



If All You Have Is A Hammer Everything Looks Like A Nail

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DODO: Your work *All The Paintings In The Museum* is an alphabetized list of all the paintings in Cambridge's Fitzwilliam Museum. Many of the titles are, more accurately, descriptions of the paintings ascribed to them *après la lettre* by dealers, curators and archivists. The work exists both as a book and a digital slideshow. What is the relationship between the two?

The book and slideshow can be seen together or independently. The content is the same but the two different manifestations give very different experiences. The slideshow offers the viewer no control as the texts flash by at 2 seconds per title like the end credits of a film. However, it is perhaps only when you experience both together that you are more acutely aware that the book gives the viewer control over how they will engage with the content. Viewers will engage with the book in a way they decide - how they touch it, hold it, read from front to back, back to front and how quickly and so on.

DODO: The work encourages viewers/readers to think about the relationships between objects and the systems we devise for categorising them. Is this something of particular interest to you?

Yes that is of interest to me and, of course, is central to this piece. More specifically, I am interested in the relationship between language (system) and the world (object). Despite often being framed, paintings do not exist in a vacuum - there is always context. The immediate physical context of an exhibited painting is the wall and often, not far away, some language - a title.

DODO: You've commented on the inconsistencies and arbitrariness of the systems by which we seek to impose order on the world; *All The Paintings In The Museum* reproduces the idiosyncrasies of spelling and punctuation in the titles of those works as documented by the Fitzwilliam. It could be argued, however, that the unifying, all-caps presentation represents a return of the will to order. Does the work, therefore, perform the tension between a chaotic world and the human desire to rationalise it.

Yes, that tension is certainly present in the work. The source material comes from an already rationalised space which I attempted to rationalise further. The title suggests a wilfully naive or childlike notion that museums are transparent boxes of things. However, museums are complex structures that create hierarchies, narratives and context subject to the forces of economics and politics - the order of the museum cannot expunge the chaos of the world. *All The Paintings In The Museum* is a utopian gesture to try to 'shake off' the complexity of the museum context by using a simpler one - representing each painting by its title may be simultaneously barbaric and poetic, reductive and expansive.

Louise Bristow

DODO: Could you briefly say something about your preparatory process of collecting, assembling and arranging?

The first stage of making a painting involves creating a 3D set-up on the tabletop in my studio. This is what I will paint from over the next few weeks. I have a collection of models that I've made, either of abstract forms like cubes and pyramids, or parts of buildings. The buildings will usually be places I've visited myself, been interested in and photographed, or occasionally friends will send me photographs of buildings, especially kiosks, that they think I will like. I make the models based on these photographs, and use cardboard, balsa wood and acrylic paint to construct them.

Alongside the 3D models, the set-ups also include pieces of collage, such as photographs taken from books, postage stamps, bits of packaging, coloured and printed papers [...] I am drawn to the printing and paper quality of old books, and also the content - most of them are travel books about Europe, particularly Eastern bloc countries such as USSR, East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia etc, but there also books on art, architecture, Modernism, design, psychology and ethnography.

[...] Once I have a pile of stuff to work with I start arranging them along with some 3D models, playing around, seeing what looks interesting, whether visual connections start happening. The choices I make are based partly on the relationship between what I see as the content of the things (it's a photo of a factory or an avenue of trees, or a model of a Viennese apartment block) and partly on their formal qualities - the colour, tone, shape. In fact, I sometimes turn a photograph upside down, so that what it represents becomes less important, if I am more interested in its abstract qualities [...]

DODO: What comes across as a significant, and enjoyable, activity in this process is the exploration of various types of relationships between the objects. Could the selecting and positioning of them echo the decisions being made in the ordering of artefacts in an exhibition or museum display?

I've never thought of the set-ups in terms of the arrangement of artefacts in a museum - perhaps because I think of the collage elements less as objects and more as information or data [...] I think of the flat images and objects I use as embodying 'meaning', almost pieces of solid 'meaning' that I can move around and position next to each other. So I see them as fragments of experience much more than objects.

I think the set-ups have more in common with theatre than museums, but maybe I've visited the wrong museums! I suppose in a museum, the curator is also trying to tell a story through the positioning of artefacts, as well as organising exhibits so that people can understand what they're looking at. Maybe that's an important distinction - I'm not necessarily trying to clarify things when I make choices of how to arrange things.

DODO: You refer to the connections between the objects, but in many of your paintings the arrangements of objects on an empty 'stage' could suggest an isolation or disconnection. How important are these spaces, or lacunas, between the objects?

The spaces between objects/elements are very important, not least to give a rhythm to the arrangement. I'm trying to create a compelling composition, one that is balanced enough to be viewable or readable, whilst still having tension or being surprising. I think these are the compositional concerns of anybody making a painting. I think the gaps or 'lacunas' also help with the space in my paintings, they often allow a horizon line to be visible, which encourages the image to be read as a landscape rather than a flat collage.

Perhaps the set-ups are like a sentence, with each element being a word. The gaps and spaces are important in order to make the whole readable, without the gaps each word would run into the next. But thinking about this, the spaces are often more than just an absence, they are a presence in themselves, a positive gap, rather than just a lack of something. Okay, all I can say in conclusion is YES, the spaces between are important!

DODO: To what extent do you think of your work as continuing or departing from the conventions of the still life or landscape genres?

I do ask myself this question sometimes - are these landscapes or still lives? One answer is that they are neither, they are paintings! I'm being facetious but that is also true, they do have to work as paintings first and foremost.

I think these days I lean towards viewing them as landscapes, and I am certainly more interested in the landscape genre than the still life. Perhaps when I first started this way of working (15 years ago!) I thought of them more as still lives, and certainly I treat the set-up like a still life, in terms of rendering the solidity of objects, the shadows that fall across the tabletop etc. It's a fairly shallow space that I am depicting, rarely more than 50cm deep. But the implied scale is much greater, encompassing large buildings, mountains, sky and forests.

