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MA Drawing

UNIT 3 ESSAY – JULY 2017

Why draw shadows?

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Why draw shadows?

Introduction

The opposites of light and shade have dominated my drawings and paintings for several years and I have recently acknowledged the influence of chance and balance. I have previously put these down to gut feeling and intuition. Exploring why I respond as I do to an image or a process of drawing, led me to consider the work of other artists, amongst them Brad Lochore, who also works with shadows.

Instead of reaching for another book, I decided it would be an interesting experience to bypass intermediaries and talk to him directly.

One afternoon In April, we spent several hours talking, seated in his studio space in Bromley on Bow, in London's East End.

The obvious difference in our work is that he paints shadows and I draw them. I asked him questions that have surfaced in my work: from the starting point of why he paints shadows, to his work process and sources, the role of chance and the quietude within his work. In the course of the interview, other topics emerged, illuminating his thought process and references, some of which were surprising.

The conversation criss-crossed his practice, the art world and art history, with touch points that resonated with my own drawings and it is these touch points I shall be exploring in the following essay.

For me, a shadow is an enigma...it has an element of not being real, you are not able to hold or touch it. The ancient Greeks believed that when we 'pass on' we become shades within the shadow world. We are no longer real. However, the appearance of a shadow is an acknowledgement of the solidity of an object, '**... for what casts a shadow must be real**'. (Gombrich, 1995)¹

Note: *Because the interview is a primary source, I have attached a shortened version – with repetitions edited out – in the Appendix, and will refer to Brad Lochore's answers throughout this Essay.*

1 Gombrich, E. (1995). Shadows. The depiction of cast shadows in western art. London: National Gallery Publications Ltd, p 17

My first question to Lochore was “Why paint Shadows”

Lochore said his love of shadows began in a long-held memory of watching the play of light and shadow generated by leaves on a fine white curtain when he was a small child. He still spends, ‘a lot of pleasurable time staring at light gibbering on water tumbling down a waterfall’, and at ‘shadows dancing on a wall’. (Hall, 2017)²

This, combined with his love of film noir and German Expressionism, led him to discover shadows ‘as metaphors of the self dissolving’, (Hall, 2017)³ and, after observing the shadows made by stretchers piled up against the wall of his studio, the dilemma and ‘immediate intimacy of presence and absence at the same time’. (Hall, 2017)⁴ Shadows, he said, can be a way of ‘being both the subject and the viewer’. (Hall, 2017)⁵ For Lochore, film noir, ‘explores the idea of falsehood, the false self, the self that’s beguiled by out of control desire, of madness, of all the bits of consciousness outside of reason which drive humans to do the things that they do.’ (Hall, 2017)⁶

He is interested in the problem of being seduced and betrayed by the picture and the fact that it’s not real. ‘Therefore, a painting of an apple will never actually ever be an apple. It will always only be a painting of an apple, a picture of it’. (Hall, 2017)⁷

John Berger describes exactly this conundrum in his essay on the place of painting, ‘the function of a painting is to fill an absence with the simulacrum of a presence. Occasionally a portrait hangs in a room where the sitter is still to be found, but this is exceptional and, from the time of the Palaeolithic cave paintings onwards, the main task of painting has been to contradict a law which governs the visible: to make what is not present ‘seen’. (Berger, 1988)⁸

What adds to the illusion of Lochore’s shadow paintings is that they are not ‘real’ shadows. He has created these large sized window or grid paintings by referencing and abstracting window shadows through photography or computer manipulation and then projected them onto a canvas to draw and paint. His cinematic experience and love of film noir can be seen in the drama of the images.

When I ask myself the same initial question, ‘why draw shadows?’ my instant reply would be, ‘because they are beautiful’. Beauty is subjective, of course, and in today’s art world appears to have become a shunned descriptive. It became clear during the course of our conversation that Lochore views the word ‘beauty’ with considerable caution. Within the word ‘beautiful’ lies a multitude of meanings, including the very simple meaning that one can visualise in Lochore’s first memory of watching shadows on a fine white curtain and shadows dancing on the wall. The hypnotic moment, the stillness and quiet, ‘the irreconcilability’ of what he was looking at, ‘the fleetingness’ of it. Lochore’s interest in this irreconcilability and temporality provided his starting point. (Hall, 2017)⁹

2 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lachore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 22

3 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lachore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 21

4 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lachore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 26

5 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lachore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 21

6 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lachore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 21

7 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lachore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 21

8 Berger, J. (1988). The Place of Painting an essay in The White Bird. Hogarth Press.

9 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lachore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 22

His description describes a pause in the rush of the world around us, a focus and an effortless concentration of attention that spans an instant but feels like the world has stopped turning for that moment. An attempt to catch 'something' that is impossible to hold and, because of that, becomes particularly desirous. As an artist, he is utterly beguiled by shadows and uses them as a metaphor, asking himself the question, **"What is a picture?"** (Hall, 2017)¹⁰ His interest in pure visuality outside of language probably stems from being extremely dyslexic. (Hall, 2017)¹¹ As such, he starts at ground zero to explore what is pre-verbal and pre-linguistic and goes on to produce works of pure visuality.

Shadows show the existence of an object on a sunny day or where there is a strong light source. I'm interested in drawing only the shadow, not the object, and by doing so I have effectively made the 'present' object absent whilst at the same time acknowledging its existence through the drawing of the shadow. In other words, I have made it real in its absence, and in this I am using a similar visual language to Lochore's.

Applying this 'removal' to the process of drawing, one creates a sense of slowing, a move into a deeper place where the mind is almost daydreaming whilst being totally immersed in the activity of drawing. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi would describe this as being **'in the flow'**, a state of heightened focus and immersion in activities such as art, play and work. He would say it is a place of oneness or happiness. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2017)¹²

The ambivalence of what is real or not is the beginning of a sense of dislocation in drawing shadows, and I'd like to think a certain teasing of the mind with the logic of the image. Shadows engender a sense of removal and a distance.

In drawing shadows, an artist will inevitably consider light. I only see one because of the other. I only draw the shadows, leaving the light to come out of the darkness of the graphite. The light is the paper and will often bleed into the graphite, or out of it, rather than being contained in the shadow space. Shadow and light each have their space on the surface of the paper and each will balance the other through their mass or intensity.

I have become interested in the way that the intensity of a small amount of white (light) within a large mass of darkness (shadow) can be powerful enough to balance the image and how that small area can be difficult to look at in its intensity. It's also interesting to note that this intense area can appear to be whiter than the surrounding white areas.

Bridget Riley's 'Kiss' is a good example of a picture where the intensity of the small amount of white balances out the mass of the black whilst at the same time engendering the work with **'an interplay between feelings of composure and anxiety'**. (Kudielka, 2017)¹³

10 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lachore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 22

11 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lachore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 21

12 Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2017). Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi / Speaker / TED.com. [online] Ted.com. Available at: https://www.ted.com/speakers/mihaly_csikszentmihalyi (Accessed 4 Jul. 2017).

13 Kudielka, R. (2017). Robert Kudielka on Bridget Riley. Essays and interviews 1972-2003. London: Ridinghouse, p 172.

The process of producing a drawing requires an enormous effort of concentration to bring oneself to a slower pace, applying patience and discipline to the work and by so doing, reaching a place of silence, ultimately leading to stillness. This is reflected physically in the slowing of one's breathing and heart rate. It seems impossible that the quietude reached is not reflected in the work and in some of my works, I am sure it is. But the precariousness of this place and the struggle to reach it and stay there can equally engender a sense of disquiet to a piece, and one hopes that is not a bad thing.

The press release for Lochore's 2011 show at the Baukunst Gallerie in Cologne highlighted this sense of disquiet and suggests that his paintings lead to **'a systematic uncertainty of the perceiving subject: What do I see? Do I see what I see? Do I see what is shown? Is what I see, identical with what is shown?'** (Lochore.com, 2017)¹⁴

In my interview, Lochore expanded on what happens when he focuses on a shadow. The shadow, he said, **'is effectively not the thing you are looking at, it's a kind of remnant of it, you are bypassing a whole part of the brain that needs to be active in language. So, your brain is quiet, certain parts of it have been turned off and not awake.'** (Hall, 2017)¹⁵

The question of what happens within the brain when contemplating shadows turned out to be a major theme of the Lochore interview, going into areas that I have considered in relation to my own work. He recounted the occasion when the BBC commissioned him to produce a painting alongside Anya Hilbert, the Professor of Vision at Newcastle University. She is an expert in forensic brain science and explores the relationship of eye and brain. He talked about producing work where the mind is day dreaming, the brain is quiet, comfortably working through things in the same way as the mind at rest. To Lochore this is where your deepest thinking happens. As Lochore described it, **'looking at the light gibbering on the sea, you do think about things in the grander sense'**. (Hall, 2017)¹⁶ He hopes this 'higher' thinking will feed into the work, whilst at the same time he wishes the work to express and explore quietude.

