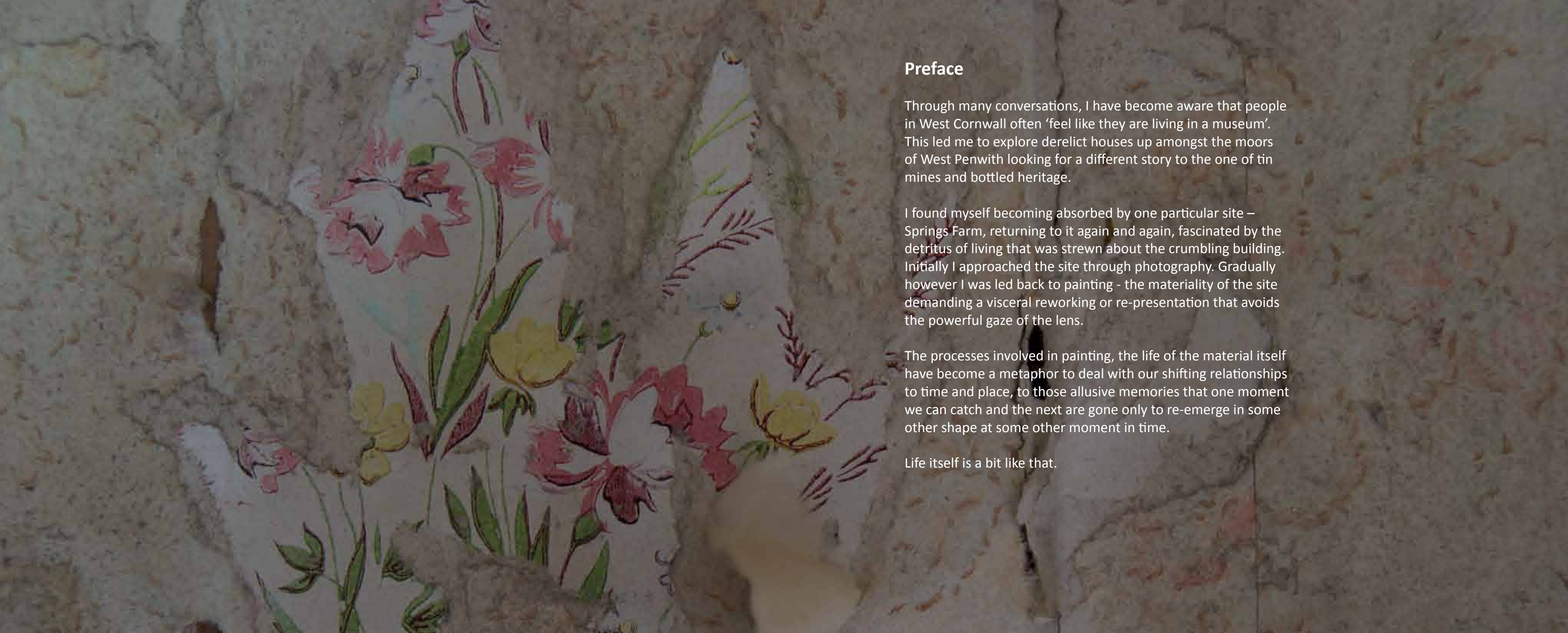


Springs Farm

a peopled place

veronica vickery





Preface

Through many conversations, I have become aware that people in West Cornwall often 'feel like they are living in a museum'. This led me to explore derelict houses up amongst the moors of West Penwith looking for a different story to the one of tin mines and bottled heritage.

I found myself becoming absorbed by one particular site – Springs Farm, returning to it again and again, fascinated by the detritus of living that was strewn about the crumbling building. Initially I approached the site through photography. Gradually however I was led back to painting - the materiality of the site demanding a visceral reworking or re-presentation that avoids the powerful gaze of the lens.

The processes involved in painting, the life of the material itself have become a metaphor to deal with our shifting relationships to time and place, to those allusive memories that one moment we can catch and the next are gone only to re-emerge in some other shape at some other moment in time.

Life itself is a bit like that.

List of figures

1. *The Crowns, Botallack* digital photograph, 2009
2. Site of former *Cornwall Motel* digital photograph, 2009
3. *Kenidjack Valley* digital photograph, 2004
4. *Kenidjack Valley* digital photograph, 2010
5. *BOShomes* estate agent sign, installation at Mill Farm, Bosigran, 2008
6. *Consolidated* fountain & bedding plants, installation in buddle at Porthmear Stamps, Bosigran, 2008
7. *Footpath Closed: This Weekend?* BOSarts project signage 2009
- 8 - 10. *Annie's Cottage* digital photograph, 2007
- 11 -13. *Coronation House* digital photograph, 2009
14. *Cottage below Kenidjack Common* digital photograph, 2009
15. *Ground floor layout* of Springs Farm, pencil and ink on paper, 2010
16. Scale plan of the ground floor, digital drawing, 2010
17. *Springs Farm* (Springs Farm series) digital photograph, 2009
- 18 - 21. Digital photographs from *Springs Farm series*, 2009-10
- 22 - 23. Nathan Coley *Show Home* 2003 <http://www.locusplus.org.uk/coley.html>
24. *Coronation House* digital photograph, 2009
25. Caitlin DeSilvey, digital photograph from the *Montana Homestead* project <http://www.slate.com/id/2129660/>
- 26 - 27. Lara Almarcegui *Relocated Houses, Britton's Yard* 2009 <http://www.onedaysculpture.org.nz>
- 28 - 29. *Sheeps Bit & Heath Spotted Orchid: It all begins with the Flowers* Series of 17 postcards and painting installation, Bosigran Visitor Centre, 2008
- 30 - 33. Digital photographs taken at Springs Farm, 2009-10
34. *Flower 1 (Springs Farm series)* 120 x 100 cm
35. *The Single Rose (Springs Farm series)* 160 x 190 cm, oil on canvas 2009
36. Matthias Weischer *Oberlicht* 120 x 150 cm, oil & tempera on canvas 2006, in Weischer (2007)
37. *The Cruellest Month (Springs Farm series)* 160 x 190 cm, oil on canvas 2010
38. Matthias Weischer *Schild* 60 x 40 cm, oil on canvas 2007, in Weischer (2007)
- 39 - 40. *Studies 1 & 2 (Spring Farm series)* 22 x 34 cm each, oil on canvas 2010
41. Karin Mamma Andersson *Leftovers* 122 x 160 cm, acrylic & oil on canvas, in Andersson (2007)
42. *Long Gone (Spring Farm series)* 150 x 190 cm, oil on canvas 2010
43. *A Shelter for Daydreaming (Springs Farm Series)* triptych, each panel 120 x 160 cm, oil on canvas 2010 (work in progress)
44. *The Continuous Presence (Spring Farm series)* 42 x 30 cm, oil on canvas 2010
45. *Redundant (Spring Farm series)* 42 x 30 cm, oil on canvas 2010
46. Francis Alÿs *El Soplón* (The Scavenger), oil on canvas, 1995-02
47. Francis Alÿs *The Collector* photographic documentation of performance 2001-2



Peopled Places: residual traces of memory and dwelling, material objects and the social

How might an arts practice investigate social complexities and cultural histories of place through its materialities and residual traces, to reveal that which has been hidden, overlooked, compromised, obscured, denied or refined?

Contents (4313 words)

1. Introduction

2. Changing context: Living in a museum?

3. Springs Farm

3.1 A peopled place

3.2 Material residue, material processes

4. Conclusion: Working in the spaces in between...

References

Further reading

Appendix:

Subjective Spece or Cultural Commodity? A further discussion.