[...] In terms of the genre, there is a precedent for artists making constructed landscapes like this - apparently Gainsborough in the eighteenth century used to construct imaginary landscapes as reference for his paintings, using hand mirrors for lakes and broccoli for trees! There's also the idyllic landscape of Poussin and Claude Lorraine, which conveyed an image of a philosophical ideal rather than a topographical reality. Which makes me think of Giorgio de Chirico's metaphysical landscapes, which I have always loved. None of these works are really about depicting a natural 'reality' but symbolic meaning.

[...] I think I want people to be less aware of the tabletop and the actual scale of the set-up, and be caught up in the content. So if they begin to read the painting as landscape-scale rather than a set-up on a tabletop, that's good. I know I do lots of other things in the painting that remind people that it's a tabletop they're looking at, like depicting a piece of creased paper which is clearly small-scale, but I've never claimed that any of what I was doing makes sense!

Camila Cañeque

DODO: In both your performance work and your material practice you're interested in the idea of the interruption or discontinuation; your *Pool With Dark Water* situates a lacuna in the exhibition space. What's the significance of these preoccupations in your practice?

The great acceleration of present times could be a trigger for the scenarios in both my performance practice and object works. And the image of an altered temporality as a result, a break. It could be read as the reminder of a threat or as the feasibility of a desired moment, which is a permanent pause in the middle of a scene. A sudden interruption of action offering a comfortable space of discomfort, where things are still present but their functions are no longer working. A frame of the reign of the dysfunctional. Prototypes of the elements that are in that place. There is something - not everything - that has been deactivated. Unplugged, or simply still after a long movement. An empty stage with an audience, or an emptied theatre with a play. Items that are detached from a supposed imperative usefulness and are back to an essential uselessness. I see it as the state of some things after overloading them, after an overdose of meaning over time. It's a show in the middle of the mist.

DODO: Your website informs us that 'the works of Camila Cañeque are on the ground or represent the ground.' You've worked with melted ice cream, overturned chairs, sun loungers, mattresses, puddles... What keeps you returning to the condition of horizontality?

As opposed to horizontality, which I see as a sort of constant rest, I think of verticality as a laborious state of tension which can only be temporary. This precarious vertical would contrast with a more firm, maybe surrendered, horizontal requiring no physical or mental exertion. The first is deliberate and has an end, the other is unintended and lasting. In horizontalism there are no hierarchical levels, nor changes. There is no ascend and descend or ups and downs. There is no movement but just a non-mediated neutral permanence. The unadorned horizontal indifference is defied by those vertical intents, which would be building difference. More than a political point, I think of a physical position. If an individual or object is standing, it's trying something, and when it lies down, it joins a not linear temporality, not based on progressive growth. The circular circle. I think of what could be located outside the mundane terminable timeline, in the suburbs or at the outskirts of it. Horizontality is not a resignation gesture but more a fixation with focusing on what could be endless. A curiosity for what is in a parallel plane to all this active vertical initiatives. Also, I conceive horizontality as what comes after action. There is probably no movement, it's clearly unintended, it has no words, and happens in an unthinking way. There is no more after than this after. The horizon is horizontal, so it's still an untouchable unit of meaning, an unattainable place that I look at and try to decode how could its "sound-image" be like.

DODO: You've talked about your work as a form of research into states of inactivity, tiredness and isolation. Do you see these states only as symptoms, or can they offer a mode of resistance to the accelerated reality you describe?

The rejection of what is programmed, which is active, energetic, and social may be in itself a form of resistance. My different works originate as reactions to an overwhelmed context, but I begin to see them as an entity, no longer depending on the conflictive other's authority. If they were an antagonistic gesture, an alert announced, an invitation to violence, a symptom revealed, or an emergency suggested, now they are slowly becoming a chosen texture. They are not only a negative version, but a positive and plausible imagery. And they are all becoming apolitical to my eyes. Here, the objects created through a more dialectical opposition method find themselves detached from their reverse. A puddle is not only a fuck you river, but a hole of water allowed and or condemned to stagnate. Among the excesses of the urban life, some viewers are alien to those accidental holes on the ground of our current cities. And I like to enlighten them. This to say that I like to focus on those dysfunctional spaces and their characteristics. It's not a matter of claiming leisure versus work, or blaming these hyperactive times and questioning the dangers they may involve, or praising the passivity of the non-participants in the euphoric race of productive empowerment, but only to step back and contemplate the scenery. Even if I'm still facing the current imperative of efficiency with distrust, I try to identify what elements are not serving the production machinery and go for them. Those quiet areas of this speedy world, whether inserted in or isolated from the contemporary landscape, are also part of it.

Annie Carpenter

DODO: You've described *Productivity Sticks* as 3D representations of your day's activity over a period of 22 days. Could you start by giving a brief explanation of how the data on your productivity is collated and then transferred to the turned wooden sticks.

I carefully tracked my day-to day activity using a combination of basic notes and software on my computer. I had to determine which of my activities I would categorise as 'productive' and which were 'non-productive'. Things like eating and sleeping were reluctantly put in the 'non-productive' pile. That data was then turned into hand-drawn graphs, or drawings, in which the height of the curve corresponded to the diameter of the sticks. The productive tasks I tracked soon predominantly become the act of making the artwork itself.

DODO: You're based in Manchester, the centre of the cotton industry during the industrial revolution. Is it too much of a stretch to think that the shape of your turned productivity sticks resembles that of the sheaves of cotton on the spinning machines in the mills?

Definitely not too much of a stretch. In fact, at the time of this work being made I was funding my MA by working at the Museum of Science and Industry. One of my jobs was running the textiles machinery and explaining it to visitors. I didn't realise it at the time but the piece very much resembles the speed frames used to loosely twist cotton onto a bobbin before being spun into thread.

DODO: The measurement of a worker's productivity (and the definition of 'productive' and 'non-productive') has been an obsession of western work culture since that time. Your recording of your own productivity gradually comes to document only the task of documentation itself. Does the work comment on the absurdity of time management procedures at their extreme? Does it pass ironic comment on the desire to know what it is that artists do all day?