One of Lochore's favourite artists is Matisse and he cited Matisse talking about his paintings as **'a place where the working man could come home to rest'**. (Hall, 2017)¹⁷ It is an inspiring thought that a painting can give the viewer a moment of respite, a place to rest in today's hurly burly world. I find it fascinating that a painting can be imbued with an element, outside of its visual content, that is waiting to be tapped by a viewer. It sits on the wall waiting for the right person to stand in front of it for a connection to happen, or as Duchamp first argued, waiting for the viewer to bring the work full circle to complete it. (Iversen, 2010)¹⁸ To have work that talks to the space, before the viewer even arrives, to create a unified 'song' and to then give this to the visiting viewer is both a gift and masterful.

As an example of the effect that pictures can have on the viewer, a few years ago I went to a Singer Sargent show at Tate Britain and felt as if I had interrupted a private party. Singer had portrayed his subjects with such power that I had a sense of them stepping out of their frames when the gallery was empty to catch up with old friends, and hopping back into their frames to strike up their poses when a visitor entered the gallery.

14 Lochore.com. (2017). Brad Lochore. [online] Available at: <http://www.lochore.com> [Accessed 4 Jul. 2017].

15 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lachore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 22

16 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lachore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 22

17 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lachore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 22

18 Iversen, m. (2010). Chance. Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Ltd and the MIT press, p.103

Agnes Martin and her work come to mind when thinking of a peaceful place to rest, with her ability to bring a sense of meditation into the gallery space. And, of course, there is Rothko's work for the Rothko Chapel, a non-denominational chapel in Houston Texas, founded by John and Dominique de Menil. The interior is not only a chapel, but a major work of modern art.

Lochore's shadow paintings have a stillness, a quietness to them and he achieves this by his rigorous removal of any impediment that may get in the way of allowing the work 'to be'; or by 'stepping out of his personality to surrender himself to chance and thus removing himself from the work, as David Frankel describes in an article on William Anastasi. (Iversen, 2010)¹⁹

By-passing the Self

Either way, Lochore arrives at his finished work through a process of elimination, a removal of exterior noise. Anything he puts in must stand on its own so that there is nothing in the work that should not be there. The paintings must have their own life and an internal logic that reduces the work to documentary, despite being highly fictional things. As Lochore put it, **'I want it to have almost a documentary quality, there's no fiction in there at all'**. (Hall, 2017)²⁰

His commitment to removing any vestige of himself from his work is similar to the approach of Gerhard Richter with whom Lochore spent some time shortly after leaving art school.

Lochore described the importance of chance in Richter's work process, and how Richter **'was always trying to work his way out of the paintings, so he was the least present he could possibly be in the painting.'** (Hall, 2017)²¹

Lochore emphasized the importance of removing any element of himself, or any sentimentality that may have crept in, even if this leaves him open to being **'accused of making cold work ... well, I don't really think that. I'm happy to have that sense of utter removal'**. (Hall, 2017)²²

This suggests the reason his paintings have a stripped-back, minimal feeling to them. The monochromatic colouring (despite being painted in colour) adds to this. It may be that his interest in and liking for the work of John Cage, Donald Judd, Robert Smithson and Robert Morris has fuelled his ability to bring a quality of minimalism to the work. Despite this, he talks about injecting grace to the austerity in his paintings, to ensure the work does not become too distant. **'I do like a kind of austerity in language that is graceful. I can think of austerity and complexity at the same time.'** (Hall, 2017)²³

19 Iversen, m. (2010). Chance. Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Ltd and the MIT press, p.106

20 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 23

21 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 27

22 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 28

23 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 23

Making a work sing

Lochore's love and interest in music has a clear influence across his work through pattern making and rhythm. He talks about Beethoven and the cohesion of a Bach fugue and the latter's ability, in *The Goldberg Variations*, for example, to take a simple four note theme and create incredibly complex things whilst maintaining the four notes. In his mind, the binding of enormous simplicity with an intense, majestic internal logic brings the two together. He sees no reason why this is not possible to do in painting by plugging into a viewer's pre-existing mode of pattern making and thus grabbing their attention.

In addition, Lochore can opt to 'play' with the visual elements of his painting. In many of his works, he experiments with fragments of windows, creating chaotic, incoherent, grid-like window images that are full of syncopated rhythms put together for us to enjoy. He teases our brains with an image that has echoes of things we know but find difficult to resolve or hold in our minds for long. To a certain extent, it is even difficult to look at the image close up, as it shifts and shimmers before one's eyes. I found myself trying to make the image come into focus. For Lochore, there is a clear enjoyment of puzzle making to keep viewers looking and striving to understand what they see. He says, **'They are nothing more than illusion. So, going back to the question about rhythm making, its rhythm making for a purpose to lead into a query, an enquiry of some sort.'** (Hall, 2017)²⁴

Rauschenberg, in an interview with Dorothy Seckler, talks about the influence of John Cage on his work. In the same way that Lochore uses music and syncopation, they discussed the use of intervals, waiting and silence, and how, in painting this gets translated into open spaces, areas where there is less happening and how these work effectively in relationship to things that are happening very fast in other parts of the canvas, highlighting the importance of interval and openness. (Iversen, 2010)²⁵

The artist Phoebe Unwin also considers the area of a canvas, embracing the pictorial space to make it as powerful as possible through echoes that happen on one side of the picture and are visually repeated on the opposite side, as well as rhythm through repetition of a colour or a form and a consideration of the speed of the mark. **'Some of my paintings are made very quickly, while others are made over a very long period of time. Those are different rhythms for me too – not just pattern. I find it fascinating that with painting the attitude with which a painting was made is captured in the finished work'**. (<http://www.i2ads.org>, 2017)²⁶

These are things I consider when drawing: the speed of a line and the spaces that are left open, the depth of the tone at the bottom of the page and how this balances with a white space at the top. Part of this process is left to chance, whilst at the same time allowing correction points to happen en route. In some instances I arrive at this through logic, but it is more often intuitive.

24 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 25

25 Iversen, m. (2010). *Chance*. Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Ltd and the MIT press, p.110

26 <http://www.i2ads.org>. (2017). Interview with Phoebe Unwin. [online] Available at: <http://http:www.i2ads.org/en/blog/article/english-interview-with-phoebe-unwin/> [Accessed 16 Jul. 2017]. p 4

The Role of Chance

Gerhard talks about chance never being blind. **'It's a chance that is always planned, but also always surprising. And I need it in order to carry on, in order to eradicate my mistakes, to destroy what I've worked out wrong, to introduce something different and disruptive. I'm often astonished to find how much better chance is than I am.'** (Iversen, 2010)²⁷ In its unpredictability, chance brings a freshness to the process of drawing or painting.

Up until recently I had not considered chance to be an influence in my work. I certainly play within drawing, and there is an element of what he termed, **'letting the work come rather than creating it'** (Iversen, 2010)²⁸ I do think about pitch, which in music is that almost painful fineness one hears between the softness or loudness of a note, the pause and the holding out and stretching of the sound. Translated into drawing, pitch can be expressed in the thickness and thinness of line, the lightness and heaviness of touch and the rhythms and patterns that develop as the drawing progresses, comparable in complexity to a musical composition. When it starts to sing you know the drawing is almost finished. It is at this point that I stand back to see whether the drawing has worked and it is then that I can see how much chance has been involved in the process.

Gerhard Richter, in a statement penned in 1985, said, **'Using chance is like painting Nature – but which chance event, out of all the countless possibilities?'** (Iversen, 2010)²⁹

To see or not to see

Reflecting on this and all the countless possibilities we encounter as we move through our world, leads me to ask, what makes one see a particular 'thing' or opportunity at a particular time? Synchronicity of colliding moments, chance, being open to what's around? It is a matter not just of looking but of seeing. Jorge Macchi described it as the ability to find the meaningful in the everyday, refining a sensibility and an eye for the remarkable within the commonplace. (Iversen, 2010)³⁰ Another way of defining it is the ability to let the superfluous go, sifting out the rubbish to allow what is important to come forward, so there is a clarity in what you see and how you then build this into a concept and ultimately a drawing.

Lochore talks about what you choose to exclude or to include in order to create a highly abstracted space, and how this reflects on you and your world. **'It needs to be highly filtered,'** he said, **'to allow the mind to rest on one thing'**. (Hall, 2017)³¹

Along with seeing and chance, filtration plays an important part in Lochore's painting process. He says he finds it **'so interesting, that optical thing of filtration, the act of filtration, what do you exclude and include, what do you take out and leave in'**. (Hall, 2017)³²

27 Iversen, m. (2010). *Chance*. Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Ltd and the MIT press, p 159

28 Iversen, m. (2010). *Chance*. Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Ltd and the MIT press, p 158

29 Iversen, m. (2010). *Chance*. Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Ltd and the MIT press, p 158

30 Iversen, m. (2010). *Chance*. Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Ltd and the MIT press, p 186

31 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 30

32 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 30

As mentioned earlier, he once watched the effect of the afternoon sun on some stretchers leaning against the wall of his studio. The shadows were split into fragments due to the multiple windows in his studio. It was by chance that the stretchers were piled that way in his studio, and after seeing the effect of the shadows on the stretchers, he decided to introduce the element of time, combined with chance, and deliberately threw four dice in order to divine the times he would record the shadow patterns. The result was one, three, four and five o'clock. He went on to draw the four different shadow images on one canvas. Consequently, **'there is not a singular time in the picture, there's a singular object but it's singularly absent.'** (Hall, 2017)³³ What he liked was the immediate intimacy of presence and absence at the same time.

