

Loose Canon

Zombie Formalism was a term coined in attachment to a specific type of abstract painting, sampling from the past, process-driven, market-friendly and yet in critique of itself. Painting is, of course, a Zombie activity regardless of its form - re-imagined as dead, singular, stalking the past as if it were the present. Zombies are de rigueur this year. And next. And so Painting, a discipline constantly being derided as dead, is now somewhat awakened by its own potential for deadness and the necessity to richly observe its histories, pluralise them and cut loose the canon.

Taking 'Fully Awake' to be a proposal rather than an actuality, I am interested in here considering how fully 'a wake' for Painting might enable a conversation about the complications of baton-passing and legacy. How we deal with the apparition that is a singular version of its history and review the ways in which we were taught and the ways we teach. We are awakening, not yet woke, and I am proposing that we use our deadness productively.

This year at Wimbledon we have adopted *Ruin* as a research thematic, connecting staff and student interests. In relation, here are some analogies and models, to accompany this exhibition's remit in thinking about a generational relay race and how to productively engage with legacy.

1.

Expanding the field, or, How a trapped man can help us understand how to get out:

In the final scenes of 'The Truman Show' Jim Carrey's eponymous character smashes into the back of the reality televisual arcology he has inhabited for thirty years, and appears to climb the stairs - in what seems to be a Michael Simpson painting - in order to get out. In this reversal of the death of painting where a flat image kills off the cinematic, the choice is made clear to him: the safety of the illusion *within* or the unknown, yet still illusory, world beyond the wall¹. It's a strange victory for the two dimensional (maybe even for Flat Earthers...) as Truman Burbank is faced with the hard truth that an ocean-borne sublime he had, just moments earlier, put brief faith in was rendered by image-makers and fantasists. His entrapment exists on both sides of the canvas - a to-scale curved rendering of blue sky with clouds, presumably just as sky-like and cloudy on the other side. The decision to leave his flawed familiar is, therefore, a complex one and, as Matisse wrote about creative practice in 1954, 'to see is itself a creative operation, which requires effort. Everything that we see in our daily life is more or less distorted by acquired habits' (Matisse, 1954).

2.

Destruction as production:

In Christian Marclay's cinematic montage, *Made to be Destroyed* (2016), he compiles clips from film and television showing works of art being wrecked in acts of violence where the works themselves play the role of the victim. Whether sprayed (*Batman*, 1989), burnt (*Equilibrium*, 2002) or smashed (*Le sang d'un poète*, 1932; *The Naked Gun*, 1988), paintings and sculptures are variously destroyed. Had the clips been extended we would have seen how the breaking of

¹ undercover reference: *Beyond the Wall* is also a flippant nod to the title of an extended episode of pop Medievalism's own 'Game of Thrones' focused on the *wights* - themselves zombies.

an artwork resolved something for its destroyer and been witness to a story arc where resolution is achieved via urgent and painful purging, fictive but full of pathos.

What we - undead painters - and Zombie Formalists are united in recognising is that ruin is a kind of recording and a collapsing of pasts and futures. This is vital material and includes forms of distressing, entropy and notions of the copy, sample or replica as forms of critique, taking down an 'original'. A useful analogy from the critique of digital media is Hito Steyerl's assessment of the demise of an 'originary original' - to be taken down by 'swarm circulation, digital dispersion, fractured and flexible temporalities', which provokes the question about whether the first image is the ruin or the subsequent 'poor images' to follow. (Steyerl, 2012, p: 44)

3.

Formations:

In Isabelle Graw's recent book, *The Love of Painting - geneology of a success medium*, she argues for a Foucauldian conception of history in her analysis of Painting - that the present can only be understood if the past is kept in view - using existing classifications, while simultaneously questioning them. This positioning of painting as a *formation*, in a constant re-becoming, allows for its unfixeness and (audible exhale) for it to challenge its own canon. Whilst Graw is talking about her methodology in an analysis of the *medium*, I think this is just as useful as a tool within teaching practice, opening up terms and creating space for debate and re-assessment when constructs or positions are being presented. In the arcology of Painting - before Truman's ship pierces the skin of its mastery, the work of art possesses an unquestionable position, a reflection back to the viewer of what *he* wants most to see. In its more crumbly brokenness something new and less territorially bound opens up. He can still look back but the knowledge of a piercing enlightens him.

4.

Krasner cut-ups

The formula for this exhibition cycle, suggests possibilities for observing the traces of one in the other: the teacher in their student and a further trace in their own subsequent student, combined, of course, with the learning that is embedded in teaching itself. These are supportive gestures, backwards and forwards in time. A commemoration of negative institutional experience would make a much less focused show. But this sideshow - a sort of legacy B-side - is also played out in the formation of our artistic identities.

Lee Krasner's collages, *Eleven Ways to Use the Words to See* (1974-77) were formed of cut-up and reworked sections of drawings she made in the late 'thirties under the instruction of Hans Hofmann. Hofmann was handsy with his teaching methods and frequently tore up or drew directly onto his students' works to correct them. This imposed collaboration is critiqued in Krasner's later works where she employs Hoffman's misguided pedagogies as a methodology and an act of *détournement*, slicing into her *failed* drawings and re-investing in them.

5.

Co-production as legacy:

As we de-canonise, it is interesting to also consider the value placed on *independence* in our field and whether teaching histories of co-production and communities of practice (to include histories of pedagogies) can offer a valuable counter to the space occupied by the single artist's narrative or preserve over their moment in time. Maintenance of the individual and their legacy

need not be a stronghold of independence as a *solitary* position but could engage shared dissolution of ideas and processes. Even within the canon.

Sol LeWitt's wall drawings are, of course, maintained via a legacy of instructions and re-performed in closely re-enacted measured lines and gestures. This, now posthumous, whispering game both preserves the identity of the work and communicates ideas around labour, co-production, exchange, the repeat and, of course, teaching.

A few days after the death of Eva Hesse, his closest friend, in May 1970, LeWitt made a work, *wd 46* (wall drawing 46), with vertical 'not-straight lines'. He was later asked, by curator, Andrea Miller-Keller, 'Was your introduction of the not straight line, in part, a quiet homage to Eva Hesse and her unique sensibility?' LeWitt answered that, 'I wanted to do something at the time of her death that would be a bond between us, in our work. So I took something of hers and mine and they worked together well. You may say it was her influence on me.' (Zevi, 1995, p: 108-9)

Any subsequent executor of this drawing - it is a work produced one-handedly - makes the piece freehand, first hanging strings from ceiling to floor as a visual guide. Art historian, Kirsten Swenson writes that, 'the clarity of a rational set of instructions collapses into failure and chaos.' (Swenson, 2015, p: 171) This new maker, along a line of whisperers, is braiding their own gesture with the embodied, experiential content of one dead artist's work, through the conceptual lens of another.

During my own studentship in the mid-to-late nineties the potential death of the medium was often assumed to come from an emergence of other media and not from *within*, where there still exists - among us painters - a great desire to destabilise it. Shifting pedagogies, internationalism, the economics of production, socialising of art practices and the ongoing project of de-canonising curricula are generating co-owned and progressive models for teaching Painting. Being undead could certainly be a great vantage point for a conversation about legacy.

Pass it on.

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Zoë's research engages disorder as a culturally produced phenomenon, in parallel to its clinical counterpart, suggesting its value to knowledge production within Fine Art and critical theory.

She is the co-editor of *The Edit*, an inclusive bibliography for Fine Art.

In a crisis on a plane she has to explain she's a doctor of collage and can't really help.

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