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# WORKING TITLE:

Post neo-expressionist values and the modern aesthetic experience in painting

How conventions associated with post avant-garde expressionism can be reconfigured and appropriately adapted to inform a contemporary painting practice; and develop and/or enhance an aesthetic experience for practitioners in Fine Arts.

# AIM:

This research aims to investigate how pictorial conventions used in a previous generation of expressionist painting (1980's post avant-garde) can be reconstituted and appropriated to develop a contemporary painting practice. The research also examines if a methodology can be derived from this investigation through painting methods that will enable new means by which narrative implications can be understood in the reading of painted imagery.

# INTRODUCTION

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In a conversation with Bryan Robertson, (2001) Christopher Le Brun states:

Smith, Charles., Norbert Lynton  
and Bryan Robertson. Christopher  
Le Brun. London: Booth-Clibborn  
Editions, 2001.<sup>1</sup>

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“One of the differences between illustration and painting is the weight of form in painting and how it is described and deployed. There are independent abstract structures of scale, colour, space, light, texture, thickness and thinness, which somehow operate separately to what appears to have been depicted, or even intended. I understand, to some extent, what I depict but I feel differently about my decisions in the physical world of colours and materials. I trust them more. As a painter, I give more weight to this intuitive structuring and handling of materials than to my own understanding of any depicted meaning from which I might begin”.<sup>1</sup>

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There has been for some time a parallel understanding of this occurrence (Le Brun’s position) within my own practice and I have become increasingly interested in the ramifications of giving deliberate freedom to this intuitive exploration to the painting method. There has been an attempt to adopt this deliberate intention into a critical strategy that will illuminate and harness an aesthetic independence from antecedent pictorial values, associated with the neo-expressionist genre. The aim is to gain an interesting and independent painting method, not reinvent the wheel, nor completely sever ties from art history. My own practice depends on a considerable knowledge of art history; of both recent and early painting history in order to have a robust stance in this particular field of expertise and to chart a particular path within a context in which the status and continued relevancy of a contemporary painting practice is regularly challenged.

I am certainly interested in an intuitive process in painting. Looking back at art history, a more technocratic understanding of a painting practice has tended to overlook the more holistic and intuitive motivations that govern a painter’s methodology. A holistic I find more credible is an appreciation of painting practice that acknowledges practice as a painterly record of the unconscious thought, movement and non-movement. American Abstract Expressionism is a classic example of this.

The early classical formulation of Abstract Expressionism as evidenced in the 1950's work of Willem De Kooning demonstrates an idea of narrative being encapsulated in the process of making the work. Narrative in this sense is identified with the artist's own physical gestures as being a manifestation of the artist's emotional/psychological being.

The later works of Philip Guston go beyond this classical formulation by reintroducing recognisable imagery, but still employing the conventions of process and visual language of abstract expressionism. These late works of Philip Guston play a pivotal role in defining the language and motivations that had subsequently informed the neo-expressionists of the 1980's. This reintroduction of social commentary and political consciousness within contemporary painting is the premise from which my own investigations started.

## INITIAL RATIONALE

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Smith, Charles., Norbert  
Lynton and Bryan Robertson.  
Christopher Le Brun. London:  
Booth-Clibborn Editions, 2001.2

“For many artists, the questions are ‘what am I doing’ and ‘why am I doing it’ - which favours semantics rather than aesthetics. So therefore instead of asking ‘what am I doing and why’, you can turn the question into ‘how’, which can then be answered in artistic or practical terms”<sup>2</sup>

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To commit to painting is to commit to the unknown within a contemporary world in which the digital pervasiveness of imagery invades every aspect of modern consumer economies. It can be argued that Painting’s role in society has become little more than crude interior decoration or a means to produce mediocre imagery for ‘low rent’ advertising.

The dilemma of the painter is not so much about finding a justification to paint; but rather it is ‘how do I paint freely within an unsupported and self-consuming environment?’ This question is the framework that supports the research question and title; this is the beginning of an inversion by practice and what dominates the early experimental phases of this project.

The beginning of an inversion by practice is exactly that, a beginning. Initially the idea of inversion in the early phase of the project was not yet a concept with contextualized parameters; it was rather a sense of change coming. There was a seemingly innate nervous drive to find something more from the act of painting than just simply the ‘act of painting.’