For him, getting to 'A' is the interesting bit and he will deliberately set up chance, as he explained, **'spin a dice, see what happens, chuck some stuff on the ground and see what spreads'**. (Hall, 2017)³⁴

Lochore's process and use of colour

When Lochore arrives at 'B', his process becomes highly structured, highly technical and nothing is left to chance. He describes himself as a psychotic surgeon, psychotically controlling the drawing and painting stage.

When I draw shadows, my challenge is to achieve their inherent fine tonal qualities using graphite. In Lochore's case, this is done with paint. Shadows have a multitude of tones and getting the right combination gives the drawn or painted shadows their beauty. They have sharp edges and lines alongside blurred, pale, burnt-out edges. They move from almost pitch black to the palest of greys.

Lochore's paintings are deceptive in their greyness; they are in fact all painted without the use of black. He tells me **'I've got recipes for every shade of grey mixed with every colour you can possibly imagine'**. (Hall, 2017)³⁵ One tends to think of shadows as being monochromatic but in fact they are full of colour. Les Fauves, early in the twentieth-century, are a good example of artists who used colour in shadows, although they exaggerated the colours. In contrast, Lochore's use and sense of colour and his ability to render a painted shadow is extraordinarily fine and nuanced.

He describes how the viewer, coming closer to his paintings, will see the grey 'zing' into colour. The colours appear grey from a distance because the eye mixes the colours, but up close you can see the full spectrum of colour. It is a game he plays with colour. He'll spend time over fine adjustments to the colour range, making the background slightly richer or less rich, constantly monitoring the purples, blues and greens as well as yellows... constantly fine-tuning.

Most of the shadows I viewed within Lochore's work have soft edges. Edges where the light has burnt away the crisp edge to give the greyness a slightly unfocused view that challenges the eyes and the brain.

33 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 26

34 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 27

35 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 28

Size and Scale

The size of the work and how it fits into the space it is shown is incredibly important for Lochore. In a gallery, he says his paintings look like a regatta, each painting a boat. As he put it, **'when I think of them as images I think of them as single floating objects in a sea, and when you have an exhibition, I see them as a set of boats literally at sea. The galleries are often whited out, a kind of limitless space, and the paintings are literally sailcloth on walls.'** (Hall, 2017)³⁶

Scale and size is also extremely important to Phoebe Unwin when painting. She produces and uses different size canvases depending on the subject matter and the 'feeling' she wishes to convey to the viewer. (<http://origin.anothermag.com>, 2011)³⁷ Unlike Lochore, she is not looking for her paintings to be 'windows' to somewhere else but rather as constructions of colour, form and material, coming together to communicate a subject's image and feeling. (<http://origin.anothermag.com>, 2011)³⁸

I am interested in creating images that draw a viewer in. So, when thinking of scale, I think more of someone standing close to the work so they can peer in. I like drawings that change as you get closer to the work, coming in and out of focus depending on where one is standing.

Lochore's deep knowledge and understanding of the 'masters' underpins the question of size in his work. The gallery space and the human scale of the visitor and where they stand to view the work are all considered. The importance of the size of the work becomes a game, playing with the scale of the picture plane of a wall, and the gallery becomes part of this game. He wants the work to relate to the projected space of the gallery whilst considering the area around the observer and playing with the idea that the participant in the game is looking through a window at a world beyond the room. He says it is a 'magician's' trick that comes from painting on the walls of chapels. **'Chapels are just simply a visual chamber where you make magic shows happen'**. (Hall, 2017)³⁹

John Berger, in his essay, the Place of Painting, expressed the same concept, **'to paint is to bring inside – doubly: into the inhabited space around the image and into the frame. The paradox of painting is that it invites the spectator into its room to look at the world beyond'**. (Berger, 1988)⁴⁰

36 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 23

37 <http://origin.anothermag.com>. (2011). Phoebe Unwin. [online] Available at: <http://origin.anothermag.com/art-photography/858/phoebe-unwin> [Accessed 16 Jul. 2017]. p 1

38 <http://origin.anothermag.com>. (2011). Phoebe Unwin. [online] Available at: <http://origin.anothermag.com/art-photography/858/phoebe-unwin> [Accessed 16 Jul. 2017]. p 1

39 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 24

40 Berger, J. (1988). The Place of Painting an essay in The White Bird. Hogarth Press

Windows and the Grid

Rosalind Krauss, in her essay on the Grid, considers how the grid is both centrifugal and centripetal, the former expanding out of the frame to infinity, leaving us with the impression that the painting is a small part of the whole, whilst the latter starts from the edges of the painting and goes inwards, shutting out the world beyond. Lochore's window series are essentially grids in which he has played with both the idea of inside out and outside in. Lochore does this by further abstracting the syncopated window shadows with the addition of shadows that fall from the edge of the work onto the wall, and including these within the work. He has created a double fiction and multiple complexities by doing so and hopes that the viewer will pick up on this. **'People might see that and not think about it, but that is part of observation, being an observer even in the studio and putting that observation into another work that becomes about observing it, bringing that fiction or that reality and making it a fiction inside another reality'**. (Hall, 2017)⁴¹

With my recent window drawings, I am conscious of providing a view to the world beyond but I do not wish to make it easy for the viewer to look through the pane, or for the subject matter to be straightforward. I have questioned whether this is intentional, or whether, unconsciously, I myself am not ready to look. It is only after the drawing is finished that I realise there is this push-pull effect going on. I am offering a view to the other side but denying access to that world. For the curious individual, the other side is somewhere you want to go, but there is a sense of disquiet in the possible journey. Where am I going? Do I really want to go there? And am I ready to go?

In the book 'Chance' edited by Margaret Iversen, Michael Archer recounts the Greek legend of the painting competition between Zeuxis and Parrhasios. The latter won because, whilst Zeuxis managed to fool the birds with his cleverly depicted grapes, Parrhasios's trompe l'oeil curtain was able to deceive humans: **'If one wishes to deceive a man what one presents to him is the painting of a veil, something that incites him to ask what is behind it.'** (Iversen, 2010)⁴² The painting of a window will always invite the viewer to look through to see what is beyond and if there is something that denies this view, the 'drawing in' and 'the push away' create an undeniable tension.

Rosalind Krauss, in her essay on the Grid, talks about how the grid first appears in symbolist art in the form of the panes and window mullions and in the **'hands of the symbolist painters and poets, this image is turned in an explicitly modernist direction. For the window is experienced as simultaneously transparent and opaque'**. (Krauss, 1979)⁴³ The transparent panes transmit light or spirit into a dark room whilst at the same time they reflect light and images...in other words they act as a mirror. When transmitting light, the panes represent transparency, opacity and water, which can be a source, as in **'birth-amniotic fluid'**, but when acting as a mirror, the panes transmit freezing, stasis or death, **'the unfecund immobility of the mirror'**. (Krauss, 1979)⁴⁴

41 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 26

42 Iversen, m. (2010). Chance. Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Ltd and the MIT press, p 197

43 Grids Author(s): Rosalind Krauss Source: October, Vol. 9 (Summer, 1979), pp. 50-64 Published by: The Mit Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778321>

44 Grids Author(s): Rosalind Krauss Source: October, Vol. 9 (Summer, 1979), pp. 50-64 Published by: The Mit Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/778321>

The Presence of Death

This brings me to death. It is not something I had originally connected to shadows as I saw them purely as visually beautiful tones, shades, forms, shapes and patterns.

To Lochore, shadows have connotations of death. We live our lives in the knowledge that, from the day we are born, we walk towards our death and the fleetingness of our lives is echoed in the fleetingness of shadows. **'Shadows inevitably are a figural of the fleetingness of things, they do have the sign of death'** he said, further defining them as, **'the non-being of the being of the thing they depict so they are a perfect metaphor'** (Hall, 2017)⁴⁵

He referred to the use of the memento mori in painting, giving as an example the Dutch golden age still life painters. They knew that, to make an utterly convincing depiction of the exuberance and joyfulness of a bowl of fruit and the pleasures of wine they needed to include a memento mori to prevent the work being too saccharine. Lochore expressed this concept forcefully, **'you've got to have the worm coming out of the apple'**, (Hall, 2017)⁴⁶ he said. So, death gives shadows a countering balance to their beauty, it takes away any potential saccharine that has crept into the work.

Beauty

In considering beauty, Lochore defined it as a moveable feast, meaning different things to different people. He described his use of beauty thus, **'I hope that the picture, by being seductive, will also reveal the elements of its betrayal as well; that it will have contained within it the reflexivity to be able to reflect on the fact that it is actually only its fiction, this moment of beauty is fleeting.'** (Hall, 2017)⁴⁷ I was struck by Lochore's insistence that the picture reveal elements of its own betrayal, showing that it is only fiction and that this moment of beauty is fleeting.

In opposition, Helen Frankenthaler's concern and internal question to herself when finishing a painting is 'did I make a beautiful picture?' She looked for a synchronisation of head and heart to produce a work that looked as if it had 'just' happened. Any appearance of labour within the work and it was rejected. (Greenwood, 2017)⁴⁸

It has been suggested to me that I would find it difficult not to make a beautiful drawing and I think that is probably true. However, I do not set out to create a beautiful drawing. My attention is all on working out what I'm doing, where I'm going and how to get there through a process of playing, abstracting, deleting, cropping and introducing elements.

