REFLECTIONS
OF A
THIRD YEAR FINE ART STUDENT

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BA Fine Art (Hons) (2015)
University of Bedfordshire
“If I’m going to sing like someone else, then I don’t need to sing at all.”

Billie Holiday
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ARTIST STATEMENT

I am currently studying at the University of Bedfordshire for a BA (Hons) Fine Art Degree and am in my third and final year.

My main line of enquiry is in the human figure which includes but is not limited to portraiture and the nude.

I have started a project which explores the notion of “dead colours” which is a classic technique used by the Old Masters and how to interpret this in a more modern way. To this end I have isolated this technique and aim to complete 99 portraits using this idea over the next few years and am interested to see if and how they change over this period.

I like to work on a fairly large scale and currently use acrylic and oil paints on any surface including paper, card, board and canvas.

At a later stage I am also keen to explore the techniques of screen printing and how I can adapt my practice and artwork to suit this medium.
INFLUENCES on my work
Bill Viola was born in New York, USA in 1951. He attended Syracuse University where he studied for his Bachelor of Fine Arts but at the same time he developed an interest in electronic music and the then new technology of video art. After leaving University he came to Europe and spent nearly two years in Florence, Italy where he soon discovered the Renaissance and the paintings of the Old Masters which quickly became an important visual reference for his later video work.

Bill Viola has more than 70 exhibitions under his belt and has won numerous prizes and fellowships. Renowned for having helped develop the technology in the 1970s he is also instrumental in making video art fully recognised by the contemporary art world.

Viola’s study of European Renaissance paintings and his ability to read the narrative give Viola’s films a painterly quality.
In 1990 Bill Viola’s mother died and this had a profound effect on him. “Heaven and Earth” is an installation which consists of video images of a woman giving birth and a woman dying. These two videos were placed very close to each other and capture the start and end of the human condition – life and death.
“The Greeting” 1995 is based on Jacopo da Pontormo’s painting called “Visitation” which was painted in 1528 and was created for the 46th Venice Biennale as part of set of five works collectively titled Buried Secrets, and showed a slowed-down staged film of three women meeting. With reference to the Renaissance the minutely observed, coagulated moment becomes emblematic of a broader time-span of human experience.
“Emergence” 2002 which is based on a fresco painting by the 15th-century Italian artist Masolino which depicts Christ half in and half out of a sarcophagus and is supported on either side by his mother and St. John (Pieta by Masolino (1424). Bill Viola’s film shows two women seated by a well from which a pale young man slowly rises to the surface and they lift him from the water with some difficulty and lay him out on the ground.
Odd Nerdrum was born in 1944 in Sweden but his parents were Norwegian and they returned home to Norway after the end of the Second World War. Nerdrum started his artistic career with the usual 1960s art school route but quite quickly became disillusioned with the trend to ignore the traditional classical
techniques and concentrate only on the then burgeoning conceptual type of art. He left prior to graduating and taught himself the so-called “forgotten techniques” of the Old Masters.

He is mainly influenced by Caravaggio and Rembrandt both for their use of chiaroscuro – dramatic contrasts between light and dark but also by their sheer mastery of traditional techniques.
Always a social commentator in both his paintings and his whole ethos and message of anti-modernism Nerdrum was considered by the art world as a whole to be rather irrelevant in the fervent quest for more and more novel and revolutionary and seemingly shocking and thought provoking installation art.
Nerdrum suffers from Tourette’s Syndrome and is a striking looking man with his blonde baby curls. Nerdrum rarely allows himself to be photographed but keeps his profile high by producing between 6 to 8 paintings a year and has written many books.
“IDIOTA” by Odd Nerdrum (1990)

The Odd Nerdrum School in Norway was set up by Nerdrum because he has been constantly approached by artists over the years asking how they too can become the masters of the Renaissance technique as even now this is seen as out-dated and not necessary or even desirable for today’s aspiring artists to know. Their works are exhibited once a year and it is clear to see that the beauty and sheer delight of hundreds of years’ knowledge is being revived by this upsurge of taught classical technique.
Self Portrait as Possessed by Caleb Knodell

Dead is Dead by Luke Hillestad
FOUR KEY EXHIBITIONS VISITED IN 2014/15
THE MARTYRS

A BILL VIOLA INSTALLATION

6th November 2014
I visited St Paul’s Cathedral to see this particular installation by Bill Viola. I was not quite sure what to expect but when I stood in front of the installation I was not disappointed. The four films of Martyrs depict three men and a woman, all barefoot and plainly dressed, enduring trials by the four elements: a man immersed in dust; a woman bound at her hands and feet and subjected to furious winds; a seated figure consumed by fire; and a man hung by his feet with a rope and deluged with water.