That's a nice way of putting it. And more simply, I'm just interested in the different ways people 'work'. I've always been a little jealous of craftspeople, who seem to have this drive to just continuously produce, whereas I'm more of a daydreamer and procrastinator. Learning how to turn wood allowed me to get lost in the craft, in a way it's hard to do when you're a conceptual artist, working in different ways from one project to the next.

Jon Carritt & Dan Palmer

Kitty Bew: In the upcoming DODO exhibition at Phoenix Art Space, you are both featured artists, as well as exhibition organizers. How have you found juggling both the roles of curator, and artist?

We have tended to think of *If All You Have Is A Hammer Everything Looks Like A Nail* as an artist-led show that has, nonetheless, required a number of decisions that might usually be associated with the role of a curator. It was probably important that the work we included as artists wasn't too 'meta' in its approach and didn't exploit the privileged overview of the show that our position as crypto-curators might have permitted. Otherwise, working in both roles presented a practical problem for the Q&As booklet, one that we attempted to circumvent by having you ask us questions on DODO's behalf. At the time of writing we have yet to install the show. It will be interesting to see whether any conflicts of interest in our roles as both artists and curators arise at this stage.

KB: How do you find working as a pair? Does collaboration come naturally to you?

We find there are definite advantages to working in a collaboration. We have known each other for much longer than we have been collaborators and, most of all, our work emerges from the conversations we have together as friends. Ideas get batted back and forth between us and evolve over the course of the conversation such that, ultimately, it's often difficult to say who made such-and-such a contribution. We recognize the need, initially, to bring even the most half-baked idea to the table and are secure enough in our working relationship not to be embarrassed to do so. If the other partner responds positively to an idea, it's at least guaranteed an audience of one! Of course, some ideas are destined never to get off the ground, and in those cases it's a relief not to have to be your own worst critic.

KB: A unifying theme of DODO seems to be about re-constructing, re-interpreting or exploring the role of the artwork as object. Are the relationships between objects something that the two of you enjoy exploring in your own practice?

Exploring the nature of artwork as object is a unifying theme of this exhibition, but not necessarily of DODO in general. If DODO goes on to have any further shows we probably wouldn't wish to repeat that emphasis. As far as our own practice goes, we are not skilled makers whose work develops from a close engagement with particular materials or processes. Our practice is not a craft-based one. Rather, we adapt the approaches and procedures we employ according to the requirements of each new work. Oddly, given the nature of this exhibition, objects probably aren't, or perhaps they *weren't*, that important to us. For the first few years of our collaboration we made work without a studio, partly by necessity and partly because of the nature of the work we were making. This most often took the form of site- or context-responsive installation, developed in relation to the specifics of a particular opportunity. It's a moot point whether our late-come interest in making objects was one motivating factor in acquiring a studio, or whether it has been a consequence of that.

KB: Why have you chosen the Phoenix gallery store room as the home of DODO? And if any future iterations of the DODO exhibition were to take place, would they have to be held in neglected spaces of storage?

DODO was conceived, in part, as a response to the lack (or loss, in some cases) of spaces for smaller, unfunded, artist-led initiatives in Brighton. Although the concept of DODO was elaborated very specifically in relation to the sudden availability of this particular location (the gallery store at Phoenix Art Space), we always had half an eye on DODO's afterlife. One or two other ideas for future DODO projects have arisen, which might or might not take place in similarly overlooked spaces, but we don't think we would want DODO to become 'the storeroom gallery.' The dodo may have been flightless, but it was ambulatory.

KB: I get the impression that you are reluctant to be too literal with the concepts of DODO. Is it crucial that your exhibitions are more theoretically inclined? Why is that?

First, we might argue that any exhibition, however literal it seems, operates according to certain habitual attitudes, or theories, about the way art ought to be seen and experienced. That said, we don't feel that *IAYHIAH* is an excessively theoretical show. We have always tried to avoid burdening our own work with the weight of too much theory and have sought to avoid it becoming merely an illustration of things we have read. Despite what may often be the best intentions of the theory, this can actually lead to a closing down of the work and a narrowing of the range of possible readings. This is also how we approached the task of curation for *IAYHIAH*. There are some consistent ideas that underpinned the selection of artists' work, but we didn't want to tether the exhibition to one prescribed reading.

KB: Why is it important that your participating DODO artists each take part in a Q&A?

In the earliest stages of planning the exhibition we were concerned that we might be placing the work of other artists in an interpretative context quite different from the ones in which they conceived and thought about their own work. Every curated exhibition or group show does this to some extent, of course. The Q&As seemed like a means by which something of the artist's own voices could be heard. We were very pleased with the way all the artists responded to the idea and engaged with the questions we asked. Conducting the Q&As has been a really rewarding exercise that's helped us gain, we hope, a better understanding of the artist's individual practices and to develop our relationships with them, not just in our role as curators but as fellow artists and friends.

Andee Collard

DODO: We'd like to begin by asking about the diversity of your painting practice, which employs a remarkable range of figurative and abstract approaches. One of Charles Lutz's *New Yorker* paintings depicts a couple of art buyers standing with a young artist in front of a number of the artist's canvases and asking, 'Why don't you settle on a style so we can tire of you?' Do you consciously resist a signature style?

I definitely resist the notion of having a signature style. I never like artists who work in a homogenous way, it seems like a cynical bet on making something the audience will always like, as if past triumphs are the guarantee of future success. It seems lazy and designed to be easily processed. I like artists who take risks and are able to use their mastery in one area and translate into another.

'Style is often something which locks the painter into the same vision, the same technique, the same formula during years and years, sometimes during one's whole lifetime.'
— Pablo Picasso

I think a lot about someone like Stanley Kubrick who had a lot of superficial stylistic traits. I love his films because of these but also his ability to totally flip the script and work across a huge genre range.

Strong beliefs loosely held is a mantra that I make my work by. I want a practice that is a vital thing constantly changing. I think by working like this I'm able to avoid turning my work into a pastiche of itself or anyone else's work. I used to rely on appropriation strategies to get my fix of eclectic styles but over time I recognised this as a crutch in itself. The project that toys with the tension between series, having a style and doing whatever is perhaps my *Daily String Drawings* which through its 1200+ drawings explore almost as many approaches to making an observational drawing.