45 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 31

46 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 31

47 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 31

48 Greenwood, R. (2017). #63. Len Green writes on Patrick Jones: "No Pasaran", Exeter. (online) Abcrit. Available at: <https://abcrit.org/2017/05/06/63-len-green-writes-on-patrick-jones-no-pasaran-exeter/#more-1115> (Accessed 23 Jul. 2017)

It is also an exercise where one is filling a space, avoiding spaces, creating echoes, introducing lightness, mass or lines, until the work looks balanced. It is only at that point that I will stand back, like Helen Frankenthaler, and ask myself 'has this drawing worked?' If I 'must' keep coming back to look at the work I know I've created something that is interesting... to me, at least. In my mind, the beauty in a work comes because of everything working, singing together or against each other for that matter. It is balanced. For Helen Frankenthaler it is when hand and heart have synchronised in the act of painting.

Lochore has a wonderful description of Gerhard Richter's early squeegee works having a kind of **'objectivity of chance' that makes them feel as if 'they belong to a process in the universe that doesn't belong to any single person, they are outside of conscious decision making ... works that seem to appear out of a kind of churning universe of stuff just happening.'** (Hall, 2017)⁴⁹ Thus, the work reveals itself, almost mysteriously.

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Control

Lochore exerts rigid control over his work so that the outcome is never in doubt. He said there is nothing romantic in producing the work; it is just **'hard bloody work to achieve an end goal'**. (Hall, 2017)⁵⁰

My last question to Lochore was 'Who do you paint for?' and his reply was 'Me, me'. He owns a lot of his own work and keeps the ones he likes; the others get binned. He has been lucky enough over the years to have accumulated a group of collectors who buy his work, so the worst thing for him is selling the work and it disappearing to hang on someone's wall, or possibly to turn up 15 years later. From his experience, the art marketplace is a tough road and artists have to be brutally honest with themselves, pretty much ploughing their own furrow, even if this means they are talking to themselves and **'sometimes that's fine'**. (Hall, 2017)⁵¹

I asked Fiona Rae this same question, and her reply was also 'Me, me'. She paints for herself first; the viewer, buyer and critic come second. I think that when artists are 'talking to themselves' as a result of ploughing their own furrow, they bring integrity to the work.

49 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 28

50 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 29

51 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 32

Conclusion

Reflecting on the conversation between Lochore and myself, I see we share the same interest in shadows but approach them in different ways.

We both use chance in the early stages of the work. At the production point, Lochore will switch to a highly controlled place where chance is no longer part of the process. Whereas I have discovered that chance and intuition guide and interfere within my work right through to the end of the production process.

As the conversation progressed, he made me aware of the subterranean role of death and chance within shadows, the memento mori, and how this is developed in the drawings and paintings we produce.

It is amazing how we live our lives, mostly unaware of the role chance plays daily. I still think change is the status quo, but now I would say that change happens because of chance. Chance is the catalyst that constantly creates change and keeps us on our toes. It stops us staying in one place too long and stagnating. Balance, for me, is a kind of checking point, a brake if you like, which brings control and tension. When things are balanced everything is quiet...whether it is a painting, the arrangement of a room, the garden, or one's life. Chance stops our lives becoming predictable and humdrum. However, even balance can be precarious if it falls too far one way or the other. They both sit quietly in the background of our daily lives until we get caught up in some event where we become leaves in a storm.

This brings me to consider the connection between chance, balance and the precariousness of life. The precariousness of life is why I, particularly, appreciate quiet moments getting lost in a drawing or a painting where everything falls away into stillness. Lochore's work captures some of these higher moments through shadows, and gives them to us in images that take us out of ourselves.

So much of what I produce is by intuition, and looking back at my most recent work I can see how chance and balance push against each other. That, coupled with a building of energy through the fine tuning of hand, eye and brain co-ordination, brings a drawing out onto the paper, whether it is a wandering line or a building of different tones to form a shadow. The momentum is maintained through an intense curiosity as to the evolving and unknown result and, hopefully, to the final surprise.

Lochore talks about the importance of chance in his work, happening to spot an image at a particular time that resonates with him. The conceptual moment is at the early stages of seeing and working the image out. The act of producing the final image is very controlled, in fact he talks about how onerous it is, **'I wish someone else would do them. I've done the job, the real job, the execution's just graft after that.'** (Hall, 2017)⁵²

52 Hall, J. (2017) Interview with Brad Lochore: Why Paint shadows? London. p 29

In contrast, I give control up to something outside myself. The chance element within my recent 'window drawings' comes from a colliding moment when an image or shadow catches my attention. Sometimes I am looking for them, and at other times they just happen to be there. The resulting drawing becomes a time-consuming process of building up tone, placement, abstraction and balance and I only know if the drawing is going to work when it is finished. In contrast, line drawings flow quickly, almost as a sense of relief, **'the replacement of the desire to do something with the desire to see what will happen'** (Iversen, 2010)⁵³

Josef Albers taught his students at Black Mountain College, Colorado, to develop their own personal sense of looking and this had to do with the whole visual world, applied to whatever they were doing, whether it was gardening, painting or whatever. (Christies.com, 2017)⁵⁴

John Cage also talked about diminishing the distance between life and art, insisting on the importance of the instructional frame: **'life without structure is unseen. Pure life expresses itself within and through structure'**. (Iversen, 2010)⁵⁵ In my case, I depend on a fixed outer structure to support the freedom of my art-making: the structure one builds in life outside art allows one to play with chance and balance in one's practice without inhibition, and the art feeds back into one's life. It does not stop at the edge of the canvas or picture frame. One lives it...or at least comes home to rest within it.

Everything goes round and round. We rise each day with the sun and the shadows will come and as the sun sets and we lie down to rest the shadows of the day depart and the shadows of the night rise. Shadows will keep coming round and round, for as long as the sun shines and the moon waxes and wanes. Meanwhile chance and balance will have their fun with us.

53 Iversen, m. (2010). Chance. Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Ltd and the MIT press, p.24

54 Christies.com. (2017). 'I have been thinking about Josef and Anni Albers for four decades' / Christie's'. [online] Available at: <http://www.christies.com/features/A-visit-to-the-Josef-and-Anni-Albers-foundation-8423-1.aspx> [Accessed 23 Jul. 2017].

55 Iversen, m. (2010). Chance. Cambridge: Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Ltd and the MIT press, p.14



1. Kiss 1961 - Bridget Riley⁵⁶

56. Kudielka, R. (2017). Robert Kudielka on Bridget Riley. Essays and interviews 1972-2003. London: Ridinghouse, p 168



2. Ladder 1992 - Brad Lachore⁵⁷

57. Tate.org.uk. (1992). Brad Lachore. (online) Available at:
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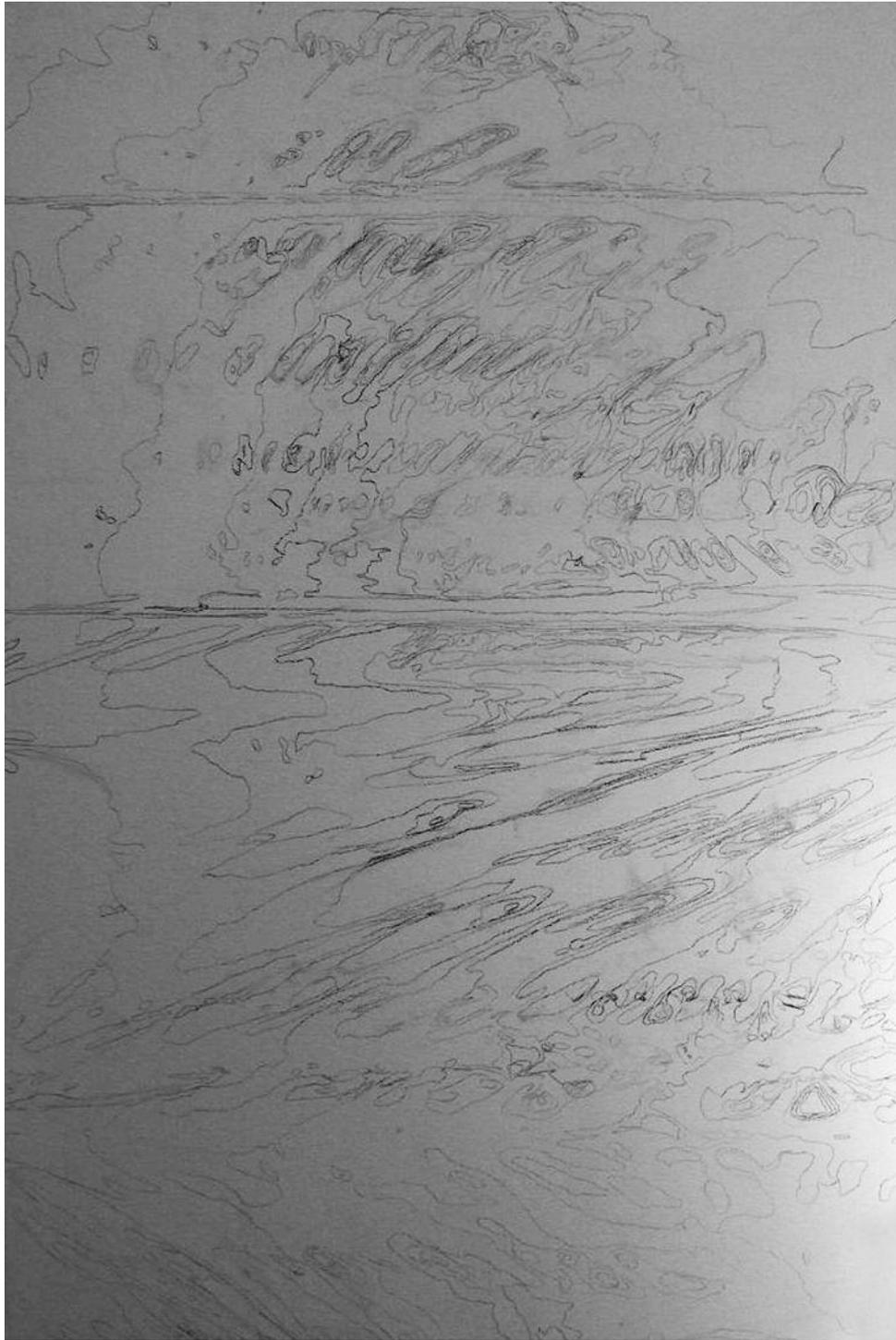


