brücke, throwing down my brushes I rushed out to witness a piece of Cold War history. I was learning more than the rules of perspective; I was putting myself in perspective and learning about life outside of my previous narrow academia: school, college, teaching. But as my savings dwindled it became imperative to get a job. I worked as a bar man serving beer to the British Army garrisoned there to keep guard over Rudolph Hess in Spandau Jail. Did Hess die of old age or was he 'removed' to make way for Perestroika?

It was in Berlin that I really started to work on irregular shapes because I wanted to use more than one view point in order to give a better representation of my surroundings. The painting of the apartment (Johanniter Strasse 7) is an all around view of my entire home, we enter and leave the apartment through the door to the right. The hallway is tiny, it's daytime, to the left is the bathroom and straight on is the kitchen; breakfast plates are in the sink, dinner is on the table, supper is cooking. The bed is in the kitchen to give me more space to work in the room next door. In the corner an old storage heater is trying to dry equally old clothes, it's night, I've been working all day.

Whilst in Berlin I went to night school to learn German and there I met a French couple who had friends who had a farm in the south of France. They arranged for me to go and stay there so that I could work and paint on the farm. After ten months in Berlin I followed the wind and went south.

In between driving a tractor and picking tomatoes I looked for the colour which the Impressionists, Van Gogh and many others have made famous but to be honest I didn't see it. Myth. Instead of colour I saw light and contrast, these coupled with decent reliable weather meant it was possible for me to tackle that old problem and story: landscape.

Landscape has been regarded for decades as old fashioned and suitable only for the amateur painter. Balderdash. Such snobbery on the part of the 'Avant-garde' only goes to show up their ignorance. To paint a landscape which is in front of you requires a lot of analysis; a lot of selection and rejection. Never mind the result, I recommend to anyone to try to paint a landscape *en plein aire* because it is a tremendous exercise in abstraction, especially when there is so much information which is constantly changing. It is inevitable that these lessons will carry themselves over into other work, and so imperceptibly painting by painting, month by month things change and develop.

Since my introduction to painting *en plein aire* every year I make a point of painting landscape, not just to get out of my studio and into the sun but also to take my mind away from the studio style picture making and force myself to solve different problems. At first I used to separate the two styles but in recent paintings - the windows which open and close to reveal a landscape - I've combined the two.

Painting a landscape directly from the motif is far more rewarding than trying to work from a photograph - at least for me. A photograph flattens everything and simplifies volume to an arrangement of dark and lights on a flat plane; all feeling for space is lost. It becomes a 'photoscape' and doesn't tell me anything more than what the weather was like.

However photography can be a great help for recording details such as patterns, shapes of shadows etc. But a photograph just reveals 1/250th of a second of a scene, presenting us with a 'Ready Made' image, and what can one learn in such a snap shot compared with studying the scene over a few hours? Answer: A different lesson. It all depends on the objective and if the end justifies the means then that's OK. I'm not saying there is anything wrong with working from a photograph, it's just that it's like a McDonalds fast food meal; nutritious and filling but not quite as satisfying as a meal you've cooked yourself. Chacun à son goût.

1987 - 1989 The Venlo Incident

At the end of 1986 I left the south of France and returned to the grey light of Germany in order to complete enough paintings for my first one man exhibition which was to be in Hilden. I had intended living in Köln, a large city with a lively art scene but instead I moved across the border and lived in the quiet little town of Venlo in The Netherlands.

There are advantages, believe it or not, to the quiet life. One of which is that there are fewer distractions, i.e.: bars. Another is the cost of living. One disadvantage is that of isolation; no one ever sees what you are painting and you'll never meet the people and make those important contacts which you need to promote your work. It's Catch 22. The choice is whether to live in the centre of activity but not have any money to sit back and paint, which means one would have to get a "Proper Job". (How many times have I been asked, "... and when are you going to get a proper job?"). Or to live on bread and vegetables - which is very healthy - and live out in the artistic wilderness where the rent is cheaper which means you can paint. I was determined not to return to England and enter the world of teaching, which is just about the only well paid job for anyone with a Degree in Fine Art, because I am convinced that nobody should be allowed to come straight out of college and go directly into teaching. There should be a minimum of five years where the student should be sent off into reality so that they actually know something about life before settling into the classroom until they retire.

