

***ROSS SINCLAIR***

***20 YEARS OF REAL LIFE***

***PUBLICATION***

**4**

***JOURNAL CONTRIBUTION***

***REAL LIFE PAINTING SHOW***

***'PAINTING AS A NEW MEDIUM' SYMPOSIUM***

***PUBLISHED IN 'ART&RESEARCH.ORG. VOL.1 NO.1'***

***DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY BY PUBLISHED WORK***

***THE GLASGOW SCHOOL OF ART, 2016***



This publication is a translation of the content originally published in Art&Research.Org: Volume 1. No. 1 (October 2006). This issue highlights the exhibition Ross Sinclair: *Real Life Painting Show* and the related *Glasgow International Symposium I* initiated to accompany it: *Painting As A New Medium*, both held at CCA Glasgow in 2006.



In this repurposed layout (necessary due to the poor online quality), documentation and background material on the *Real Life Painting Show* has been placed alongside the Art&Research.org content to create a more comprehensive document of the exhibition. This allows visual references from the show to accompany the various transcriptions presentations and round table debates, aspects of which were held in the exhibition space itself. However I should make clear that, except where clearly stated the text in this book is reproduced verbatim from the online journal.

All content from the journal can be accessed at the following link using the navigation menu:

<http://www.artandresearch.org/v1n1/v1n1editorial.html>



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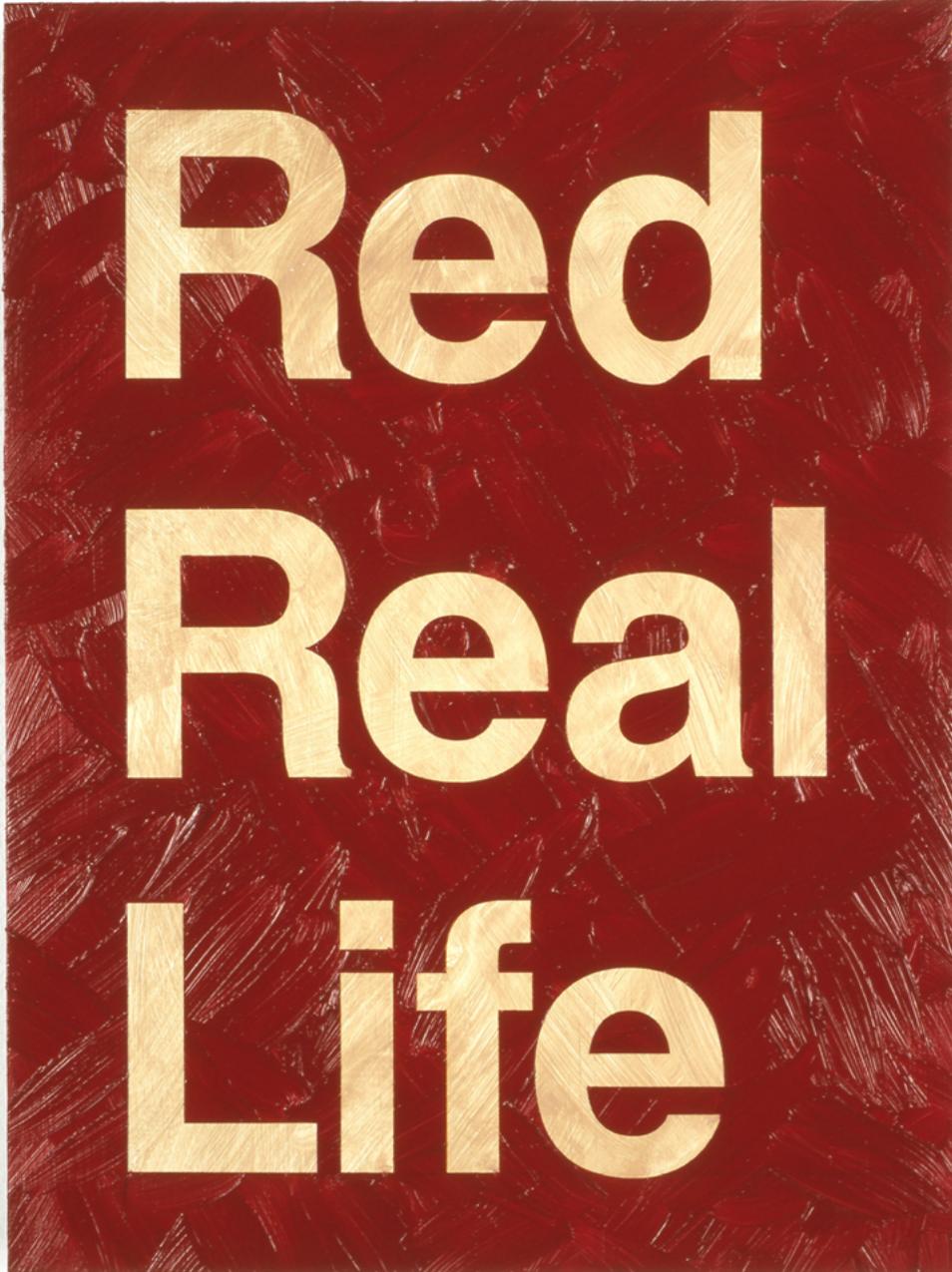
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Photography: Ruth Clark

**CCA:** **ROSS SINCLAIR: REAL LIFE PAINTING SHOW OPEN: APRIL 19 – JUNE 3**  
Centre for Contemporary Arts, 350 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow G2 3JD  
[www.cca-glasgow.com](http://www.cca-glasgow.com) [www.rossinclair.co.uk](http://www.rossinclair.co.uk)

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# CCA:

## Ross Sinclair: Real Life Painting Show

Ross Sinclair is better known for his large-scale installations than for his painting. He would be the first to admit that he is not attempting to create a masterpiece in oils in the old tradition. However, he is determined in this exhibition to investigate the possibilities of how paint can be used by a contemporary artist who may use many materials at different times, rather than follow a long apprenticeship to just one medium.

The *Real Life Painting Show* is characterised on every level by a sense of experiment. One starting point for the work lies in the frustration that many successful artists experience today: working on large installations or exhibitions with little time, issues arise that can only be dealt with quickly before moving on. Sinclair, for instance, felt that when working on his installations he would face choices in terms of combining colours, often on a large scale. The implications of these colour combinations, though, was always something that there was never enough time to address. The *Real Life Painting Show* is a deliberate attempt to examine those issues and explore their consequences. Describing this process in his own words he says, 'I'm taking a few steps back, holding a mirror up to my practice, pulling it apart, asking what the building blocks of it are, the pieces of the jigsaw, what are the essential elements?'

Allied to this exploration of the basic elements of his practice, Sinclair found himself rethinking the role of the studio in his work. Like many contemporary artists, he found the traditional studio unnecessary for long periods of his career. While developing the *Real Life Painting Show* he began to discover the benefits a studio can bring. Setting up a large space first in Kilcreggan at Cove Park and later converting the CCA galleries into a vast studio, Sinclair created a hybrid between a factory and a laboratory, producing over 100 paintings. The physical space of the studio allowed for a more exploratory way of working. Everything was in continual flux and there was time to reconsider, change or extend the reach of the work. Even in the final days of the exhibition installation, the studio gave him the possibility of creating new paintings and taking the series in new directions.

Assessing his approach to this body of work, Sinclair explains that he needs to discover the power of the medium he is using through the process of making. In *Real Life Painting Show* that meant reconsidering the potential today to tap into the modernist tradition and its bold uses of colour: 'The only way for me to try to investigate the power is to crawl inside and try to come out from the inside. To see if one could ever regain that confidence and certainty. What happened to that at the end of modernism, when everything went off into a million different avenues of investigation? Is there something that can jump from there to now?'

He and his wife, the artist Christine Borland, have three daughters, Grace, seven, Agnes, who is nearly two, and baby Jean. "I think a bit of it is responding to their growing

up, mark-making, doing paintings, using colour, it's responding to that very unlearned, pre-cognitive reasoning. 'I want red, I want yellow, wow, there's orange in the middle'. It's totally brainless in a way!"

But they also articulate a series of questions about painting itself. Sinclair's monotonous nod towards the modernism of the 1950s and 1960s. "There is something attractive there, the confidence and the certainty. Ad Reinhardt doing all black, Robert Rauschenberg all white, the absolute certainty of these poles. From the beginning of the 1970s everything squelched sideways in interesting and important ways."

"Without sounding too ridiculous about it, perhaps [it's about] the transformative power of art, perhaps a reaffirmation of the importance of a single brush stroke, the joy and humanness of that action, this sense that you can still express some things, can still make this creative image to talk to people, to have a dialogue. I love the idea of just one mark, that joy of being creative, like kids, that unbridled imagination, when anything is possible."

CCA would like to thank Cove Park, where Ross Sinclair was generously allowed to prepare the work for this exhibition. Quotations cited above are taken from 'Primary colours', an interview with Susan Mansfield in the Scotsman, 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2006.

#### **Ross Sinclair**

Ross Sinclair is a Glasgow based artist currently exhibiting as part of Glasgow International at CCA. Ross trained at the Glasgow School of Art and attended the California Institute of Arts in 1992. He is now a part time researcher and lecturer at the Glasgow School of Art in the department of Sculpture and Environmental Art. His recent practice has included a variety of materials including neon, sound, deer antlers, photographs and room sized installations. The current exhibition at CCA demonstrates Ross' determination to investigate the possibilities of how paint can be used by a contemporary artist who may use many other materials at different times, rather than follow a long apprenticeship to just one medium.



The background of the image is a dense, textured pattern of dark blue brushstrokes. The strokes are thick and expressive, creating a sense of movement and depth. The colors range from a deep, almost black blue to a slightly lighter, more vibrant blue, with some areas showing the texture of the paint or the underlying surface.

**Blue**

**Real**

**Life**

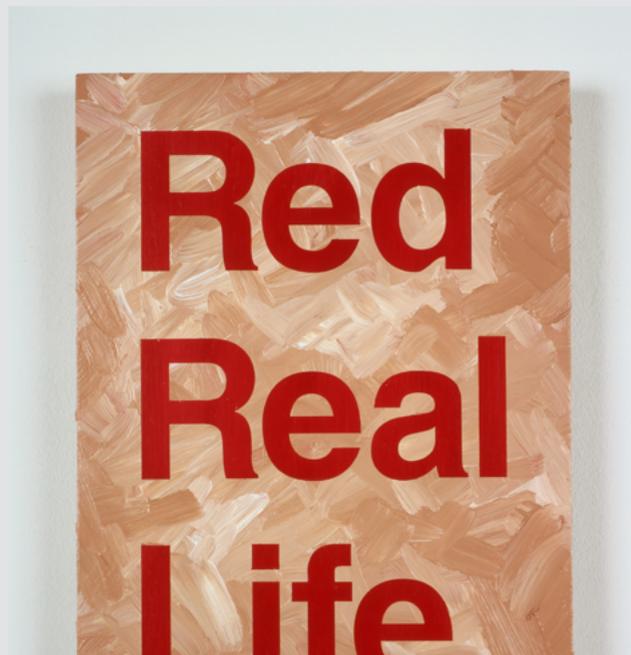
**Blue**

**Real**

**Life**



**Real Life  
Research:**  
Ross Sinclair  
Interview by  
Ross Birrell



**Ross Birrell:** I had a question to do with the authenticity of painting and the reference to the brushstroke which came up in our previous discussions in Cove Park, but which was also referred to in the CCA conference: Painting as a New Medium. It was to do with the use of the word 'Show' in the title of the exhibition: Real Life Painting Show. Why not stop at Real Life Painting, why have Real Life Painting Show? To me, the inclusion of the word 'show' seems to introduce a distance from the notion of authenticity, from risking the brushstroke and introduces a performative mode.

**Ross Sinclair:** I don't know if I would have used the term the authenticity of the brushstroke but maybe we could get into that in a minute, but with the title, I think it seems clear to me that once I had hit on the title being Real Life Painting Show that helped define what it was – what it could be. For example the press people made an innocent mistake in an advert which ended up reading - Real Life Painting and when I saw that I did think, no that's not what it is. I think for me, the idea of this show is so essential to it, which I suppose it is, effectively, the polar opposite of any kind of flirtations with modernism in that sense, because for me with this, as with everything else I do, it does absolutely need the show. It's just not the same with the door shut and the lights off. ... I mean, it just felt so right for a start, Real Life Painting Show, Real Life Painting.... Real Life Painting sounds so arrogant and self-aggrandising, somehow, like this is Real Life painting,

and all other painters missed the point. This is it now, you know? I mean, it's really not that. It's a Real Life Painting Show, yeah, it's kind of temporary, it's in the moment, it's about now. Essentially it's about doing a painting show perhaps now, you know, in May 2006. What does a painting show mean now, compared to, you know, what a painting show might have looked like in the sixteenth century, or 1950s or sixty-five, or whatever. But I think essentially, for me, what that underlines is still the idea of audience and dialogue. That's the really strong desire for me, that it's about the idea of like, one brushstroke, could one brushstroke save the world? And all the kind of things that go with that, that make up that sort of gesture, the individual, the transference of the human hand. But it only is worth anything, I think, if someone else is looking and a dialogue takes place, however slight or abstracted or after the fact or in someone's memory or imagination. The significant thing is the impetus to say, I'm still alive, I'm still here, you know, this is only me, but this is this really simple mark which is a kind of pre-language, signing your name with a cross, or something, you know? And I think its important as an artist you are conscious of setting up the conversation. The work is constructed to test the premis Admittedly, within an extremely self-conscious articulation and I don't know if that's a long way of saying it, but for me, the show is still the moment of debate. It wouldn't be Real Life Painting Show in a crate in a storeroom somewhere. It would be in some sort of hiatus then, but it's here and now, in the show and what that means at the moment.

**RB:** That possibly makes it like an event. Not necessarily a performance event but a performative relation to the element of dialogue or even open-endedness which you mentioned. But where are those points of entry for the audience in something which looks like a very complete, sealed exhibition in a very traditional sense; you walk into the gallery, the paintings are on the wall, which are finished in the studio being brought into the gallery, so the studio is the site of production, the gallery is the site of exposition? It seems that's the kind of relationship in my mind as well, with the repetition of the production, or the serial production works and then you're getting a different sizes... this is the large scale, then the smaller version. So it has a very close relationship to commodity production and painting is seen at the centre of the market place in the fine art tradition. Tom Lawson - who was at the conference you organized at the CCA - obviously talked about the camouflage of painting as a critique of the market place in the 1980s and 90s, and that's something that came out of the idea of painting being a kind of strategic place to be, as a critique of the marketplace whilst aping the marketplace. And I wondered if that was also feeding in to the context of the painting in this case, this event - it's a show, a strategic moment rather than lasting for all time. Is it because painting and the market place here is still a site of antagonism, is it something you see in your question 'can a brushstroke save the world?' Well save the world from what? A brushstroke against what? There seems to be a kind of interesting

ambiguity here; echoing traditions of painting echoing the production of commodities for a market but at the same time referencing this recent history of Tom Lawson and the antagonism with the market and saying that there is something resistant in the brushstrokes still.