3. Shadow No. 48, 1994 - Brad Lachore⁵⁸



4. Brad Lachore in his studio. Photo by Janine Hall

58. Lochores.com. (1994). Brad Lochores. [online] Available at: <http://www.lochores.com/staging/page/2/> [Accessed 30 Jul. 2017].



5. Early working out traces on canvas showing how Brad Lachore starts a painting. Photo by Janine Hall

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Why do you paint shadows?

Interview with Brad Lochore on 6 April 2017

Edited by Janine Hall

Why do I paint shadows? Well, the origin of what triggered off an interest was through cinema. I was very interested in cinema, vicariously, as the better bits of cinema are moving pictures, literally moving pictures, and there are certain moments in the history of cinema where the pure visuality of the moving picture is explored as a metaphor for the thing you're seeing. So, there's a language base in cinema which is very close to painting and the history of painting and the closest I ever saw that, for me, was through German expressionism and film noir. Film noir explored, probably the most closely, the actual metaphor of cinema itself which is a cave where images are projected on a wall, very much like Plato's cave, which is the originating argument that Plato makes for not allowing artists to run the Republic because they're magicians, they're unreliable, they produce falsehoods. And film noir explores the idea of falsehood, the false self, the self that's beguiled by out of control desire, of madness, of all the bits of consciousness outside reason which drives humans to do the things that they do. So, combining these things, you have in film noir, shadows as metaphors of the self dissolving and I find that very interesting.

In the late 70s and early 80s, I was exploring being a painter, and looking at the kind of ghastriness of most of the things being made around me and the use of language in painting. I think it had pretty much dried up and had become rather lost in new technologies and so on. I'm interested in painting as a place of exploring the problem of being in a world of pictures, of being beguiled by pictures. So, that very same problem of being a magician, that Plato was really distressed to have potentially running a republic, was the very person, as an observer of paintings, that I was. I

was aware, in the same way that the private eye in film noir is aware, of the problem of being the desiring subject, who's not only the person trying to find out the source of the crime but is also potentially the criminal himself. It is the problem of being both seduced by a picture whilst, on the other hand, being aware that you're going to be betrayed by the picture, it's not real. Therefore, a painting of an apple will never actually ever be an apple. It will always only be a painting of an apple, a picture of it.

I found that very interesting, that whole area of picture-making, trying to find ways to make pictures that avoided all the pitfalls, the dead-ends of flat-edged painting that appeared in Germany, of a kind of return to a kind of naff figuration with infantile gibbering figures on canvases seemed to me to be pretty uninteresting. So, it seemed that shadows could be a way to explore the dilemma of there being both presence and absence of a thing in a picture. Even if you decide that may be an interesting metaphorical or philosophical way of exploring the dilemma of being both the subject and the viewer of a painting, you can explore the philosophical problem of being a gibbering consciousness in the world, beguiled by images, then what would happen if you asked the simplest of all questions which is, what is a picture? I guess that's what I've been doing ever since, is using shadows as a metaphor for asking that very simple question of what is a picture and what is the problem of being an animal utterly beguiled by shadows.

And so that's one question. The next point beyond that then is - I've always been interested in bits of pure visuality that resides outside of language, and I think that's something that's arisen out of being possibly a little autistic and extremely dyslexic. I have an awareness that there's a part of my brain very independent to the

part of my brain that constructs language, verbal language. In fact, brain science has proved this to be right, that they reside in very separate areas of the brain. So, if you are exploring the idea of what is a picture, it's inevitable that you end up exploring the problem of what is a pre-verbal, pre-linguistic, pre-verbal pure visuality of the world that you might start with as ground zero to take forward. Well, I don't know about you, but I've spent a lot of my time, pleasurable time, staring at light dancing on water for instance, just watching the gibbering of water as it goes down a waterfall and find myself spending a lot of time staring at things that have no cognisant value at all, for instance shadows dancing on a wall. One of my first early memories as a child is lying in a cot, and seeing the light of leaves as shadows on a silk curtain, a fine white curtain, and it's a very clear memory and a very pleasurable one, of the irreconcilability of what it is I'm looking at, the fleetingness of it and that seems like an interesting place to start.

Well certainly the paintings that you produce, shadow paintings, have a very timeless quality, like suspended time.

Correct.

They have a very peaceful aspect to them, is that conscious or unconscious?

Well I think you have to ask the question what kind of peace is that, what kind of quietude does that express or explore and I think it is specific and to do with the brain. The BBC commissioned me to make a painting once and they introduced me to a woman called Anya Hilbert, who was professor of vision at Newcastle University. I spent a week with her, and it was very interesting talking about all these things... she spends her whole life, using forensic brain science, exploring the relationship of eye and brain knowledge. So, if we go back to that question of quietitude, I described to her why I was working with these images and that if you're focused on something like a shadow, which is effectively not the thing that you're looking at, it's a

kind of remnant of it, you are bypassing a whole part of the brain that needs to be active in language. So, your brain is actually quiet, certain parts of it have been turned off and not awake.

The visual cortex is hugely responsive and sensitive to visual stimulus. So, if we're looking at a fire, staring late at night into the dancing flames, it's this visual consciousness that's focused on something that it knows not to fear, it's at rest. And yet it's active, so it's active in the sense of doing light walking, we're not running, fleeing an animal that's going to eat us, it's the pleasure of walking, it's a rhythmic pleasure, it's the 'cycling' of the brain. I'm not giving it any metaphorical, metaphysical meaning, it's simply that. Matisse talked about his paintings, at one point of being a place, they would be something that the working man could come home to and rest. I kind of thought that was an interesting idea and think he achieved that in his work. I find his work much more interesting than Picasso's in that respect.

So, it's not an unworthy thing to be doing in one's work. I think of it as something more – is it possible to make work where the mind's literally daydreaming, the brain's in a kind of daydreaming spin and does something in the same way as the mind at rest, comfortably working through things? This is where you do your deepest thinking. Is it possible to make a work that does that? I do want the work to express and explore the quietude where the brain is doing something, it's being philosophical, as you do when you're on holiday and you have an hour to yourself, and you're looking at the light gibbering on the sea, you do think about things in the grander sense, you do have access to those ideas.

When you're painting and in this peaceful place do you think the paintings get imbued with your peacefulness and is this something you consider when putting a collection of work together in a room? For instance, if you had a solo show, how would this affect the space?

Well that's a secondary consideration, the first consideration is the single work. I think it's a very

interesting metaphor if you think of a canvas, literally a canvas. If you look at Van Eyck and the icon painters they painted on wood which was subject to cracking as well as being badly affected by moisture and so on and so forth. After Van Eyck, oil painting was discovered using linseed oil and mixing pigments rather than tempera and paintings very quickly appeared upon canvas, which made them light and portable. It was actually sailcloth, they'd simply adapted sailcloth, so the metaphor of the mobility of the canvas is attached to the idea of literally an image on sailcloth. So, when I think of them as images I think of them as single floating objects in a sea, and when you have an exhibition, I see them as a set of boats literally at sea. The galleries are often whited out, a kind of limitless space, and the paintings are literally sailcloths on walls. I wouldn't want to pursue that any further but I think it's interesting. When I paint a work on a white wall, it'll be singly on its own surrounded by a white wall, literally a boat on an ocean and when you put them together what you're doing is kind of assembling a regatta. If you're making a show you want to have something thematic and not too abruptly strange and different, you want to explore some kind of theme, in an ideal world, it doesn't always work out that way.

Some works I've made are on aluminium, and the very Hexalite that I buy and carve into strange shapes, like the oval one for instance over there, they're made from material used by aircraft manufacturers, its aircrafts are the modern sailing boats. It's curious that the same supports for images are always taken off the metaphors of transport and mobility. So, paintings are mobile. The days of painting tempera on plaster walls are over.