In Venlo I supported myself and my painting by doing a variety of part-time jobs including driving vans, working in factories and washing lorries. I spent a very enjoyable and productive two and a half years in the artistic wilderness working three days a week to earn money and painting the rest of the time. In 1985 I had left England to avoid falling into the trap of a "Proper Job", and to see a bit of the real world and to develop my paintings and myself.

In Venlo the views from the windows of my new home weren't very exciting and, since I had been cutting away unnecessary corners, I cut out the views and replaced them with seven interchangeable alternatives. This breaking up of the picture plane led to constructions; 'Sculptural Paintings', which had a depth of approximately 35 cms. These, together with my Berlin paintings, were exhibited in my first one man show in Hilden in 1987.

1988

Artists who were on my mind during the Venlo years were Cézanne, Picasso, Braque, Gris, Hopper, De Hooch and that Grand Master Vermeer, a strange mixture I admit. I was interested in Cézanne because of his breaking up of the view points and the eye levels whilst maintaining a cohesive image. Picasso, Braque and Gris because of their Cubist paintings and how they completely broke the picture plane and rearranged the image not according to what the subject looked like but as an idea of what it could look like, they used their brains to see not just their eyes. Hopper because of his composition, colours, the mood and quiet atmosphere within his still and contemplative interiors. De Hooch because I was living in The Netherlands and I like details in paintings and Vermeer because that man has light: he has solidity, volume, time, life and presence. Vermeer has it all, the swine! If I were ever to steal a painting from a museum then Vermeer would come very high on my list.

Neither a vertical nor a horizontal line in sight. If you are familiar with the book 'Cézanne's Composition' by Erle Loran then you'll recognise the style of this analytical drawing which shows how I was thinking about composition at the time. "The Waiting Shadow", which combines dynamic movement and dramatic use of dark and light surrounding the focal point of the painting with subtle colour harmonies, is very typical of the paintings I made in Venlo.

1989

In Venlo I lived in a large house designed in the 1930's which was occupied by students. It was quite a journey from the front door to my room; there was an interesting entrance with an arched doorway which led into a spacious hallway with three doors leading off into other rooms, the staircase went up to a landing from which six identical doors led to other rooms, corridors and staircases. One of these staircases led up to yet another corridor with seven doors one of which was my small room containing a bed, a sink, my easel and very little else. The house was a labyrinth and one needed a map to find ones way round. This idea of a map where one could

navigate round the house, from painting to painting intrigued me; they were like a route map so that anybody visiting would be able to find their way to my room from the front door even in the dark.

1990 Italy

In 1990 I had a one man show in London at which I met an Italian and his wife who had a house in Italy which they rented out when they weren't there. What an opportunity to spend five months in a village just outside Padova. I packed in my part-time jobs and packed my brushes instead.

Although I had painted in the south of France, Italy was my first introduction to real light. I became obsessed with chasing its progress around the house from early morning with its fading mists to the gentle warmth of the summer evening. My interest was shifting from the play with perspective as a subject in itself to the play of light. My neighbours thought - not surprisingly in hindsight - that I was a bit odd. They would often question me about why I never bothered going to Padova or Venice but at the time the relationship between two old chairs in the corner of a room or the light raking across a wall was simply more intriguing. The cold grey light of northern Europe which comes in through the window isn't spectacular, windows are to keep the weather out but in Italy they took on an extra dimension. My interest in perspective and the windows joined together and in 1990 I made my first 'mobile' paintings. The shutters of the windows are cut in perspective to appear either half open or half closed - but because they are hinged and therefore move they can be fully opened or closed and yet due to their shape always appear to be either half opened or half closed - confused? It was also in Italy that I became interested in the notion of time as a subject. In 'The Shadow of Time Passing' the shadow of a mans finger points, like a sun dial, accusingly to the fob watch on the sofa. It's a duel between real time and time made by man.

Unfortunately my neighbours had a dog and the dog, unfortunately had 'owners' who treated it like a mere utility. However, the dog knew how to gets its' revenge with that irritating ability which some dogs have: to bark non stop for hours, upon hours, upon hours. That damned dog barking drove me mad.

1991 Spain

When I first went to Spain I couldn't have been much taller than 50 cms. and like most four year olds I wasn't very interested in architecture, local cuisine nor staying out late. However by 1991 my stature had increased somewhat so I asked a friend who had a house somewhere in Spain whether I could rent it.