This essay was produced as part of an MA Fine Art (Contemporary Practice) University College Falmouth. July 2010

1. Introduction

Looking back on my work over the years, the main line of enquiry has been to do with time and place, with identity, culture and heritage. How do we relate to the past? What does it say about who we are in the present? Is there a need to ossify the past, to preserve every fragment of past lives in order to give us a sense of who we are as individuals, or as a society today?

This essay sets out to unpack this practice by looking at a research project *Springs Farm: a peopled place* and questioning how an arts practice might investigate social complexities and cultural histories of place through its materialities and residual traces, to reveal that which has been hidden, overlooked, compromised, obscured, denied or refined.

Previous work explored questions around how identity, culture and heritage are preserved and (re)presented, and how contemporary culture is framed by and also constructs the past in an attempt, perhaps to make sense of an endemic and personal sense of rootlessness in a fast changing world. Drawing from discussions across the disciplines of art practice, cultural studies and geography I will consider ideas that have been central to the recent developments in my practice: how ideas associated with individual, cultural and societal identity can be explored through the subject; and whether this can be used to develop a counter-narrative that resists homogeneity.

This journey will start with an introduction to both the specific socio-political context of site and to early attempts to work within this framework that led to a focus on a particular derelict site, Springs Farm, and the resulting enquiry and body of work. Subjective approaches to place (space) and to houses (home) will be interwoven with a thread that explores notions of memory and temporality



Fig 1. (above)
The Crowns Botallack 2009
One of the most photographed spots in West Cornwall and featured in the 1970's BBC drama *Poldark*.
Fig.2. (right)
Site of former *Cornwall Motel* 2009



1. Rosalyn Deutsche *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (1996) p xxiv.

and the potential relationship between materialities of place and materialities of media and form. The discussion will hint at the role of memory and the subjective image in constructing the present, further questions involving Rosalyn Deutsche's work around the creation of a 'democratic spatial politics'¹ will be left for another time: this project is only the beginning of an enquiry, that is throwing up more questions than it answers!

2. Changing context: Living in a museum?

My work starts with immersion in place, currently with living and working in West Cornwall. From conversations with people living in the area around St Just, I am aware that people 'feel like they are living in a museum'¹.

'I don't go much on these museums,
they don't bring in the money like
they [the mines] used to...'¹

In September 2006, I was out walking with my dog along Kenidjack valley near St Just. The centuries old crumbling tin mining site, stack at its centre, which had been retreating into the heath and cliff, was now encased in scaffold. Over the following months, the site was beautifully consolidated with European money and the stack was now rebuilt. Entropy is ossified, decay set in cement. In my naivety, I wanted to finish the job with a pretty ribbon tied in a bow around the newly placed cowl!

These responses are one possible reading but inevitably lead to further questions: is it enough to observe that culture is being objectified and sold back to us as tourist product or is the context far more complex and evolving?

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In 2007 in response to these questions, a fundamental shift occurred in my practice² resulting in an installation *St Just Revisited for MoreCornwall*, and then a year-long residency, the *Bosigran Project*, with the National Trust. My work had become project-based: site, context, dialogue and collaboration were now essential components.



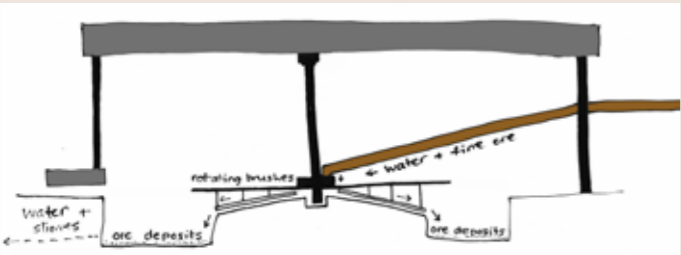
Fig. 3 (above)
Kenidjack Valley Winter 2004
Fig. 4 (right)
Kenidjack Valley July 2010

1. Both quotes are from elderly resident in St Just, recorded by myself June 2007
2. Previously I had worked within community development and economic regeneration, initially as a community activist then later within both the statutory and charitable sectors. Alongside this work and bringing up my family, I was also struggling to establish a painting practice... I now started to realise I could bring the two seemingly disparate strands of my work together and work in a different way.
3. The Bosigran Project took place at the National Trust Bosigran Farm between Morvah and Zennor on the coast road to St Ives. The farm is set amidst one of the oldest continuously farmed landscapes in the world on a tapestried plateau of tiny fields and ancient fossilized hedge-lines, between the heath, protected by Carn Galva (Galva means 'protector', the 'gentle giant'), and the rugged north coast granite cliffs at the entrance to the St Just World Heritage Mining Site. See 'BOSarts' page 10.



Two pieces of work made for the *Bosigran Project*³ were particularly forming in terms of this project. *Consolidated* was a sculptural installation in a buddle⁴, a three-tier welded frame that functioned both as a fountain and as a formal planter. The water was piped by gravity feed from 500m upstream and returned to the stream along the original granite drainage calvert. A heritage style 'interpretation' board accompanied the installation. *BOShomes*⁵, an ongoing piece, appropriates the form of an estate agency, consisting at Bosigran of estate agents signs placed alongside the remains of Victorian settlements that are scattered around the farm.

These pieces were in many ways both visually and conceptually effective, with the various audiences of walkers, visitors, school groups and artists, able to access and respond to the work from different points of entry (the National Trust were still getting enquiries about the buddle piece a year later).



Crowned Glory...

The fountain in the buddle, placed at Porthmear stamps in 2008, is fed by gravity feed.

250m of water pipe extends from the buddle over the steep drop in the wheel pit, under the bridge and up stream to the second mill at Mill Farm.

The buddle was 'consolidated' as part of the Objective One (European) funded St Just Area Heritage Regeneration Project

Buddle: a cornish term for part of a mine processing site

The ore was sent to the centre of the pit, gravity graded it leaving the heavier ore at the centre. The brushes spread the ore to avoid channels being formed by the flowing water. The buddles at Porthmear are of the convex type, which were introduced in the 1850s, these buddles had circular pits with rotating brushes. The brushes were often made of heather, which was close to hand.



Fig. 5. (above)
BOShomes
Estate Agent sign installed at Mill Farm, Porthmear Stamps, Bosigran
Fig 6. (right & left)
Consolidated
Fountain in buddle at Porthmear Stamps, Bosigran, extracts from *Interpretation Panel* installed next to the fountain.

4. Part of a 19th century tin processing plant, the buddle was used to separate out the tin ore from the rest of the residue.

5. *bos* Cornish (*Kernewek*) for dwelling place, a common suffix found at the beginnings of place-names in West Cornwall, thus Bosigran is likely to have been 'Egret's place' (Egret was said to be the mother of King Arthur)

6. *Furze* bracken. Furze was traditionally harvested at the end of the Summer to use as winter bedding for the cattle. The cutting of bracken and gorse (for winter fuel) was an integral part of the traditional heathland management that resulted in the creation of the heath as we know it today. Management techniques of grazing, cutting and occasional burning, keeps the furze in check and allows for a rich bio-diversity of fauna, insect life and bird habitats.



However the work had only tentatively begun to start the process of questioning how an arts practice might investigate social complexities and cultural histories of place. And I was still left with a practice whose material presence ranged from furze⁶ cutting and cream teas to photographic media, watercolour and sculptural installation - a way off a coherent research-led practice!