**RS:** Well, there's a lot of points there. I think, in a sense, its about wanting to explore this medium which is in more straightforward a dialogue with an audience, it's the one medium a 'public' most expect to see in an art gallery, so perhaps for me, for whom the formal aspect is usually much more sculptural and complicated and busy, this takes away a couple of those barriers and makes it much more straightforward sort of relationship. And I really wanted to explore this medium, this relationship - this love affair I'd never been part of. So with this work I try and make that 'way in' as straightforward as possible which I suppose in a sense, is the opposite of what I usually seem to do, which is to make the space of viewing, or reception - that moment of consumption - something other than which the viewer might expect. I will try and build that into the work in terms of their expectations of what might happen in an art gallery or some other space. And yet here the whole structure of the project, the show... ninety percent of it is all exactly the same on each different piece. - The difference, of course is the colour definition, yellow, black, brown, blue, yellow, green, pink, black, white, grey, what have you. What could this mean...Red Real Life, Green Real Life? Do

they have a life outside of the structure? – I think they could. So, this system is just a sort of armature that the colours and the mark-making sit on top of, and as you pointed out, you know, we have basically small, medium and large, so it hopefully can test that response to the colour, to the mark-making on a kind of small scale, where it does look very market-oriented, let's say, and through to the large ones, which I specifically made to have a very physical human scale, you can stand in front of them, you can stand right next to them and they basically completely fill your field of vision and you can still just about smell the oil paint and it's quite physiological, phenomenological, even, this sort of physicality of them and you know, the cyan, magenta, yellow, black one, you know, it's twenty-five feet long, it must weigh 200kg. It's quite a substantial object in a sense, and that's partly also the fact that they're all on 18mm MDF and not on canvas. I wanted them to remain quite brutal, sort of ugly objects in themselves, although the surface was very carefully contrived, very seductive, beautiful, but only perhaps a mm or two in depth.. So yeah, I mean, the structure is the same in all of them. There's no interest, there's no distraction, you know, other than the colour, the texture, the application, the scale. So, in a sense, in terms of a set of research questions, let's say, it boils those down to quite a tangible... quite a quantifiable straightforward equation. What do these specific constituent parts amount to? What does it mean when you see them repeated again and again, in different tones, in a different scale? How does it make you

How does it make you feel – are you seduced, repelled, bored? How do you respond to it as a totality? What does it make you think about? How do colour relations work with each other on this small scale, on a medium scale, on a big scale? How does it affect your perception of the work there? Can meaning be constructed in relation to the scale? Or, how does the response differ on the different scale? For example to the small ones you feel you could hold in your hand, and to the big ones that are these big lumps of wood that weigh fifty-five kilos each, and would probably kill you if they fell off the wall. So, I suppose it goes back to the kind of over-arching questions for me, about the whole project which were to try to identify very particular and quite small details within my practice that I had been working with for twenty years, let's say, but never really paying enough attention to them. So, over those years, you know, many, many works were made that dealt with colour and text and letters but I felt I was never giving myself enough time to think about the decisions I was making. For example in these early t-shirt pieces that I started making around '93, which, incidentally, I called t-shirt paintings... when you look at all these together, for example at the Fruitmarket in '94 they're not so different, really, you know, in form from these paintings. Sort of squares of coloured t-shirt with three lines of text on them, I mean, not dissimilar at all in many ways to these different colours together, different text, so in a sense, there are various antecedents in the work. Anyway over the years, particularly as the Real Life project

developed I was working through bigger scale installations or you know, came across moments where I forced to make decisions about colours and what went next to each other, and why things felt different if they're blue, or red, or yellow, or green. I mean, it's very basic, of course, but you know, with this project I wanted to, take these tiny details and amplify them. I guess with a fairly open-ended ambition to see how they would resonate in a very clean 'white cube' space like this.

**RB:** Did you have a specific of research context you were dealing with in relationship to colour theory or a particular moment in the history of artistic investigations in the use of colour. What were the touchstones here?

**RS:** Well, I mean, I've articulated the sort of strategic model of everything being the same, just laying different colour relationships, which is on top of all that, of course. I'm almost embarrassed to mention it in the same breath but of course Josef Albers' 'Homage to the Square' series, which you know, is a lifetimes of work, and maybe I spent a year on this, but you know, in fairness, probably twenty years before that, thinking about it in the back of my mind, though perhaps not in this form. I don't feel there's a big rush. Of course I could have made it an extremely dry and technical sort of unpacking of that sort of theoretical perspective from a number of different angles but that's not me really. And in a way I was more excited about some abstract concept of Reinhardt vs Ryman, black vs. white.

I wanted to find out what it would mean to completely immerse myself in painting for a while, to try to make it feel like mine. Also a desire to go back to basics, to check the foundations of the most fundamental of desires to communicate. What really interested me was, actually using the paint, working with the paint and that was a bit of an unknown quantity, I didn't really plan each one. What would happen when I kind of got the paints out and put them on? The whole structure was pre-determined, the preparation the under-painting with the particular colour with acrylic, the vinyl text being applied, then already for the top coat, and when the top coat of oil paint went on, I was quite intuitively, playing with the paint and seeing what happened when you pushed it around, and as the bigger ones are more than two metres square there's a lot of paint to push around on those, so it's quite a physical relationship to them when I'm working all this paint about on the surface, and how the image, if you like, such as it is, is sort of constructed within that. So, I wanted to leave a certain ambiguity there, a certain openness, a certain feeling that could develop from how I just... how I intuited it really, at the time of the construction, within the framework. And, for example, I worked for a long time just on the computer, everything was done on the computer, so I've got a million and one prints of everything in absolutely pure, tonally flat, perfectly beautiful, one colour behind, you know, green, another shade on top, really beautiful empathetic relationships I built up with all those combinations of them, in the computer. But as soon as I started working with them, with paint,

forget it - it became much more than that. You know, maybe that could be interesting for a series of prints, flat screen prints. or something, But its is a lot to do with the paint as well, the oil paint, the quality of it - it's part of the equation for me and it's so alive... I didn't want to make that completely flat and I wanted there to be plenty of evidence of hand and evidence of the construction of them and the sort of humanness of them within the strictures of the template.

**RB:** So the next question is to discuss painting as a methodology. You mentioned that the method of composing the works on computer was different. It seems that in 'Real Life Painting Show' you can't not use painting as a method – it would be perverse to just use the computer.

**RS:** Yeah, although I did make some at the beginning, when I was of developing the research, that were completely flat and devoid of brushstrokes and the brush marks and were not expressive in any way, but that didn't seem to be it for me. That wasn't heading where I thought these questions were going to be addressed, if not completely answered, but it was I think in relation to this idea of the brushstroke, it's much more about one position, one voice, one hand, one person, one individual within any given peer group, society, world, country, whatever, and perhaps the idea of the show sort of underpins that as well, that's it's not a technical exercise. It's more open-ended than that and it's just the fact that all the text is the

same, the template is the same, that's enough. Then the space is left for a free hand, literally, in terms of the application of paint and the way it goes on and that's the start of the journey to a dialogue.

**RB:** In the last decade or so there seems to be a real significant return in investment, and I don't necessarily mean an economic investment in Saatchi terms in *The Triumph of Painting*, a real investment in painting again in terms of a return to investigate the premises, the roles and the possibilities of painting. In *Painting As Model*, Yve-Alain Bois quotes Hubert Damisch, which seems to get to the contemporary context:

*It is not enough in order for there to be painting that the painter takes up his brushes again,' Damisch tells us: it is still necessary that it be worth the effort, 'it is still necessary that [the painter] succeeds in demonstrating to us that painting is something we positively cannot do without, that it is indispensable to us and that it would be madness - worse still, a historical error - to let it lie fallow today.'*<sup>1</sup>

Damisch's comment seems to come close to something you were talking about with the possibility of the brushstroke saving the world, that it seems, you know, painting not just *is*, but *is necessary*.

<sup>1</sup> Yve-Alain Bois, *Painting as Model* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT, 1990), p. 255. The quotation is from Hubert Damisch, *Fenêtre juane cadmium, ou les dessous de la peinture* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1984), p. 293.

RS: Obviously I've seen quite a lot of that work and seen some good, some bad, some terrible, but you know, very little that moved me. Generalising, of course, there's a lot of work in these shows you're talking about so it's probably not fair to do so, but I mean a lot of painting just kind of goes on, rumbles on and I never... a big beef that I always have with certain painters is that they never seem to consider why they're painting, it's just the sort of, it's just what they do, you know, it's what they've always done. They don't think about it, what it might mean to be making a painting right now - today. It's just simply their format, you know, their platform, their surface to work on... Anyway, in the 'Painting as a new medium' symposium, we held while the show was on you remember I drew an analogy with works that I've made like *Dead Church/Real Life* which addresses faith and the idea of one's relationship to the church and organised religion through the process of remembering and learning and singing religious songs within a sculptural construct contrived for the work and in a sense, this painting project is similar to that. In the former I start from a position of having no faith and trying to address how one may acquire some and perhaps here with *Real Life Painting Show* my starting point is a dearth of experience or understanding of painterly notions of the sublime, let's say. Rather than painting just being with me I wanted to go towards painting to understand it, to interrogate it, to ask some questions – to try to know it - initially for simply find out for myself, ... having painted quite a lot over the years in various projects

and works, but really just as a basic tool. The idea of painting as a conceptual tool was something that Francis and I were batting about, I think it was perhaps one of the sub-titles of the symposium, but I suppose that was partly my premise to go to the idea of painting, fully cognizant of these questions - the history, what it might mean, how it wasn't simply enough to be painting and you know, to lift the brush and that that brushstroke... I think can mean quite different things, depending on the context, depending on the framing of it, which again, I suppose, underpins further this idea... explains to some extent this idea of the show, it's a painting show but it's in a very particular context, it's a *Real Life Painting Show*. In a sense, I could argue that it sort of packs into all these simple images a compact history of things that I've made in the twelve year history of this *Real Life* project. For me, it's all in there, in the foundations of the construction of this project, which is I guess paradoxical with the modernistic sheen of them, but I suppose just thinking aloud, that's really part of the research question for me is, do they work individually on their own as groups, and how much can I expect my whole body of work to be... is that assimilated within these or does it stand apart from it?

RB: If I can return to *Bois*, in *Painting as Model* he not only refers to Damisch and to the indispensability of painting, but to painting as a site of antagonism. And there was an element to the *Real Life* project which I always saw as an act of defiance of to spectacular relations, spectacular society - which

is I why I referred back to Tom Lawson's essay 'Last Exit: Painting' in relation to the camouflage of painting as a critique of consumer capitalism - an act of defiance of its position at the heart of the market place. These were obviously antagonisms based in the art world of 1980s/90s New York when something else may have been at stake. But although there may be this challenge, do you situate or see these works more in relation to your other works on Faith, Utopianism or Democracy, with the mention of the challenge of the sublime. It seems to be a slightly different question than attacking painting as a cultural commodity. It seems to be a different site of investment, more cultural than economic. For example, although there is a tension between the vinyl text and the paint, the machine and the hand, I'm not sure I get the same sense of antagonism, I mean we're not confronted with the tattooed figure with their back to us, the rebuff of 'Real Life' is elsewhere.

RS: No, I think this is a very particular project for me I mean, that currency of painting is so entrenched I felt I wanted to utilise it perhaps to address that spectacular relationship in some sense. though not simply to criticise. Yes maybe it is more like some of my other projects when I try to take on a particular idea of an institution and try to deal with it in my own terms, in order to set up a relationship with a broader audience. I guess painting is also an institution just as clearly defined as some of the others I've been interested in. Though in a sense they couldn't really be any dumber or have really only one level

- less content but I suppose my challenge in that, perhaps of myself, is the question - can they collectively build on the Real Life project which I have been working on for more than a decade, can they embody that, can they advance that in some sense, take up the baton and run with it?

RB: On one level, you could see them as a process of reduction in order to negate that access to the sublime, which you would expect from a language of pure colour, paintings which are intended to invite the sublime. These seem to invite the sublime and negate it in a double-handed gesture. But on another level, there does seem to be a totality addressed in the sense of the scale of the show, having them all in a series of 'all creatures great and small'. Does this sense of totality have something at stake - the project of painting?

RS: Yeah, maybe it's a sort on Noah's Ark of colour, there's two of everything and they can all go into the ark of culture when the flood happens. We can unpack them afterwards and again repopulate the world with colour after the apocalypse. That's it. Thank you. Yeah, I mean, to be honest I mean I had a lot ideas about it and a lot of impulses in the development of the show but I certainly didn't have an over-arching, conceptual agenda in terms of a fixed outcome that would be simply tested with a sort of formula versus a pre-expected solution somehow, that could then be held up against the sort of ABC conceptualism,

I suppose, or ABC of painting almost. But it is much more fundamental than that, really. I wanted Blue Real Life, Yellow Real Life, Green Real Life on this sort of scale and I certainly did want to have my cake and eat it, you know? I wanted to test this... What are these colours? What do they make you feel? You know, what emotions do they conspire with you in producing? But also, I mean, as a sort of abstracted conceptual premise, Blue Real Life, I wanted to look at that and kind of imagine what that was, what that felt like? And maybe ultimately, you know, it's too ambitious for that, it's wanting to do that, and do the sort of technical exercise and do the scale and do everything, and maybe that's somehow possible.

RB: There are two things, which are related in my mind but which are not resolved, to do with the context of research, the context in which we are discussing the work, and that is the relationship between play on the one hand and research on the other. Although there are obviously research questions to discuss, I also see a lot of playful elements in the show which are either foregrounded or creep in which don't necessarily address the same kind of questions you've talked about. There are gaps in the show. In the CCA conference, you talked about one of the inspirations as not necessarily Albers but your daughter being an inspiration, your daughter playing with colour, that kind of return to the simplicity of just playing with colour or material and then just allowing that conceptual baggage or framework to fall away.

RS: Yeah definitely...

RB: And also the smaller works become far more playful and they really start to become small jokes, in-jokes and references.

RS: Yeah, I think this thing with the kids and colour, I mean, it is very refreshing to see that sort of pre-cognitive response to colour and form and art generally, and you know it's not to do with any kind of external validation... anything anyone thinks is valid or worthwhile, or good or interesting, it's just a pure kind of joy of colour. Making a mess You know, that's definitely something I was interested in as well in terms of my own practice and where it is twenty years down the line from a beginning, it's like having dealt with a lot of, sometimes with a very small 'p', politicised questions of various investigation of subjects or institutions, structures, whatever. The constant questioning of what is art for? How can art be of value? To whom, by whom, for whom? And I don't mean in a sort of funding framework where you've got to kind of fight your corner, in a kind of honest me and you talking about it, you know, really, having a sort of interest in things political, and as we both do, dealing from time to time in the work with things with a bigger 'p' or a smaller 'p', or sometimes no 'p' for political, but having done that for ten, twenty years, with still a kind of idealistic, youthful feeling that art can in some sense have the possibility to change the world as stupid as that sounds in the current climate. Maybe that gets back to the idea of

the brushstroke saving the world again? I suppose, and maybe it's a bit of a mid-life crisis as well, turning forty, but it's sort of taking stock in a sense, formally, in the work and looking at these details that I sort of felt sometimes got missed out, but also feeling that after like, you know, twenty years of working, and making dozens of projects, hundreds of works over that time and all that time desperate for this sort of dialogue with an audience, always thinking about the audience, the context, what could be... what were people thinking about? What kind of space was it? How could I change that relationship? How could that plug into what was in the world? How could art have some meaningful engagement in that sort of context? In very practical terms, of course, knowing, understanding full well that one's own contribution to the world and culture probably has made an extremely small, invisible, dent in the kind of global carapace of capitalism, let's say, to use a term that's not really discussed any more as a catch all of all things bad. I'm a big boy and I know I've done it enough and spoken to enough of the 'audience' to know that I think there's a real value in just this voice, this presence in the world, this affirmation of one voice having a meaning and a value and a location that's embedded in something that is real life, let's say. So, perhaps this project maybe tries to address that from a different angle and... can, could red, yellow and blue - well, it's not my question, could... who's afraid of red, yellow and blue? - change the world let's say. Which of course, is a sort of forty year old question. But I suppose within my own practice that kind of

riffing off this sort of joy of painting that my kids have and seeing how the older one is already kind of growing out of that at eight years old, and is becoming more self-conscious and 'I'm no good at painting' sort of style. Just startled to just sort of take that sort of real basic simple, stupid kind of potential for joy and affirmation of life, however sort of hippie-ish that sounds, to feel how that sort of investigation of that could perhaps inform and advance my practice generally. Some of these other kind of more deep-seated or longer term questions to see how exploring this for a year can maybe alter some of these other questions of pre-conceptions or ways of working or researching or methodology, how that could change with the emphasis on perhaps another way, looking at a very different way to try and engage in this sort of conversation with the viewer.