Callosa d'Ensarria lies some 65 km north of Alicante and is so small that it wasn't even on my map, I was setting off for an adventure to ... no where. I arrived in Nowhere tired on a dark October night in 1991. The following morning curious to know where Nowhere was I opened the front door and looked out. Calle Alta lives up to it's name, it is a very steep street and I was at the top of it. At the very top Calle Alta meets with Calle Santa Barbara which takes it's name from the shrine above which I saw the motive for my first painting in Spain: 'Tempus Fugit'.

The Mediterranean light and my bright and cheerful surroundings were new elements which I could employ in my work. If you look carefully at the old buildings in the towns and villages in Spain you will notice that on the whole the average domestic architecture hasn't been designed but added to; houses in Spain grow. Another child in the family equals another room and so the terrace disappears for a week only to reappear perched over the house next door. This organic style produces endless vistas. No architect could dream up such richness, they would tear it down and redesign it with a ruler. I moved the subject of my paintings from interiors of houses to the interiors of streets where the boundaries of vision are the walls and where confined views broaden out to reveal breathtaking skies.

Every morning I used to go to the baker to buy bread, later I would go to the market and then later still go to the bar. I couldn't decide at which time of the day Callosa looked the most interesting so I did a painting with three interchangeable sky panels. Pale blue for the morning, strong blue for midday and deep blue for the afternoon. It's amazing how, by removing one sky colour and replacing it with another, the whole mood of a painting can be altered.

1992

Whilst breaking away from the constraints of square and rectangular canvases may be liberating irregular shapes also impose limitations, especially on spontaneity. When one works with a square or rectangle one has scant concern for the edge, one is as free as the clouds in the sky to go wherever, do whatever and change whenever. Whatever mark, colour or shape that one puts down on the canvas is totally independent of the border. The border is there because it is and not for any deliberate reason. When painting on a blank square or rectangular canvas everything is open and one can do what one likes - both liberating and terrifying. A shaped canvas on the other hand is deliberate; there is a reason for it, it sets the parameters to whatever happens within. Every event has to be accountable to the preconceived form, accidents rarely occur because the objective has been clear from the outset. I couldn't paint in a purely abstract manner; that would be like going out for a stroll just for the sake of it and walking along aimlessly just waiting to see what happens and where I end up - what a waste of time! That's not my personality, if I go out for a stroll then there has to be an objective; walk to the end of the road, have a coffee and then come back. I don't mind detours en route, I don't even mind not getting to the end of the road, just so long as I set out with a purpose. The shaped canvas is my purpose, it tells me "I am the shape of your objective, now give me substance". Not "I am a square white canvas, now go for a stroll". After so many years of working with shaped canvases the thought of a directionless and mute square or rectangle doesn't excite me.

A 'minimalist' or 'conceptualist' would be quite happy just to hang the bare shaped canvas on the wall and leave the imagination to fill it in, at times I am too, but leaving the canvas bare is too simplistic, cowardly and unoriginal. To reduce a painting to its basics requires a lot of work and to do it with sincerity even more. Looking at how other artists such as Nicolas De Stael and William Scott, for example, have solved such problems of reducing, of abstracting their subject matter to blocks of colour is natural and helpful, but to imitate their styles would be shallow.

The blinding penetrating light of Spain bleaches the colour to a minimum and this spareness of colour makes the eye dance with the dark and lights and focus on the few accents which heighten the awareness of pattern. My paintings started to change, I began to apply heavy textures to the picture surface, reduce the colour and increase the contrast.

1993

Why limit the picture plane to two dimensions? In 1987 I had started making 3D paintings and paintings with separate pieces but had never really followed up the idea because at the time I was struggling with the formal problems of irregular shaped canvases. In 1993 I returned to the problems of integrating a third dimension into my painting by working on concave, convex and inclined planes in order to increase the feeling of depth. (You'll have to use your imagination to understand how these paintings work because unfortunately the sensations cannot be reproduced on a tiny computer screen).

1994 Going around the bend

A logical step from the concave painting of the previous year was to push the actual painting into the corner of a room. The corner paintings are very logical; they are paintings of corners which are constructed of two flat planes, both of which are painted to look three dimensional, while having their illusion brought to life by being joined together in the corner at 90°; a mixture of painted illusion and actual constructed space - a sculptural painting. There are three examples illustrated here, those that fold themselves into a corner and one which wraps itself round a corner. The latter invites investigation as one has to walk around the corner to discover, as in reality, just exactly what is there. The third painting, an inside corner, is further complicated because it has three planes: two of them meeting at a right angle whilst the third, the inclined plane of the pebbled street delineates the space the painting occupies by creating a genuine foreground.