DODO: You mention appropriation and pastiche... For an artist who clearly knows his history, it's remarkable how free from quotation your work is. Is there, nonetheless, a 'meta' dimension in your diversity of approach, or is it simply that you revel in variety?

One of the main hangovers of my formal education is the feeling that every action must be based on a book you just read or backed up by rigorous research to be part of the cultural canon - I think I'm now allergic to that approach. I love hip-hop and feel a far greater kinship to the producers' ethos of beat making - essentially sample anything and everything and don't worry too much about why or whether you are allowed to do so. The variety of the work I make is intentional, the meta commentary is constantly present in my mind, but what I'm striving for is not to make a painting like the one before.

DODO: You've written about your commitment to daily practice and the enormity of that undertaking. Are the restrictions you appear to set yourself sometimes in painting - a limited number of brushstrokes; straight brushstrokes only; thin with the left, wide with the right, etc. - a means by which you can cope with the realisation that 'you could literally do anything'?

My daily practice is sometimes something that is rigidly followed as in the case of my daily drawings, other times it's about being present in the studio and trying stuff out. With most things in life, having practiced and repeated actions you become better at them. What I don't want to do is make a factory for my signature style. Robert Rauschenberg spoke about how if he ever had an idea about a work he'd go for a walk and try to forget it. I restrict myself to improvising my approach to my work as I'm making it. In the process of making work I am setting myself limits and rules but I don't want these to ever be my sole motivation. The realisation that I could literally make anything is a comforting one for me, to quote David Hockney, 'I paint what I like, when I like, and where I like, with occasional nostalgic journeys.'

Lucy Delano

DODO: In the titling of your contribution to the show you directly reference John Hilliard's 1971 photographic piece *Camera Recording Its Own Condition (7 Apertures, 10 Speeds, 2 Mirrors)*. In a number of other works you also explicitly 'quote' other artists' work either visually or through titling. Can you say something about this art historical referencing in you practice?

My work is a visual commentary on whatever is uppermost in my mind or presenting itself the most loudly in my life at the time. As I am now immersed in the world of art it feels natural that it should become the subject of much of my work. I make art which is quietly discussing art, art history, the art world and art academia. I don't seek to critique or condemn, simply to flag up anomalies and irony, and to ask questions and trigger conversation. In making art about art, by definition, there will be an element of self-reflection. *Scales Recording Their Own Condition* not only references Hilliard's work, inviting reflection on that conceptual art piece with its embedded self-reflection, but at the same time is by its essence a piece in which the materials (if not the 'meaning') are having a dialogue with themselves.

DODO: The dialogue which the scales are having with themselves is one of weighing or measuring. Could this be thought of as being analogous to a questioning of their own value as artwork? In a previous piece you have re-contextualised your father's knitted chessboard in response to his question about its possible status as art. Is this a recurring concern in your practice?

The lasting objective of my work is to challenge the viewer to question the absolute nature of art, through the simple act of observing art. Who decides what is or isn't art? What is the value scale attached to art? Can art be utterly meaningless and retain its status as 'art'? What does 'art' embody that is missing or absent from 'craft'? How does an object become art? Using a visual commentary, which is designed to be non-judgemental but at the same time deliberately provocative, I give the viewer no choice but to examine their preconceptions, prejudices and assumptions.

My Father's Knitted Chessboard is the result of my father's inquisitive mind asking if it 'counted' as art. I sent an image of it to contemporary galleries and art academics around the world with my father's question attached 'is this art?' The responses covered everything on the spectrum from 'no, as he's not an artist (!) to 'yes, as the concept of 'art' now has such a wide definition. To ensure that I could say yes to my father's question, I exhibited it as one of my final MA show pieces. It's presence in that gallery guaranteeing its status as art. The only remaining question being, whose?

DODO: To a large extent your work depends upon utilising the gallery's conventions of display and the discourse of art history to "guarantee its status as art". *One Of These Oranges Is Not Like The Other Orange* is interesting in this respect as it is very much a lesson in the 'magical' transformative power of the plinth.

One Of These Oranges Is Not Like the Other Orange [consists of] two oranges side by side, each on top of their own plinth. They appear identical, but on reading the information, the viewer discovers that one of the oranges was taken from *Soul City* by Roelof Louw, (a work consisting of a large pyramid of oranges which through inviting each viewer to take one away, and then replenishing the pyramid overnight, discreetly raises issues of decay and regrowth.) The orange on the adjacent plinth was bought at Tesco. They appear the same. But on learning more, the viewer will have a sense that one of the oranges has an innate and inherent 'artiness' having been in an exhibit at Tate Britain, which is lacking in the one bought in a supermarket. The essence of art is challenged. In this case, it's not even what you see, it's what you know.

DODO: *Soul City* was originally shown at the Arts Lab in 1967 and the art historian Charles Harrison has recalled that one of Louw's intentions was to provide the hippies there with some vitamin C. Is it possible for art to be returned to the everyday..? Louw's orange to the greengrocer's stall? How did the two oranges compare in taste?

As I said, it isn't what we see, i.e. an orange exhibited in a gallery, it's what we *know* about the object, that makes the 'art'. The knowledge that one particular orange had been previously exhibited in Tate Britain, (amongst other places) affords it a provenance and inherent value as an art 'artefact'. Without this knowledge it is (or appears to be) exactly the same as the other orange that was bought in a supermarket. The twist in the tail of this piece is that once the *non-art provenance orange* had been exhibited alongside the orange from Louw's piece, it then also has an art provenance (having been in a gallery/exhibition scenario) which it was originally used to demonstrate its own lack of.(!) At what point did the supermarket orange become 'art' rather than an orange? The moment the artist decided to put it on a plinth? The second the gallery doors opened? The first time a viewer considered it? And at whichever point it was, what changed?

As to whether [...] art [...] can be returned to the everyday, I suspect that the reply is only if one is unaware of its past life as 'art'. In the same way that with a lack of knowledge as to its provenance, Duchamp's urinal could get away with being reinstated in a public toilet, in disguise as a urinal.