**RB:** Had you done any wider investigation or research in the context of child development or children's experience of art and drawing?

**RS:** I did look at quite a lot of stuff, but to be honest, I never wanted the project to be... I mean, I'm very wary of the work being so heavily 'visibly informed'. You know, I looked at a lot of that and... but really, that was kind of in the bubble around how I wanted to develop it so I think to be honest, I was looking at that but also looking within a fairly dense vein in my own practice of you know, as I say, a lot of rich experience of dealing with

colour, dealing with text, dealing with scale, dealing with installation, dealing with spaces, dealing with audience and I suppose in a sense those were the sort of questions that I was wanting to address in quite a different way from the way that I normally take them on, which is possibly a lot more about the scruff of the neck and this time, I wanted to be, I don't know, be a bit more friendly or something.

**RB:** I only ask to establish the distance from that kind of artistic research, because I don't see it as about that at all. I see it as a spark rather than a context. If you turned that moment into a research project looking at children's painting - I can see it getting a grant but maybe not being very interesting.

**RS:** I think if I was talking to a student I would be telling them that all that theory and would be like in a sense, secondary research, where I'm kind of reading up on it, on the subject and I'm wanting to get informed about that but my own investigation of it has to plough its own furrow and a lot of that comes with a momentum of practice of research questions of methodology that I have perhaps developed in quite a kind of genuine, real, truthful sort of practical way over a couple of decades where I've gained a lot of experience testing these kind of questions, because virtually every thing I've ever made has been specifically for a particular context, environment, gallery, space, hillside, magazine, book, whatever. I mean the reality you know, is I've been working fairly seriously for twenty years, let's say, I feel like I've been making

exhibitions for a long time, thinking about the questions of audience and context and engagement and dialogue, or not, and form and content. I've been thinking about that since the first exhibition I ever made. So I'm always thinking about that context and how that might change the perception, the meaning, the kind of engagement with the work. So, I think my research is encapsulated in there but I think the specific research questions might be informed by the existing material which is out there in the world but formed more by the different avenues of investigation in my own practice in which I've sort of identified different questions, but wanting to refine or further investigate in a different way or try to renew somehow, or to further investigate, or to nail down, or to define more. There were perhaps things that got kind of dealt with quickly at some point, but this project was an occasion where I wanted to take those out and really try to address those questions in a much more detailed way.

**RB:** How do you see this project developing? What's next?

**RS:** Actually, what I feel now is that, I think I'd still like to go into it more deeply and I think probably I would do that using small ones again, because as you said, they were more playful and just more expedient really and I think there's quite a few things in that I'd like to kind of test out more and try and it's much quicker doing it in that way so in a sense, the smaller ones are more

like a kind of open sketch book or a sort of more worked up sketch book, that they're smaller kind of Maquette's almost for the ones that turn big or medium sized or whatever. So, I'd like to certainly do that but also, what I've been thinking a lot about is actually how these might be informed within the other works... with other strains of practice and I'm quite excited about that idea of physically putting these together with various kind of relationships with other formal kind of premises of the work, let's say, and with the scale and the colour and just the form of them. I'm quite interested in how they might form sort of architectural spaces in the way that I've done a lot with other works, built spaces and spaces that you go through. It crossed my mind at the beginning of this also but I wanted to kind of do it straight first in away, but I like the idea, for example, the one I'm looking at over your shoulder, cyan, magenta, yellow, black, it's about twenty-five feet long, in four sections, I really like the idea of like turning that round as if hinged, into a sort of box space and rather than looking at the things on the wall and retaining that sort of hierarchical, spectacular relationship, you actually stand in the middle of it and it becomes this sort of enclosed space that as a viewer, you're no longer looking at, like you're actually much more inside it. So, I mean that, there's a lot of different things in there which need a lot more development and research – oh and I really want to get some neon on them, I've been messing about with that – I just can't resist it.



# CCA:

Symposium;

**Painting as a New Medium**

April 27<sup>th</sup> 2006, 11am – 6pm

### **David Batchelor**

Currently Senior Tutor in Critical Theory in the department of Curating Contemporary Art, and previously AHRB Research Fellow (2001 – 2004) David Batchelor studied Fine Art at Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham (1975-78), and Cultural Theory at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham University (1978-80). He has exhibited in the UK, continental Europe, the United States and Latin America; written two books, *Minimalism* (1997) and *Chromophobia* (2000), and contributed to a number of journals including *Artscribe*, *Frieze*, and *Artforum*.

### **John Calcutt**

John is an art historian, critic and writer. He is Lecturer in Historical and Critical Studies at Glasgow School of Art. John was born in Chipping Norton, Oxfordshire. He studied History of Art at the University of Edinburgh, graduating in 1973 and then took a Masters Degree in History of Art, at Courtauld Institute of Art, completing in 1974. John joined the Glasgow School of Art in 1987 and is currently a lecturer in the Department of Historical & Critical Studies and also on the School of Fine Art MFA course. He has previously taught at the University of Central Lancashire, the Open University and Ohio State University, Columbus, USA. He has been External Examiner at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, University of Bradford, Manchester Metropolitan University and University of Ulster. John is currently Art critic for Scotland On Sunday, The Observer and The Guardian. He is also Associate curator at the Centre for Contemporary Art (CCA), Glasgow and was on the Scottish Arts Council exhibitions panel (1995-99). He has written numerous articles and catalogue essays on contemporary art and was commissioning editor for, "292: Essays in Visual Culture". His research interests include experimental approaches to critical writing about contemporary art.

### **Thomas Lawson**

Tom Lawson is an artist, writer, editor and curator based in Los Angeles. He trained as an artist in Glasgow and New York and has been the Dean of the School of Art at Cal Arts in Southern California since 1991. He has exhibited internationally and surveys of his work have been mounted by the San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art at La Jolla; the CCA in Glasgow; and the Battersea Arts Centre in London. He has curated and collaborated on exhibitions for over twenty five years, acting as curatorial consultant at the Drawing Centre in New York from 1979 – 82, co selector of the British Art Show in 1995. He most recently curated *shimmer: an exhibition of new painting from Los Angeles* for the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery.

### **Francis McKee**

Francis is a writer and curator based in Glasgow. He is currently Interim Director at CCA and Curator of Glasgow International. He is a lecturer and research fellow at Glasgow School of Art, working on the development of open source ideologies. He has curated many exhibition including *This Peaceful War*, *The Jumex Collection* for the first Glasgow International in 2005; *Zenomap* (together with Kay Pallister), the presentation of new work from Scotland for the Venice Biennale in 2003; *Words and Things* for the relaunch of CCA in 2001. For the past ten ears he has written

extensively on the work of artists such as Christine Borland, Douglas Gordon, Simon Starling, Joao Penalva, Matthew Barney and Pipilotti Rist.

#### **Ross Sinclair**

Ross Sinclair is a Glasgow based artist currently exhibiting as part of Glasgow International at CCA. Ross trained at the Glasgow School of Art and attended the California Institute of Arts in 1992. He is now a part time researcher and lecturer at the Glasgow School Art in the department of Sculpture and Environmental Art. His recent practice has included a variety of materials including neon, sound, deer antlers, photographs and room sized installations. The current exhibition at CCA demonstrates Ross' determination to investigate the possibilities of how paint can be used by a contemporary artist who may use many other materials at different times, rather than follow a long apprenticeship to just one medium.

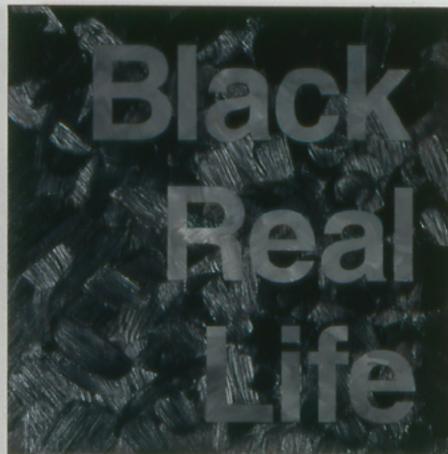
#### **Barry Schwabsky**

Barry Schwabsky was born in Paterson, New Jersey, and now lives in London. Aside from his poems, published in *Opera: Poems 1981-2002* and *[ways]* (both from Meritage Press) as well as the chapbook *Fate/Seen in the Dark (Burning Deck)*, he is the author of many works of art criticism, including *The Widening Circle: Consequences of Modernism in Contemporary Art* (Cambridge University Press) and contributions to the volumes *Vitamin P: New Perspectives in Painting* (Phaidon Press), *Jessica Stockholder* (Phaidon Press), and *Gillian Wearing: Mass Observation* (Merrill Publishers). He writes regularly for *Artforum* and other publications and has taught at New York University, Yale University, and Goldsmiths College, University of London, among others.

#### **Itinerary**

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| 11.0 – 11.30  | - tea and coffee   |
| 11.30 – 11.45 | - housekeeping, announcements  |
| 11.45 - 12.15 | - John Calcutt, chair for the day will introduce the symposium       |
| 12.15 – 1.00  | - Ross Sinclair discusses Real Life Painting Show with Francis McKee |
| 1.00 – 2.15   | - lunch break  |
| 2.15 – 3.45   | - Thomas Lawson, David Batchelor, Barry Schwabsky                    |
| 3.45 - 4.10   | - coffee and tea   |
| 4.10 – 5.00   | - Plenary session  |

Glasgow  
International  
Symposium:  
**Painting as a  
New Medium**





## CCA, Glasgow

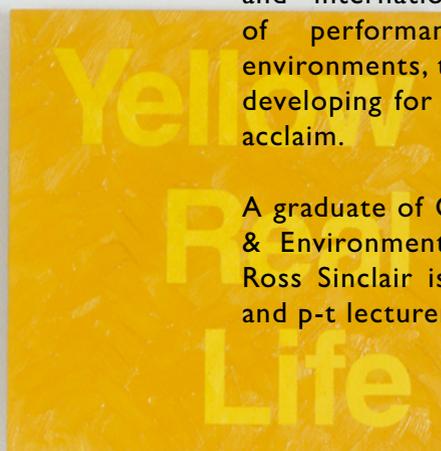
This issue focuses on Ross Sinclair exhibition at CCA (*Real Life Painting Show*) and the GI symposium: *Painting as a New Medium*.

The symposium opened with a presentation by John Calcutt and was followed by a presentation by Ross Sinclair on the role of painting in his ongoing *Real Life* project. This was followed by a conversation with Dr. Francis McKee. In the afternoon presentations by Thomas Lawson, David Batchelor and Barry Schwabsky. There was a final plenary session, chaired by John Calcutt, which invited questions from the floor.

Ross Sinclair's *Real Life Painting Show* was exhibited at CCA 19 April - 3 June 2006 as part of Glasgow International. This series of paintings strips his work back to the most basic building blocks that help construct any creative practise, investigating the fundamental role of colour in the transformation of perception and meaning. These new works linger on the most irreducible elements of the creative process hoping to test the medium of painting as a contemporary conceptual tool.

Ross Sinclair is one of Scotland's most prolific artists and has exhibited widely nationally and internationally. His *Real Life* project of performance-installations, site-specific environments, texts and photographs has been developing for over a decade to international acclaim.

A graduate of GSA's Department of Sculpture & Environmental Art and MFA programme, Ross Sinclair is currently a SoFA Researcher and part-time lecturer in Environmental Art at GSA.





# John Calcutt

It's best not to automatically equate painting with art. Sometimes painting is simply painting, an innocent, art-free zone. Painting, in fact, often has to go through the agonies in order to turn itself into art. For the last hundred years and more this has involved painting being pretty hard on itself, ruthlessly stripping away all its unnecessary bits. Narrative, perspective, trompe l'œil effects, naturalistic forms - all those accumulated techniques of pictorial and allusion - became excess to requirements. Before it could be about anything else, painting had to be about itself. For Mondrian, painting was an exercise in pure plastic necessity: all right-angled grids and flat primary colours. For Malevich, it was a virulent attack upon the forms of nature: black square; black circle; black cross. But the more doggedly painters tried to discover the purified inner essence of their discipline, the more insistently it opened itself to the influence of external forces. Everything within it, they discovered, is reliant upon something beyond its apparent limits. Purity, originality, autonomy: they all turned out to be compromised ideas; convenient myths rather than absolute truths. Needless to say, there is a fairly

long and complex history involved here, but in summarizing it Yves-Alain Bois concludes, "while the full realisation of the modernist program [of purification] would have theoretically signalled the end of painting, I don't have the slightest doubt that this very realisation is unobtainable." Despite an investment in a misconceived concept of its supposed inner necessity, painting-as-art survives - but at a cost.

Continuing his reflections on avant garde practice in the second decade of the twentieth century, Bois writes,

*During this period, the will not to compose - a deliberate downplaying of subjectivity - seems to be the product of an extreme anxiety: now that art is relieved from the constraints of mimetic representation, objective guidelines have been devised to avert the sheer triumph of arbitrariness and triviality.... Finally, this period also witnesses the first criticism of absolute non-compositionality as an unreachable goal: both Duchamp and Mondrian realise that the eradication of subjectivity is not so easy to achieve...*

Frames: you could say that a lot of it comes down to frames. Mondrian drastically played down the role of the physical frame for his paintings - hoping thereby to encourage a free exchange between art and life - but they were nonetheless framed in other ways. A museum or art gallery is not merely a building; it is also a kind of frame, defining its contents: defining them, of course, as art. And, paradoxically, the more painting reduced itself, the more its identity as art came to depend upon the defining properties of the physical, conceptual and institutional frame of the gallery. It was this very realisation that caused Duchamp to abandon painting entirely and begin producing his readymades, forcing attention upon the fact that the gallery can endow the status of art even upon ordinary, mass produced objects.

In constructing small scale versions of Malevich's momentous Last Futurist Painting Exhibition (1915) and Mondrian's New York studio, David Alker and Peter Liddell simultaneously encapsulate this tragic history of avant garde painting's relation to the institution and rescue it in the name of a revised concept of art. If Malevich's paintings became the subject of the gallery - and if their status as art was to an uncomfortable degree dependent upon their enframing by gallery - the gallery (with Malevich's paintings) now becomes in turn the subject of Alker and Liddell's art. At first glance it may appear as if Alker and Liddell are thus engaged in a form of institutional critique not unlike that developed by various neo-avant-garde artists of the later 1960s in which the power of the gallery and its associated

institutional apparatuses is challenged. There might be some truth in this, but only a partial truth. It is nevertheless useful to note certain similarities between the interests explored by Alker and Liddell in their reduced scale reproductions of Malevich's exhibition and Mondrian's studio, and the critical agenda of Daniel Buren. In 1971 Buren wrote an article entitled "The Function of the Studio" in which he articulated the intellectual premises upon which his own mode of institutional critique was founded:

*Of all the frames, envelopes, and limits... which enclose and constitute the work of art (picture frame, niche, pedestal, palace, church, gallery, museum, art history, economics, power, etc.), there is one rarely even mentioned today that remains of primary importance: the artist's studio. Less dispensable to the artist than either the gallery or the museum, it precedes both. Moreover., the museum and gallery on the one hand and the studio on the other are linked to form the foundation of the same edifice and the same system. To question one while leaving the other intact accomplishes nothing. Analysis of the art system must inevitably be carried on in terms of the studio as the unique space of production and the museum as the unique space of exposition.*

The studio, says Buren, is the only place where the work of art is really at home. But it is also a kind of boutique which curators and dealers visit in order to make their selections. Once these selections

have been made, the work is transported to the museum or gallery where its “truth” and “reality” are lost. In the Jeu de Paume museum in Paris, Buren notes, Impressionist paintings are set into the salmon-coloured walls of the galleries, whereas in the Art Institute of Chicago, “paintings from the same period by the same artists are exhibited in elaborate carved frames, like onions in a row.” When a museum or gallery brings together different works by different artists and exhibits them in the same space, we are forced - argues Buren - to draw one of the following two conclusions: either, “all works of art are absolutely the same” (for how else could we explain the fact that they are all arranged and exhibited in much the same way); or, “all works of art are absolutely different, and...every museum, every room in every museum, every wall and every square metre of every wall, is perfectly adapted to every work.” Neither of these conclusions is satisfactory, but what can the artist do about it? Not a lot, according to Buren. The work of art is misrepresented in the gallery, but it is dead in the studio because no one ever really sees it there. Work produced in the studio has to take into account the fact that, if it is to be sold in order for the artist to earn money to live and carry on working, it must see the gallery - or some place other than the studio - as its inevitable destination. After dismissing the idea that the work of art is a purely internalised, self-referential affair which will not be affected by the conditions in which it is exhibited, Buren concludes that the only thing the artist can do is to imagine the typical space in which his (sic) work might end up:

*The result is the predictable cubic space, uniformly lit, neutralized to the extreme, which characterizes the museum/gallery today. This state of affairs consciously or unconsciously compels the artist to banalize his own work in order to make it conform to the banality of the space that receives it.*

*By producing for a stereotype, one ends up of course fabricating a stereotype, which explains the rampant academicism of contemporary work...*

Buren’s own answer to this dilemma is to give up entirely the idea of producing work in the studio: “All my work,” he declares, “proceeds from [the studio’s] extinction.”