1995 Separate Piece Paintings

I'm lazy and I admit it - but aren't we all when it comes to doing useless tasks? Why waste hours and days painting something when by simply ignoring it you can still explain its presence? Take, for example, the painting called 'Quick there's something happening around the corner ...'

and not 'Quick there's something happening behind the house ...' What caught my attention when I was walking along in the deep shadow of a building was the curve in the road, the yellow houses, the intensely blue sky framed by over hanging roof tiles and two black windows. I knew the house was there but it wasn't interesting - so why bother painting it? Eureka is normally a word scientists use when they discover something, I used it that day because I had found a lazy way to include the house without painting it; the house that isn't there is hiding the something that is happening around the corner.

Apart from being very sensible, paintings with separate pieces are also very logical. The space between the separate piece and the main body of the painting becomes a negative shape which the eye sees but does not dwell on. Instead the eye moves quickly, as in reality, to the next point of interest and leaves the imagination to fill in the gaps because although it may be the eyes which look it's the brain which sees. Without these negative spaces the attention would be diverted away from the principal elements and the initial inspiration for the painting would be lost. I concentrated only on what caught my attention and painted only what was necessary.

1996

Light is, of course, an essential element in all paintings and living in Spain has given me the opportunity to take full advantage of the amazing Mediterranean light. The skies over Spain have become a challenge for me; how to capture the richness, luminosity and intensity of their colour and at the same time portray the dramatic effect on the textured walls of the white houses so prevalent in the region. One of the results of my fascination with the skies has been the painting of pictures which show the same scene either in series throughout the day, or in pairs which contrast the bright dazzle of midday with the soft, velvet balminess of the evening. Since there is never any one particular moment when a subject is revealed at its best very often the subject is the light itself. This for me is the advantage of painting over photography; a photograph only records a moment of real time whereas a painting can be a mixture of various times: a memory of the experience. Using these memories our imagination can recreate in our minds eye all those images experienced throughout the day. These could be when looking in various directions in order to understand the whole or simply when looking at the same scene over a number of hours and noting how it has changed as the light has moved from dawn to dusk. In these paintings I have had to select and reject from all that I have seen and experienced in order to arrive at a synthesis through which I can express my thoughts and feelings in a tangible form.

1997

It doesn't rain in Spain, it pours, especially towards the end of summer when, after the months of exhausting heat, the humidity rises and the heavens open. In 'Towards The End of Summer' we hurry to close the windows as the rain lashes down but the force of the storm blows them open, snapping the cord. After the storm has passed we open the windows and as we do the lizard, who was sheltering on the window ledge, is startled and scuttles off into the sunlight which shines crystal clear through a break in the clouds. The rainbow, that symbol of peace from God to Noah, announces the end of summer.

This painting actually started life in Spring 1993 when I saw a rainbow stretched out above the village of Polop. I was so struck by the scene, the fact that beneath the rainbow there was light and colour whereas just on the other side of the prismatic bands it was dark and stormy, that I immediately made a note on the only piece of paper I had to hand, I kept the 4 x 5 cms. scrap of paper in a box not knowing what or how I could use it. Three years later I saw another impressive rainbow which reminded me of the little drawing but this time the idea of combining it within a window painting which would show before and after the storm was a logical solution especially since I had just finished 'La Ventana Rota'. As with all my paintings, one idea leads to another.

Having decided to make a painting with a window and a rainbow (yes, I know it's a cliché to paint a rainbow but please give me the credit for not being intimidated nor frightened to tackle it. It's a brave man who dares to take on a hackneyed theme!) I had to find a suitable landscape which, fortunately, wasn't difficult because every time I passed along the road from Altea to Polop I would always look at the small white house set amongst the terraces of olive trees and wonder about the lucky soul who lived there. During the summer of 1996 I took the central part of the painting out into the country and every day I worked on it between the hours of 2 and 5 until it was finished. After I was satisfied with the landscape I took out my scrappy little drawing of the

rainbow and using those notes and memory I painted the dark brooding sky. A few years later, when the painting was in an exhibition, a very observant gentleman told me that I had made a mistake: the colours of the rainbow are in a slightly different order. In a rare moment of quick wittedness I replied: "I'm not a camera nor a scientist - I'm a poet!"

The two window panels with their reflections and rain were actually painted in my studio in the middle of the annual drought which afflicts southern Spain.