Gabriella Gilmore

DODO: Structural frameworks, and in particular tent frames, have been recurring forms in your practice but are we right in thinking this is the first time you have exhibited one entirely on its own without it supporting or 'housing' any other associated objects, however minimal?

Indeed, structural frames have been a constant, and as you say this is a frame entirely on its own, unlike the others. Using frames began for me as a response to the politics of wall space in art school and soon became 'work' itself. From early on it was about marking territory, defining a particular space as separate, and always with the idea of housing some kind of activity or other work. They've had sand and clay floors, contained lights, had other objects integrated into them, like bottle caps. Or, in the case of the cathedral frame (*Rezirèksyon*, 2015) made for the Ghetto Biennale in Haiti, I worked in direct collaboration with another artist (Rachael Minott) whose work hung from the poles. In this frame of a storage room, there are no other directly relating components. However, only if we are discounting the other art works in the space, visitors, and other ancillary things like light switches and wine glasses. After all, spaces are never truly empty, and a frame is always around something.

DODO: This sounds a notable shift. If your frame structure no longer supports or houses any other objects that you have installed, do you see it as moving towards becoming solely 'content' rather than a framing device for the various contents of the gallery?

I think it is and always has been both. I've never been that interested in creating stand-alone objects, it's always about context. In this sense, these sculptural framing objects are interventions into space, as a means of re-defining/re-interpreting/re-marking. The subject of this work is directly relevant to its context, and dependant on it. If this piece was purely content, you could move it anywhere without changing the essence of the work, and I don't think that's true in this case. The work is about the Phoenix gallery store. It's showing dedicated attention to a space that is mostly unseen, that isn't beautiful or even designed, but developed in relation to the activity going on in the adjoining space - the space which is normally thought of as 'gallery'.

DODO: Previously your work with tents and other temporary structures has seemed to have been related to ideas around diaspora and the migration of populations. Is this still relevant in the present context?

I am drawn to the politics of space, and the way we distribute it, who has access and who doesn't. How meaning is imbued to certain spaces, how we mark out what's sacred with boundaries, and how that affects behaviour. Some of the most interesting examples of this are seen in sacred lands and religious buildings, especially those with long and fraught histories. The Tabernacle from the Jewish Exodus story, for example, was a sacred tent that housed the presence of God, yet it moved across the desert. This meant the holy space was within the frame, and not ground-dependent. This led to the piece *This Will Be Your Land*, which relocated the to-scale outline of the 'promised land' as described in the Bible, across

the surface of the UK, with 7 small tents erected at key junctions. Lines, walls and boundaries with collective importance operate on multiple scales, from global politics, to our homes. Where and how we show art objects is also dependant on such framing, and not at all dissimilar to how objects of religious ritual are housed and revered. So yes these ideas are always present, they motivate me and, I think, are what makes these works interesting.

Bill Leslie

DODO: The shape and size of *The Things Themselves* suggests that they have been formed by a hand grasping the clay. Has any other modelling taken place in order to refine the shape or to create a base to enable them to stand upright?

Yes, this is a part of the contract of sorts I entered into with the people I asked to squeeze the balls of clay. They squeezed, then I left the clay to harden and used a small tool to shape the sculptures, following the form left by the impression of their grasp. It was important they could stand up, so that they could be put places ready to pick up and handle. They were loosely based on Henri Gaudier-Brzeska's *Torpedo Fish (Toy)* that he made for the philosopher T.E. Hulme as something he could fiddle with as he wrote. They were then fired and glazed. Most of the sculptures were given as gifts to the people who had squeezed the clay. Personalised sculptures fitted to their hands. The ones in the show are ones I never managed to give out, or that I have borrowed back.

DODO: Your work frequently invokes the work of the early 20th century avant-gardes - the Vorticists, say, or the Russian Constructivists. In the making of *The Things Themselves*, however, one could perceive a connection to the participatory tendencies of the mid-century Brazilian Neo-Concretists; the objects were not shaped by yourself but by several dozen collaborators. To what extent did you consider the project as a participatory exercise? Without asking you to name names, who were the other individuals involved?

I made *The Things Themselves* nearly 10 years ago and I think they are a kind of proto-participatory artwork. At the time I was thinking much more about the way in which objects can be transformed by the camera. I had in mind that these little objects could be photographed in ways that would make them appear monumental. Getting people to squeeze the clay was a way of getting interesting shapes, but also I wanted them to retain something of their hand-scale even when photographed to look monumental. That they would exist as both miniature and massive, or when looking at the photographs viewers would not quite be able to work out what they were looking at. I've always been interested in how people grasp images and how much this is linked to our ability to literally grasp things.

DODO: Your sculptures are conceived with their own mediation as image already in mind. Indeed, this is a process you initiate yourself through film and photography. Arguably, this *a priori* mediation has been a condition that has affected art production almost since the advent of photographic media. Would you agree? Has this intensified in the era of Instagram?

Yes, since its invention photography was taken up by art historians to photograph the sculptures of antiquity and this immediately began to inflect or impact upon the sculptures themselves. Early photographic processes couldn't easily capture the greys of marble so early images of sculpture tended to be made of the plaster copies of the original statues which had been in circulation for decades. The white of the plaster being far easier to capture on film. These early photographs are then representations of representations.

You could argue that the history of modern sculpture is totally tied up with its ability to be photographed. Angular abstraction in particular photographs incredibly well when lit from severe angles and this I am sure influenced the making of sculptures even if this wasn't a conscious process for those artists. Equally most people's experience of most sculpture is through photographs, so we could also imagine that work which doesn't photograph well naturally fall from the public or art world consciousness, simply because the images don't capture attention.

Many of my friends who are artists now use Instagram to share their work. Especially living hectic lives and doing multiple jobs, as we all seem to, Instagram has been a way to share work in progress, but I have frequently had conversations with people who are effectively only making work to photograph because of this desire to share and because opportunities to develop work for exhibition are less frequent.