A mere recording of movement and thought by means of spreading ‘coloured goo’ over a surface is as significant an act as daily bowel movements – it’s a sure indicator that one is still alive, but rather a mundane act of necessity. Painting as a mode of expression has the ability to disembowel the subject matter, leaving the viewer unsure of how they see themselves in relation to the image that can cause an eerie sense of disembodied perspective and perception.

Neo-expressionism lends a springboard for a physical exploration. It is here the project begins to disintegrate the notion of ‘neo-expressionism’ in the knowledge that the kind of psychological pressure described is particularly sensitive to the bodily physicality of a well-constructed painting.

that initiates the first explorative paintings and drawings executed under this project.

# EARLY EXPERIMENTATIONS



(Fig 1)



(Fig 2)



(Fig 3)



(Fig 4)

## NEO-EXPRESSIONISM DISINTEGRATED

This early series of drawing were constructed through a method of improvisation with the desire to challenge my own conventions already proficiently used in building up an image. The gradual deconstruction of the first image (Fig 1) disintegrates until all that is readable is the essence of the original drawing. (Fig 2) This deconstruction alters the reading of the pictorial plane, and could be described as scraping away the debris splayed across the threshold of the pictorial plane causing a breakdown in the restrictive glance and challenging the first impression- Demanding further commitment from the viewer as they try to grasp for recognition of the figure.

These drawings (Plates 1-8) set up the parameters for a body of work that consists entirely of an attempt to locate, utilise and disintegrate the neo-expressionistic aesthetic in an entirely process derived investigation. Although this was not a specific intention upon the outset, they do describe in essence the apparent resistance to convention and need to break away from a stylistic tendency rooted in a physical painting process. And in doing so differentiate myself from the precedent of 1980's Neo-expressionist. As the paintings progress, the pictorial devices get more specific as the continued disintegration of the image is applied, until the plane consists of an entirely abstract field in contrast with a recurring central form. (Fig 3) This is an indication of the first conscious reconfiguration of an aesthetic derived from neo-expressionistic pictorial conventions. This initial reconfiguration becomes more operational as the process of disintegration and reconstruction becomes more concise, triggering an obvious contradiction displayed through the work by the introduction of real objects in opposition to abstract forms and field. (fig 4). (refer plates 9-40)