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So derelict mine stacks from the area's industrial part have been 'consolidated' with European funding, decay arrested, vast tracts of cliff and moor covered by official designations designed to protect and preserve... Looking deeper through dialogue and relationships, we are presented with complexity, contradiction and compromise, in which different histories and narratives interweave and sometimes collide. People originally from the area are proud of their heritage; those who have moved here like myself may have 'bought into it', perhaps lured by nostalgia or more recently by ecological imperatives; many are dependent on the vagaries of tourism, the cultural and ecological landscape for their income; motivations are complex and realities layered, new relationships between people and place are being continuously formed...

BOSarts grew out of the Bosigran Project. It is an artist-led partnership with the National Trust based in Cornwall. BOSarts makes and commissions artist projects that explore the spaces and dichotomies between art, culture, everyday living, heritage, the environment and the contemporary world, particularly within a rural context. Projects tend to happen off site in out of the way places, on beaches, farms, moor and clifftops. BOSarts in its early development has developed an interest in the space between the embedded and the transient, in research process and dialogue. A dynamic way of growing dialogue has been developed through the projects in both 2008 and 2009, using the format of a 3-day artist camping seminar drawing artists and speakers from across the UK and beyond.

This Weekend? in 2009 commissioned six artist projects across Cornwall. The project used the wider context of Cornwall to explore issues to do with rurality: land use, conservation, tourism and the construction of local identity (looking at many of the socio-political issues that prompted this research project). Each project sought to grow out of dialogue whilst also having a public interface that lasted for no more than a weekend.



Fig 7. (right)
Footpath Closed: This Weekend Project
signage installed on Zennor cliff
September 2009, BOSarts.

The coastpath had been closed for some months following a torrential storm which had tragic consequences. The coast is not always the contemporary playground we often think...

This complexity of narrative and histories, of which the increasing commodification of cultural heritage and place is a strong current is very much the contemporary context in which we live; it led me to want to create a visual narrative that by holding up a mirror to these complexities perhaps told a different and contrasting story of place.

My fascination with the scattered remains of former settlements strewn across the moors of West Penwith remained, as did my antipathy to planning policies that favoured the 'doing up' of redundant farm buildings as holiday lets whilst proscribing their use for local housing⁷; these concerns provided a starting point. I started photographing these derelict spaces, returning to them again and again. As I worked I soon realised that my focus was changing, from originally setting out to research for *BOShomes*, I was focussed on one particular site, Springs Farm, a derelict four-bed farmhouse on the edge of the West Penwith moor, in the midst of the Cornish Mining Landscape World Heritage Site.

And so this enquiry led to the project Springs Farm (a peopled place) - a visual exploration of a derelict farmhouse on the edge of the West Penwith moor – and a return to painting...



7. Sofa surfing is endemic, as is the loss of young people. West Penwith has the largest gap between house prices and average household income of anywhere in the country outside of the Borough of Kensington & Chelsea.



Figs. 8-10 (left)
Annie's Cottage Porthmear
 Figs. 11-13 (above)
Coronation House Bosullow
 Fig. 14 (right)
 Cottage below Kenidjack Common



3. Springs Farm

*'...the house shelters day-dreaming,
the house protects the dreamer,
the house allows one to dream in peace.'*¹

3.1 Peopled place

Springs Farm has been empty since the late 1980's; the fascination was not just in the building itself, but in all the detritus of living that has been left behind and is in various stages of decay; the tug between granite-site and former dwelling-ness.

This obsession with derelict houses sprang from a childhood spent 'house-hunting'.² It is probably not coincidental in terms of the allure Springs Farm has for me, that much of the detritus relates to the 70's and 80's, my teenage years, with Barbie dolls, ceramic 'chef'³, school photographs, pills, bank-books, tools and the paraphernalia of farm and family life. It also held the allure of discovery, of risk - climbing in through an open window - rats - an unsafe and crumbling structure. It felt important to leave it undisturbed.

Initially it was a recording and cataloguing process, exploring the site using taxonomic processes, aware of the approach of geographer Caitlin DeSilvey as well as artists who work with archival processes such as Mark Dion. In an early show of some of this work, in which the photographs were sorted into taxonomic groups (already anticipating a refusal on my part to see them as individual objects?) the fascination that they encapsulated soon became clear; as a society we have a overwhelming nostalgic impulse for the old and the forgotten, that in this particular case seemed to become the sole point of entry

Fig. 15 (right)
Springs Farm

1. Bachelard *The Poetics of Space* 1994 p.6
2. Until moving to Cornwall ten years ago, I had never lived in any one place for more than three years - one day I will do a project based on all the places I have lived.... Moving to Cornwall in 2001, represented the first time I felt able to 'settle' or 'make home' anywhere.
3. A ceramic container that used to stand on the side of many kitchens. The chef had a hole in his stomach into which wooden spoons were put for storage.



to these photographs, to the extent that they seemed unable to operate on any other terms. I became very clear that this was not a place I was interested in occupying as an artist - it was its antithesis.

This realisation, that the process was about something more than the photographic image or archival processes led me back to my original enquiry around the nature of place and specifically *home*, and then to a visceral response through painting.

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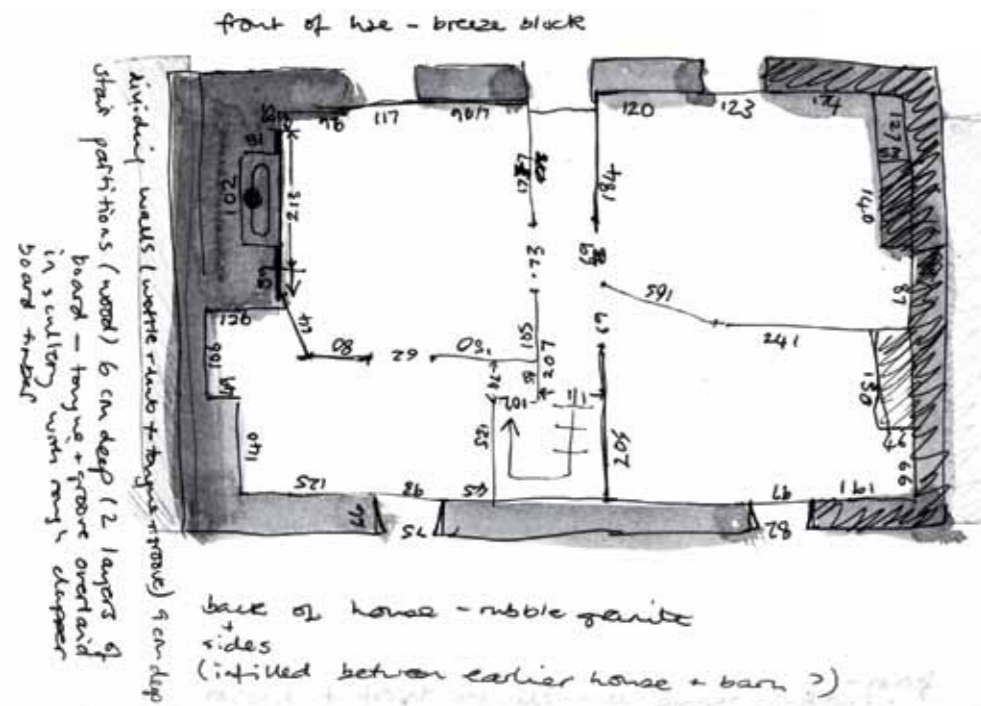


Fig 16 (left)
 Drawing of layout of the ground floor of the farmhouse
 Fig 17 (above)
 Scale drawing of ground floor
 Fig. 18-21 (right)
 photographs from Springs Farm series

Place, I had come to understand as grounded in the everyday, connected; it is intimate, experienced and therefore shifts with time ('the continuous present'⁵); it includes Massey's 'constellation of processes rather than a thing'⁶ and Deutsche's subjective understanding of the 'real political struggles inherent in the production of *all* spaces'⁷; also the metaphor of 'head-space' that is needed to write or get involved in the studio...