Ty Locke

DODO: One recurring strategy in your work is to take a familiar object and render it unfamiliar in some way. Does this act of *making strange* hope to help us apprehend what we previously took for granted in our relationship to these objects?

I love that fact that my work makes people more aware of something they took for granted. I use mundane objects that have almost become invisible [in] use due to their familiarity. By applying my absurd, irrational process, I allow the viewer to look at an object in a different way. Allowing them to build a new relationship to forgotten surroundings.

DODO: Much of your work has a kind of provisional or *ad hoc* quality. How concerned are you with the appearance of the final object (if there is one), or are you primarily concerned with process?

I super enjoy the *ad hoc* quality to my work. It's honest, it shows the labour involved. When something has a remnant of how it was made, it's all you need. Like buying a hand painted mug, you want to see the brush strokes or it becomes machined or forged. My sculptures are attempting to show my own logical thought process and allowing the work to be *ad hoc* gives it some accessibility. Presenting something slightly unrefined in a refined considered way draws people in. It adds a necessary value to the thought processes behind the work.

I guess the final product is determined by the object. A ladder I turned into a circle is an example of a sculpture where I had a particular end result in mind, even though it always ends up slightly different. More commonly, after the object has undergone its 'process' it becomes something I hadn't expected. I enjoy the unexpectedness in my work. It's a surprise even to me. However, I have this internal, gut feeling when I claim each sculpture is finished. Even if the process gives me an unexpected outcome, the stopping point is due to my own satisfaction.

DODO: One of the things we liked about your chair leg is the disorderliness of this thing that is no longer simply a chair leg, nor a readily consumable art object with an accepted mode of display. It was by no means obvious how we were supposed to display this thing. Are these sorts of liminalities a key concern for your work?

Dealing with the display of my sculptures is something I deal with in the moment. If that's setting up for a show or an Instagram post. The work can say very different things if displayed in different ways. I enjoy playing with this. When I engage with the work the way I want others to I know it's working.

DODO: I suppose we were thinking how, traditionally, certain modes of display have been presupposed by certain kinds of object: paintings get hung on walls, sculptures get put on plinths. Since the early 1960s, and ubiquitously in recent years, an intermediary group of objects has been leant between floor and wall. Your re-turned chair leg doesn't seem to infer any of these modes. It looks like something one might be more likely to find sticking out of a skip, laid out on a blanket at a boot sale,

rattling around in the bottom of a trunk or chest. Would you be able to elaborate on your last answer in relation to this?

In terms of display, I present my sculptures in a way to push the boundaries of display. I use display as a way to make people interact with a sculpture in the way I want. Sometimes that's a different way than would be obvious. For example, I wrapped 109 reels of Sellotape around 1 reel of Sellotape and I presented it on the wall. Traditionally, at eye level. This then makes the audience immediately respond to the sculpture as a painting, then after looking in closer detail at the sculptural form and recognisable material it then pushes them back and changes their perception.

The way I have previously presented the chair leg was balancing it with the other 4 lathed chair legs. Almost representing them as misplaced useless chair legs. This was my attempt to make the connection with this now unrecognisable object and its origin. However, presenting the chair leg on a wall and allowing it space would give it a sense of ambiguity which I enjoy. Giving the work some more time to interact with people rather than being immediate.

DODO: The circular ladder is a fairly recent piece, isn't it? And more recognisably sculptural than some of your previous work. Are you mellowing in your old age?

The ladder sculpture was made at the ripe old age of 22. It's an interesting sculpture because it's my last sculpture I made in my time after graduating and before starting at Slade. This is a good representation of how I work, I found the ladder by my work[place] and carried it to my studio. It sat there for being looked at until I came up with an idea. The sculptural nature of each piece depends on the material. When I have an idea like, 'I wonder if I can turn this ladder into a circle?' I've got to do it! The way the sculpture is presented or interacts with people happens after. I make things in a logical order, step by step. Once the process is finished I can put all of my time into 'presenting' it.

DODO: Your recent installation *23p Beans* introduced an element of social commentary to your practice, reflecting your own experience of low paid supermarket work and pledging over 1000 cans of baked beans to a food bank at the close of the exhibition. Did this feel like a different kind of work for you to make?

My show *23p Beans* has all of the formulas I have within my sculpture - it's irrational, it's a long tedious process and it responds to my everyday life. However, it has funding behind it. When I am given funding for a 'work' it becomes more ambitious in terms of scale and interaction. I wouldn't be able to buy 6700 tins of baked beans without funding. Then in my opinion, if I'm privileged enough to get funding to buy that many beans, they should DEFINITELY go to people who need them. I enjoy the idea that the people the beans will be going to have no access to the arts at all. Could lead to conversations like this 'god, why are there so many beans at the food bank today!?' In an ideal world I could make sculptures out of anything. Imagine if I had 100 ladders! The possibilities are endless. But I make by responding with my current circumstance, whether that's one ladder or hundreds of ladders.

Ally McGinn

DODO: You describe yourself as a conceptually representative painter. Could you say something about what you mean by that?

The phrase has two strands: Firstly, that it is the concept within my work that represents something, not necessarily the painting. Another way to put that would be to say that the focus of the works is to represent concepts, many of which revolve around painting and the way it is seen and used. The concepts they represent are not found in the traditional form of differing tones of paint across a surface, but in the relationships between materials. Which relates to the second strand: that these are paintings that are not painted, and yet become painting through their materials. A form of metaphorical painting, a concept of it, or a representation of it.

DODO: You make paintings about painting but, as you say, your work isn't about arranging differing tones of paint across a surface. Is it ok to stop worrying about modernism now?

I think it's safe to say that while modernism is far from dead, it is also far from the only stance. We've reached a point in art where anything goes, as long as it can stand up to scrutiny. Which is exactly what artists do, we scrutinise. From my perspective the only way to truly scrutinise painting is to pull it apart, including emancipation from the relative safety of modernism, which I hope most can agree is only one perspective. It's far from a new idea, but it's an important consideration. I'm exploring the definition of painting, not to find a definition, but to splash in the waters to see what appears, and possibly more importantly what it all says about us.