As with all critical strategies, Buren’s own ‘anti-painting painting’ practice has subsequently been recuperated by the very institution that is set out to attack, offering no suitable model for artists of a later generation, such as Alker and Liddell. Rather than confronting the ‘system’ by adopting an oppositional stance such as that of Buren, Alker and Liddell enter into it, repeating and restating its logic with minor - but significant - differences and modulations.

There are many features of their work that could be developed here, but I will limit myself to a few words about models. Alker and Liddell have made models of Malevich’s exhibition and Mondrian’s studio. In so doing, they have converted places and situations into objects. These present objects that refer to absent

places and situations are now themselves elements within new places and situations. It might not be stretching a point too far to suggest that in so doing Alker and Liddell have subjected the institutionalised aspects of painting (its site of production and its site of exhibition) to the logic of the Duchampian ready-made - presenting them, that is to say, as recontextualised objects. Crucially, their reconstructions have also reduced the scale of their original referents. The fact that they deal with historical material is also absolutely significant. As the American sculptor Robert Morris observed in 1966:

*'It is obvious, yet important, to take note of the fact that things smaller than ourselves are seen differently from things larger. The quality of intimacy is attached to an object in a fairly direct proportion as its size diminishes in relation to oneself. The quality of publicness is attached in proportion as the size increases in relation to oneself.'*

Thus the reduced scale of an object secures it more firmly to the realm of private experience and, as Susan Smith notes, "We find the miniature at the origin of private, individual history...." In other words, through this reduction of scale Alker and Liddell suggest that the kind of shared, public notion of universal history upon which the works of Malevich and Mondrian depended utterly for their utopian aspirations has now been displaced by a kind of privatised, solipsistic view of historical value. Thus the construct of historical time upon which the gallery and museum

are predicated is contradicted from within and its own internal contradictions gradually become apparent. For this construct of time wishes to be both historical ('significant' works of art evolve out of each other in a sequence of linear progression) and timeless (the exemplary aesthetic experience, in the words of the modernist critic Michael Fried, "has no duration"). This unresolved relation between the different temporal demands of public and private experiences of art is not the only paradox of modern art's ideological legacy to be exposed by Alker and Liddell. Reduction of scale, as we have suggested, increases the senses of intimacy and privacy. Intimacy and privacy also provide the optimum conditions under which aesthetic contemplation of the work of art may take place. Private contemplation, in fact, was at the origin of the transcendental claims made by the avant garde on behalf of the aesthetic experience (in terms of both the production and reception of art). In the case of Alker and Liddell's models of Malevich's exhibition and Mondrian's studio, however, a relation of intimacy has been staged only to be thwarted.

Despite the ideal viewing conditions there is, so to speak, nothing to contemplate: there is only the abstracted, blank scene of looking itself. In re-presenting episodes from the history of the avant garde's attack upon representation (i.e. seminal moments within the development of modernist 'abstract' painting), Alker and Liddell highlight the problematic conditions surrounding contemporary painting. Rather than being fully present, painting functions in these works as

a referent, something accessible only indirectly. Despite its centrality as a concept, it is physically and materially absent. And yet this absence does not indicate the triumph of some spiritual or other form of transcendence. Yves Klein perceived “an insoluble problem of spatial organization” in “the beautiful and grandiose, but dramatic adventure of Malevich or Mondrian”. This problem, according to Klein, involved the use of line to divide the pictorial surface into different areas of colour so that “one can no longer plunge into the sensibility of pure colour, relieved from all outside contamination.” In his own work, he claimed, “it is through colour that I have little by little become acquainted with the Immaterial.” Blue, in particular, suited Klein’s demand for an aesthetic sensation of undefined spatiality and temporality, thus on 28 April 1958 he presented *La Vide* at Galerie Iris Clert in Paris. “The Galerie Iris Clert is a very small room, it has a show window and an entrance on the street. We will close the street entrance and make the public enter through the lobby of the building. From the street it will be impossible to see anything but Blue, because I will paint the window glass with blue. The canopy will be Blue too.” The exhibition was to be “in actuality a space of Blue sensibility in the frame of the whitened walls of the gallery.” As his statement makes clear, Klein’s blue “void” of liberating immateriality was, of course, inadvertently but utterly dependent upon the confining frame of the gallery itself. His desire to project painting beyond its physical limits and into “a pictorial quest for an ecstatic and immediately

communicable emotion” - a realm of pure pictorial sensitivity - was as unfulfilled as those other desires of Malevich and Mondrian. Divorced from us in time and space, all that remains to us of these ambitious but ultimately flawed projects are some grainy black and white photographs. From these ghostly documents Alker and Liddell are able to reconstruct models and images that critically redefine the past in a gesture that simultaneously helps us better understand the present.

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# Ross Sinclair / Francis McKee

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After John Calcutt introduced the Symposium, the event began with a walk round conversation in the exhibition (in the main galleries, directly below the theatre space used for the symposium) with myself at Francis, (now) Director of CCA. Here I reflected on my aims and objectives for the show and my ambiguous relationship with Real Life Painting under interrogation from Francis and the other contributors and attendees. This set the tone of the symposium that followed firmly in the key of practice-led research interrogating the contemporary paradigm of painting. The discursive nature of this strolling dialogue did not lend itself to reproduction.



# Thomas Lawson

I wanted to talk about painting and the problematics of painting and I also wanted to do that in a slightly biographical fashion because that's how you talk about your ideas.

So, I went to New York in 1975 and at that time, I loved the Museum of Modern Art and I particularly loved work like this, this is Duchamp's *Fresh Widow* and the Modern didn't particularly love work like this, it was often hidden in a low gallery underneath the staircase, and it seemed to me you know in ways that John's very clearly kind of articulated at the beginning that art had come to this sort of impasse where it wasn't entirely clear how it related to life in general. And all the problematics of representation and so on about that early modernism, and Duchamp, and Dada and Surrealism had all kind of raised were still unanswered questions and there still are unanswered questions but looking at that seemed to me a priority. And that there was a kind of issue that had something to do with the representation of the real and what I liked about Duchamp in particular was the way that he used real things to talk about unreal things and altered the understanding of reality. More recently

I was back at the Modern admiring their new building and their new installation. And I found that what I wanted to look at was actually this painting of Picasso (*Green Still Life*). And the surrealist rooms, which are now expanded and dominating because in all those years since 1975 art has very clearly taken the side of Duchamp and I found that I was really sick of that. And that this painting, it's a little painting, this painting really summed up for me a lot of the things that I'm actually currently interested in which have to do with the more particular ways in which painting itself talks about these problems.

It's called *Green Still Life*, and the thing that's really great about it is the way that Picasso plays around with different schematic methods of representing form and light and he does that by using colour; he uses pointillist colour and illustrations of shadow in the bottle. But it's an essay in the problematics painting presents at this moment and how it might relate to every day life. And so the subject matter is table top, the bottle of wine, a glass, fruit bowl, some fruit and so it's about nothing in fact, I mean it's just sort of about some stuff. And the whole problem

is about how we really talk about that and makes some work. And which puts in motion a train of thought that brings us back to the Beckett - Joyce quote, it's all kind of wrapped into all that. But somehow putting it back into the frame of painting just seems to me currently to be somehow richer or but in a way more personal than I hitherto thought possibly interesting.

Backtrack again. Shortly after moving to New York, Susan Morgan and I started this magazine (slide of first cover). And it was I mean it was just this little artist magazine, the idea was that it would be a forum for artists to talk about the issues that were of vital importance to them and it was a vehicle for a younger generation to speak to each other. And what we were interested in was this gap between art and life and how you might sort of negotiate that. It's a black and white magazine was published for about twelve years. Slightly erratic, sometimes it came out twice a year, sometimes we skipped a year, sometimes it came out four times a year. This is the first issue and the cover is a work by Sherrie Levine. So we were involved in that whole idea of appropriating imagery from other places, to insert into the art world to talk about positions of representation. And more recently, time actually has this horrible way of catching up with you and becoming history, a couple of curators recently put together a show of the archive real life magazine. I didn't even know we had an archive until they asked about it, and (slide) so this is a picture of the display where we showed copies of the magazine, images taken from it, some manuscripts. One great thing about it was that the

early manuscripts were typed and edited by pencil and pen and cut and paste, physical cut and paste. The layout was done also by typesetting and wax. It's sort of an incredible thing, it's not that long ago that we didn't have the computer. And in doing it we learned something about the way that art supports itself

The thing about the Real Life Magazine Project and the Real Life Magazine Archives, and in fact a great deal of conceptual art that it grew out of, is that it is in black and white that it's sort of a process of thinking that privileges the idea over visuality per se and there's a desire to create a fairly sort of logical set of meanings. And as you know I do a lot of writing and one of the reasons for doing the magazine was to publish that writing, and writing is a form of expression that has a sort of black and white quality that has to do with trying to create legible narratives of thought that very clearly broadcasts from me to you or me or whoever. And that's all well and good and very useful, but one of the things that I've always thought important about art and again going back to the Duchamp in the initial framing of my thinking about art is that the great thing about art is that it doesn't make it sense, that it comes across in these other forms of communication that get to you through your senses, and make emotional sense or some kind of physical sense or something that takes you off into a different plane of thinking. And therein there's always lain my interest in painting.

This is an installation shot from a recent show, I think it was a year ago, at the

Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. A survey of painting curated by Russell Fergusson the chief curator there. And these paintings are works that I did in 1980 in those first years of doing Real Life magazine and writing essays in Artforum and so on. And they were attempts then to engage in the idea of painting from the positions that I've just sort of mapped out.

So I was looking at painting as a strategy and I thought of each painting as analogous to a very fast song by the Ramones, something like that, a very simple idea that could be executed very quickly with minimum fuss, minimum of tools, just done you know essentially in half an afternoon or something. And again like a song from the Ramones oeuvre it would pick up a quick punchy sexy theme, in this case death. And the series all had to do with children who had been murdered or beaten and whose stories have become front page news stories in the tabloid press. And so I was interested in quick shock value and sort of efficiency of just getting something out. But I was also interested in somewhat confusing that by throwing in a range of colour values that didn't exactly register with the severity of the content. These nice yellows and pinks and so on, so that the colour information was, some people said, kind of jarring. Probably important to note also that there was an aspect to this work, all of my work has to do with reprocessing information already existing in the world; one of the crises for art in the twentieth century had to do with a stepping back from the direct representation of reality and thinking about it as a more distance project where you're thinking about the ways in which

reality might be framed and talked about. So these are all based on found imagery. A decade plus of art making and thinking about different contexts for that, the whole issue of audience I think is a really crucial one and a really complicated one.

When you're thinking in terms of communication and discourse and writing essays and presenting work as a series of quick communicative bursts, you're thinking about the audience and how the audience is going to react to that and you just think contextually and you do shows that have that kind of context and make decisions that lead away from the abstraction of the studio/gallery kind of presentation and move into the public areas and by the late 80s I was doing a lot of public commissions to do with temporary works that would bring these kinds of demonstrations into a public realm that was talking to a broader public than the art public. This picture is an installation from downstairs when this was the Third Eye Centre and the layerings of imagery are all from Glasgow; the tartan, the artist figure was a sculptural figure I found at Kelvingrove and then grotesque mask came from some other building in Glasgow and I don't remember which one anymore, and you know the whole thing had to do with the art stardom of the late 80's - art as a side show, surface event.

More recently I've moved back into the studio and begun to think of the work, not exactly a private enterprise, but an enterprise that has to do with thinking consistently through a set of problems and ideas without so much concern for public. I can't tell if that's because I have

this job that keeps me so busy with all kinds of publics that I don't I don't really give a shit about yet another set of publics, that I want to sort of retreat and so it may be I've turned into some kind of old fart but I'll accept that it's possible.

I've been doing a number, two sort of concurrent series of work that have something to do with each other and then something to do with an idea of using the medium that allows for sort of unstructured continued rethinking of itself within the frame of painting. This part here is part of a project that is both part writing and part painting and concerns as its functional starting point the political

biography of a figure called Thomas Muir, who had a sort of five year adventure in republican and revolutionary politics in Scotland and France in the 1790's. These two images are sort of before and after of his adventure. This is an installation shot from a show I did last year in Chicago and excerpt from a series of a 100 portraits of his associates. It's sort of a rogues gallery or something of the world wide terror network of the 1790's - a mixture of British working class republicans, French revolutionists, American republicans and a sort of smattering of some Spanish, Mexican. All are concerned with that late 18th century issue of political representation. In terms of the painting they were based on portraits from that period of these characters. Some of them were aristocratic in origin and so their portraits are by well known portrait painters of the time. The French people were associates of Jacques-Louis David so he made portraits of them. The

working class guys, got their pictures made when they were on trial for treason, by courtroom artists. And some of the other figures are captured by the kind of antagonistic caricaturists like Rowlandson and Gillray and so there's a kind of range of information reprocessed into a series of paintings that ultimately has nothing very much to do with that original starting point. But the paintings themselves take on this life with being in a state of free play, where the colour decisions and style decisions and so on move off on their own. I think of it also musically but in a longer form of music than a Ramones song.

Concurrent with that I'm doing these pictures of renditions of the globe. And again it's this idea of using a fairly simple concept which is simply the difficulty of representing the globe on a flat surface and the related political issues of where you centre your representation. And using that as a starting point then the paintings again become this sort of ongoing contemplation of form and colour that then sort of rides free of the original ideas to some extent, with I hope some kind of slight disorientation effect. Having said that though of course, I began to think well this is kind of crazy, I'm not so entirely divorced from reality that I'm just happy to be just in my studio, that I do continue to want to see some way of bringing some of the issues of the day into the studio and figuring out some way of talking about that. This little painting helped me think of that to some extent. So along with the map paintings, I've been doing these paintings of hostages from Iran er, from Iraq - soon to be Iran though.





And again they kind of create a place where you're thinking about the news and the horror of the news and the despair you have living in America - with an administration that seems to be completely out of control and has no mandate for being as out of control as they are - but doing it in the cocoon of a studio space that's cut off from the world and withdrawn from the world. And so you're in this very strange sort of disconnect. I mean it's a connect, but it's also a disconnect.

I wanted to end with this one, to come back to the studio. You seemed to be talking about the significance of having a studio or not having a studio. To me it's absolutely crucial, I don't actually any longer understand how you work without one.