So a house, what does it represent? A renewed dwelling place⁸, a home, 'potential' as a second-home owner's escape-to-the-country and sound-financial-investment? In considering space to be a grounded and experienced constellation of processes, then the real value⁹ of the granite structures we refer to as cottages is in their potential for *dwellingness*.

Nathan Coley's work deals with issues of space and how it comes to be invested with meaning. His work operates in the gap between architecture as buildings, empty vessels or commodities, and architecture as sites of memory and social tension. As part of a commission for Locus+, Coley erected overnight an identi-kit version of a Skye croft in various locations in urban South Shields, accompanied by all the marketing you would expect from a national property development company. Locus+ in the curatorial statement¹⁰ on their website introduce the work:

The Temporary Art of the Permanent Dream

Idyll or illusion? Every urban dweller has an idealised country cottage painted in their imagination. Wouldn't it be fantastic to live in the country...someday. But can we really live the rural dream if we had the chance? For many of us those

romantised views of country living would probably turn out to be a nightmare. Our expectations are too high. But why spoil it all by putting it to the test? Why not bring the rural dream to the urban reality?



Fig 22-23 (above)
Nathan Coley *Show Home* 2003
Fig. 24 (right)
Coronation House 2009

5. Lippard, keynote, The Falmouth Convention 2010
6. Massey *For Space* 2005 p.141
7. Deutsche 1996 p.375, footnote 121
8. The gap between average household income and house prices in Cornwall is one of the largest in the UK, pressurised by a mix of market pressure from second home owners with a surfeit of disposable income, the holiday cottage industry and planning restrictions that seek to preserve the historical and environmental landscape. It is also notable how granite cottages have dropped in value in the recent market down-turn, they are a very good investment.
9. Real value is problematic: value as a function of habitation or of desire? Value, like space is politicized and relational.
10. <http://www.locusplus.org.uk/coley.htm>



The themes underlying Coley's work are explored sociologically in Paul Basu's study of the Scottish Diaspora¹¹. With its many parallels to Cornwall, Basu's work highlights a conflict between the idea of home as imaged in the Scottish media-landscape and the search for something more meaningful, localised and personally imagined. The internet is a place for the construction or imaging of these identities but also where they can be challenged and contested. The return *home* becomes an essential part of the imaging of diaspora, or the spatialisation of memory.

This imagining of home takes us to Gustav Bachelard who explored the question of whether we can, amongst the concentration of images we hold around the idea of the house, 'isolate an intimate, concrete essence that would be a justification of the uncommon value of all our images of protected intimacy?'¹³ Home becomes one of the greatest integrating factors for thoughts, memories and dreams, the daydream that binds these together, and is essentially linked to intimacy, at once a shelter for daydreaming and a nest for imagining:

*Thus the house is not experienced from day to day only, on the thread of a narrative, or in the telling of our own story. Through dreaming the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days.*¹⁴

Cornwall too has a long history of Diaspora and economic migration. From potato famine and the vagaries of tin mining, there is a saying that at the bottom of any hole in the world, you'll find a Cornish miner; Cornish technology drove the Industrial Revolution around the globe; Cousin Jacks regularly return for Feast. Young people still leave today (Cornwall is still the poorest part of the UK) believing they will never be able to afford to return, those that remain face uncertain futures amidst the latest industry that I've heard described as mining Cornwall - tourism. Despite initiatives to encourage 'sustainable tourism' (the Tate effect), the industry remains predominantly based on low level and seasonal employment patterns.



'At the semiderelict homestead in Montana where I live and work, the handle of a discarded grain-binding machine pokes out of the bark of a box elder tree. The tree clocks technological advance and agricultural decline in a 50-year accumulation of cellulose and lichen. The obsolete machine speaks to the history of human labor on this hardscrabble farm. And it also illustrates a dynamic process of landscape change—which can be seen as evolution or devolution depending on your perspective. Here human beings have ceded to the tree some control over storytelling about the past...'

Fig. 25 (above)
Caitlin DeSilvey, from *Montana Homestead*, series of photographs

11. Paul Basu *Highland Homecomings: Genealogy and Heritage Tourism in the Scottish Diaspora* (London: Routledge, 2007).
12. Bachelard p.15
13. Bachelard explores the link between image and memory, space and temporality: for him memory is fixed in space and time, motionless. I would argue with this - many times I've been convinced I said or did something, only to find out later that it couldn't possibly have been so... Memory is highly subjective, related to the moments both of reference and contemporaneity (and probably all the moments in between, our fears and our desires...).
14. Bachelard p.5



RELOCATED HOUSES, BRITTON'S YARD, WEL



This art project presents 19 houses for sale at Britton's Yard which have been relocated from various neighbourhoods in Wellington and its suburbs over recent years.

Visiting each of these houses and recounting their histories offers the opportunity to reflect on the urbanisation, construction, transformation and future of the City of Wellington.

Arriving at Britton's Yard, one's first impression is of a ghost town. Removed from their original contexts, the houses are caught between a distant past and their future re-instatement in another site. While recovering the origins of each house, a range of issues surfaced concerning heritage, land ownership, the endless subdivision of land, the evolution of regulated urban planning, changing fashions, and the building of luxury homes in the 21st century.



Beach Road Bach, Plimmerton (1929)

Beach Road was created in Plimmerton by a subdivision of the Public Trust in 1912. A doctor and his wife purchased a plot there in 1917 and two years later built his house, one of the last houses to be built on the site.

A portion of the area behind the house was a 'Special Reserve' the site of Tangi Pu, a traditional Maori village that originally contained two hundred huts.

The land remains ecologically and culturally significant, although all traces of the village were removed in a century at the top of the mountain in the early twentieth century.



Ohio Road Bungalow Brooklyn (1910)

At the end of the 19th century when Brooklyn was known as a busy production area, B. Frickert was considered by many to be the district's land agent. He owned a large lot of land and developed it into the bungalow.

The bungalow was built by the Frickert family in 1910 and was the first of its kind in the area. It was a public house and was used as a public house for many years.

In the late 1980s, a couple bought it and it was used as a private residence.

Fig 26-27 (above) Lara Almarcegui *Relocated Houses, Britton's Yard 2009*

Home represents then, both a very specific space with specific functions, and a subjective space, one of becoming, of potential, of dwellingness. Home is our past, present and future, intimately connected with our imaginings. My fascination with Springs farm concerns the idea of house as dwelling place, as site of memory and (re)imagining.