Do you consider the size of the paintings and the impact this has on the viewer?

Well size is very important, extremely important, OK there's about 15 questions in one in there. No that's fine, it's fine, it's just how would I break that down into coherent answers? The first question is probably in the making of the thing, I think it's very

important and very interesting how - my biggest horror is working on a work and coming towards the end, not finishing the work, going home at night and coming back the next morning. I leave in the evening thinking I've got X on the wall, then that first glance when you come into the studio the next morning, you realise you've got X minus Y and the first job at hand is to work out what the minus Y is in the painting. In a sense, what I'm trying to eliminate, when I come in and make that adjustment, the next day, is to get rid of the thing that might be an impediment to being... I try and make the paintings entirely independent of me. I'm letting them go, cutting the ropes and pushing away from the wharf. And so, in a way the works come out of the process of eliminating anything that might get in the way, anything I might put in has to appear as if I haven't put it in, they have to have an independent life and an internal logic that doesn't have anything to do with me.

I can't go to exhibitions ... for instance there was a Basquiat, 80's painter, black guy who died, sold \$21 million at auction the other day, graffiti artist, he hung out with Warhol. I see all these paintings, 21 million pounds, and I was looking at the illustration of it on the internet and thinking of the absolute impossibility of making a work like that, because all I could hear was this person shouting at me, shouting and shouting and shouting, and how horrific that was, how awful, how ugly and how stupid I thought the work was and how uninteresting. I could see nothing redeeming in the painting, I mean zero. And there it was being sold for 21 million pounds, passed around as yet another neo-liberal financialised chip. That's the absolute opposite of what I want to do. I want to get rid of any moment, any exterior noise whatsoever so it has a kind of logic, a reality unto itself, that isn't reality, that's not just voiced up by something else. I guess it's between documentary and fiction, somehow. I want it to have almost a documentary quality, there's no fiction in there at all, no seeming fiction. Even though they're highly fictional things, they're going to have to be absolutely convincing as a documentary of something.

Well they are very stripped back...there's a minimalism to them...

Sure, sure. I never think of them as stripped back.

I was coming back to your original question, that's the first answer to the first bit of that question. At the same time, I'm very interested in the idea that you can do something with minimal means. John Cage is very interesting for that. If you think of his early works, I've got dozens of John Cage albums, I do like a kind of austerity in language that is graceful. I can think of austerity and complexity at the same time. You think of the kind of cohesion of a Bach fugue and you think how amazingly complex it is and how amazingly simple it is at the same time, the two things go side by side. There's any number of musical analogies one could make, but a great piece of music will have enormous simplicity and a very intense and majestic internal logic which binds the two together. In a stripped-down Bach piece, even the Goldbergs or something similar, they are incredibly simple. Or even Beethoven. Look what you can do with the Goldberg variations, you can take a simple four note theme and do incredibly complex things with it, and yet you've still got a four note theme. I'd see no reason why in painting you can't do that too, certainly in literature you can do it.

I think it's interesting, the human is very attuned to pattern making, all you're doing is plugging into a pre-existing mode of attention that comes with every human being that stands in front of the work. It's just plugging into that really.

So, you mentioned size is important.

Size is incredibly important. You see it done well with all great painting, it's very considered, all the time. It doesn't matter who. You go back to 18th century painting and almost every time it's not considered it shows in the work. In the recent Caravaggio show, they put together for the first time, *The Taking of Christ* and *The Supper at Emmaus*, the latter from the National Gallery. There was other stuff from this period, you had the good the bad and the ugly, and there bang side by

side were these two works, absolutely magnetic, profound works. The thing that struck you straight away was the relationship of the scale of the skulls, literally the head of the characters in this *mise en scène*. The scale of the characters, of course, are one to one at the scale that you would be if you were being observed by them inside the room in the painting. If you scale yourself in front of the works you'll find that you're at the apex of how they would see you if they were in the same position away from the picture frame inside their room looking at you. Well the moment you do that, you have already grabbed your audience, it's a magician's trick, there is no rabbit, the rabbit was always in the hat, it just came out a certain way and you didn't see it come out that way, it's a magician's trick. But by god it works, you know, it works.

So that work over there for instance, is exactly the scale of the picture plane of the wall. The game is that the picture is a window, that's a western canon, that there is this room and then there's the room over there and for the moment you are in the room of the picture gallery looking through windows into the world beyond. You are the voyeur into the world, the next room. The room could be an Italian landscape by whoever. It could be, but that's the game, that was always the game, that was the trope that we got from the game playing of painting on walls in chapels. Basically, that's where we got it from. Chapels are just simply a visual chamber where you make magic shows happen.

When I make a work, what interests me is that the pictures themselves are standing in for the projected space of the gallery, the gallery itself becomes part of the game, and if you do that you have to then be making works that scale in to the space of the observer in the picture gallery. I look at playing with this idea and making clear that we are literally looking at windows.

I did a whole series of works around the idea of the window frame as a metaphor. I brought them in and made an uncomfortable disjuncture of them being projected onto the surface plane of the painting inside the gallery wall. So, they became observed things inside the literal projectural plane of the walls of the gallery. When I make a work like

that, the metaphor is the canvas sitting on the walls of the gallery and the scale of the thing that you're looking at is the scale of what will be projected on the wall of the gallery. It's very important in that phenomenological relationship that the scale is exactly the scale as you would encounter it if the painting wasn't there, if it was literally a cast on the wall. Right? Very different to Caravaggio in that sense, but no less the same kind of logic, structural logic.

In the case of this painting here you see there's the rope, a knot painting. It's clearly a rope or something caught in sunlight, and the metaphor of the idea of a knot is literally a painting or image as a knot, a knot that you can't unpick. In the case of that one, you don't know quite where the beginning is, you wouldn't know how to unpick it, it's impossible to understand, it's like a puzzle that you can't completely unpick. And then I got very interested in the idea of a kind of portrait, so here the roundness of the thing is actually the same scale as the head of a person. I made them literally like portraits with this round thing, so even if you weren't thinking about it you were responding to it as you might a head of a person. And in the same way that a person is something unknowable, you know another person is someone you can kind of work out and you get a rough outline, but you never really understand the mind or soul of another person, never ever really. We're unfathomable even to ourselves let alone others.

I was using the idea of portraiture here, and the idea of a knot as an allegory for a person, as a kind of complex thing you can never unravel and never kind of get to. But going back to that structural thing about scale again, that's in the scale of what a portrait would be, a 17th century portrait, the scale of the circle, the oval, is the scale of a head, and even if you don't do it you're triggering a kind relationship in the viewer, a kind of way of reading hopefully, that's unconscious.

The question of scale's very important. In really great painting, no question, it's always there whether it's a Rothko, Newman or a Caravaggio. It's a fundamental part of a great picture.

The other thing I was going to ask you, are you consciously working with different rhythms, patterns or repetition in your work? You were starting to talk a little bit about that.

I think it goes back to that question of connecting with the sheer pleasure of pattern-making, the pattern-seeking self in me and in others. If you're connecting with that then you're already having fun. If I'm enjoying myself making patternation, it's only because I'm connecting the bit that instantly enjoys, even annoying music on the street, a busker, you end up walking in step with the bloody music. I think that happens visually as well. We enjoy pattern-making, we enjoy decoration, we enjoy rhythm, all those things I like to connect with, but only for myself. How do you do it then? The question is to what purpose do you do it, that's the big question. How do you then turn it to something that conveys some information, conveys a very particular question, armed and made ready for a query about what you're doing.

In the case of many of my works, you see fragments in the window frames. I've, kind of busted and created incoherent grid-like window frames. I enjoyed playing with that to produce a kind of chaos that was both full of syncopation and a syncopated rhythm that you connected to and enjoyed. But, also there was a puzzle-making thing to produce a conundrum that couldn't ever be resolved. On the one hand your brain could see there were clearly two simple grids that clash but because they were broken and interfered with it became impossible to hold the image in your mind for long. There's a kind of real pleasure in that. In the same way, Wittgenstein's language game works between the hand and the rabbit face. The irreconcilable doubling of the image, if you say 'see the rabbit's head' - oh yes, there's a rabbit's head, then you see the hand, but you can never see the two simultaneously.

They are nothing more than an illusion. So, going back to the question about rhythm-making, it's rhythm-making for a purpose to lead into a query an enquiry of some sort.

Looking at that picture for instance, there's a lot of repetition of lines and a sort of beat...

Sure, well I'll tell you exactly what that was. That was literally, stretchers leaning against a wall. My old studio had a whole bank of northern lit windows which if you put anything against a wall you could see the shadow, for instance of that roll there against the wall. See, the colour is almost exactly the colour of the shadow, that's London light, a kind of miserable green-grey. The frame was leaning up against the wall, I saw the shadow and during the day I watched it as the sun moved around. The shadow split into fragments because of the multiple windows that were there. I threw four dice at one o'clock, three o'clock, four o'clock and five o'clock and drew the shadow, at that time of day, on the canvas. What I liked was the immediate intimacy of presence and absence at the same time. You couldn't get closer than that, a dumb old stretcher leaning up on a dumb old white wall, in an old industrial building somewhere in London with images set at four different times of the day, the times randomly dictated by thrown dice to produce the picture. That was the minimal means for the most extreme representation between presence and absence in one picture. There is no present tense, there is no present, there's only the absence of a present figure in the picture, so it's entirely absent. Its presence is marked by its absence.