# David Batchelor

My relationship with painting is ambivalent. I use the term in its strict sense, which is that I am, I guess, motivated by entraption, a simultaneous attraction to it, and repulsion from it. I used to paint and I haven't painted for a good fifteen years, more than that actually. I've never showed the painting in anger and I doubt if I ever will, but who knows. And yet at the same time, pretty much everything I do in the studio and I am a studio artist and I'm very interested in the subject of studio, what it means to work in a studio in what some people have described as the post-studio world of art, including from the 1970's people like Daniel Buren. So I work in a studio and my work in studios is certainly informed by painting. Even if my work is mainly three dimensional and some would call it sculpture, but I don't think I would. Painting still informs it more than anything else. I can't get away from painting entirely, at the same time I can't do it. And so probably you could describe all my work as failed painting. I thought I'd begin by noting the title of this conference, which is 'Painting as New Medium'. And I asked Francis who came up with that title. He said 'It was either me or Ross'. They don't seem to know.

I'm not quite sure how to understand that phrase 'Painting as a New Medium', but the term medium it seems to me never far away from the question of painting. And I've often wondered whether we need the term medium any more and partly because obviously the term medium was so prominent in the discourse of our art from the last century. But also because in recent years you've had a lot of critics and artists talking about the idea of a post-medium practice. But if we're over Modernism, which is arguable, then maybe we're over the whole business of medium specificity or medium in general. We now make art in general rather than medium-specific art. I don't think one or another is true. When I ask the question about medium I always end up not knowing what my art would be, whether it's a necessary condition or not. And it seems a lot of the bigger thinkers who've dwelt on this subject, like Rosalind Krauss, for example, can't make up their mind either. In the 1970s she was writing about the idea of the 'Expanded Field' of sculpture and she talks quite specifically

in certain essays about the medium being an outdated and unnecessary term for

discussing art, and yet when we look at that vast new tome which the October bunch have published, *Art Since 1900*, in this round table discussion at the end of the book, she reasserts the necessity of the idea of medium, without which she says, you just have arbitrariness. Medium becomes the condition of rigour and developments in any art form. Which appals her colleagues, Hal Foster and so on. So, the problem when you talk about medium is that you get dragged back to talking about Clement Greenberg, and I don't want to do that. Ever. Not that I have any problem with Greenberg as a writer, what I have a problem with is that generations of art historians who continue to bang on about Modernism, nearly half a century after he stopped writing about it seems rather a curious thing to do. It seemed increasingly bizarre to me that bloody essay, *Modernist Painting* written back in 1961, has held sway hell sway in a way that it appears to have done, not least because while Greenberg and then later Michael Fried were writing about ideas of medium specificity, self-definition and even purity within their theory of art, at exactly that time, which is say the first half of the 1960s approximately, it seems to me that almost all the best artists were heading pretty much in the opposite direction.

While the theory of medium-specific purity is very fine and good, if you look out there, it seems to me that the practice of art when it was at its most dynamic and most vivid was when it was doing exactly the opposite; when it wasn't refining and purifying medium, but on the contrary it was fucking it up, it

was corrupting the medium, it was about making works which were extremely unrefined and extremely impure. They were very hybrid like works which on the one hand I think, certainly threatened the idea of the medium of painting, but I think in another way also, where the condition for the continuation of the medium of painting by the process of contaminating it in a way. And the obvious example for me, just to get personal, is the work of Robert Rauschenberg. It seemed to me that Rauschenberg made wonderfully, deeply, problematically impure paintings. There were works which were paintings, but there were also works which were always corrupted by materials which have stood and remain outside the condition of painting. In this instance a bed but also photographs, text, pattern, design objects, fragments of, to use a Ross's term, the real life, the everyday world of New York city in the 1950s and 1960s. I think with the project if you like was wanting to see, maybe no what happens if I throw this stuff at the painting, does it stick? And if it sticks, what does that say about painting and art and where it can go and where it can't go. If it doesn't stick and what does that say? And I think that, that's what Rauschenberg was brilliant at. And the reason this is a personal incidentally

is because Rauschenberg was my entry into the idea of being an artist and doing art. It was the first work I saw when I was a teenager which made me think that painting art could be like the best books and the best movies and the best records. It wasn't a remote and exclusive and a rather intellectual activity, it could be as funky as the rest of it. And it was

seeing a Rauschenberg combine from the 1950's - and incidentally not in London at the time because in London at the time, there was nothing to see of recent and contemporary art at all. The Tate as was in Pimlico was just a dark brown place, as I remember it, with dark brown paintings in it. And it was actually going to Amsterdam, to the Stedelijk Museum in about 1974, there was a kind of revelation to me that art could look contemporary, modern, fast, funny, insolent. So that's why I start with Rauschenberg. It seems to me that Rauschneberg in a way does offer completely another way of thinking of the medium of painting than that being promoted by very loudly by the likes of Greenberg and Fried. I've got this which Bed which hangs obviously in MoMA in New York, from 1955, the one I saw in the Stedelijk was actually one called Charlene which was a very bright red object. And I remember it being very big and very bright red and it had a kind of flashing light in it, and I couldn't believe you could have art with a flashing light in it, well not a painting, of course, and I know more now than I knew then. When I saw the combine again it somehow seemed rather less red, rather less big and rather less insolent than when I was 17, but that happens. It looked rather classical in fact, but never mind, those moments are very important ones.

Now it's not just me who noticed that Rauschenberg was doing something different than that which was being espoused by Greenberg and Fried. There's a great, great, a very underrated essay by Leo Steinberg, one of the other New York critics at the time. It's actually

finally published I think about 1970. It was clearly written or developed in the mid-1960s. It's the essay called 'Other Criteria', where he nominates, clearly he's obviously suggesting other criteria, that those of 'Friedberg' as Dan Flavin used to call them, for imagining and discussing the look, the project of art and painting in the 1960's. And it was Steinberg that came up with the idea of the 'flat-bed picture plane', the re-orientation of painting away from the vertical allusion to nature, towards the kind of table-top allusion to culture. And he talked about the value of Rauschenberg's paintings, among other things, very quickly, was that, as he put it, it let the world back in again. The world seemed, as when John quoted Michael Fried earlier on, which seemed to have been impossible to deal through the medium of painting, as Fried said, painting excluded the world or maybe the world excluded the possibility of painting. And in Rauschenberg and other artists at the time, the world comes flooding back in. And I think in the process it both makes painting vivid and possible again, but it also threatens the existence of painting, there's no doubt about that. In a way I think that Rauschenberg is about testing painting as it was imagined at the time and testing it to and beyond its limits until it fell apart if you like, some of Rauschenberg works literally and fictively fall apart. Others don't, others in a way refreshed and renew it.

Incidentally there's recently been a big Rauschenberg Combines show in New York, I think it's come to Paris, it's really just work from about 1955 to about 1962 or so. Now I was quite apprehensive about

going to see it. Because it meant so much to me in 1974 I was kind of frightened that if I go and see it now it might look it looked like it will look old fashioned and something that my grandfather had made, rather than something which still remained vivid in my cultural landscape. And I'm happy to report that actually it looked fantastic. They still look great, most of them at least, they still look insolent, vivid, rich, alarming at times. And the term that came to mind, it's a term I've used before, is it looked carnivalesque, and I mean carnival, I use the term carnival in the most specific sense, which it comes from the writer, the Russian writer Michael Bakhtin who wrote about the carnival, the idea of a medieval popular carnival as being a kind of a disruption of the civic order, but also a renewal of it. It takes the official culture and sticks two fingers up to it. It turns the world upside down, but in doing so, in disrupting the world, as he would put it, dethroning official culture, it also renews that culture in the process. And I think you could say also exactly that of what Rauschenberg combines do, they have a carnivalesque relationship with the history of painting. They throw shit at it, but it sort of comes up smelling of roses, it refreshes and renews it. And it also, of course, brings in the question of pleasure to art. The carnival is not imaginable without it being a pleasurable, chaotic immersion in a kind of vast popular party. It also brings in the relationship between high and low in culture. It's in a way, often the idea of kitsch, the under-valued, the popular being used to disrupt the received culture, the received pronunciation and so forth. I mean there's been various critiques of Bakhtin's work.

Bakhtin saw the carnival as a possible idea of kind of revolution in culture while he was living in Stalinist Russia, which can't have been a very carnivalesque place at the time. But people have also argued against Bakhtin that carnival is a kind of revolution contained. You have a disruption, you have your Mardi Gras and you have your moment of carnival and then everything goes back to normal again, and it's a kind of release valve for an oppressed culture. I don't have a definitive stance on that position. Another term that Bakhtin introduced, which seems to me germane and appropriate to the work of Rauschenberg and others, really comes not from readings on Rabelais and the idea of the grotesque and carnival and so forth, not a medieval idea, but along the idea of his linguistic theory which this phrase he uses: heteroglossia. Which really means that language is not just one thing, it's not just received pronunciation. It's a whole range of types of speech acts, some of which are official, some of which are unofficial, some of which are officially sanctioned and some of which, like slang or swearing, is officially disapproved of. Any language always combines these diverse and divergent levels and if we deny that we really lose track about what languages is and that what makes a language live is this polyphonic noise. And it seems to me that a Rauschenberg painting has that in it, has different levels of language, as it were, or different levels of visual language or visual culture thrown at it all at the same time, from high art quotations of Rubens or whatever, to very local, low grade every day popular culture; magazine images, cartoons, and such like. And it all lives there, richly and confusedly in the same place.

Now it's not just Rauschenberg although it's a very convenient model for me both for personal reasons

and practical ones. I think there's a whole generation of artists in the early 1960s for whom, in different ways, the unofficial and unlicensed ways of going on became a means of continuing their practice. And this often came down to, not so much the imagery but to the materials that artists were using, particularly painters. And I think in those days, probably everyone was a painter, initially, when they went to art school and stumbled out often making other things. And even when I went to art school in the 70s, as far as I'm aware everyone began as a painter, and many people, myself included found themselves surprising themselves, realizing they weren't making paintings any more. They were building things rather than painting them.







# Barry Schwabsky

Unlike Tom and David, I don't have any slides to show you. I'm not an artist so I'll quote my own writings the way they show their paintings. Our topic today has to do with painting as a new medium but to some extent we've all wanted to talk about how important some experiences of old painting have been for us—Tom with his reflections on Picasso, David on the Rauschenberg combines, and I'm following them down their path because my presentation could be called something like, "What Matisse Means to Me." And it's a bit of an autobiographical story, a retrospect on myself, which starts in the middle of things with the essay I wrote for the book *Vitamin P* a number of years ago. As a lot of you probably know, that book was a sort of survey or overview of new painting from around the world, focusing mainly on the work of artist who had emerged in the '90s, with only a few particularly influential figures included who were just a bit older. My essay, "Painting in the Interrogative Mode," was a particularly important effort for me—it was really an attempt to synthesize my thinking about the situation of current painting over the preceding decade or so, a way of bringing together

ideas that had been developed over the course of writing a great many essays and reviews on individual artists or very specific trends or groupings, but which I had never had an opportunity to bring together into an overview or synthesis.

In the *Vitamin P* essay, I felt like I'd come to a pretty good provisional formalist account of the situation of painting circa 2000. It seemed to succeed in demoting the distinction between abstract and representational, which seemed to me at the time to be necessary for any adequate account of contemporary painting, which for me meant, essentially, painting since Richter but also since Alex Katz. Because I had come to an appreciation of painting primarily through abstraction—my first loves as a teenager were Jackson Pollock and Mark Rothko whose work I first saw on a high school field trip to the Museum of Modern Art in New York—this was essentially, and I don't think paradoxically, a question of derogating all the high modernist claims, such as can easily be found in the writings not only of critics like Clement Greenberg but also of artists such as Ad Reinhardt, that abstraction reveals the essence of art—the idea, as I paraphrased it then,

*abstract art was supposed to lay bare the structures underlying all art—formal structures, to be sure, but more importantly, what might be called structures of desire. Abstract painting made manifest the desire for painting in as general and as “naked” a form as possible. In so doing it revealed that all painting worthy of the name had already been essentially abstract, though unconsciously so. We are used to hearing that Modernism—the period from Impressionism through abstraction to Conceptual Art—was imbued with the idea of progress. If abstract painting represented a kind of progress, it was essentially in the form of consciousness—but consciousness of something that was always inherent in painting. Thus, Clement Greenberg, the theoretician of Abstract Expressionism, once noted that “one tends to see what is in an Old Master before seeing it as a picture,” universal painting.” whereas “one sees a Modernist painting as a picture first.” But what starts out as a simple descriptive difference turns out, with Greenberg’s next move, to be something more: The Modernist way of seeing, he says, “is, of course, the best way of seeing any kind of picture, Old Master or Modernist.” In other words, Modernism took what was already implicit in classical painting and made it explicit, that is, brought it to a more articulate point of self-consciousness. An even more aggressive version of this position was taken by Ad Reinhardt, for instance, who asserted that abstract painting, such as his own, was “the first truly unmannered and untrammled and unentangled, styleless,*

And yet despite my looking awry at such modernist claims for the “universality” of abstraction, it seemed important to me, and still does, to entertain a certain kind of formalism—the idea that, before anything else, an artwork is concerned with questions of art; not that it cannot take on any sort of subject matter whatsoever, but that it does so for specifically artistic reasons.

My solution was to focus on the rhetorical structure of the artwork: then,

*Contemporary painting retains from its Modernist and Conceptualist background the belief that every artist’s work should stake out a position—that a painting is not only a painting but also the representation of an idea about painting. That is one reason there is so little contradiction now between abstract and representational painting: In both cases, the painting is there not to represent the image; the image exists in order to represent the painting (that is, the painting’s idea of painting). There is something inherently polemical in the nature of contemporary art-making, but not in the sense that it declares other, competing positions invalid. The difference, one might say, is that artistic positions are now themselves received aesthetically more than in terms of some kind of truth-claim—just in the way that Jorge Luis Borges wrote of viewing philosophical systems aesthetically.*

I was particularly taken with my formulation that “the painting is not there to represent the image; the image

exists in order to represent the painting.” This was to make every painting, whether abstract or representational, into a kind of allegory of painting.

Well, the only valid reason, in my view, for attempting to arrive at an overview of this kind is to become self-conscious about one’s suppositions in order to get to know their limits—to criticize them. And in fact, it wasn’t long after I’d written the essay for Vitamin P that I began to realize that I wasn’t entirely satisfied with it as an account of the situation of painting today. Having to some extent codified my thoughts, I could better see their limitations. And the more I looked, the more it began to strike me that there was a great deal of new painting around that seemed to be using images somewhat differently than I’d imagined. I was able to try to get a grip on this problem in 2004 when I was invited to write an essay for a book that was published at the beginning of 2005 by the Saatchi Collection in London. I’ll admit to being a bit embarrassed by the book’s title, *The Triumph of Painting*, but that’s neither here nor there. What was important about the book was that it was a large-scale, fairly international compendium documenting the gathering tendency toward a new approach to the image in painting—something that really could not have been done ten or perhaps even five years before. The work shown in the book was of highly variable quality, and some of the most important painters associated with the new image-based painting are not included in it, but the book still succeeds in showing the mass of work being produced under this new image-regime, if I can put it that

way. Anyway, whatever my qualms about the title of the show, I was pretty well satisfied with the one I came up with for my own essay, “An Art that Eats Its Own Head”—a turn of phrase that perhaps does curiously tortuous things to my idea of modernist self-reference—but what is probably more telling, in this context, is the essay’s subtitle: “Painting in the Age of the Image.”