Bachelard's theme of stories and the co-penetration of various dwelling-places is echoed in the work of artist Lara Almarcegui and cultural geographer Caitlin DeSilvey who worked on a long-term immersive project in a derelict homestead in the States¹⁵. Almarcegui uses archival processes to explore neglected or overlooked sites, highlighting each location's tendency towards entropy. Her project *Relocated Houses, Britton's Yard*¹⁶ was based around a collecting site or temporary street for houses that had been moved there for re-sale. She researched and documented the history of each building and invited the previous owners back for the event taking buildings that were stranded, out-of-place, and re-imagined them:

'Seen as empty carcasses, or a pile of materials, buildings have limited value, but as a society comes together to dwell, to inhabit, and to exchange stories, value is created within such materiality just as that materiality is being lost from sight.'¹⁷

15. DeSilvey <http://www.slate.com/id/2129660/>
16. Almarcegui, 2009. One Day Sculpture Project, a New Zealand-wide series of temporary public artworks, none of which lasted for more than 24 hours
17. Kate Linzey in Lara Almarcegui: *Relocated Houses, Britton's Yard*, 2009, p. 4
19. DeSilvey p. 899
20. There is considerable resonance between DeSilvey's work in the States and the heritage industry in the UK, where a material object or even a site often becomes detached from its original referent or usage: a mine becomes a culturally determined heritage site.

DeSilvey's way of working considers place to be 'porous'¹⁹, and archiving as both a materially embedded and collaborative process that owed as much to the original occupants of the homestead as the original collectors, hoarders or archivers, as it does to any archival organizing principle. The former dwelling-place, and its associated collection, remains *fluid* and *peopled*²⁰.

3.2 Fluid resistance, material processes

Springs Farm was demanding a visceral response, a re-presentation²¹ through material processes, fluid resistance to the objective gaze prompting a significant change in practice - a move away from the photographic to a renewed engagement with painting processes.

I began looking at how I could use material processes intrinsic to painting to explore the indeterminacy of memory and subjectivity, to create a material metaphor for residual traces of memory and dwelling. In my previous painting practice I had been interested in ideas of material process, subjectivity and becoming, informed by post-feminist and post-structuralist writings; I looked at how this way of working could be used as a metaphor for a re-imagining of residues, materiality and space. Initially working with images taken with a macro-lens of grime-ridden plastic flowers that had been left shrewn around one of the downstairs rooms²², the flower paintings were worked in a way that constantly drew and then destroyed the image, consciously avoiding resolution using very fluid layers of paint that created their own edges and paths (reminiscent of watercolour and the antithesis of classical photography).

These paintings were a start in exploring indeterminacy of memory and subjectivity. However despite allowing the paint to take on a life of its own, there



Figs 28-29 (above)
Sheeps Bit & Heath Spotted Orchid: It all begins with the Flowers
 Series of 17 postcards and painting installation, *Bosigran Visitor Centre*, 2008
 Figs. 30-33 (near right)
 Photographs taken at Springs Farm
 Fig. 34 (far right)
Flower 1, 120 x 100 cm

21. *Representation*: an idea etymologically linked to that of *resent*, from the Latin *sentire*, to feel *re* again, *pre* before

22. It is strange, and also perhaps worth noting given the subject of this writing, how when you are unsure of something, perhaps taking a step out into the unknown, you tend to start from something familiar. It would be no coincidence that during the previous summer I had spent months photographing the tiny flowers on the heath and blowing them up into something exotic (see images above).

is a tightness about the images that might be expected with time away from painting, and an issue of scale and composition. A striking component in the photographs that was lost in the paintings was a sense of immediacy and the unfinished, or perhaps being a part of something larger; cropping and relationships between objects were essential components of the photographic images and was something I realised were missing in the initial paintings: *The Single Rose* was both considerably larger in scale and played around with juxtaposition, fragments and cropping; the scale consciously related to body-size in an attempt to draw the viewer into the image. This painting, while in some ways a development, was always compromised by the flattening out of the visual space, the loss of the material context of site²⁴.

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In *Twilight Memories* Andreas Huyssen explores the relationship between remembering and forgetting at the beginning of the 21st century, in an age of global connections marked by absorption with the past. Memory is based on representation; when we remember something it is not an actual experience of something from another time, it is a re-presentation¹. From his initial discussion of memory, Huyssen goes on to discuss the relationship of memory and amnesia to the cultural conditions of post-modernity. He suggests that the 24hour nature of a world marked by instant entertainment and the information revolution, is also marked by the condition of amnesia, while an attempt at reparation is obsessed by memory [and heritage], these conditions have/are transforming the relationship of past, present and future, and blurring or dissolving the territorial and spatial coordinates of our late 20th century lives²⁵. Post-modernism, for Huyssen, which is chaotic, fragmentary and free-floating (as opposed to the over-riding histories of Modernity and the Victorian) is marked by a need for 'temporary anchoring':

'Memory is no longer primarily a vital and energizing antidote to capitalist reification via the commodity form, a rejection of the iron cage homogeneity of an earlier culture industry and its consumer markets. It rather represents the attempt to slow down information processing, to resist the dissolution of time in the synchronicity of the archive, to recover a mode of simulation and fast-speed information and cable networks, to claim some anchoring space in a world of puzzling and often threatening heterogeneity, non-synchronicity and information overload.'³

*'Lady of silences
Calm and distressed
Torn and most whole
Rose of memory
Rose of forgetfulness
Exhausted and life-giving
Worried reposeful
The single Rose
Is now the garden
Where all loves ends'*²³

Fig. 35 (right)
The Single Rose 160 x 190 cm

23. T.S. Eliot *Ash Wednesday* 1930, lines 66-75

24. I had a continuous struggle throughout the process of making this painting – more than any other work in this series this piece was subject to repeated and substantial re-workings over a period of six months.

25. Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* 1995, p. 20

26. Huyssen p. 7



During the autumn of 2009, I started to re-engage not only with the processes of painting, but more specifically the history of painting drawing upon the history of the *interior* as genre, from the 16th century ‘interrupted art’ of Vermeer that, influenced by the invention of the camera obscura, casts its fate ‘not with an old order – a realm of agency, desire, and sexuality – but with the new, a world that is scopophilic, self-reflexive, and ... personal’²⁷ to the often puzzling abstractions and ambiguities in the late still-lives and interiors of Bonnard and the visual iconography of the interiors of early 20th century American city-life of Edward Hopper. I also returned to the richness of the surfaces and narratives of Peter Doig I had encountered for the first time in the major retrospective of his work at Tate Britain in 2008²⁸, whilst also discovering contemporary painters including Matthias Weischer’s interior spaces exploring culture, dwelling and memory; Dexter Dalwood’s collage derived paintings and juxtaposition of images, that self-consciously refer to culture and society; and the strange unsettling interiors of Karin Mamma Andersson²⁹.

Weischer’s paintings use images collaged from interiors magazines as an initial

Matthias Weischer, a painter originally from Hungary, who having studied under Neo Rauch, became associated with the ‘Leipzig School’ that achieved unprecedented hype in 2004. Between the years of 2004-7, Weischer’s paintings move from depicting near empty corners, ‘indeterminant spaces... that evoke a bareness born of poverty’³⁰ and that French critic Thibaut de Ruyter describes rather dismissively as being corners that are ‘familiar and protective structural non-spaces where a human being occasionally decides to hang out for a while’³¹ to becoming increasingly complex, filled with objects and signs of human presence/absence.

The more recent paintings depict deserted rooms which have a feeling of being forgotten in time, they are ‘voids, which remind us how fleeting our “certainties” really are’³² They are as if someone just left while also having the sense of the inhabitants being long gone; uneaten fruit in a bowl on the table, rubbish on the floor, a window left open, a lamp left on. They are fragments of lives held in time, held in paint. They are or were dwelt-in places; they hold out the hope of being lived in again.

Will someone return?