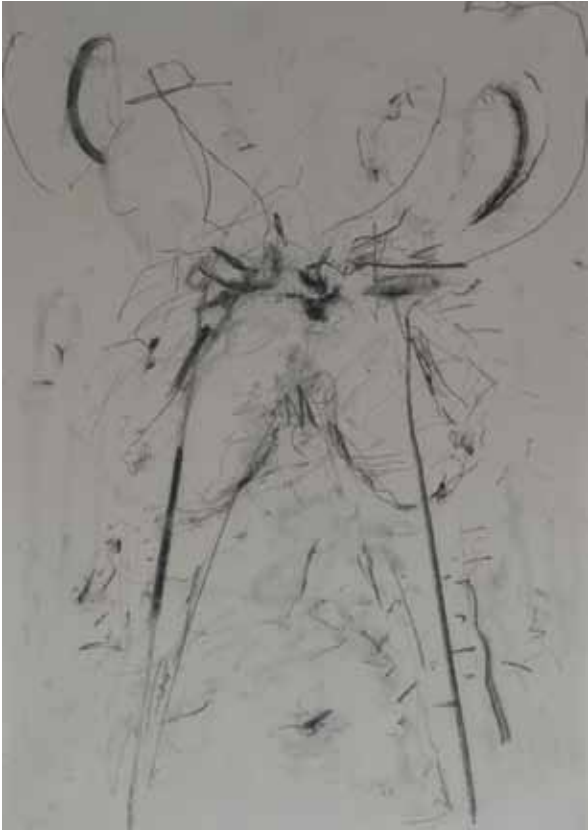


PLATE 1



PLATE 2



PLATE 3



PLATE 4



PLATE 5



PLATE 6



PLATE 7



PLATE 8



PLATE 9



PLATE 10



PLATE 11



PLATE 12



PLATE 13



PLATE 14



PLATE 15



PLATE 16



PLATE 17



PLATE 18



PLATE 19



PLATE 20



PLATE 21



PLATE 22



PLATE 23



PLATE 24



PLATE 25



PLATE 26



PLATE 27



PLATE 28



PLATE 29



PLATE 30



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PLATE 32



PLATE 33



PLATE 34



PLATE 35



PLATE 36



PLATE 37



PLATE 38



PLATE 39

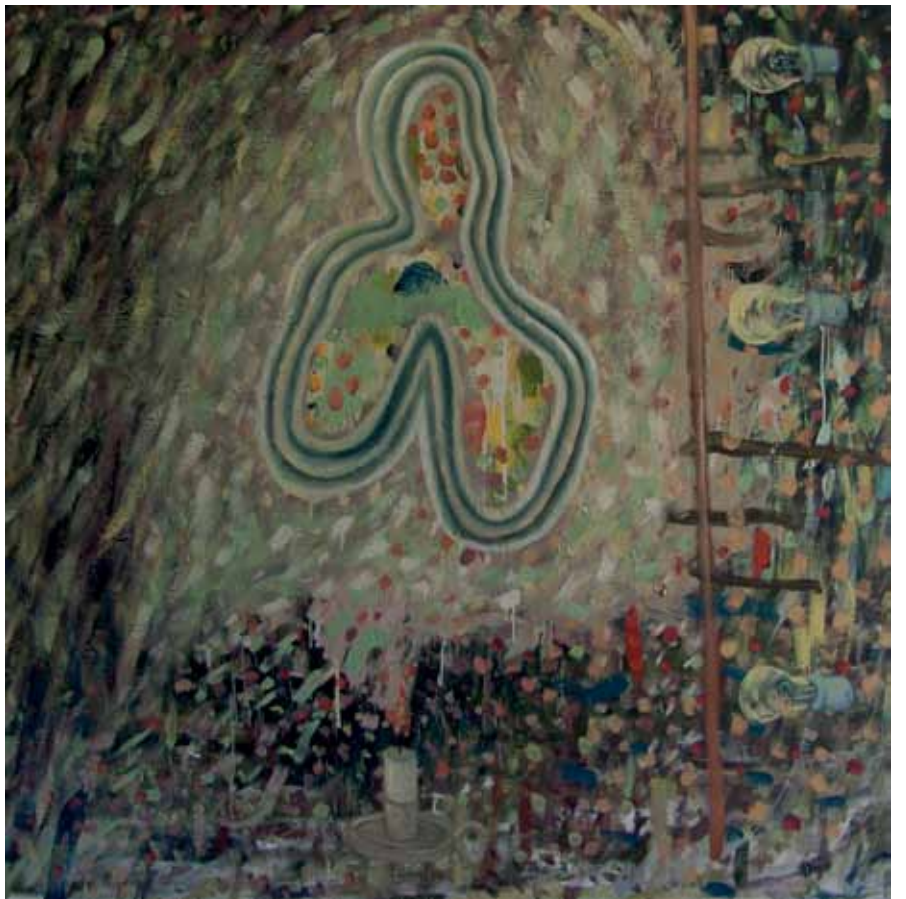


PLATE 40

# RECONFIGURING CONVENTIONS

It can be argued that Neo expressionism when looking at the aesthetic has a set of conventions. The abstract and desecrated figure, the expressive mark and the graphic colour combinations for example can all be seen as conventions common to neo expressionism.

It is what I consider to be the conventions of neo expressionism painting that my own painting practice has formed. There became a need to progress from a strictly neo expressionistic convention in order to investigate the idea/sense of inversion by practice. Reconfiguring the neo expressionistic conventions of my painting practice is when a method starts to form.

Reconfiguring conventions or reconfigured conventions is a term that I have used to describe a basic formula that lends a beginning to my further investigations. The reconfigured conventions are my tangible beginnings into a terrain that I have never before ventured.

When describing a painting process that is embedded within the physical act of applying paint there must be a level of knowledge obtained before further investigations into the conceptual realm of a painting practice can be further developed. Pertaining to this knowledge is the understanding of basic pictorial devices as conventions. Configuring the relationship between the figure and the field is the basic foundation on which to build up a painting.