In August 1997, on the advice of a painter friend who thought I might find inspiration for some new paintings, I went to Tossa de Mar. The town is charming, small and during that time of the year over run with tourists like myself, but for me the most striking discovery was the little bay. I had to return despite the hoards of tourists.

Setting up ones easel and trying to paint the movement of the water, the changing of the light amidst an international crowd of bemused onlookers requires more than just a bit of concentration especially when the wind is howling in off the sea and almost blowing the painting off the easel. I had the selfish feeling that this was my bay, my discovery and I should be able to have it all to myself - or at least until I had finished the painting. Just when I wanted to study the colour of the sand at the waters edge a group of children would descend and start building sand castles. I moved my attention to the beach, within minutes umbrellas would appear and open up like psychedelic mushrooms. Examining the colours in the water, a difficult task in itself, is not made any easier when obscured by bobbing air beds. No, the only way to have paradise at my finger tips was to paint it. Out went the boats, out went umbrellas and all other distractions including the people - even topless ladies (artists have to suffer for their art).

After numerous frustrating visits to Tossa I put the painting to one side telling myself that I would return later in the year to finish it and that in the meantime I would work on the two doors. The painting took longer than expected because I only finished it in April 1999.

1998

Over the years I've lived in various places but instead of photographs to remind me of them I like to make a painting. I never work from photographs because a photograph only records a moment of real time whereas a painting can be a mixture of various times and view points, a fixed viewpoint can be restrictive because our perception of our environment depends upon our memory joining together many different views; the true representation of reality requires more than just a snap shot, and this for me, is the advantage of painting over photography. This painting is an all round view of my apartment in Barcelona, it shows everything there is from the kitchen sink to the fire extinguisher all of which are painted in a very matter of fact realistic manner. The painting is a memory of the experience, a synthesis of all that I have experienced whilst living there. The space in the painting can be read in much the same way as a map; a flat surface which relates one place to another and yet this is not an architects plan. The space comes and goes as objects are rendered to look and feel three dimensional but instead of moving fully into the picture plane as in traditional Renaissance perspective we can also move up or down the picture plane rather like in Indian, Chinese or Egyptian pictures. But the painting is more than just an inventory of the apartment it is also a story, there are figures - activity. Adding another layer to the picture is the element of time which has crept in because we can see through the bedroom window that night has fallen.

Nonetheless to describe the painting as 'Realistic' in the accepted form of the word could be misleading and raise questions about the difference between recognisable and reality. The painting is an idea, a concept of reality. On the one hand it would be a lie to say that this is what my apartment looks like, but on the other you would recognise everything portrayed, even a thief could use the painting as a map - but please don't try!

Once a bohemian always a bohemian - until marriage that is. It happens to all us dashing romantics who throw caution to the wind and with it our clothes on the floor. Even Jan van Eijk noticed it when he painted the newlywed Arnolfini: only the shoes are scattered on the floor, snr. Arnolfini has had to smarten up his act. This change is subtle and inevitable and is like one of the Rites of Man.

I first conceived the idea for the painting 'The Changed Man' with the light coming in through the balcony doors in 1996 just after we were married but I didn't start the painting until 1998. During which time the idea matured that the light falling on the floor had to illuminate something, but what? However one day, like Saul on the road to Damascus, I saw the light because I caught myself not dropping or throwing my clothes on the floor and jumping into bed (for my Marital Rites) but carefully placing them - in the middle of the floor.

1999

Dashing adventures don't present themselves in the way they do in the movies - or do they? A chance encounter with a group of Russian artists in September 1997 opened the door to an adventure worthy of any trainee James Bond 007. I was to spend 6 weeks in Moscow, my mission was to take part in the art fair, Art Manege, in December 1998. My contacts had organised accommodation. I was to rent an apartment, not in some luxury hotel which would blow my cover, but in a typical Soviet designed tower block. Where better to disguise oneself as a local than to live amongst them? Stage one of my mission was to get my paintings out of the hands of the Mafia (the customs officials at Sheremetyevo airport). This took two days and a lot of cunning but, thanks to my friend Vladimir, this mission was accomplished with the minimum of bureaucracy - in just 2 days! Wow!

In Moscow it is advisable, if one doesn't want to be stopped by the police whose salary is supplemented by making gullible foreigners pay fines (bribes), not to stand out from the crowd. Disguise is an art. Preoccupied with this discovery the first painting I did when I returned from Moscow was 'Pravda' - Truth. The painting has two parts: inside and private, outside and public. "Who is he?" asks the nosy neighbour as he peeps through the spy hole and sees the man in the Mr Normal Suit going down the stairs. The newspaper cutting, dated 5th May 1999, pinned onto the back of the door with the pin through Lenin's head reads 'USA and NATO bomb Siberia, this is what American school children think'.