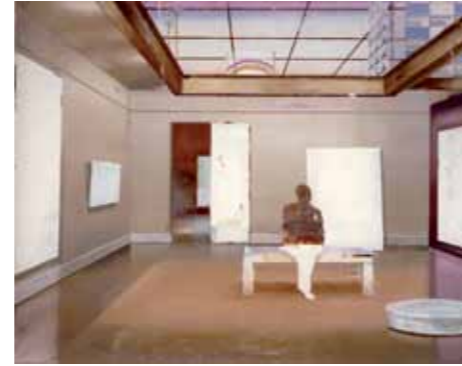


Fig. 36 (above)
Matthias Weischer *Oberlicht* 2006



27. Brian Jay Wolf *Vermeer and the Invention of seeing* (University of Chicago press, 2001) p.119

28. These paintings will stay with me for a life-time... As well having an eye to discussions that arose from the Landart movement of the 1960/70's and more recent work that is understood as being site, context-specific or project-based - for a fuller discussion of this contemporary context please refer to appendix 2.

29. Karin Mamma Andersson (2007)

30. Susanne Pfeffer p. 4???(box above, check)

31. Thibaut de Ruyter, ‘Les Coins De Matthias Weischer/Matthias Weischer: Collisions and Corners’, *Art Press* (2006), 42-47.

32. Rudij Bergmann, ‘Nobody Lives Here Anymore’, in Matthias Weischer: *Malerie/Painting* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2007).

source. Despite the very different starting point, I discovered with real excitement he was interested in similar territory. Spending days looking at the paintings of Weischer led to a small series of studies on paper in which I started to incorporate the architectural/compositional structure of the room/canvas into the work. Structure left me feeling freer to work. I had created space in more ways than one without immediately realising the significance of this step; on completing the studies, I didn't expect to increase the formal structure of the larger paintings and began *The Cruellest Month* with different intentions, half way through incorporating the room structure in what felt like a moment of recklessness! And something worked. I started to play round with structure and perspective against indeterminacy of spaces, with flat areas against perspective, with dense areas of paint against thin layers of glaze. At the same time, the objects in the space did not conform to recognisable notions of scale, elements of surprise challenging the authority of the pictorial space/architecture. What I found starting to happen was the incorporation of the physical site more directly into a material but fluid dialogue with the canvas and the viewer. The triangle/constellation of processes was starting to feel more balanced.

As my work has progressed through this enquiry, I have increasingly tried to work with architectural complexity as it relates to 'the site' but also in terms of scale and its relationship to pictorial form and how it relates to the viewer. So the series of paintings also incorporates some much smaller pieces that create a more intimate relationship to the viewer; they consciously focus in on elements that are also contained within the larger paintings. Although using similar processes to the large pieces, these works have a strange quiet to them, touching on Benjamin's separation of the interior from the public space: in the creation of the interior, we suppress the worlds of the social and of work, from this suppression springs 'the phantasmagorias of the interior.'³⁴

*'April is the crullest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with Spring rain.'*³³

Fig. 37 (Right)
The Cruellest Month (160 x 190 cm)

33. TS Eliot *The Wasteland: 1. The Burial of the Dead* lines 1-4 (1st published 1930)

34. Walter Benjamin, 'Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century', *Perspecta*, 12 (1969), p.169



This idea of conflict and then breakdown between the exterior and the interior is taken up in Susanne Pfeffer's contextualization of Weischer's work. From the 19th century Pfeffer suggests there has increasingly been a breakdown between these two worlds to which the enclosed spaces of these paintings allude:

His interior views shut themselves off from the exterior world. But for a few exceptions, his rooms have neither windows nor doors. There are also no views into adjacent rooms, which might offer other perspectives. The detachedness, the being-for-themselves of his rooms heightens their intimacy. The viewer is alone with himself and without the world. In Weischer's interiors reflection is made possible. Important constituents of Weischer's interiors are loneliness and intimacy, but also stillness and concentration.³⁵

Perhaps it is in the absence of direct human forms, that Weischer's paintings achieve their power. In their architectural complexity and pictorial structure laid bare on the canvas surface, in their quietness and emptiness of direct human presence, they function as a place of imagining and projected intimacy alluding to the complex emptiness of the interiors of Vermeer. I realised I was moving to a similar place in my own work, the difference being that I am, unlike Weischer, interested in referencing a very particular site and re-imagining my relationship to it.

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In understanding memory as being a function of time and experience (of the *now*, of the *then* and of the *to-become*), temporality and process are at the heart of the paintings. Whereas photography captures a specific instance, it fails to excavate timescales. The element of time is intrinsic to the specific methods in-



Fig. 38 (Above)
Matthias Weischer *Schild* 2007
Figs. 39-40 (right)
Studies 1&2, 22 x 34 cm each

35. Susanne Pfeffer p. 10

The paintings of Karin Mamma Andersson are a revelation: often strange unsettling interiors that owe as much to the *bête noir* of film as they do to the harsh northern light of her native Sweden; a mix of idiosyncrasy, perhaps even of the outsider, whilst directly referencing the history of painting. Painted images appear almost indiscriminately, breaking down any sense of an objective reality or of a system of representation, self-consciously drawing us back to the process of making, to the materials and the picture surface. Perhaps with these works it is more fitting to talk of amnesia³⁶ than memory...

Mamma Andersson is first and foremost a storyteller, of enigma, with her more recent work 'calling into question the nature of time, space, illusory objects, and the relationships between them... [appearing] to propose an inverse relation between images and the possibilities of the real'.³⁷ There is something familiar about the world of these paintings that draws you in, 'rooms are always under the influence, both the inhabited and the deserted, it is in the rooms we live our lives - or lived our lives'³⁸, but they also depict a world in a 'progressive state of decomposition'³⁹, of instability. Inside and outside are inverted, conventional categories are intermingled, boundaries are elastic.

The breakdown, the effective of destabilised vision and the deconstruction of conventional and rational boundaries, takes the onlooker from the visual to the tactile, from the narrative to the physical. In a similar way to the work of Weischer, the paintings of mamma Andersson also create that space for a temporary anchoring.

These paintings are illusive, they need time...

tentionally used in the making of these paintings. The development, its drawing and structure are deliberately worked out on the canvas with interplay between the workings of paint, the source material (photography of the material residues of site) and the hand/eye/experience of the maker. They become a physical excavation of the canvas using the material processes of paint, a process of palimpsest, one that excavates additional layers through the interrelationship of the paintings to each other and the resulting visual dialogue.

The element of time perhaps is nowhere more explicit than in the Triptych piece *A Shelter for Day-dreaming*. It is not possible to use the triptych form without directly being aware of its significance throughout art history⁴⁰, any use of this form will knowingly work with metaphors that reference time, a beginning-middle-end or a past-present-future. *A Shelter for Day-dreaming* refers to the



Fig. 41 (above)
Karin Mamma Andersson *Leftovers*, 2006
Fig. 42 (right)
Long Gone 150 x 190 cm
Fig. 43 (overleaf)
A Shelter for Daydreaming
each panel 120 x 160 cm, triptych

36. Kim Levin 'Under the influence' in Andersson 2007 (no page numbers)

37. Amnesia - recalling the work of Andreas Huyseyn (1995) and his discussion on the relationship between remembering and forgetting at the beginning of the 21st century and the cultural conditions of post-modernity.