Though deliberately timeless and placeless, the connection with the torture and persecution we encounter frequently today in the news media is unavoidable but, curiously, the work is never harrowing. The figures are becalmed, all of them initially sleeping or in meditation, never expressing emotion at their trial. The man who sits amid raging flames, for instance, meets our gaze insistently yet impassively.

That the films are touching rather than unsettling is also down to their sheer beauty. The dust that rises in slow motion from the man immersed in earth is lit in such a way that it glisters — a form of alchemy, as base material becomes almost celestial. What you take from them is up to you —
they’re easily readable as a story of Christian redemption, as all the sequences end with the figures bathed in light, their heads turned towards the heavens, other than the man doused in water, who literally ascends off the screen.

But Viola also taps into ancient symbolism, where the four elements are metaphors for life; and light has always evoked much more than God in his work. This is as much a hippie message as it is a Christian one, about a journey to self-knowledge, the light within as much as from above. Light is crucial in the way we experience the work, too. The screens sit on an elegant steel stand designed by Norman Foster, beneath one of the vast, spectacular windows with which Sir Christopher Wren made St Paul’s such a luminous space. Reflections of the architecture are initially frustrating but are necessarily part of the installation, eventually enhancing it — walk around it and you can place Viola’s figures within Wren’s arches and between his columns, as if the videos and architecture are one. Neatly, the installation is placed above the spot where Wren is buried. How fitting that this dramatic work should occupy a kind of limbo, between the St Paul’s creator’s mortal remains and the infinite sky he framed through the window above.
“THE IMAGE AS BURDEN”
MARLENE DUMAS

TATE MODERN 2015
Marlene Dumas

Born in South Africa, Cape Town, in 1953 Marlene Dumas moved to the Netherlands in 1976. Dumas is primarily a figurative artist and uses pre-existing images and never paints from real life. Her work explores issues such as sexuality, death, love and shame and these are not romantic visions but are very real and very potent in their effect.

Marlene Dumas, South African-born Amsterdam-based artist, is perhaps one of the most significant practising contemporary painters. And, according to the curators of The Image as Burden at the Tate Modern in London, this is “the most comprehensive retrospective survey of the artist’s work in Europe to date”.

Since the early 1970s, Dumas has produced paintings that focus mainly on the human face and body. Unlike similar figurative painters among the Pictures Generation, which dominated contemporary art in the early 1980s, Dumas survived the supposed “death of painting” that followed. Like many figurative painters of the 1980s, Dumas acquires her sources from image-rich mass culture. Unlike many of them, however, she appropriated imagery secure in the faith that images can still emotionally affect us.
One of the best works is *The Painter*, 1994 who turns out to be a toddler with a wary or defensive look, standing vulnerably naked. She is partly drawn – in the manner of Ingres, sinuous and precise – and partly painted, her face the white of greasepaint, her torso carrying a pale blue haze like a Degas pastel. The child’s hands are thick with paint, one violet, the other blood-red as if caught in the act. Perhaps the punishment is to become both a painting herself, and its reluctant model. That *The Painter* is female and naked seems to be at least part of the point.
The strongest works in this show is that although her source material is modern, Dumas is an old-fashioned expressionist. The *Black Drawings* from the 90s are as devastating as they should be: 112 heads, cropped at the neck, that look like portraits with no individuality. Which is exactly what had happened to the original subjects, black Africans photographed by ethnographers. Dumas’s paintings are alive with sympathy.
EGON SCHIHELLE : THE RADICAL NUDE

THE COURTAULD GALLERY

Somerset House, London

2015
EGON SCHIELLE

Born in Austria in 1890 Egon Schielle was a protégé of Gustav Klimt (1862-1918) and is considered to be a major figurative painter of the early 20th century. He is mostly known for his self-portraits of which he produced many and for his distinctive and unusual twisted body shapes.