'The Uninvited' is the second of a series of paintings with Russian overtones. The apartment I rented in the Stalinist era block of flats was not the sort to inspire devotion to The Cause let alone to painting. You've got to be either tough or crazy - preferably both - to sit in the middle of a block of Muscovites for six weeks on your own and paint, especially when you don't speak a word of Russian. I never saw many of the neighbours; the moment they heard my door open theirs closed. I must have been the first real foreigner 99% of them had seen, they weren't unfriendly just uneasy, particularly those who must have lived through the Soviet days when neighbours were encouraged to report on neighbours; "Who's this outsider?".

2000

I have always admired the mediaeval paintings because of their story telling power and in particular the altar paintings with movable panels. These paintings not only beckon the viewer to look but also to participate more fully in their stories. A single image tells a story on one level but the altar paintings reveal much more and give greater depth and richness turning the story into an epic. Opening the panels is rather like turning the pages of The Good Book. Nowadays we are swamped with words and images, with information in general, but in the dark ages the sense of awe and wonder which the altar paintings must have had on the people as they entered the House of God must have been a monumental visual and spiritual experience - it still is for some. Imagine what it must have been like to walk into the cathedral in Gent 500 years ago and be confronted with van Eijk's painting of the Adoration of the Golden Lamb or to be a patient in the monastery hospital in Colmar and to see the chilling Crucifix by Grünewald. Despite the constant TV images of death and disaster around the world this painting is still horrifying. These mediaeval artists, conjuring up and provoking sensations, were the Hollywood story telling Spielbergs of their day.

Sometimes the best stories are the simplest ones but told with a touch of flair and imagination. Stories can be direct and amusing, subtle and subdued, bright and cheerful, whilst others anxious and disturbing. The best story tellers are those who delight and inspire, who inform and provoke the viewer to participate and reflect. In my paintings I'm trying to tell stories of everyday events and to make them as interesting to you as they were to me - not the epic parting of the waves - but more the admiration of the silent rainbow as the sun comes out after a storm worthy of any heavenly damnation. Stories telling of the passing of time, of day turning to night.

A story showing that in the corner of a room a seemingly banal and innocent wall can become menacing and threatening, a hidden door to a hidden life. How many Anne Franks have been forced into hiding over the centuries? How often do we hear that a supposedly respectable person turns out to be quite the opposite, have you ever closed the door on a neighbour who passes on their way downstairs? Ever hidden behind a door which separates you from the outside world and all those nasty tall stories, ever wanted to live in your own world and listen to other tall stories which tell the truth - at least in a way you want to hear it?

2001

Prior to my first trip to Moscow I had always avoided using any letters or words in my paintings because of their inherent symbolic value; the word or letter poses problems about purpose and meaning: What does it mean? What does it say about the painting? A word can alter the content so completely that its integration is a very delicate operation. Apart from the obvious choices such as which word to use, what size, what colour and where to place it, there are other subtleties to be considered like which type face to use and how this will influence the interpretation of the painting. No matter in what language I were to write using Latin script it would be decipherable, one might not understand the meaning but one would recognise the alphabet. However if I were to write in Arabic or Japanese it would appear too painterly, too calligraphic and too gestural. It's formal presence in the painting would be different to that of text. Cyrillic uses many letters which are similar to those in the Latin alphabet which makes words recognisable as such but - unless one speaks Russian - incomprehensible. The presence of a Russian word in a painting creates a barrier which alienates the viewer but also gives it a particular atmosphere of unease; the unease which one can feel when one is in a strange environment.

The choice of stencilled lettering serves two purposes, firstly, by breaking up the letters so they merge more easily into the paintings' surface like brush strokes and, secondly, the stencil style is anonymous, impartial, cold and functional. Its lack of charm is as uninviting as an office door in some institutional building. Have you ever stood in front of an intimidating door, perhaps the door to someone intimidating? Who and what lie behind this door in the painting and why that Red Line? Has somebody painted everything in black and white or am I looking at a world devoid of colour? Am I entering a restricted zone demarcated by the Red Line or maybe just gazing Through The Looking Glass?