38. Midori Matsui 'In and Out of The Visible Frame' in Andersson (2007).

39. Mamma Andersson quoted in Kim Levin, op cit.

40. From the medieval icons through to the work of artists including Francis Bacon (*Second Version of Triptych* 1944, 1988 Tate) and Peter Lanyon (*Bojewan Farms* 1951){Causey, 1978 #804}[23]. Originally used within medieval iconography to explore theological understandings and narratives of creation, crucifixion and the resurrection.





metaphor that Bachelard developed with the house as place for day-dreaming that encompasses the dark side of life as well as the more hopeful as we traverse from cellar through the domestic spaces up to the attic... Similarly the panels tell a story as we move through the space of the cottage. I worked on each canvas simultaneously as a piece in itself, and as a part of the whole, breaking down edges, borders and boundaries, opening up constant possibilities, keeping the work alive, avoiding closure, remaining 'open to inconsistencies in their systematic ordering, and to displacements that trouble the phantom of a coherent, bounded site'⁴². Whereas each piece could function on its own, the spatial devices⁴³ when they are put together draw the eye through the composite whole, back and forth, opening up the work, creating a space that functions as a place of imagining and projected intimacy, a storied space full of its own possibilities, and a *continuous present*.

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It is the viewer who completes the work in their subjective present. The work needs to remain open enough to allow the viewer in, to enable a space for re-imagining... so the door remains open, the floorboards draw you in, the surprises and twists in scale in the larger works invite you to step in and make the space your own. The smaller spaces pull you up close to examine, to explore, to recreate stories.

Neither DeSilvey, Almarcegui or Weischer work in a way that attempts to define a space, they open up images/sites in a way that acknowledges the potential for spatial conflict. It is here that I find resonance to my own work: in Weischer's own words his paintings consist of 'the empty and the overloaded space'⁴⁴.

*'Because I know
that time is always time
And place is always place
And what is actual
is actual only for one time
And only for one place'⁴¹*



Fig. 44 (above right)
The Continuous Presence 42 x 30 cm
Fig. 45 (below right)
Redundant 42 x 30 cm



41. T.S Eliot *Ash Wednesday* 1930, lines 16-19
42. DeSilvey p. 899
43. For example the perspective of the 'stairs' in the left hand panel directly leads to a vanishing point that is centred on the yellow bauble in the right hand piece.
44. Ammann & Weischer (in conversation), 'Its a Search That Takes Place in the Mind', in Matthias Weischer 2006.

4. Working in the spaces between...

Developments over the last two years have confirmed to me that my practice is project-based and research-led. Grown out of a process of practice and reflection, this recent body of work has clearly become about the relationship between materialities of place, media and form, the processes and history of painting, within a socio-political understanding of site. Trace, residue, gesture, stain, the vibration of colour and perspective, the unexpected and the incongruous, have become tools to excavate memory, absence, loosing and finding, the poetic, the abstract and the hidden.

While at the moment in terms of materiality this practice is specifically working with paint processes, dialogical and curatorial processes are an essential part of the mix, allowing for a *questioning of viewpoints, of distance and proximity*. As always it is about a constellation of processes and subjectivity. The artist Francis Alÿs stated that painting is a media he uses when there is something that he is interested in that can't be put into words¹; this is how I've come to understand my own practice. Working within a very specific context, becoming immersed in issues to do with social complexities and cultural histories of place, investigating *site* from the place-bound to the widest sense of the word and creating a visual narrative that reveals materialities and residual traces is essential to the contextualising of my practice. The different forms the work takes are different dimensions of the same enquiry developing out of immersion in the socio-politics of situation.



'A personal encounter with a place makes a radical impact on the form of the work and my needs in terms of functioning and expressing if you want... The reality of the city is quite filmic, edging between the reality of what you look at close up and the distance that's provoked by [on-looking from a] distance is subtle. It still has shocks on the street that disarm me in terms of understanding it or integrating it.'

Francis Alÿs¹

Fig. 46 (above)
Francis Alÿs *El Soplón* (The Scavenger)
Fig. 47 (right)
Francis Alÿs *The Collector*



At the moment it is paint, but whatever form a project takes in its materialisation, it is the 'discursive spaces between' that drive my work. The paintings are bringing a visceral quality to bear on the narrative, they are intentionally illusive in their reading; I want them to operate in the *spaces between*, to 'claim some 'anchoring space'.

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Images in their illusiveness,
allow a space for day-dreaming...

Francis Alÿs, in an interview with curator and critic Catherine Lampert¹, talks about the relationship of his paintings to his more widely known work the social happenings, including the seminal piece *When Faith Moved Mountains*. Several distinct threads run through the conversation: Alÿs describes himself as a 'storyteller', his work being a direct response to the socio-political context in which he is locationally immersed; his practice is process based with a continuous conversation running across and through its various forms; viscerality and intuition are as much a part of his process as discursive reflection and analysis.

Often at the time of making a painting or series of paintings there is not a direct relationship that is apparent between these works and other forms. The paintings are intuitive; the connections only become apparent at a later date. Alÿs describes the act of painting as being a slow process, a never-ending activity, images for him are never really finished, they take on their own lives (he will often end up reworking an image even after he has officially shown it). He sees painting as being a medium that is more digested, offering a different, perhaps broader way to engage with an audience. Painting allows him the chance to develop a generic figure that maintains a distance with the character. This questioning of viewpoints, of distance and proximity, and the role of various forms of documentation within this, runs throughout the different forms of his work (fig 45). He talks about how the video documentation of the Lima Project was cold compared to the emotionality, and collective belief of the actual event. The paintings that relate to this work are part of the residue of the work. Although they do not try to document the work in a conventional sense, they put something differently, or add another dimension. Alÿs suggests that with paintings there is a refusal to really understand images; they are illusive.

1. Francis Alÿs in conversation with Catherine Lampert, *Painting Present: Francis Alÿs* (Tate 2003)

In many ways I have come full circle, developing a confidence to work in different ways that are in a constant and necessary dialogue with each other, both in terms of the space within and the spaces without. Creating a dialogue to underline the development of new work, has become an imperative, it is essential to what I do; this will include a range of audiences - from other disciplines and community settings to the academic, as well as peers within the world of painting. Directions for the future include further painting-based research², exploring dialogue and interactions with audience(s)³ including showing the Springs Farm project both in a setting related to context (community/heritage setting) and the white cube; and further off-site work and curatorial collaborations using BOSarts as a vehicle to explore different aspects of the same territory.

This enquiry, as I thought it might well do, has thrown up further questions to be addressed through practice-led research: in what ways could material objects and art processes such as painting be generated through dialogical relations? How might the use of unstable and emergent materials be incorporated as fluid resistance to the objective gaze? To what degree can a work be both object and a subjective, discursive space? What is the relationship between materiality on one hand and the relational on the other? What is the role of memory and the subjective image in constructing the present, and how might it be involved in the creation of a 'democratic spatial politics'⁴? These questions like the material thrown up through this project are I think going to absorb me some time to come. Both empty and overloaded, it is a space that is full of possibilities.

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Images in their illusiveness,
allow a space for day-dreaming...

2. see below and appendix 1
3. At one time I might have resisted approaching a gallery, on quasi-political grounds, now I would see this as being a part of the dialogue I would like to set up around my work. Just as the work can take many different forms, so too can the context within which I show work. I think of it like a cube – the work, the ideas, the context are the centre of the cube whereas the form it takes and the way in which it engages audience are the varying faces...
4. *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (1996) is a collection of papers originally written by Rosalyn Deutsche between 1985 and 1995, exploring connections between contemporary art, space and political struggle. Writing from a perspective that takes in Marxism, geographical thinking and post-modern discourses but that at its heart is driven by a feminist critique of the image that insists that identity and meaning are formed in the public sphere, Deutsche challenges the homogenization of discourse around the arena of the public and proposes a form of art in the public space that rests in the indeterminacy of the social. She is interested by both the struggles that characterize public spaces (regeneration, gentrification, exclusion etc) and those struggles that produce and maintain the public sphere. She proposes an interruptive model of site-specificity as opposed to one that is assimilative (in which the art work takes on the role of being a tool for social cohesion or harmonization of the public space): 'The social sphere is produced and structured by conflicts. With this recognition, a democratic spatial politics begins' (p. xiv). I am interested in how this way of thinking might have resonance in a practice such as mine that straddles site-specificity, the social and more traditional media such as painting.



