

SIMON CALLERY

PIT PAINTINGS

Thames Gateway Project

the gallery at wimbledon college of art

Simon Callery Pit Paintings Thames Gateway Project* is the thirteenth exhibition to be held in the gallery at wimbledon since its establishment in 2004. As such this exhibition celebrates the colleges commitment to research as it previews Callery's findings at a midway point in his (AHRC) Fellowship. Working in partnership with Wimbledon and Oxford Archaeology, and funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, Callery's research is seeking new art forms for the representation of the experience of contemporary landscape.

For the college the exhibition affords us the opportunity to bring the work of one of our key researchers in direct contact with the community of scholars, artists, designers, researchers and students within the university. But most importantly to share Callery's discoveries with a wider public, local and national, as Callery's practice unites the disciplines of archaeology and fine art. We look forward to welcoming you this unique and exciting moment in Callery's fellowship.

Dean Of College
Professor Anita Taylor

* The largest regeneration scheme in Western Europe. Source: ODPM 2004.

Private View

Friday 7th September 2007, 6pm - 9pm

Exhibition Information

Saturday 8th September - Thursday 13th September 2007

Weekdays 10am - 8pm

Saturday 11am - 4pm

Closed on Sunday

Friday 14th September - Friday 26th October 2007

Monday - Friday 2pm - 7pm

Closed on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays

Agendas, Agendas, Agendas

A symposium on the Thames Gateway Project.

Tuesday 25th September 2007, 2pm onwards

Wimbledon College of Art, Merton Hall Road.

Also exhibiting at Wimbledon College of Art, Merton Hall Road:

MA FINE ART - Drawing, Painting, Print and Digital Media, Graphic Media and Sculpture

MA THEATRE - Visual Language of Performance

Private View

Friday 7th September 2007, 6pm - 9pm

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Saturday 8th September -

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Closed on Sunday

For further information on the Postgraduate Shows Please contact the College on 020 7514 9641 or see our website www.wimbledon.arts.ac.uk

THE GHOST OF A FLEA

Works by Ansel Krut, Wimbledon College of Art Teaching Fellow in Drawing 2005 - 07. Exhibition held in the Centre For Drawing Project Space.

Private View

Friday 7th September 2007, 6pm - 9pm

Exhibition Information

Saturday 8th September 2007, 11am - 4pm

Monday 10th September -

Thursday 13th September 2007

By appointment only

For further information on THE GHOST OF A FLEA please contact the Research Centre on 020 7514 9708/9706

Contact Details

For further information on SIMON CALLERY PIT PAINTINGS THAMES GATEWAY PROJECT please contact

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Wimbledon/Wimbledon Chase: train
Dundonald Road: tram

Acknowledgements

the gallery at wimbledon college of art would like to thank everyone who contributed to the exhibition and in particular the following:

Simon Callery, Mark Fairington, Rachel Withers, Professor Anita Taylor, Ben Ford, technical staff - the gallery at wimbledon, Ameet Hindocha (Designer), Karen Bateson (Proofreader), Caxton House (Printers), Esther Hartley and Miranda Clarke.

 Arts & Humanities
Research Council

 oxford archaeology

Forthcoming Exhibition

the gallery at wimbledon
Works from the *Jocelyn Herbert Archive*
9th November - 7th December 2007.

To laypeople, archaeology and excavation are inseparable. Archetypically, the archaeologist digs, gingerly bringing to light material traces of past societies.

Are archaeologists themselves, on the other hand, ever tempted to reverse the process — in imagination, that is — and mentally bury the landscapes that surround them under centuries of soil and rock? Applying their specialist knowledge, do they contemplate modern Britain and remodel it as it might be in thousands of years' time: the campus, the park, the factory farm, the shopping mall, the airport, the remand centre, the art gallery, all abandoned in their present state, silted over, maybe sunk beneath the sea or under desert sand? In this fantasy, are teams of seventeenth-century scholars at work, digging, clearing, mapping the landscape, analysing the buildings' remains? And what of the billions of things: folding chairs, food tins, overalls, paperbacks, display units, parking tickets, works of art, etcetera, etcetera — that have broken down, rotted or rusted away deep underground? How might the archaeologists of the distant future interpret all this? If they were to unearth the remains of a twenty-first century archaeological excavation, for instance, what might they make of it?