Typography, like so many things, is prone to fashion and style, something I do my utmost to avoid; I don't want a painting to be datable as it must always be stranded somewhere between the past and the present. There may be an old telephone in the painting but it could still be in use today - or even tomorrow.

Sometimes I wonder whether there's a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in me as I can flit so easily between paintings whose moods are dark and mysterious, like those in 'Caution: Red Line' and 'Office 202b', and the cheerful, breezy landscapes which haven't a care in the world.

2002

The maxim that the artist only paints one picture in his/her life and the rest are variations on it must be true - at least in my case so far. It was only a matter of time before I combined the two ideas of a corner painting with a door painting. A door opens and closes; allows entry and denies it, we take doors for granted, we open and close them without giving them a second thought - other than to lock someone or something in or out. Instead our attention is normally focused on what lies behind and to where they lead. In this series of paintings the doors actually open and close giving them an extra dimension. In 'Disconnected', a corner painting, i.e.: two planes which meet at 90° and which hangs in the corner of a room, there is a door tucked in the corner, but closing this door to deny access from one stairway merely shifts the problem as another doorway is revealed giving access from a different set of stairs. It may be very efficient but it is also equally frustrating and quite disturbing as it is impossible to close the door. Even the telephone is frustrating because one cannot use it to dial out. This could even be an 'Impossible' corner somewhere in Mr. M.C. Escher's house.

Another variation on the corner theme this year is 'The Wall' painting. In this particular painting we can see a brick wall which looks as though it disappears in perspective into the distance. I chose to make the wall very normal in order to emphasis the the most important part

of the painting: The door at the end of the corridor. What makes this painting different is that the door is at 90° to the wall - as some real doors are. As in reality with a door one can look both outwards and also inwards; so from the inside we can look out and see a landscape; on the other side of the door way we look back down the corridor. The door which sticks out at 90° adds an extra dimension; a two way view which makes the painting more than an exercise in perspective. The three dimensional feeling is accentuated by the illusion of a corner and the little door on the right, which are on the same flat plane as the brick wall. The painting is large (266 x 122 x 15 cms) in order to add to the feeling of distance as one has to walk along the length of the painting - down the corridor - in order to experience it fully. If it were smaller one would understand the idea but not feel it.

The paintings 'Eye Can See You' and 'Door With A View' vary slightly because in these paintings it is the view which moves. You must have had that sensation when sitting on a train, for example, and looking out of the window at another train next to yours which moves, or appears to. Is it your train moving or is it the other? If it's your train then you are the door moving but if it's the other train then it's the view through the window which is moving. This idea of changing perceptions is another development in my paintings. It may be subtle but it's quite unnerving because one is not used to the idea that the view moves.

'A Door With A View' requires a word or two of explanation: When the door is open the light comes in, casting a shadow of the balcony on the door, and we can look out past the balcony to the sea, but when we close the door we see that the same view has been painted on the back of the door and the open door with the light falling on it has also been painted on the brick wall. The occupier of the house has painted a 'Trompe l'oeil' on the back of their door - hence the title of the painting 'A Door With A View'. This painting is a painting about that painting on the door; a 'Trompe l'oeil' painting about a 'Trompe l'oeil' painting.

2003

Some painters work at home whilst others work in studios away from where they live. Personally I prefer to stay at home rather than go off to the 'office' for a days work. Like everything else in life there are advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of staying at home are that no time is wasted on travelling and that the act of painting is just one of those daily routines; going out of the house becomes an event. My paintings are, for want of a better word, domestic; they're about my surroundings which could easily be yours too; they're about daily life and they're about painting. Breathing, eating, painting. The disadvantages of working at home are those of self discipline and the fact that life and work are never separated. Going off to the 'office' - an studio outside of the house - makes it easier to start and finish 'work' but it also separates living and painting.

In the paintings of interiors I have concentrated on wide perspectives which show the whole environment. With the separate piece paintings I painted just those parts which I thought were enough to explain a wider view. But recently I have started to paint individual objects such as the pieces of furniture around me which when seen collectively make up the whole contents of a room. In other words I am showing an interior by painting the individual objects separately - separate piece paintings. The combination of a 'corner painting' with a 'door painting', as in the painting 'Disconnected', led me to the idea of combining 'individual object paintings' with 'door paintings'.

