Finding Time: How it is Made Visual Artists Newsletter

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Finding Time

BRIAN FAY OUTLINES THE PROCESSES AND CONCEPTS UNDERPINNING HIS PRACTICE

In recent years my art practice has been almost exclusively drawing based - using drawing as a vehicle to record and mark time. My current work is focused on the cracked surfaces of historical paintings and distressed film stock from early silent cinema. The intention being to record the effect that time and history has had on their materials and supports.

I arrived at drawing through a process of stripping down to the essentials of exactly what interested me in terms of looking at and making art. Removing everything else and focusing on line enabled me to see more clearly the areas and issues that I could concentrate on and work with. I began to work on process-led repetitive drawings - reiterating lines within a given formal constraint, and where time was revealed through the act of drawing. While this was a necessary stage, it became somewhat reductive; and so I began to look at ways of making the line refer to something outside of itself - some thing or form, whereby time would already be present and referenced.

Sometimes, when you are using reduced means, it can be the little things that can have a major affect. I noticed that if I broke up a line it began to resemble the dots and dashes of Morse code. At the time - February 1999, Morse had just been officially declared a dead form, whereby time would already be present and referenced. It seemed that you were no longer just looking at an image of a painting; rather a recording of times action since the painting was made.

This facilitated a shift in my choice of sources, while I was still using layered experience seems to correspond well with the increased layering of line and imagery in my drawings - and it certainly informed my thinking for my most recent show 'Some Time Now' and a selection of digital print on paper, Dimensions (framed) 40cm x 30cm 2006.

The Butler Gallery in 2005. This series of craquelure drawings comprising of graphite drawings on paper, developed this idea further with his treatment of experienced time as a multi-faceted experience seems to correspond well with the increased layering of line and imagery in my drawings - and it certainly informed my thinking for my most recent show 'Some Time Now' and a selection of digital print on paper, Dimensions (framed) 40cm x 30cm 2006.

Conceptually, I find myself returning to Henri Bergson's notions of time as simultaneity of both 'present' and 'past' Edmund Husserl, developed this idea further with his treatment of experienced time as containing competing hierarchies of time and memory - between recollection, retention and prospection. This notion of time as a multi-faceted experience seems to correspond well with the increased layering of line and imagery in my drawings - and it certainly informed my thinking for my most recent show 'Some Time Now' at The Hugh Lane Gallery and The National Gallery, London. An earlier manifestation of Art-Watching appeared as a supplement in CIRCLA magazine (issue 116 2006). We included an essay, Watching Over Art - Thoughts on Art and Art Criticism, and a selection of digital drawings responding to specific works at the Hugh Lane that will shortly appear in the Art-Watching book. Secondly, and specifically for the supplement, we invited 12 art writers, critics, historians curators and conservators to submit a short reflection on the subject of 'watching art'.

I've been undertaking further research into the subject of craquelure – in particular how it is recorded and imaged with conservation technologies. I was fortunate to speak with Joanna Sharpe, Head of Conservation at The Hugh Lane and the set me in the right direction in order to track down the relevant sources. Increasingly the sophistication and accuracy of digital imaging and infrared photography is offering conservation new avenues to explore – in particular the x-ray. I have started to incorporate images derived from x-ray analysis of paintings into my drawings – thus tracing a further element of time into the works – revealing of the layers beneath the finished surface of the work, showing the time before the painting was completed.