As I think that subtitle indicates pretty directly, I’d had to change my idea about the role of the image in contemporary painting. Not that I wanted to go back to an old-fashioned representationalist view according to which the painting would, after all, exist in order to represent the image—but still, I was now according the image a certain priority I’d been unable to grant it before. And if the stimulus to this re-examination of the status of the image in painting was a change in the way young painters were working, compared to their immediate predecessors, the theoretical device I hit on to start explaining it to myself was a century old. I found it in the philosophical writings of Henri Bergson, which allowed me to understand a fundamental distinction between representation as it was understood before the invention of photography and the image as we know it today. I was able to articulate this distinction through a comparison between Bergson and Kant: “It has often been said that the invention of photography in the mid-19th century changed the nature of painting by withdrawing from it the task of representation that had so long been at its core, “ I wrote, and by the way I think that phrase about “withdrawing”

must have been an allusion to the same Michael Fried essay that David mentioned. Anyway,

*It has often been said that the invention of photography in the mid-19th century changed the nature of painting by withdrawing from it the task of representation that had so long been at its core, thereby enabling the emergence, in the early 20th century, of a fully abstract art. The initial plausibility of this story, however, should not disguise its falseness. Any mediocre painter of the 19th century could depict a person, object, or landscape with greater accuracy and vividness than a photograph. (If nothing else, the painter could show the color of things, hardly a negligible dimension of visual experience.) The real attraction of the photograph—beyond simple economics: a photographic portrait cost a lot less than one in oils—lay not in its capacity for iconic representation but rather in what has been called its indexical quality, that is, the apparent causal connection between object and its image. The image comes from what it shows, a sort of relic.*

*Far from irrational, there may be an important truth lurking in this notion of the image as a detachable constituent of the reality it pictures. In any case, it finds an echo not only in the transformation of art since the advent of photography but even in philosophy. In the late 18th century, Immanuel Kant taught that we can know, not things in themselves, but rather phenomena,*

*appearances. The “thing in itself” is something whose existence can only be intellectually deduced. The perceiving mind, on this view, is something like an idea of a portrait painter. The subject of the portrait, the sitter, is over there; the painter with his brushes, palette, and easel is over here. There is no direct contact between the two of them. Instead, the painter constructs a set of appearances on the canvas that somehow corresponds to the features of the sitter. At the end of the 19th century, after the invention of the camera, a different idea of perception became plausible. Henri Bergson declared that what we are acquainted with the world not through mere appearances that are somehow different in kind from things in themselves, but through what he called, precisely, “images,” which are part and parcel of the real. The mind, for Bergson, is less like a painter than it is like a camera, its sampled images not fundamentally other but simply quantitatively more limited than the “aggregate of ‘images’” that is reality. Our perceptual apparatus is, one might say, touched by the thing it perceives as the photographic plate or film is touched by the light that comes from the object.*

Is it problematic that I used a century-old philosophical idea to explicate a change in the practice of painting that seemed to me rather recent? I don't think so, because while Bergson had articulated his philosophy around the turn of the last century, it had been ignored for a long time and only recently begun to acquire new currency again. I myself had

studied philosophy as an undergraduate and the name of Bergson had never been spoken during the four years of my college education. When I did my brief and unconsummated graduate studies in literature, my reading was dominated by the then rather new approaches of what came to be known as “French theory.” Here too, despite the fact that some of the authors whom I was reading so assiduously might be considered Bergson’s successors, his name remained little more than a very distant echo. No one I knew read Bergson. He was, to all appearances, a dead letter.

So when Gilles Deleuze’s book *Bergsonism* was published in an English translation in 1988, what registered was not that this was a belated emergence in English of a book that was already twenty years old. If anything, it seemed further evidence of Deleuze’s conspicuous eccentricity, his bravura ability to turn the strangest things to account. Little did I realize that within a decade Deleuze’s interest in Bergson would spread. When I arrived in London in 2001, I began teaching in the critical studies section of the undergraduate fine arts course at Goldsmiths College, and one of my duties there was supervise the final thesis projects of a certain number of the students. These projects were meant to bridge the theoretical interests they might have developed while studying at Goldsmiths with the studio practice they had developed there, and I was rather taken aback to discover that a number of them were calling upon the writings of Bergson as part of their theoretical armature. So it was really in order to catch up with my students that

I began reading Bergson. Perhaps it is for this reason—because he is a philosopher who only came to me by way of people younger than myself, rather than from my elders—that it still seems perfectly reasonable to me to use his writings as a way into the work of artists who are younger than me as well.

At around the same time as I was writing the essay for the Saatchi book, I was asked by Statens Museum for Kunst, the National Museum of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, to write an essay for a book on eight major Matisse paintings in their collections—eight writers, each contributing a close reading of a single painting. Mine was the great *Portrait of Mme Matisse* from 1905—*The Green Line*, as it’s better known. In preparation for my visit to Copenhagen to spend some time in front of the painting itself, I naturally began to look up some of the commentary that had already been written on the painting, and of course the first book I turned to was Pierre Schneider’s magnum opus—to my mind an inexhaustible work, though certainly exhausting as well, something unique in the literature of art. What struck my eye right away with the force of a revelation was the fact that Schneider approaches the painting by using the same dichotomy that had been so useful to me in writing about the new painting being shown by the Saatchi Gallery, the dichotomy between representation and image. According to Schneider, “‘The Green Line’ is serene because Matisse accepts the substitution of the image for representation. Representation looks back to something, recalls a model; an image invents a presence.” He also says,

“To construct through color is to make an image; to destroy through color is to undo representation.” Schneider attributes his special sense of the word “image” to Kandinsky, who used it in this way in describing the art of Cézanne but who added, “The same intention actuates the work of one of the greatest of the young Frenchmen, Henri Matisse. He paints ‘images’ and in the ‘images’ endeavors to reproduce the divine.”

But for all the confirmation I felt in seeing Schneider use the same terminology I had resorted to, I could also see that there was a discrepancy. Because while I had not tried to define the term “image” in any strict fashion, what seemed important to me was that it was in some way a trace of a perception, the imprint, as it were, of a sensation. And for this reason I could not accept the way Schneider’s notion of “image” seemed to be pushed in the direction of a sort of abstraction or, perhaps it would be better to say, of formalism, as when he specifies that “An image functions only insofar as it is an artifact, an object that does not deny its nature as canvas covered with colors assembled in a certain order.” This didn’t seem right, despite the fact that Schneider’s formalist bias was shared by many others among Matisse’s best critics, from Clement Greenberg to Yve-Alain Bois. (It’s not irrelevant that in his essay “Painting as Model” Bois specifically takes up Hubert Damisch’s critique of the concept of image and of what Jean-Paul Sartre called “the imaging attitude.”) Aside from the fact that in this Schneider was not in accord with my reading of either the Bergsonian sense of

the image or the sense of the image in contemporary painting, his idea of image seemed at odds with things that Matisse himself often said, from the 1908 “Notes of a Painter” onward. Matisse’s sense of image does not erase the connection to a prior reality, but it reconfigures that connection, and in a certain sense even makes it stronger, because indexical. In any case, Matisse always emphasized the importance of the presence of the model. Even at the end of his life, by which time his art had arguably become much more abstract than it could ever have been in 1905 when he painted *The Green Line*, he would affirm that “The driving force that leads me throughout the execution of a portrait depends on the initial shock of contemplating a face.” Thus the reason why, as Matisse once put it in a letter, “One should not work with elements from nature which have not been subject to feeling”; in such a case that force of shock would be lacking. The portrait would be the record of this striking, almost violent perceptual experience, and not only the portrait, though perhaps exceptionally so: “The almost unconscious transcription of the meaning of the model is the initial act of every work of art.” I found that I could only write about *The Green Line* by seeing it in relation to its revelation of “the essential character” the artist had glimpsed in the presence of his wife, the subject of the portrait.

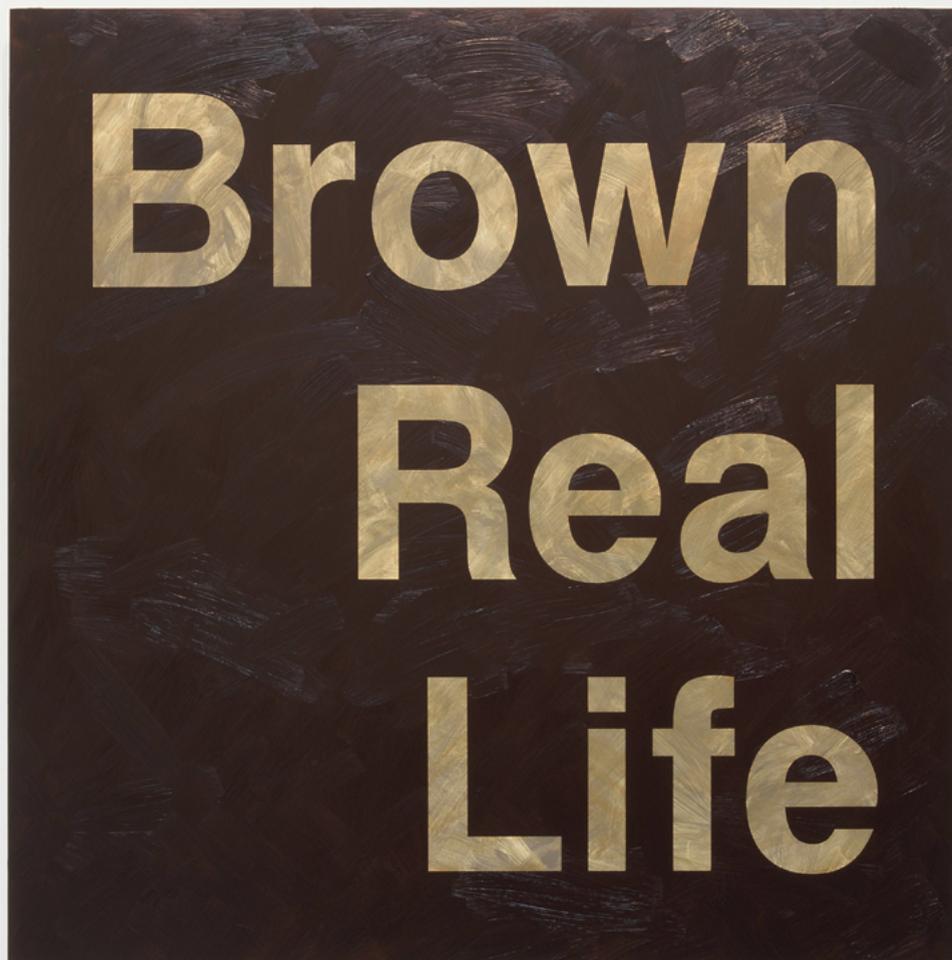
Painting is irrevocably linked to perception for Matisse and this is because “To see is itself a creative operation, which requires effort.” Art, in this view, is not other than but more than perception, just as perception is not other than but simply less than its object. For Matisse, the effort

of perception involved a certain kind of distillation: “Everything that we see in our daily life is more or less distorted by acquired habits, and this is perhaps more evident in an age like ours when cinema posters and magazines present us every day with a flood of ready-made images which are to the eye what prejudices are to the mind.” The main difference between today’s painters and Matisse is their feeling about these ready-made images; for many contemporary artists, such images are not what need to be cleared away in order to see other things more clearly, but on the contrary, they are precisely what need to be seen more clearly. This is why I wrote in the Saatchi book of today’s painters as working “in the age of the image.” But Matisse already had a glimpse of it. Speaking of the landscape around Collioure, where he often painted in the Fauve days, Matisse told Ernst Goldschmidt, “There were more paintings in what I was seeing than in what I was painting.” He saw the reality of the perceptible world as an image reality. The world is already full of images and the point is to succeed in transcribing or as it may be, translating them onto canvas. Likewise, a few years ago, the painter Gary Hume, who often works with images from the media—those cinema posters and magazines that horrified Matisse—told me “Everything’s found. I recognize it as my painting and then I paint it.” How close the two of them are, in using the images that come to them as the source of their own paintings, and I would also add that I don’t think they’re so different from Frank Stella saying that the paint has to be as good on the canvas as it was in the can. In each case, there is the sense

that the painting already somehow exists out there in the world. For Matisse it was in nature. For Stella it was in the industrial materials he used to make his paintings, and for Gary Hume and a lot of other painters today it’s in the image reality that surrounds us. But in any case, the painting is part and parcel of reality, which in Bergson’s terms, the aggregate of images.

The inflection toward formalism that we find in Schneider, as in Greenberg or Bois responds to one important strand in Matisse’s art and thereby helps us see how artists like Ellsworth Kelly or Barnett Newman might have been influenced by him, but they leave us at a loss to understand why today, when image-based painting is in the ascendance, Matisse remains by far the most influential modernist painter. In order to understand his connection with painters like Hume or any of the other outstanding contemporary painters of the image, we will have to turn again see how Matisse was a painter of the “paintings in what I was seeing.” They are not practitioners of traditional representation, nor of Pop art (even when using media images), nor are they expressionists, despite their work’s typically loose and spontaneous facture. They’re something different, and this something, whatever one might call it, finds a progenitor in Matisse more than in any other modernist painter. And we might even see how contemporary abstract painting, which is intertwined with sensations from the image-world in different ways than some of its predecessors, is likewise in accord with Matisse’s sense of the image, which was so

influenced by Bergson's. The Bergsonian image, after all, is not necessarily a whole "picture" but any simple or complex sensation, so that the pictorial elements—the colors, shapes, and textures of which an abstract painting might be composed—are also already images. In a sense, I've turned Greenberg upside down or inside out: It's not that even a classical painting is already abstract, or already to be seen as abstract, but on the contrary, even an abstract painting is already image, or to be seen as image.





**Round Table:**  
Ross Sinclair,  
Tom Lawson,  
Barry Schwabsky,  
David Batchelor  
**Chair: John Calcutt**

**John Calcutt:** Ok. Welcome back to perhaps the most important part of the day, we're going to open up to discussion immediately. And if you could ask questions through microphone please and as much as possible if you can try and keep the questions focused upon what the speakers have individually been dealing with.

**Question:** This may be slightly old fashioned, but in terms of the question that came up earlier in the discussions with Francis and Ross, and the idea of amateur works and the idea of bringing in everyday the way Rauschenberg does and in the context of opening up different mediums and not thinking specifically in terms of painting<sup>1</sup>. How do you think you begin and do we even need to bother addressing the issue of quality?

**David Batchelor:** Is that addressed to anyone in particular?

**Question:** No, no it's not.

**David Batchelor:** I don't mind trying to say something, not I mean it's a good question and every artist is concerned that the work's got to be good enough to leave the studio. How you measure that it is very hard to say. And it's interesting what was said at the end of Ross talk about amateurism in his work, which was said about his work rather than by him, I try to change the materials I work with fairly regularly so that you don't become too slick, painting bottles or something, you've gotta keep learning apart from anything else, and I've always tried to, you know, in a way

to reinvent the work, at least the material fabric of the work fairly regularly, while at the same time trying to keep some sense of subject which holds it together. But how do you judge if it's any good? I don't know. I mean my answer to that is a very practical one, in that if you come back the next day and it doesn't embarrass you then it might be ok. And if you come back the day after and it still makes you think a bit then maybe it's got something going for it. I don't know how else... It's got to keep me interested. That would be the first condition I would say at least.

**Barry Schwabsky:** I think that any quality that you can name can be good or it can be boring, but to some extent, that sort of positional, if you know what I mean, if everything around you seems very professional, then that starts to get boring and then maybe something being amateur seems really good. If everything looks amateur, then maybe something which is really slick and professional might start to look good to you. Then, you know that's, that's kind of on one phase of evaluation. Then, then there is a kind of when you've gone through a cycle like that a few times you begin to realise well, maybe there's more to it than that and then you step back and you start trying to sift out other kinds of qualities. But I think in terms of the more direct part of your question about amateurism, to kind of make that a positive quality doesn't on the face of it seem to say, 'oh well, then there's no more judgement of quality'.

<sup>1</sup> The reference here is to Moira Jeffrey's article on Glasgow International, 'Portrait of a Rock Star as artist', The Herald (April 21, 2006) which unfavourably referred to Sinclair as an 'amateur painter'.