DODO: In trying to decide which of your works to include in the show, we talked about how they might look/function in the storeroom as opposed to in a white cube setting. What relationship does your work have to the gallery?

There is an element of need in the relationship between some of my work and the gallery setting. The white cube is a blank canvas, anything placed in it becomes art, which is useful when considering unwanted materials. The gallery allows for the representation of work that might live in the borders of art. A perceptual space where it can exist.

In other spaces the dialogue is more nuanced. In many cases non-white cube settings are where I like to see my work, but elements of it can get lost without the visual blankness of the white cube as a frame.

However, I like the ambiguity of some of my works when seen in unexpected places. It almost always inspires the question 'is this art?' Which leads to questions about perception and has the potential for deeper interaction between audience and object. It's an interesting question, because all artworks aspire to the gallery but few

ever make it. To me the gallery is a space of interaction and connection. The art object fulfils its purpose and interacts with the audience.

So maybe the definition of gallery is changing, especially as my work being in this show is due to Instagram, the gallery most of my works exist in and certainly where they are seen the most. In which case the gallery is an archive and a space to share the work, and the thinking behind it. The work exists within the gallery, and without it.

Lisa Scantlebury

DODO: Could you explain what the object is that your *Ecart* is cast from?

Ecart is cast from a found object, an industrial polypropylene pallet. It caught my attention, largely due to the fact that I didn't know where it had come from when I first saw it lying around. I'm not proud of the fact but I stole it.

DODO: What about the title? It's is an anagram of 'crate', of course, and suggestive of the world of e-commerce.

I needed a title and it seemed to work nicely with some of the things I was thinking about at the time. It kind of refers to a 'cart' or maybe even 'carting things around...' Quite a traditional view of the object, but then we also increasingly see these kind of objects being used due to the rise of internet based delivery systems. So, yes, *Ecart* does refer to this too.

DODO: In French, *écart* has a cluster of meanings around it, associated with the idea of an interval, a gap. A couple of the other works in the show deal with the idea of a gap or pause in activity. We wondered if the French had any significance for you in naming this object whose movement seems to have been (temporarily) halted.

I love a French word... *introuvable* being one of them. Aptly, I struggled to find a translation for the Japanese text I found on the pallet. 'SA NA TO RII' was initially the best me and Google could come up with until I realised it was actually 'SUNTORY,' the name of a whiskey and soft drink manufacturer in Japan. This confusion does interest me, when ignorance or unfamiliarity with a language reduces the letters to pure shape form - perhaps less so with French but most certainly with Japanese. This 'gap' in knowledge, this inability to translate, mirrors the experience of the viewer when they first encounter an object such as *Ecart*. Perhaps we need a Google translate for art, or maybe that would take away the fun...

DODO: *Ecart* seems to have an almost luminescent, spectral quality. It seems to hover between two worlds or two states, restless, without belonging. The shipping pallet itself has a similarly forlorn existence - once delivered, it's usually wanted neither by the freight company nor by the recipient. Would this be too bleak a reading?

Yes it would... but I see what you are getting at. You see them around. Often they appear sort of lost, but then again I remember collecting them as a student to make both work but also furniture - crude chairs or futon bases (it was the early 1990s..). They definitely fall into the category of a thing you don't need until you need it, and then they become extremely desirable. I tried to reflect this in the process of making, transforming a standard everyday (or at least every other day) object into something 'special'.

DODO: Much of your work is produced or commissioned for public spaces and you tend to work in response to the site. *Ecart* is a more discrete and portable work, however, with something of an itinerant character and, as you have indicated, stems more from your personal experience. How easy do you find it to adapt your approach to make these different kinds of work?

Quite easy I think, but that depends on how successful you think the work is. If you think it fails, then maybe it's actually quite hard for me... I am fascinated by what the role of an object is - its aesthetic function, how it operates in a gallery, for example, and its *functional* function (for want of a better phrase), how it operates in the world. For me this work straddles both. It operates within a space but it somehow belongs to the world (or maybe it belongs to neither exactly because of the relationship between its form and the change of material). It's almost as though someone made a mistake, they forgot to remove some packaging or transit material after the install.

DODO: In selecting work by different artists for the show, we have been conscious of having to walk a line between work that acknowledges its immediate context (the storeroom) and work that performs such an act of mimesis that it ends up being consumed by that context (a simulacrum of a box of lightbulbs would risk being mistaken only for the thing it represents). *Ecart* pulls off a clever trick in that regard. Are we right in thinking that *Ecart* has been shown previously in a number of different spaces, from a more conventional gallery space to something rather more ad hoc? Does it work differently in these different kinds of spaces?

I never intended *Ecart* to be exhibited in a gallery space, though it has been on several occasions, and that has been really interesting for me. What I really wanted to do was leave it around the docks in Bristol. Maybe that's what I will do in the end, return it home almost. Maybe it will find a function back out in the world.

Andee Collard

DODO: We'd like to begin by asking about the diversity of your painting practice, which employs a remarkable range of figurative and abstract approaches. One of Charles Lutz's *New Yorker* paintings depicts a couple of art buyers standing with a young artist in front of a number of the artist's canvases and asking, 'Why don't you settle on a style so we can tire of you?' Do you consciously resist a signature style?

I definitely resist the notion of having a signature style. I never like artists who work in a homogenous way, it seems like a cynical bet on making something the audience will always like, as if past triumphs are the guarantee of future success. It seems lazy and designed to be easily processed. I like artists who take risks and are able to use their mastery in one area and translate into another.

'Style is often something which locks the painter into the same vision, the same technique, the same formula during years and years, sometimes during one's whole lifetime.'

— Pablo Picasso

I think a lot about someone like Stanley Kubrick who had a lot of superficial stylistic traits. I love his films because of these but also his ability to totally flip the script and work across a huge genre range.

Strong beliefs loosely held is a mantra that I make my work by. I want a practice that is a vital thing constantly changing. I think by working like this I'm able to avoid turning my work into a pastiche of itself or anyone else's work. I used to rely on appropriation strategies to get my fix of eclectic styles but over time I recognised this as a crutch in itself. The project that toys with the tension between series, having a style and doing whatever is perhaps my *Daily String Drawings* which through its 1200+ drawings explore almost as many approaches to making an observational drawing.