There's not a singular time in the picture, there's a singular object but it's singularly absent. And also, literally again, the stretcher echoing, they are like echoes of the frame itself including the edge. We often ignore the fact that there's a shadow line on the side of the painting. For instance, at the top and the bottom. I like to think that a highly-observant viewer might see this.

I was very influenced by minimalism, and the phenomenology of all those guys particularly Judd and Robert Morris, and I got very interested in the idea of bringing back a breathing subject into the room and making them aware of being in the room and the act of observation. So here, the dark left hand side of the canvas and the dark bottom hand side of the canvas is echoed inside the painting. I

don't mind that people don't see this at first but this became part of the work. I was exploring that aspect of it and bringing it into the work.

The fact that, as a viewer, you have a fictional relationship of being the observer in a gallery, at that moment, being made aware of the fiction of the picture, the fiction of the moment of saying 'this is art', this is an art moment, and just querying its serendipity, if you like, to be declaring itself as such. I find that very interesting.

That is the logic of the painting for me. If you look, where you're sitting right now and look at the far right hand edge, you see the hard edge, you see the way the painting becomes a hard edge, to the white of the wall? In other works I've introduced that inside the painting. So, you'll see the shadow cut off inside the painting. That hard edge, if you're viewing this right now becomes inside the work... You can see there that there's a double fiction going on where that edge becomes part of the work. It has a multiple complexity.

So, the wall has come into the painting or the painting's gone out into the wall.

People might see that and not think about it, but that is part of observation, being an observer even in the studio and putting that observation into another work that becomes about observing it, bringing that fiction or that reality and making it a fiction inside another reality.

How much is chance involved in what you do?

Well, that's probably the most flagrant and most strongly obvious metaphorical use of the idea of chance in my work where I literally used a dice, literally gambled with time. But then I think all of it has that element, how much can you control a piece of flex to produce the thing you want? I think the question always hovers around editorialness. Where's the conscious moment you say, 'that's what I'm going to do'. Is that a chance moment that you encounter, when you just go snap, it's the moment you press the trigger, the shutter, and you suspend it.

That painting there with the fan, I set it up in the studio, it was quite a complex set-up. It's a print from a painting I did for a biennale in Brazil. I hadn't been to Brazil, but I was interested in the idea of exoticness and far-off-ness, the idea of Brazil before having arrived there. I hung the fan from the studio roof, and got a cinema lamp and projected it through there. Of course, I had to spin this bloody thing, and I took maybe four or five hundred images, trying to find the right moment. I didn't quite know what I was after, I just knew that I was interested in the idea of a spinning fan.... I haven't forgotten the question which is on chance.... at what point do you sit in front of your 400 images and you go, that's it. If you're not quite sure of something you spread out enough stuff, and again that pre-lingual thing goes, that's the one that interests me the most, then you can process it afterwards and kind of go 'right, it's because, der-der-der-der'. But chance is used in the process, you're throwing stuff out and then you let your mind be captivated by something, so chance is used in the earlier part of that process, of chucking stuff out. Is chance still then part of the process when you've selected the image? No, it's not, it's highly structured at that point, as you take it through to the execution of the painting. By that point you're highly technical, nothing's left to chance, you know you're locked into a process that will take you from A to B and B is the result. But the getting to the A bit is the interesting bit and chance is used all the time there. I think all the works have that. Spin a dice, see what happens, chuck some stuff on the ground and see what spreads.

Interesting. A lot of those minimalist guys were using that. I think of people like Robert Smithson, for instance, where he experimented with pouring stuff down a hillside, or those early Richard Serra pieces where he was throwing molten lead in the corner of a room. Those guys were ultra-minimalists, they were interesting for very different reasons and very different parts of their study, Smithson was interested in entropy and Serra was interested in the kind of horror of materiality. In early pieces such as 'Prop', that big steel thing in the corner of the room with the prop underneath, it

would kill someone if the prop came out. Those guys were using very minimal and chance-like means to get to those places, very interesting that they should use something so prescriptive and so expressive as that.

Yes, interesting the thought of chance being an early conceptual thinking space.

I guess that's what I'm saying, I am influenced by the guys in that period, I think it was a very interesting time. Other things were going on, Penone and Gordon Matta-Clark and those people I find very interesting, even now, but I'm more interested in the Smithson world.

In terms of image-making, it's interesting, because I ended up meeting Gerhard Richter at his first show in Dering Street in 89, I was just finishing my BA, and that's when he invited me to go to Dusseldorf, Germany. We talked about chance, weirdly, and I still think his best works are the abstracts, they're amazing. He was very influenced by Cage, so the idea of putting stuff on a squeegee and allowing the materiality of the paint to produce the image, that idea of a kind of outré distance between you the author and the finished thing, was in extremis in those works. I said to him ... you've still you've got to choose the yellow or red, and you've still got to choose to use the squeegee as well as when to start and when to stop. He was using chance inside the work as a kind of action painting, but not an action painting. You could say Pollock and co were using that or even De Kooning if you want to argue the point, in a kind of surrealist way, but Richter was trying to do it in another way. In the end, he had to choose when to stop and start the squeegee.

In a similar way, he was always trying to work his way out of the paintings, so he was the least present he could get in the painting, and of course they're enormously powerful, I mean really fantastic, I think by far his best work. There is a kind of objectivity of chance that is present in the work, they feel like they belong to a process in the universe that doesn't belong to any single person. They kind of stand outside of conscious decision making. 'I'm going to

make a portrait of someone, sit in the chair, I'm going to paint your portrait'. These are works that seem to appear out of a kind of churning universe of stuff just happening. Random collisions between things. So sorry I haven't read the original question, but that is very interesting.

We were talking about Gerhard Richter and chance, and how much he uses it in his practice, and about keeping paintings open...

Yes, I totally agree with that.

And about the fact that he's trying to close the paintings down but that they end up always being open.

He says that but I don't think he's being entirely honest. Well, he is entirely honest in one respect, but in another respect, I think he was always trying to work himself out of the picture. That's more to the point.

Which is what you were talking about with your paintings, making sure you remove yourself.

Yeah. So that they have a reality that's independent somehow, you're not pressing yourself into the thing the whole time, even though of course, if you put one's work in a room with everyone else's someone will pick it out. That's yours that's what you do, but the aim is for the work to stand by itself on the wall. A better way to put that would be - it's a word I use in a derogatory sense the word 'sentiment', I think I would not want to have any sentiment in my work. You know, it may be what Richter is kind of saying, although he is incredibly sentimental. I do think I would always try to eliminate sentiment. Sentimentality, nostalgia, anything like that, it can easily enter a work, and it's really important not to have that, otherwise it becomes like mood music in cinema, it ruins cinema.

So, it's important, somehow, that you work out the sentiment. I've been accused of making cold works ... well, I don't really think that. I'm happy to have that sense of utter removal.

Well, I guess one reason someone might think they are cold is because they're monochromatic.

Yes, you could say it that. But then, that's the subject of the work. If you look at the colour of that shadow, literally, and look at the colour of it there, then I'm only being mimetic of something that already exists. If I lived in Bali I think the colour of the show would be different.

There is an awful lot of colour in shadow.

Yes, there is. I never mix with black, all my greys are mixed with colour, always. I've got recipes for every type of shade of grey mixed with colour you can possibly imagine.

Well that comes back to my question about your process, how you paint. So that's interesting you use a lot of colour in your shadow.

A huge amount and unfortunately, the two works that I've just moved out of here, on the one hand look very monochromatic, yet when you get up close they kind of zing into colour. There's a full spectrum of colour in them, you're mixing them with your eye, I'm playing games with colour. This one here the tree, it's going to be richly yellowed, and there's purples and blues and greens in there, so it'll be very coloured.

So, when you start the painting do you project the drawing onto the canvas?

I do project the drawing onto the canvas. And then I kind of use my eye to do the gradation lines, working towards darks. I've got quite used to a kind of shorthand. So, here are four drawn-up paintings, at an early stage,

This is my kind of ghostly series, just the edges of a palm forest, deep forest. I've gone with sheets of paper into a darkened wood and picked out these circle things, of course it's sunlight. Eyes and configurations start to appear, so you can see that's the drawing for that. That's the rope piece, this is another piece I'm drawing up, wrapped plastic ends

up looking like water. It's very complicated, that's a couple of weeks' work ... it does turn into a landscape.

I guess part of that is because you've got a horizon in there.

Absolutely right. Again, it connects with all of that. But in that one of course, it's forcefully horizontal, whereas if you were really pursuing it you'd want to go with the horizon and produce a landscape, but here I wanted to contrast this big foreground which keeps dropping all the way to the bottom. So, you get a sense of contradiction - there is no reflection between the top section and the low section. That would be the tension in the picture between the top and the bottom. If it was the sea it would reflect, but it's not reflecting at all, and it's doubled up by bringing it to a vertical format instead of a wide format, as such it's doubly troubling. So, you'll be wanting to think it's landscape, but it isn't, and then there's the double landscape, a fold in the plastic, a second fold, so it echoes above. You'll constantly be trying to make it work and it won't work. It'll be there but it'll be pushed out.