**Thomas Lawson:** I think also something happens as that is the longer in terms of years that you're working with something the more you become concerned about the issues of how it's put together. Not exactly the quality thing because I think Barry's right that the context often dictates how you approach something I don't, but I'm certainly much more conscious of sort of working out and thinking through how something is put together than I was when I was when I was a mere slip of a lad like Ross for instance. [Laughter]

**Ross Sinclair:** Well I mean I was just gonna say that I mean I quite consciously actually celebrated the idea of the amateur in quite a lot of my work over the years. And in a sense, I think tried to claim that as something quite positive. But often perhaps contextualise that within a sort of working process where it's not simply the production of something amateurish but maybe in a broader sense the work takes in, in terms of an engagement with an audience, that idea that they're witnessing to some degree a kind of example, let's say of one person or one individual sort of going through a certain route or a certain, you know, interacting with a certain group of situations or whatever, so it's in there, but it's quite self consciously modulated maybe. But maybe that stands for something that has the possibility of a more intimate connection with an audience, I found in some works. Not particularly I think with this but...

**TL:** Wouldn't you say it's all about 'accessibility' in a way, I mean by laying

yourself open to 'here I am making this in front of you' kind of thing, you're inviting the public into the process?

**RS:** Yeah, definitely, in terms of the sort of dialogue which I know I, I'm always kind of interested in, it's definitely on levels of entry into things... and also I like the idea that it can be something that's not mediated by or less mediated perhaps than kinds of languages maybe aesthetic languages, maybe actual languages, whatever, it could be more of an easy connection.

**DB:** I've got an example of the problem of getting too good at something which is really just sad for me because it was seeing one of the William Kentridge films yesterday. Now again I love that work, that body of work is fantastic you know, but the recent film, the single screen projection, the drawing on that now was so unbelievably professional in a way, that somehow I thought the work lost something. It made me really nostalgic about those quite early collage-based animations Kentridge made... It's too good.

**RS:** I mean that is interesting. That whole body of work often is so interesting because there's a feeling I think, it's not so much the amateur thing, but there's a feeling of here's somebody who normally does this, doing this. And it's really quite interesting because it's informed by a whole different kind of raft of experience but channelled into another kind of medium that, in fact, reinvigorates it and explores something in it that maybe those who are more used to working in that way have kind of lost sight of.

JC: I think, as I understand it, one of the things that interested Francis McKee in framing the discussion today was this sense that in a post-media age, if we are in such, it's painting that's maintained its medium-specific demands; so it doesn't seem to be problematic for an artist to make a video, for example, whereas to move into painting, if that's not what they normally do, seems to be somehow more difficult to deal with. I just wondered in terms of this idea of accessibility, again, that it is with some idea of a sense of a confidence the audience might have in terms of what they think the artist is doing in relation to painting. I don't know if that's the case or not and I suppose one can never tell.

Question: I can't remember which one of you said it, but you were saying that when you go to [Art] school, you start off as a painter and then you go on to something else. Do you ever find it's the other way around, like people start off as a sculptor and go into painting? Can you talk about that?

DB: That's never happened in the history of western art. [Laughter] I know of many, many people, myself included, from my generation at least, I can't speak beyond that, for whom painting, and drawing obviously, was what you did and somehow you stumbled out doing something else. As for the reverse, I don't know.

BS: I have a story about that actually because my wife is an artist and she went to college actually not for art, but she studied economics and philosophy and then after working in the real world for a

number of years she realised she couldn't bear that and she started making art and she went to art school and got an MFA. And she studied performance and video and she got her degree in that and she never learned anything about painting. And from performance and video she got into making sculpture and that's when I met her, when she was making sculpture and then, eventually, she started to make some paintings. And I thought I would help her out because she was very busy and so I started stretching canvases for her and she was very happy about that and one day I said to her, well do you want me to gesso the canvases for you? And she said: 'Oh no, I, I like to gesso them myself because it helps me get in touch with the canvas.' I thought, oh god, you know, they become mystics just by using the materials, they don't even have to be taught it. So anyway but that's one who went the other way.

RS: And I can probably say in a sense with this project of mine I've kind of done that to a certain extent. Not coming out of a painting tradition and, in fact, always working in an extremely wide range of formal kind of media. To such an extent that actually, over the last few months, it's been an extreme relief to say to taxi drivers when they say: 'Oh, so what do you mate, eh?' 'Eh, I'm an artist.' 'Oh what's, what do you do then?' 'Well it's kind of big scale installations. And sometimes I'm performing and sometimes I do music in them as well.' 'What!?' But this time I can say: 'Oh, painting. I'm doing a painting show.' 'Painter, yeah?' So that was kind of different.

JC: As I was saying earlier, it does seem me its kind of interesting or it's

quite difficult, it seems to me, to talk about painting without somehow its kind of history and position coming in tow. But I don't know whether it's possible to answer this Ross but whether in that sense when you are working on those pieces, do you feel a kind of responsibility to painting in the abstract, in the general?

RS: Not responsibility, but I mean a definite attempt to try to better understand the immense power and force of the kind of canon of works which, interestingly, everyone has broadly been kind of touching on today. And I suppose in general and in my own work perhaps as I mentioned earlier, as youthful desires to change the world change into middle aged spread or something, a sort of reappraisal for me of well here's a strategy that I've been trying for a decade or two decades or whatever and I'd really like to think about could another way to do it [exist] that could be much simpler or, or just different to look at the properties and in that sense, the I mean there is incredible allure to the works mentioned, you know broadly speaking circa late 50s or whatever, into the 60s where, I mean, for me, the certainty and the confidence and the sheer thinking knowing-your-rightness of them all at that point is in a sense again a sort of broadly discussed, you could say after that point, it's the sort of squelching sideways a bit and it's the no longer linear progressing, it's everything bubbling up in a big sort of cloud rather than in any kind of line. So in a sense, going back to just before the cloud and at the end of the road sort of thing and seeing what the shape of that was somehow and to see at that moment when those things changed

of like probably say a hundred years of modernism into something else and where nothing was so certain again. So I don't know that's sort of a bit of a rambling reply.

BS: Here's my question for you... In order for it to be a good work of art, does it have to be a good painting? Or can it be good work without having to be good painting?

RS: It's a good question. I think in terms of the painting part of that, perhaps I can't answer that. For the other part of it, I think it can have a certain,... it can do quite a lot of the things I hoped it would do, but as to the other part, the good painting part, that's more difficult, I don't really have an answer for that yet maybe.

TL: I want to actually get back to three questions ago or something, but continue answering off all of them. Because I think that the majority of art students as they come into art school do think of painting as being their primary activity, I mean there's always gonna be some who have a three-dimensional imagination, but the majority of them think of painting. And then what happens at art school is that their eyes are opened to this history, certainly since the 60s, of a visual culture and an art practice that puts a great deal of pressure on that idea of painting as central and, you know, they kind of see a history develop of all these sort of gestural activities aimed at reframing the argument, pointing to different possibilities, opening up the field, all that kind of stuff. And of course, that gets much more interesting so you begin making other kinds of art work. Once you're doing that, then I

think it's possible to make fairly sort of abrupt, non-complex paintings as gestural statement in terms of its larger argument about what art is. And those paintings can be good enough to make the point, so that would be 'good paintings'. And that's sufficient as long as you're interested in having that argument about the broader field of art, but then what I find is that after a time, you're no longer interested in that gestural statement and you develop a more coherent and complex body of work or see someone do that. Then the danger oddly enough is something that you [DB] pointed to where you become too craft-oriented or something and lose touch with the live wire that animated it so I mean it's a tremendously complicated thing. I'm in a bit of jet-lag fog, I think it was in *The Guardian* or *The Independent* review two days ago, about Werner Herzog shooting a film [Rescue Dawn, 2006] on the Thai border and he's been financed by Hollywood who have provided him with a full on Hollywood staff and he and his small cadre of film-makers, who he has always worked with, are at war with this huge group of Hollywood specialists. He's doing a fictional version of a film he's already made – a documentary - and he just wanted to keep the truth and kind of 'in-the-moment' really and the Hollywood guys well just can't deal with the fact that he's not willing to have big explosions and frame it that way, and so it was a real example of that tension between high craft and idea.

DB: Which is also a tension which animates the whole idea of modern art...

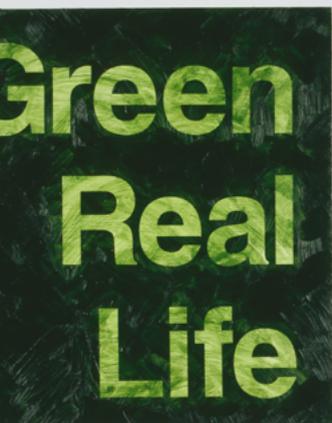
TL: Yeah.

DB: ... Academic skills and sort of virtuoso technique to no obvious end at all other than to show off its own virtuosity. I mean that's Manet and everything. And, in a way, somehow, in some strange form I think it is still with us.

BS: When you bring up the Hollywood thing it also brings up the economic aspects as well, and, you know, what you might have to kind of trade in to get certain kinds of means, you know, at your disposal. And that maybe is a way for me to segue to something that I wanted to ask about is a generalisation that we haven't talked about and I was wondering whether it had come up and in this whole question about what the relation of the market is to painting or painting is to the art market. I mean can we sort of generalise and say that there is kind of two there's two economic structures, more or less, in the art world that are complimentary but are semi-distinguished, there is a market economic structure and the institutional structure; if you make installations you're working for the institutional economical structure, and if you make paintings you're working for the market economic structure - if you have any economic structure at all, which most artist don't, then you have a teaching job. What do we think about that I guess is what I want to know? Does it mean anything?

TL: Well it does mean something and also its complex and contradictory because those two structures tend to have different meanings.

BS: But they always meet eventually.



Green  
Real  
Life



TL: They meet but in some ways it can be difficult. I mean certain bodies of work get misunderstood because they're thought to belong to one system when in fact they are the other somehow, or not seen as part of something it is.

JC: It is complicated but I was thinking when Ross was showing work from Real Life, the market stall piece, I was thinking about this question which has run through the day to an extent, about the studio and the gallery and the museum, and the way in which certainly I suppose, traditionally, historically the museum has tended to encourage a particular form of contemplation-relationship with the work which is somehow at times transcendent, whatever, but is always I guess fighting against those other kinds of experiences everyday. I'm thinking about an essay by Homi Bhaba where he makes the distinction between aura and the agora of the market place, the work having to negotiate those two incommensurable pulls upon it.

Question: Can I ask a question? I would like to make a comment, I would like to congratulate David on acknowledging the contribution of women in the field and making direct reference to two of them, so thank you. And what I'm about to say circles back to the argument of mastery and whether having mastery maybe means of perhaps a quite limited practice I guess and that's also in reference that he said this morning about the constraints of the studio and what's implied by working in the studio. Without being too general little girls you know how to sit down and be good and that's partly by their nature and partly by their nurture and

boys have and some girls have a tendency to learn better kinesthetically through their cognitive set-up, also hormonally, and through their socialisation as well. Some boys and girls though, aren't that good at sitting still and they need to move and be better prepared with tactile things and they learn with their body and they interpret and understand the world by their lived experience, rather than what's said through a book or by a teacher. Now, these people are a little bit different because they're in the minority, or they're not in the majority, and these days it's been problematized through to A.D.D.. But that sort of artist, that sort of person may grow up to be an artist and they may not be able to settle into a small studio space or to a studio practice and may be better making interactive or civic art that invites people through their lived experience to understand and to learn and to grow up and in that way one might change the world, not through a single brush stroke, but through someone else's single brush stroke when they have been inviting to participate in the art making experience, or though they might not understand religious experience but understand they might understand the lived experience of spirituality through singing a song. And yeah sure, I mean I think of my work on the walls and they might be taken seriously but, and I can paint but I'm not sure whether that's the only way to be accepted and the only way to be running with the big boys, cos we're a long time dead, I guess. And I don't know if you need to be a master painter to have mastery of art practice.

RS: I mean I think generally to just respond to that I mean when I, when I

talk to the students that I work with, one of the things that sometimes I try to discuss with them is that I feel that one of the I mean in a sense it's just generally speaking, being an artist is generally quite a tough sort of gig and you know for everybody at any level anywhere, and you know nobody asks you to be an artist, nobody particularly wants you to be an artist and everyday you have to get up and sort of make that decision again, particularly if you use kind of different medium and maybe don't have that you know, mastery of one particular thing where you just go back to that again and again. And I think that you know the incredibly exciting thing about being a visual artist, I feel personally, is that one can access all manner of different formal media, and yeah you could say 'jack of all trades master of none' - and I'd probably hold my hands up for that to a certain extent - but the fact that you can use two dimensional things, painting three dimensional sculpture, work with spaces, use sound, light, all these things are in, available in the talent let's say, and it just seems to me there are, there isn't really another kind of contemporary medium you know even theatre whatever, where that sort of that possibilities are available to somebody to, you know express themselves most broadly. So, you know I think that's, you know it's tough every morning you have to get up and invent it all again, but you know, there's the level of freedom there I think potentially also where you know all this stuff is out there and I think it's extremely important that artists keep being artists because it seems to me in the contemporary world today let's face it, the idea of one voice having something to contribute is incredibly valuable. And you know to

keep that at as a sort of cherished thing I think is very important. I'm just kind of responding really to what you're saying.

**Question:** Yeah sorry it's on a completely different subject but it's really if you could talk about good painting made me think of Animal Farm or something like that, but I was wondering if each of the panel could in less than 50 words give an example of a good painting and why?

**DB:** I'd like to convert that into my favourite painting. I don't know I mean that, again one of the, one of the things that keeps me artist is so rich and so complex a subject, that you can keep coming back and there's nothing in the world, apart from some private things and music perhaps, that I've found I can go back to every day of my life and found out something new from it, even if I'm looking at the same thing. I mean last week I saw a Zurbarán still life, absolutely blew me away<sup>2</sup>. It's four or five simple jars on a shelf with a blank background. There's almost nothing there, and yet, actually to quote, oddly, Greenberg 'there's a world of experience in there'. And I couldn't actually say how that was the case, but I know that it was the case. And because you can't actually explain it to yourself, that's why you do get up in the morning, as Ross was saying and start it all over again the next day. A Zurbarán still life for me, but that's just today.

**JC:** I know in my case it's almost as if you don't have one particular consistent set of values. I mean there are certain works for example I mean, in my case,

that I like, but I don't think are very good and there are other ones I think are good, but I don't particularly like. We were just talking, as it turns out, about Jasper Johns. I think Jasper Johns is good, but I don't particularly like. Well maybe then it's in part just to do with this question of quality, where quality resides. Are we looking broadly at some kind of intellectual quality of some kind of sensual aesthetic quality. One of the things that I suppose we were saying about Johns is I can appreciate what I think is happening in those paintings but there is something about it which is a bit somehow programmatic - it's a bit painting by numbers, or as David was saying, it's kind of painting for art historians.

**TL:** It's such a complex question because you keep seeing different things. There's a painting by Laura Owens, it's a large painting, bisected by a tree branch in winter. And on the ground there are spring flowers, in the tree there's an owl, in the background there's a monkey and there are some other sort of displaced objects all around it<sup>3</sup>. The painting looks very casual, it's done in oils and enamel paints. It has this tremendously spontaneous, childlike feeling to it. It's actually very, very heavily worked and considered and altered; there's a whole series of studies that lead up to it, which when you see, you realise how complex it is. I think any favourite painting or any good painting, or any good work of art has this sort of complex layering of strategies of thinking about what is going on in the work before it gets finished and then the finished product elicits a similar series of complex responses in return.

**BS:** I should also admit, this is not like my favourite painting or anything, the question about is good painting good art that I asked, actually goes back to a conversation I had with an art historian/art theorist called Thierry De Duve and it was about the painting *Tu m'* by Duchamp; he said that it was a bad painting, but a great work...

**TL:** ... I just saw it on Saturday and he's right. It's a terrible painting.

**BS:** ... And I said, I don't know if I can accept that. If it's a great art work and it's a painting, then somehow or other, it must be a good painting too, even though I may not be able to see why. So I don't know about that, you know, you're probably right really...