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Appendix

Subjective space or cultural commodity?

A discussion.

On returning to writing after several weeks, I sense that I am immediately caught in a dilemma, unable to get back into a space for writing. I have spent half the morning going through a process that I seem to return to every time I have to get my head into the right space to do something, whether it's a piece of writing or studio practice, I tidy and organize the area I am going to be working in, it borders on ritual. So my desk area is now cleared, dusted(!), my books are all lined up, I have found a pen that works and my laptop is backed up, and I have drunk several cups of tea... It is a process that yes, is about ordering a physical environment full of the objects of my trade, a place to work (landscape in its widest sense) but it is far more than that. The use of verbs such as ordering, tidying, organizing suggest that it about more than physicality, it is a process that exists in time. And it is a process in which I, as the protagonist am intimately involved; it is a process that involves interrelatedness or intimacy. The geographer Doreen Massey, who from a starting point of looking at the shifting geologies of the earth's masses, sees 'place and landscape as events, as happenings, as moments that will again be dispersed.'¹

Bearing in mind the movement of rocks... space and landscape could be imagined as provisionally intertwined simultaneities of ongoing, unfinished stories. Space as a dimension, cuts through such trajectories, but not to stabilize them into a surface; rather space is imbued with time. Moreover, one constantly emergent, ongoing, product of the intertwining of trajectories is what we call the landscape.²

But what of the intimate, the social, the culturally determined? Or 'if everything is moving where is here?'³. In considering the role of the intimate in our understanding of space and flux, Lucy Lippard⁴, in her seminal text *The Lure of the Local* explored an understanding of place as a dynamic construct, as a lived in inter-textual landscape that is marked by intimacy⁵. From her analysis based in the American Mid-West, which includes the Native American relationship to land, she proposes place as being performative rather than object-based. Lippard formulates a vision

1. Massey 'Landscape as a Provocation: Reflections on Moving Mountains' 2006 p. 46
2. Ibid p.46
3. Massey *For Space* 2006 p.138
4. Lippard is a key thinker within this field, where art practices overlap with geographical concerns to do with place and space
5. Lippard *Lure of the Local* 1997. p. 325
6. Ibid p.286
7. Kwon *One Place after Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* 2002. p. 35
8. Ibid p.135. Lippard tentatively talks of 'the dialectic between place and change [which] can provide the kind of no-man's land where artists thrive' (p.19), but it is perhaps left to others to explore this more fully. Kwon, in the final pages of *One Place After Another*, in a passage that has hints of the despondency of Foster's discussion of trauma (*Return of the Real*, 1996), suggests it is only from the position of being out of place that we can attempt to develop new skill - perceptual and cognitive - to map the new hyperspaces wherein we have to survive.' (Kwon, p. 40) Through Kwon's description of the dilemma of Majeski, in the play *Valparaiso*, who by accident finds himself on a plane to the wrong place, she suggests we can think about the wrong place in different ways. The opportunity of being 'out of kilter [with place] opens up the possibility of an exposition of 'the instability of the *right place* and by extension the instability of the self... Majeski's psychological unmooring as a result of his trip both liberates and shatters him' (Kwon, p.164). This discussion could be seen as being framed within painting terms in the work of Matthias Weischer, the 'empty and overloaded space'.
9. Kwon p.164
10. Massey *For Space* 2006, p. 185

for place-specific art practice that is about a depth of relationship with place (that is essentially peopled, a lived-in space), that looks beneath the surface and exposes 'the layers of emotional and aesthetic resonances in our relationships to place'⁶.

Mikon Kwon whilst having some sympathy for Lippard's position critiques it as being an 'antinomadic and antitechnology argument'⁷, and one that is unable to resist the nostalgic impulse, a return to something slower, some way of living that it could be argued has been lost.

On the other hand Kwon is also concerned by the romanticisation of the itinerant internationally operating artist:

'But I remain unconvinced of the ways in which a model of meaning and interpretation is called forth to validate, even romanticize, the material and socioeconomic realities of an itinerant lifestyle. I am suspicious of this analogical transposition and the seductive allure of nomadicism it supports if for no other reason than for the fact of my own personal ambivalence toward the physical and psychical experiences of mobilization and destabilization that such nomadicism demands.'⁸

So with a charge of nostalgia on one hand and romanticism on the other where do we go?

It could be argued that Kwon's position is problematic in her dismissal of all approaches to site and identity that are 'essentially bound to the physical actualities of place' as being 'nostalgic'⁹. Massey strongly critiques positions such as the one taken up by Kwon, that polarize discussions of space as being on the one hand localized and on the other characterised by an embrace of a nomadic fluidity of subjectivity, identity and spatiality.

'Polarisation between the space as real everyday, lived, grounded are constantly deployed and bound together; they tend to evoke security, and implicitly – as a structural necessity of the discourse – they counterpose themselves to a wider 'space' which must be abstract, ungrounded, universal, even threatening... It is a dangerous basis for politics. One cannot seriously posit space as the outside of place as lived, or simply equate 'the everyday' with the local. If we really think space relationally, then it is the sum of all our connections, and in that sense utterly grounded, and those connections may go round the world.'¹⁰

Recent literature deals extensively with the problematics of site and archive, the nostalgia of the lost place or the romanticism of the nomad, the museum as archive or the museum as discursive site of memory. There is an acknowledgement of an in-between space for criticality, the potential for a spatial politics. Kwon argues that space is grounded, as too is place. Everything is grounded in some way by its

connections. There are echoes here of the work of Rosalyn Deutsche who, in her essay 'Agoraphobia'¹¹ problematises space in terms of the public. Talking about the tendency with some critics to create a dichotomy between space as real and space as discursive, Deutsche says:

'For no space, insofar as it is social, is a simply given, secure, self-contained entity that precedes representation; its very identity as a space, its appearance of closure, is constituted and maintained through discursive relationships that are themselves material and spatial – differentiations, subordinations, domestications, attempted exclusions. In short space is relational, and consequently as Mark Wigley writes, "There is no space without violence and no violence that is not spatial."'¹²

So in answering the question subjective space or cultural commodity, it becomes not an either/or, but recognizing the production of conflict and working within the space.

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Space then is grounded in the everyday and it is connected; it is intimate, experienced and therefore shifts with time ('the continuous present'¹³); it includes Massey's 'constellation of processes rather than a thing'¹⁴ and Deutsche's subjective understanding of the 'real political struggles inherent in the production of all spaces'¹⁵; it can include the notion or metaphor of 'head-space' that is needed to write or get involved in the studio...

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11. in Deutsche *Evictions: Art and Spatial politics*, 1996

12. Mark Wigley, Editorial, *Assemblage* 20 (April 1993). p 7, quoted in Deutsche 1996

13. Lucy Lippard, keynote lecture, Falmouth Convention 2010

14. Massey p.141

15. Deutsche p.375 (footnote 121)