This scenario might well make an archaeologist grin, because it shares the historical solipsism of much sci-fi: its hypothetical future is merely a postdating of present cultural practice. (And one suspects that the chances of Bluewater, say, being suddenly abandoned and left untouched for millennia, like a Chinese Emperor's tomb, are, sadly, rather slim.) But maybe the idea of one archaeological survey revealing another might appeal, for — as Simon Callery observes, informed by his long-term fascination and involvement with the discipline — archaeologists do not regard excavation as constituting "time out" from history and cultural production. A dig is not a suspension but a continuation of human landscape use. Anything taken from one site must necessarily end up in another, be it the British Museum or the base of a traffic roundabout.

Digs, therefore, are places where the elaboration of historical knowledge doubles up with the production and definition of present-day culture, so to some extent archaeological practice is always, also, its own object of study. Art likewise: if an exhibition of contemporary paintings achieves a new manifestation of what painting can be and do, this will inevitably also effect a redefinition of some aspect of painting's traditions. Motifs, forms or techniques are extracted from one art-historical setting and deposited elsewhere, in a different context, maybe far away. Art's pasts are cannibalised, and the process laid bare for examination.

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Callery's recent paintings arise from his study of the wide-ranging work of Oxford Archaeology, the U.K.'s largest commercial archaeological company; and in particular, the visiting of excavations. His layered paintings-cum-assemblages are responses to the material and textural properties of excavation sites; not literal mappings of trenches, pits and boundaries, but experiments which seek to produce a physical experience equivalent to that undergone on site. The artist characterises this as a multi-sensory comprehension of time and change as they are materially, palpably bodied forth in the excavated landscape. Constructed fast from an array of pre-assembled components and with as much attention paid to structural as visual considerations, Callery's paintings are objects that appeal to viewers' kinetic, tactile, material and processual intelligence, and

their scale relative to the human body is very important. Looking at them, a static viewpoint is of limited use; their forms, substance, structure and proportions ask, much more explicitly than traditional representational paintings, for a mobile response.

So while the material discourse of these paintings was instigated by the experience of archaeology, it clearly returns to considerations of art. Callery acknowledges that in a "filtered and indirect" way, the memory of colour in Venetian painting is working itself out here. Complex, visually unstable greens, reds, rusts and crimsons, produced through a process of repeated staining and washing of the canvas that allows layers of complementary-coloured pigments to sit one on top of another, seem to echo Giorgione, Titian, and Poussin landscapes and the sumptuous costumes in Veronese and Tintoretto portraits: the National Gallery's Vendramin Family, for example. The circular stretchers Callery has been using are the direct consequence of an encounter with a circular Tiepolo ceiling painting in the Accademia: a moment when an embodied sense of the work's form and structure impressed itself on the artist as a phenomenon needing to be understood through physical reconstruction and reinterpretation in the studio.

So here is another overlap between archaeology and art (and art criticism, too). Competent practice depends on the understanding that an important aspect of our knowledge of the social world is material knowledge of a kind that rarely achieves verbalisation. "Verbal declarations about the material should... be understood as a layer of meaning overlaid on the material... and only partially and uneasily linked to it". However, material meanings may be elucidated and shared through adept demonstration, contextualisation and comparison, processes that work by highlighting some particular aspect of the material under consideration. "Try looking at it this way, as if it were like a...". Artists and archaeologists equally must be used to this type of exchange: a relatively innocuous-seeming dialogue — yet the effects of the perceptual shifts triggered may be profound.

Of course, archaeologists have no privileged view of the future. Equally, artists cannot discover if a work of art will 'work', without making it. Neither art nor history can be predicted, only postdicted. Historians can retrospectively trace effects back to causes, but those causes do not inevitably or necessarily give rise to the particular effects that, historically, have come about. Ditto artists: supposed aesthetic 'principles' don't guarantee successful outcomes. When Callery hypothesised that a big, emphatically vertical painting needed a version of an entasis (the tapering proportion of a classical column) to manage its height and its relationship with the viewer, this

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could only be tested through practice. And how does Callery ultimately decide when a painting is working? Paradoxically, he suggests that it's when viewers, having internalised the work as a material communication — having located themselves in it and it in themselves — turn away; look elsewhere; prepare to layer that intensified physical, spatial experience under what's to come: another way, maybe, of things sinking down into the past.

*Roland Fletcher: Materiality. Time, Space and Outcome in Bintliffe ed.: A Companion to Archaeology Blackwell, 2006, p. 111

Text by Rachel Withers



Romano-British burial on A2 excavation site, Photograph: Simon Callery 2007



Round Cadmium Red Deep Painting 2007

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