This particular exhibition consisted of 38 paintings and drawings by Schielle and as I walked through and viewed these I was struck at how vibrant and direct these nudes are. Mostly in pencil and gouache their overt sexuality is instant and frank but Schielle’s nudes are drawn from keen observation and he keeps lines to a minimum. Erotic and bold these water colours are innovative and are almost, but not quite, abstract definitions of the human anatomy. His striking colouration of the hands and face in Erwin Dominik Osen (1910) and again the hands in Mime van Osen (1910) are particularly interesting as they obviously refer to the fact that Osen was a mime artist who used his hands and face within his own practice.
Woman with black stockings (Woman in red garters) (1913) is a striking image with its highly charged sexual almost pornographic display of her genitalia framed by black stockings and, just to make sure your eye is not diverted elsewhere, bright red garters direct you straight to the spot where Schiele wants you to look.
Standing nude in red jacket (1913) is a master class of how to depict the human figure with pure simple line. Each line has a purpose for being there and there are no unnecessary flourishes. Again, red and black direct us to the areas which Schielle obviously wants us to observe.
I think we should remember that Schielle was in his early 20s when he created these works and like most young men (and women) pornography and sex is what interested him most and this is clearly visible.

Sadly Schielle died at only 28 years of age of the Spanish Flu so we will never know how he would have developed into maturity and we are left with just a glimpse of his genius and which still enthralled and shows us why he is considered one of the most important artists of the early 20th century.
FIGURATIVELY SPEAKING

38 Alma Square, London NW8

Heike Moras
FIGURATIVELY SPEAKING

This exhibition was very different from all of my other previous exhibition visits as it was held in a private house and hosted by the owner and was curated by Marcelle Joseph.

To understand why this exhibition was held in a private home I checked Heike Moras’s website and obtained the following information:

“Heike moras art aims to bring emerging and established artistic talent to London. Located in a private townhouse, heike moras art is a contemporary art salon that offers an intimate and personal viewing experience away from the white-box format of conventional art galleries. The exhibition programme comprises of forward-thinking contemporary art in a variety of media that reflects the scope and diversity of the global artistic commune. Our ambition is to foster an understanding of new art and artists and we are dedicated to serve as a platform for artists which we consider to be relevant to the current discourse.

Heike Moras advises international collectors on establishing and maintaining contemporary art collections. Her previous employment with a private art dealer has fuelled a passion for emerging talent and provided her with a keen understanding of the contemporary art world. Heike received a Masters in Art Business at Sotheby’s Institute of Art in London and was awarded a distinction on her dissertation on the art market of Cuba. She periodically lectures on the Cuban art market. “

I must say it was an absolute delight to see the artworks displayed in someone’s house and gave each work a new depth and you could see how they might work in your own interior. It was
interesting that the “white cube” held no sway here yet each artwork was well displayed and you could clearly see their uniqueness and their strength. Heike told me that she gets quite attached to the art she hosts on her walls but as all the works displayed had been sold although she felt sad to let them go she was excited and looking forward to the next exhibition she was hosting in the Summer.
Man with a drink (2008)

Chantelle Joffe

Chantal Joffe RA (b.1969, St. Albans, Vermont) lives and works in London. Possessing a humorous eye for everyday awkwardness and an enlivening facility with paint, Joffe brings a combination of insight and integrity to the genre of figurative art.
Eileen Cooper

*Sixth Sense*, 2012
Lynette Yiadom-Boakye

Heaven Help Us All, 2005
“LEARNING THROUGH PAINTING”
“Great things are done by a series of small things brought together”

Vincent Van Gogh
Stages 1 and 2

using acrylic as a ground and then oil paint
ALICE at 101 (2015)

Oil on canvas
From charcoal drawing ..... then under painting......
…work in progress ….
SIDELINES :

(a series of portraits using an isolated
“old masters” technique)

I hope to complete 99 over the next few months but here are some I have done so far.
AMOS (2015)
At the time of making this little book
I have been made a
Fellow of the Digswell Arts Trust
(a charity which helps emerging artists by
supplying studios and other help)
and I am working out of a studio
in Letchworth, Hertfordshire…….
.....the adventure continues........
“Painting is easy when you don't know how, but very difficult when you do.”

Edgar Degas
Susan Coussens

University of Bedfordshire

(2015)