DODO: You mention appropriation and pastiche... For an artist who clearly knows his history, it's remarkable how free from quotation your work is. Is there, nonetheless, a 'meta' dimension in your diversity of approach, or is it simply that you revel in variety?

One of the main hangovers of my formal education is the feeling that every action must be based on a book you just read or backed up by rigorous research to be part of the cultural canon - I think I'm now allergic to that approach. I love hip-hop and feel a far greater kinship to the producers' ethos of beat making - essentially sample anything and everything and don't worry too much about why or whether you are allowed to do so. The variety of the work I make is intentional, the meta commentary is constantly present in my mind, but what I'm striving for is not to make a painting like the one before.

DODO: You've written about your commitment to daily practice and the enormity of that undertaking. Are the restrictions you appear to set yourself sometimes in painting - a limited number of brushstrokes; straight brushstrokes only; thin with the left, wide with the right, etc. - a means by which you can cope with the realisation that 'you could literally do anything'?

My daily practice is sometimes something that is rigidly followed as in the case of my daily drawings, other times it's about being present in the studio and trying stuff out. With most things in life, having practiced and repeated actions you become better at them. What I don't want to do is make a factory for my signature style. Robert Rauschenberg spoke about how if he ever had an idea about a work he'd go for a walk and try to forget it. I restrict myself to improvising my approach to my work as I'm making it. In the process of making work I am setting myself limits and rules but I don't want these to ever be my sole motivation. The realisation that I could literally make anything is a comforting one for me, to quote David Hockney, 'I paint what I like, when I like, and where I like, with occasional nostalgic journeys.'

Sid and Jim

DODO: A number of your works make mischief with the mechanics and conventions of exhibiting. To what extent do you see yourselves as satirists?

I think the mischief comes from the fact that we're a collaboration; lots of our works are conceived through conversations we have with each other, it's enjoyable to make each other laugh so I think that might flow through into our work. We like to use props as the basis for many of our works, this can range from props from films to gallery archetypes (gallery props); there is a valuable asset in fictional or real life props in that a lot of the leg work of recognition is done for you. The viewer understands the purpose of the object, whether it's an informative gallery wall text, bright white lights in an exhibition space, or an air-conditioning vent tucked away out of sight, they are all parts of the expected building blocks of a stereotypical exhibition space. As a result of this, we feel that people can let their guard down a little, only to be curious when the object is performing a different role than they expected. By assigning added importance to the less visible parts of an exhibition space we are able to be critical of both gallery archetypes and the role of the artist when exhibiting; perhaps in this way we are acting as satirists.

DODO: Who is Millicent Place and is she the artist we can hear in 'Fill the gaps with discarded breadcrumbs'? Your work consistently makes use of fictive constructions, for example, in the use of a ghost writer, an imaginary football team or invented home movies. What is the purpose of this?

Millicent Place is a fictional character who featured most prominently in our project *Mirror In The Text* (or *Nesting Narrative*). The work manifested itself as a twitter feed belonging to the receptionist of a fictional gallery, Millicent Place. The idea was that art galleries are huge, interconnected, webs made up by all number of individuals, within which the lowest ranking is often the receptionist (this is based on personal experience!). Despite not making any of the big decisions they still have an insight into the general goings on. Those 140 character insights paint a disparaged picture of a gallery that is never seen but described, with a variety of characters and situations becoming familiar to regular subscribers.

She's not necessarily the artist in this work but we enjoy that you're asking and it's a perfect segue to the next part of the question about our objective when using fiction because our interest in the stories is mainly due to their knock on effect. We want to create situations for people to use their own imagination and enable them to contribute to the narratives we've hinted at. Resisting closure is a key aspect to achieve this, whether it's a series of voicemails inquiring about a lost artwork or vinyl lettering advertising a fictional art fund, it's the withheld story which is the most important aspect; we're intrigued by the hidden rather than the visible narrative and the effect that it has on the viewer.

DODO: You mention your wish to critique gallery archetypes and the role of exhibiting artist. To do so, however, one must also re-invoke these conventions. Does your work stage an effective critique or does it risk re-affirmation?

We like to think that we re-invoke conventions with an unfamiliar twist. The artwork may be packaged in a familiar way but on closer inspection there'll be something unexpected that's intended on making the audience reconsider their prior thoughts on the matter. There's a certain currency in not being sure whether what you approach is an artwork or not, and then there's also a currency to the materiality of things in general. You can construct an artwork from those currencies as if they were materials. So instead of having the materiality of concrete or orange paint, you have the currency of the double take. For example, we made a fictional information stand for an exhibition, and many of the visitors thought that it was in fact the information stand for the whole show. Discovering that it is in fact an artwork, hopefully encourages people to reconsider other elements of their daily lives they otherwise take for granted.

DODO: There seems to be an ever increasing number of artist duos and collaborative practices these days. We are interested in conventions of nomenclature and wondered what were the reasons that you chose to identify yourselves by your first names only?

Including our surnames felt a little too formal really; we're friends before we're artists so we wanted the name to feel more familiar, we address ourselves with our first names, so it felt right to attach that to our work. There are some more logistical reasons too; having only forenames makes it less of a mouthful to say, hopefully making it more efficient and more memorable. The domain name was also available, which probably shouldn't affect these things... but it does. Prior to making a website we were called Jim and Sid, but that domain name was already taken... by a married couple's wedding photos! That domain is available now and I think their wedding website lives on in a WordPress unpaid domain name graveyard.

We also didn't see ourselves as a collective, more as a duo, so it felt strange to attach a word to the practise that wasn't our names, like a band might do (although, this comparison is probably disproved with the myriad of musical duos titled with their names - Simon and Garfunkel, Ike and Tina etc.). We have had some instances where people have jumped to some conclusions because of our name - on more than one occasion someone has assumed we were a couple, and we worked with a curator once who was convinced that Jim was fictitious because they hadn't met him. As far as we remember, Jim was just on holiday!