I look forward to seeing that finished.

I dread that one, it's complicated.

We've talked about openness plus chance and control, and I suppose control comes in when you're starting to actually paint.

Yes, psychotically controlling at that point. Psychotic, surgery. I mean it's literally surgery when you see the brushes and everything.

And are you painting with a brush, or spraying?

Never. All painted.

Amazing control.

Well it's interesting, again chance and all those other things. All that job is done. I'm so with Hitchcock, he always moaned about having to

make films. Le Corbusier never turned up to inspect the works while they were being made. His job was done once the drawings had been completed. I'm with them both on that. It's painful, I wish someone else would do them. I've done the job, the real job, the execution's just graft after that. Well no, I'm being dishonest. There are fundamental editorial decisions that can be made, sure, when you finally get it done and you know that there's a need to rip off two inches at the bottom and just blank that off. They're more compositional add-ins later... 95/98 per cent of the job is just the execution of the work, sure you're constantly monitoring. I'll torture myself over adjustments to the colour range on the background to get it right, and it might mean sometimes removing paint, coming in one morning and going tsk, it just needs to be slightly richer or less rich. The horror is always the final execution, just getting it right. Do I really want that much purple in there, no it needs to be tempered with some yellow just to bring it back a bit. That's fine-tuning, it's like sailing a boat, constantly trimming all the time. I don't know anyone who can just hit a canvas and paint, I admire that, I couldn't do that. There's a few people I admire whose work seems to have that freedom - Wilhelm Sasnal's work for one. You know Wilhelm Sasnal, Polish painter... quite interesting?

I guess the next question is linked to being in control. Do you always know the outcome of the painting and are decisions made early on to make sure that you achieve this?

Pretty much, yeah, afraid to say. Nothing romantic about it. I think a lot of people's preconceptions are that there's some sort of great romantic moment and there isn't, it's just hard bloody work to achieve an end goal.

I always think of poor old JS having to knock out his cantatas every week. Sunday's coming up, shit. You know, his wife and children used to be put to task ... you do the cello part, I'll come back and I'll mark it up, you just get the bits knocked in. Lots of flourishes here and there. I like that, there's something very pragmatic about it. He kind of just

had to get the job done. I'm not saying I'm Bach, I'm saying I like that, the pragmatism of Sunday's coming and I've got to knock out a cantata.

Are you painting from imagination, memory or from reference?

Well, given that we're meat and bone and are conscious and having to stare through a mind which is made up of circuitry not of our making, I think everything we look at is memory. The entire visual world that we live in is in the present tense and already predetermined by memory. We experience the world through what we've already experienced, so we bring that experience to understanding it. The present tense is always laden with memory, and that to be awake is to be experiencing if you like your imagination. What I did this morning is already disposed in a memory box, what I expect to happen late this afternoon, is already imagined, we're caught in the middle of all of that. Unavoidable.

Are you looking to abstract the images you paint? For example, that particular painting over there, where you described taking the window grid away, in my mind, that's a form of abstraction.

Sure, because to make music you have to turn it into eight notes, eight particular notes, and even if you're trying to express the sound of seagulls, or the sound of a ship's horn or traffic or whatever, if you're a musician, you've got to strain it through this particular thing, in order for it to work.

I mean, a very good case in point, there's an argument to be made against photography, I'd love to do a lecture on 12 reasons to hate photography, and for someone who loves photography to argue against it. What's interesting, I think, is the dilemma that photography has, it's so utterly mimetic of the moment in which you take the photograph, both in terms of swamping the picture plane with information and confining it to the micro shutter, quite often at the moment of its taking. It's like human consciousness that human consciousness that can filter information instantly.

When you are walking up to the tube at the end of this, you'll be swamped by all the things that are around, and most of it you'll disregard because it's extraneous information, it has no value or interest in your day. The shocking thing might be a seagull dying on the side of the road, as I saw recently, but most of it will be put to one side to concentrate on something. To be focused on something you must push away all that other information and focus on one thing for a picture to work outside the mimetic world. The world that we encounter all the time needs to be highly abstracted, it needs to be highly filtered, to allow the mind to rest on one thing. By focusing on one thing it enters a different realm to the one we're in all the time which is just baggage... most of the information we receive through the eyes is just baggage, it's unnecessary, superfluous and quite safe information, and what you're doing by focusing is making unsafe, you're bringing something to the fore and saying this is important.

A great case in point is Matisse really, I think Matisse does that so well. What do you lay in front of the eye to create a highly abstracted space, being in a room or overlooking a garden or something as dumb as that. There's a whole pile of stuff, it's so interesting, that optical thing of filtration, the act of filtration, what do you exclude and include, what do you take out and leave in. What does that say about you... it must always reflect on how we put together the world? I do a whole lecture, in fact I do several lectures talking about Euclidean space, about the construction of knowledge through the eye. There's a whole pile of stuff, a whole history of how we've come to understand how brain-eye works and how knowledge is constructed out of the eye, how it's a metaphor, how it's used in philosophy and in culture.

It's a constantly interesting problem. So, the act of abstraction, going back to that question, and therefore the process of filtration to come up with a propagandist image is no different for me from someone selling toothpaste or politics, it's all light-handed illusion, it's all about extracting information, extraneous information, focusing on certain things, it's just mostly put to bad effect.

Is it important to you that your paintings are beautiful?

Very interesting. My first-year essay was the anxiety of the beautiful painting, and I wrote an onerously long essay on that very same problem and I looked at all the philosophical dilemmas of all this stuff, problems of beauty and so on.

As a slightly older person I would be looking at that... well, the first question, break that up into about 15, that are cascading through my mind. They're all about terms really, which is always the problem of language. Beauty is a very moveable feast, for different people it'll mean different things. If you look at the avalanche of junk that's being produced by the art world now, I guess what is the purpose of a picture, of spending time with a picture, and if it were only to concentrate on the thing that the picture depicts, or the thing that it represents, or just an internal kind of game between you and it, as a substitute, an extracted substitute from the world that puts you into a better place, then I wouldn't say that the job's been very well done. I hope that the picture, by being seductive, will also reveal the elements of its betrayal as well, and that it will have within it, contained within it, the reflexivity to be able to reflect on the fact that it is actually only its fiction. This moment of beauty is fleeting. The Dutch still-life painters knew this in the 17th century. They knew that in order to be an utterly convincing picture of the exuberance and joyfulness of a bowl of fruit and the pleasures of wine and drink and exuberant food, you must put the memento mori in there, without that it would just be saccharine. You've got to have the worm coming out of the apple. You've got to have some moment where you recognise, that all great beauty is also the metaphor of the flower isn't it? All great beauty is but fleeting you know, and I think on its own it would be saccharine, it needs to have an element of punkdom which is always referring back to the fleetingness not only because beauty does reflect on a moment of a hyper-state of pleasure, the joy of calmness and oneness and all that kind of stuff, but we all know that these things don't last, we're

propelled against the nail-studded door at some point.

This was one of the questions I was going to ask you earlier which neatly comes round here - that shadows have a lot of connotations with death, does that give balance to beauty do you think?

Yes, I do I do, I think it does, yes. We only live in contrast to the knowledge of not living, we only understand living in relation to non-living, understanding of its fleetingness, that it isn't permanent. Immortality is only provided for by our offspring and you know, I don't know, I'm a militant atheist so I'm very much trying to reflect on the world with that fully aligned in my sensorium. Shadows inevitably are a figural of the fleetingness of things, they do have the sign of death. They do have the sign as in Plato's case the prisoner's dilemma [court of the cave] the sign of even of fear, and in the case of film noir of violent death, disintegration of self, of non-being, they are the non-being of the being of the thing they depict. So I think it's a perfect metaphor.

Who do you paint for?

Me. Me. I don't have a huge audience for the work. I don't like selling the work. I actually own quite a lot of my own work, because I like it. The ones I don't like I bin, so I only really show the works I like. And I'm autistic enough to think that everyone else is like me, so that's probably, as my wife says, the weakest aspect of me assuming everyone else thinks the same way. In extremis as an artist I think you have to be a little bit extremist.

At least to get anywhere?

Well, I think in terms of marking out your territory, you've got to pursue... and it's a very hard road to go through all the different methodologies and languages and whatever of a whole art tradition. To extract from the things we do like, what we want and not just be imitative and to come to find your

own little, slice of the cake. It it's a very tough road but you've got to be brutally honest with yourself and actually pretty much plough your own course for whatever consequences. If it means you're just talking to yourself sometimes that's fine. I'm lucky, I've got a pile of collectors who do buy the work, so it's probably the worst situation where the work gets bought and sits on someone's wall and disappears I don't see it again, maybe it turns up 15 years later. So, it's triply mad – the art world, triply crazy and insane, a dreadful hall of mirrors to see oneself reflected, as a maker let alone as a viewer. So it's very tough – a very tough space to be in.