**DB:** He is.

**BS:** ... But I can't quite fathom it in my mind. If the same thing is a painting and an art work, then if it's good as one then I was it to be good as the other. If it's bad as one, I want it to be bad as the other. But maybe I can't have it that way... My favourite painting is definitely *Jupiter and Io* by Correggio in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna and I think it's because really I'm very, very interested in physical, sensual pleasure and to me that's the painting that captures what that is about in its most ungraspable essence<sup>4</sup>. Because you know if you know the painting, you know the subject, you know that's it's a painting about a woman who's having sex with a cloud and so she's kind of having this incredible orgasm or, but you can't

see what's giving her that feeling but the painting kind of makes you feel like you know why she's having the feeling, even though you can't see what that is. And so it kind of turns physicality inside out in a very moving way.

**JC:** I think part of the difficulty with the question is that there's a Tom Stoppard play, I think it might be called *Professional Foul*, where there's a philosopher talking to his wife and it's something like... He says: 'Good day Mary. How are you?' And she says: 'Good'. And he says: 'You're a good woman, and you're a good cook.' Good means so many different things that it's very difficult to argue.

**Question:** I was wondering, really thinking about your paintings Ross, how you were saying that in oil painting it never felt the sublime for yourself and also when you were sort of making work sort of churches and coming from that sort of atheist background. And I think I was wondering where you feel the sort of importance or power lies in those works when you are accessing things which you don't personally subscribe to and what room is left in making works like that for aesthetics?

<sup>2</sup> Francisco de Zurbarán (1598-1664), *Still Life with Pottery Jars*. Oil on Canvas; 46 x 84 cm; Museo del Prado, Madrid.

<sup>3</sup> Laura Owens, *Untitled*, 2004. Oil and acrylic on linen 11' x 9'3". 335 x 282 cm.

<sup>4</sup> Antonio Allegri Correggio (1489-1534), *Jupiter and Io* (1531-32). Oil on canvas, 163.5 x 70.5 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

RS: Well to respond to the first part, I mean the very reason that I don't believe in God, let's say, is the very reason that I want to kind of try to find out where that power resides in the formal accumulation of things like hymns, for example. These words in relation to the melody or whatever that are so powerful formally that they could almost induce me to have faith but the intellect is always too strong. But nevertheless, I can see that they're so powerful that I really want to explore and find out and almost try to be converted, let's say, or to expose myself as much as possible. And really when I'm, for example in these works, when I'm singing these songs let's say or making a video when I'm singing these songs, I mean it's not like a show or an act or something, I've really kind of spent a long time, you know, researching and looking at it, and learning them and reading them and immersing myself in it quite truly. I'm not kind of kidding on, it's not ironic, let's say, which is often what some people sort of throw at me. And, also I would say similarly with this show it's not ironic, from my perspective anyway. In terms of aesthetics, I don't know, I mean I suppose basically I come from a tradition of work which is ideas driven as was discussed a moment ago, I think Tom touched on it, so I tend to, you know, try to find the tools in the tool box that best..., they can allow me to you know build whatever it is I want to try to construct. And with the idea of the sublime as well, maybe it's not that I don't, I don't accept it or don't like it or anything, I just, I feel kind of personally at a kind of loss because I..., I don't get it, I don't feel it. I mean a couple of years ago, I went to the Rothko Chapel in Houston and I was really kind of open to be really

moved and everything, and I just kind of wasn't really. And I could see it, and I could put all the bits of it together and I could sort of respond to a lot of it, but the magic moment didn't kind of happen, the sort of Road to Damascus moment. And although I haven't really thought about it that much, I mean it could be that that experience actually for me, informed a bit of this, 'cos I've been thinking about this project for a few years, and I have developed it in different ways, I've tried out different things. So I'm not, or I don't want to be dismissive, I feel I'm trying to find it for myself. I'm trying to see where that moment could be, or revelation, or change, but I just always feel that the my mind is, for me anyway too, not too strong, but I can't overcome the kind of mechanics of thinking about it in a way. But maybe that's my loss [mock tears].

Question: I'm not really sure how to ask this question, but I'm wondering if it would be possible to talk a bit about what appears to be the proliferation of representational painting at the moment or the relatively small amount of abstraction being made at the moment, or do you think that's even, now, at the moment, a useful distinction to be making - or a useful thing to talk about?

DB: It's not a distinction I make when I'm looking at a painting or any art. But I know a man who does. I know, for example, someone like Nick Serota, or maybe someone like John Latham, seems to divide the world between figurative painting and abstract painting and everything sort of divides along that fault line. It just doesn't for me because of so

much work which seems indifferent to those divisions. And there doesn't seem to be anything, for me, at stake in that division now, but there clearly was for other generations of critics and artists.

**Question:** If it doesn't for you, when did it stop. Was it because at the certain point it stopped being possible or interesting to make that distinction?

**DB:** I mean I love abstract art, I really do and I'm enormously looking forward to the Kenneth Noland show that's coming up at Tate Liverpool because he's clearly still the most unfashionable artist in the universe I think. And it always feels slightly old fashioned to say that I love abstract art. Very quickly I want to withdraw my Zurbarán thing from before otherwise you'll think I'm just into bottles. Instead I'm going on an Eva Hesse drawing for my 'take home' work for today because there's almost, almost nothing there.

**JC:** Yeah, Barry do you have a response to Louise [Hopkin]'s question?

**BS:** Yeah,... my thought, as I've tried to give an indication before, is I think these days, which is different from what I thought for a long time. You know before I kind of thought more or less like what he said, you know, it doesn't matter anymore, that, you know, there are too many kind of grey areas and hybrids in between and there's no, no divide. And I still think that there's no divide. But I also have come around to the idea that to talk about the distinction between abstract and representation isn't quite

right, because actually representation isn't even it, representation to me belongs to a historical era that's kind of closed. And it means something very different to me to say image, than to say representation. And I think that for a while it did somehow seem important to a lot of people to deal with images, and that's something that I sort of want to try and get to understand better. I don't have, you know, a kind of set position on it, this is kind of project of mine I want to look into. Whereas before I thought that, well, today representational painting is already really abstract anyway. Now I think today, abstract paintings are really already images. So it's sort of switched over.

**TL:** I would add just some sort of local - different locality but local... Amongst the painters who are pretty visible at the moment in Los Angeles, quite a number of them work within an abstract-looking mode which is in fact sort of tightly woven with image and representation and language, and, you know, someone like Monique Prieto switches back and forth, Ingrid Calame looks like abstraction but they're really heavily constructed images. I don't think you can say there's a divide exactly.

**DB:** That does bring up something that I'm often reminded of... Monique Prieto, Ingrid Calame was mentioned, also Linda Besemer and Polly Apfelbaum, a lot of those artists are people working in the States. And there is a curious thing that whereas traditionally abstract art was seen as the preserve of men, it seems very prominently an art engaged in by women, and it has been for the last ten or so years. I don't have any explanation for that at all.

JC: Do, do we have any more questions?

Question: I just wanna pick up on that a little bit, I mean there are probably two, three themes that, you know, at least I have picked up from today from all those presentations that we had. And I think you know take the last one, like when abstraction and representation actually fall together because it was part of, I think you called it, the image reality anyhow. Somehow I feel this is probably the end to something like a struggle which has driven or which was the motor for a lot of discourse going on among artists and in the art world. And then there is another theme, both Ross and Tom mentioned that actually, saying I think something like: 'I use painting as a strategy'. Is there actually all of a sudden a need to have a strategy in order to, well, feel you are allowed to paint?

TL: I think actually my position is I think that was the case, but I'm not so sure it is anymore. That I think we've passed the period of strategizing and entered some other area.

BS: Is the 'we' there a generational 'we' or is there more to 'we'.

TL: Probably generational, but I'm reluctant to speak for a generation. And I certainly can't speak for more than that.

DB: You can't even speak for yourself.  
[Laughter]

RS: I think for me it probably is still a strategy which sounds bad because you've moved on from that [Laughter]. But again, for me it's about some idea of communication, dialogue, engaging and I'm still personally always really thinking about an audience and again, it was touched I'm not sure by whom, the sort of expectations and the ways of entering into works and in a sense, you know, I've, again I'm only speaking for myself, but never taken an easy route formally in terms of making things which would be generally pleasing to people, let's say, to kind of - even as a strategy - to, you know, reel them in a bit you know. So maybe for me it is still somewhere operating on that level. Because I think actually for me everything's a strategy really, because I'm so interested in at least an aspiration to this sort of dialogue, I'm always trying to think around everything, the whole shape of it, maybe too much.

BS: You can't do anything without a device. You can lean to love the device. But it's not a question about painting, really, it's about just doing anything.

JC: Do we have what will probably be the final question?

Question: It's a question concerning a phrase that you used earlier Barry that was a Borges term about the aesthetics of philosophy. And I guess my question is, is there some kind of intellectual evolution and absorption via the information that we all take in general through visual culture and media culture, is there some sort of kind of fusion that really

traditional aesthetic experience of beauty and rapture and sensuousness combining with some sort of aesthetic experience of ideas and philosophies and intellectual concepts that is kind of informing what, if there is such a thing as an avant-garde right now and if that is being played out through painting. Is that idea of some type of new avant-garde relevant to painting and is that idea of the aesthetics of philosophy - I don't know exactly much about - how does that factor in I guess, or maybe could you even just expand on that a bit.

**BS:** Yeah, I don't know. I think there's a couple of parts to what you've asked and I'm not exactly sure how they relate. I mean there is one question about the idea of an avant-garde and I have to say that that's not a concept that I think has a lot of relevance to our current situation, even though I have a great love for much of what was done by the avant-gardes of the time when I can see why it made sense to want to be avant-garde. But I think that our situation is just too different now to kind of share that. Right that's the one part, then the other part is about looking about philosophical students aesthetically vis-à-vis Borges and I guess I'm not sure exactly what your question was about that.

**RS:** Can I just say, I was just thinking as you were asking that it made me think that at first I thought you were just sort of describing quite a straightforward model of modern art, kind of thing, with these two, you know, let's say the formal and the intellectual sort of thing, broadly speaking. But what it made me just think of really when you related it to painting, that I feel it's important that painting

shouldn't simply assume it has a privileged position in that sort of canon anymore. And part, I suppose again for me, part of the reason for doing this show really was to try to test that to see if it could still earn its crust in some way, or could it be a conceptual tool, and you know these are just questions for me obviously that come out of my own practice. But I think that's important to consider, you've got to make it work and whether I do in the show or not is another question, but generally speaking, I think it should be interrogated and tested and not just assumed to do anything really just as it shouldn't be assumed now by sticking it in the white cube then, you know, it makes it art, let's say, or does all the things you're implying.

**BS:** Look, if I go to Venice and I look at the Bellini painting of 'The Virgin and Child' then whatever it is I take from the painting, I don't have to take on board the theology that Bellini was sort of promoting through painting the painting, even though I have a general sense about what that is and I use that as part of my interpretive material, so to speak, but when I have an aesthetic experience with the Bellini painting I'm not having an experience of Catholicism. And when I go to the Museum of Modern Art and look at a Mondrian painting...

**DB:** You don't become an amateur theosophist.

**BS:** ... I become neither a theosophist nor whatever it was that he became maybe later on in his life. And I understand his ideas about the relationship of art and

society and all that, but I don't have to accept them in order to appreciate the paintings even though the more I know about them the more I understand the paintings. And I think the same thing is true when I appreciate the work of a conceptual artist. There are ideas that that person has about what the work is and about why they're doing it, and it's a whole philosophy and ideology that they have around how they've arrived at doing just, whether it's Joseph Kosuth or whoever it is, and my appreciation of the work doesn't entail me taking on board his ideology. Even though the work hardly seems to be made of anything else but that, you know, strangely enough. And I guess that's sort of related to what I mean in my reference to Borges. In the same sense whether Ross' work you wanna see as these paintings here and are they good paintings, or if you wanna see it as a broader project in which the paintings are devices that are just part of the project, in either case somehow I have to come to terms with the in cognisance of his sort of philosophy about why he's doing what he's doing, but somehow the work kind of gets clear of that too I think.

**Question:** It needs you to participate.

**BS:** Well it needs somebody, yeah. Yeah it needs the other person and that's why it needs the public situation that it has.

**JC:** Could I maybe perhaps ask a final question I think it is, is the very long, intense, fascinating day, but there is a question I would like to ask each of the

panel members. If it turns out to be too broad, too vague, too difficult just say so and we'll just finish it there [Laughter], but I suppose my question is, throughout the day you've been thinking about, talking about, considering the, I suppose the testing and the problematizing of painting, and I suppose my question is whether that testing and problematizing has had such a qualitative effect, if you like, that when we speak of painting today we are speaking of something which is kind of different, that is to say that we are talking about painting as a new art?

**TL:** Substitute the word art for painting and I think I can go along. It is difficult to say. On the face of it is absurd to say that painting's a new medium,... so it's a little difficult. But I think it is true that it is now commonplace that everything is up for questioning and examination and interrogation as to why it exists and that's why it should be considered in an art context as in some other. And so within that everything is up for grabs. Therefore older versions of art making which were once thought to be in the past are potentially viable again because they are part of that question.

**DB:** I've got a slightly simple way of answering, or referring to your question not answering it. I think in a way I guess that every time you go to the studio you have to reinvent the medium at some level. And yet the extraordinary thing about painting is that every time you do that you've got 500 years at least of the practice of painting breathing down your neck. And it's a very strange relationship to try and do something which is at one level new and at the other level ludicrously ancient.

RS: That's true,... can I say what my favourite paintings were, I never got to say [laughter]. I was going to slightly cheat actually, I want two; because while I was sort of thinking about this for the last... years actually I sort of imagined this sort of room with two paintings in it - Robert Ryman and Ad Reinhardt - all white and all black. But, of course, the key thing about them which just makes it work is imagining the space between them but, of course, one is neither all white and the other it's, it's not all black but it's in that space that I wanted to place my head, sort of, while I was thinking about all these things.

DB: Bravo.

BS: Bravo.

TL: Thank you all for coming.

JC: I will not attempt to summarize. All I will do is ask you please to join me in thanking our panel: Ross Sinclair, Thomas Lawson, Barry Schwabsky, David Batchelor.

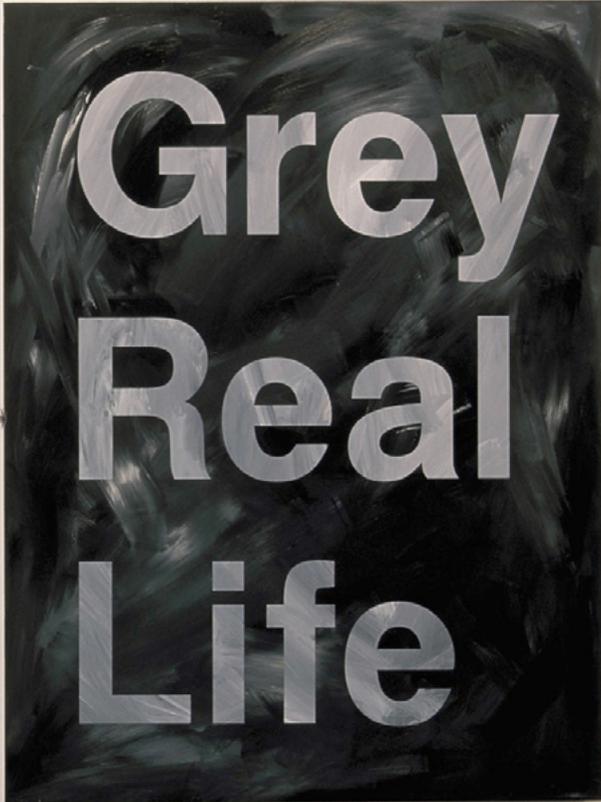
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ROSS SINCLAIR  
REAL LIFE PAINTING SHOW



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Life**

**Red  
Real  
Life**

**Orange  
Real  
Life**

Upstairs for:

CCA:5

CCA:6

CCA:bar

Toilets





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