A door doesn't have to be just in a wall, it can also be in a cupboard or a wardrobe for instance. In 'Reflect on Yourself' I have painted a wardrobe complete with a real mirror. Paintings which have mirrors built into them oblige the viewer to become a part of the painting thereby making the paintings interactive. This is particularly so in 'Reflect On Yourself' because the viewer can open the painted 'door' panel. This is more than a painting, it is a contradiction. It is not functional like a wardrobe, as it is not a piece of furniture, but the wardrobe door is hinged and can be opened just like a real door and the mirror is a functional mirror so in that respect it becomes furniture: Functional Art; it's a real mirror but it's not a real piece of furniture. Perhaps it would be best to describe it as 'functional tromp l'oeil' - if that's not another contradiction. (Please, let's not get into a discussion about 'What is the function of art?' ... I'm just the painter not the critic).

In the painting 'Put Yourself In The Picture', the mirror engages the spectator in a significantly different way to other mirror paintings by inviting the viewer to complete the picture by introducing their own image. A photo booth takes a photo of the person who enters and sits down, this painting is a self portrait of the viewer because the viewer has put himself into the picture.

2004

In my naïve understanding abstract art should develop from one idea to the next; each abstracting elements to produce a more simplified - but not simple - solution to the pictorial problem. In other words looking for another way to represent the same subject; a more basic and direct way to show the salient elements; those all important parts with which to tell the story, rather like a précis of a book which sums up the core meaning or feeling, something which takes most painters a life time to achieve. We're all trying to define the indefinable: Painters try to do it with coloured mud, writers with words, musicians with sounds and dancers with movement.

I can see that it would be easy for me to become an abstract painter because I know what would be expected of me as I have a preconceived idea of what abstract art is - I've seen it in art galleries and books. When I see students painting abstracts I have to ask myself whether I am looking at the result of investigation or the result of the teaching of how-to-paint-in-an-abstract-manner: Abstraction has become an academic subject. It has the veneer of art but not the substance. What worries me is that I feel abstraction is no longer the result of years of study since some painters can start with an abstract image - and that is not abstraction, that is style. Style is decoration, and yes I agree, everything is decorative whether it be wallpaper, graffiti or a Rembrandt since it all decorates a wall, but the difference is that decoration fills in the space on the wall and art fills in the space in between ones ears.

Some of my earlier paintings were huge interiors where I concentrated on wider perspectives in order to show the whole environment. However when we look around us, although we may see everything, we really only look at what attracts our attention. So why not just paint those parts, those objects, which are interesting and leave the rest out? So now I've started painting little bits, those individual elements like telephones, furniture, doors, windows etc. I'm abstracting the whole into its component parts. These individual objects which, when arranged together, furnish an interior. The space in between the painted pieces i.e. the parts I've not painted, like the walls, are just as important for the whole as they complete the scene. One painting on its own is just one painting, two could be hung side by side but still be regarded as individual paintings but when they are juxtaposed in such a way then the paintings start to take on an extra dimension by involving the space around and in front of them. The purpose is to arrange all the paintings together in an exhibition space of various rooms in order to create an 'interior' rather than paint a view of an interior in the classical sense. So although the paintings may be two dimensional when arranged together they have a three dimensional aura. It would be an 'installation' because one would have to walk around the (3-Dimensional) interior of the rooms to look at the (2-Dimensional) painted furniture.

The installation would comprise of an entrance corridor, a living room, kitchen, bathroom and bedroom. The total area would be approx., 42 sq. m. which can vary according to the venue. I estimate that I will have to paint between 60 and 80 individual pieces to complete this project, something which will take me a few years to do. As they say: Watch this Space!

2005

Some of the paintings from this year have the sea as their theme. I don't feel that this is a radical change of direction but just one to follow for a few ideas. One of the problems of following the same line of thought all the time is that eventually a way of looking - a way of thinking, becomes a formula / a style which inevitably leads to repetition. This is fine in the commercial world where a client may request a couple of paintings in a predictable style but for the image maker who wants to find an alternative solution to a familiar problem it's a restriction. I don't believe in revolution only evolution. To revolt against all that I have done so far and do something radically different - in style - is only to change one set of problems for another and not actually solve anything; rather like living in a sky scraper and being afraid of heights and moving to another sky scraper in the hope that the change of view will cure the phobia. The only way to cure the phobia is to understand it and progress; the only way to develop a painting is to work at it, not to

regurgitate it ad infinitum. So the four most recent paintings - far from revolutionary - are a gentle stroll down a previously unexplored (by me) avenue. I might come back and continue on the route I was originally going or I might discover something new. Whichever, all routes lead somewhere and that's better than nowhere.

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