Informing the figure/field method is the friction described between the figure and the field. This friction is described by the physicality of the paint, the texture and the viscosity of it, etc.

The vehicle for the description of the physicality of the paint is the mark itself. The mark is, in effect, a map describing the movements of the collaboration of the hand and the eye; a collaboration seemingly informed by the emotional elements of thought, that is, this could be considered as a response to an event/experience or even an idea.

Changing and altering the figure and the field will by default change the pictorial space, and by doing so, sets up a description of form because when the pictorial space is altered light then becomes a movable element. Description of form of any kind is a description of light or absence of light. One cannot exist without the other. The description of light is deployed by colour and the substance of colour is delivered by the mark, thus illustrating a cycle.

# TABULA RASA: THE RED HERRING

The early experimental phase of this project sets up a formulation for experimenting with basic figure/field conventions that have become a reoccurring theme in the paintings. The formulation as described in the previous chapter is essentially one of repetition, although there is no intended or prescribed physical outcome expected from this series of paintings; there is certainly a chartable progression from the beginning of the project to this point.



(Fig 5)

The prominent concern in this progression is the reoccurring illuminated centralised figure set into a flat field becoming more descriptive of the figure, light and space (Fig 5-7). It is this series of paintings that inform and aid the development of the reconfigured conventions of the previous chapter.



(Fig 6)

Something begins to happen when at a point of frustration, the paintings become further descriptive of figure, light and space. A profound example of this is a painting done near the end of the early experimental paintings (Fig 7). Initiating a period of reflection that was at the time of execution unknowingly the entire content of the next painting. It is outwardly a drastic change in style that in retrospect is traceable to the reconfigured conventions. This painting is titled *Tabula Rasa*, (Fig 8) which translates roughly in English to the aloof ironist, a title given because there was an element of aloof detachment. This is a place in the project where text and naming of paintings start to become an expressive device, an early attempt to figure out the usefulness of a narrative as a mode of expression within a method or something to aid the development of the reconfigured conventions.



(Fig 7)



(Fig 8)

The motivation behind the Tabula Rasa image (Fig 8) was clearly different to the works executed prior, the physicality of the paint may differ in the Tabula Rasa painting to that of the previous work but the conventions derive from the reconfigured conventions, albeit with a broader scope. For example; the conventions become a method to developing some kind of content as opposed to solely being the content, in effect causing the notion of narrative to merge and thread within the convention. Instead of painting the effects of light onto the form, light is painted as the form (candle and light bulb painted in Fig 7 and 8) which in turn is posing a challenge to the convention of light and how it might be read in a painting, thus becoming a possible content and narrative.

In a similar sense the convention of figure / field tension which harbours the form is being challenged by the formulation of both the pole figure and the cigarette figures posed against the leaning floor and the seemingly transparent wall (Fig 8). This field now contains the figure and is a direct challenge to the ambiguity of the previous abstract fields painted in the prior works. The challenge is the description of ambiguity in the reading of the figure in context to the field. This is a kind of inversion of the figure or at least the reading of the figure. To describe it in practical terms it could be said that the figure is painted to 'pop' from the field of the painting whilst at the same time being 'sucked' back into the painting by the weight of the floor and the wall - in essence describing gravity as a possible narrative.

Reading gravity as narrative causes implications of perception to become part of the overall reading of the image, striking a cyclic momentum to the narrative that is driven to the pictorial plane by the simple effectiveness of the reconfigured conventions.

The Tabula Rasa signals a significant development in the project that subsequently informs the next series of paintings and places drawing as a higher priority than in the previous works.



PLATE 41

# RABID DOG SERIES



(Fig 9)

The Rabid Dog series was an attempt to try to make some sense of the implications of the Tabula Rasa painting in context to the systematic investigations of the earlier works. The Rabid Dogs are not attempting to destroy the reconfigured conventions developed and formalised from the interrogation and disintegration of the neo-expressionistic aesthetic. Rather the drive is seemingly to further test the implications of perception, as the reading of gravity as narrative becomes a possible addition to the reconfigured conventions.

Drawing becomes an important component for the development of this series. Aiding the creation of the object to gravity to illustrate gravity. There must be weight that can pierce it. That is an object; the object or the friction to gravity was developed as a set of forms carried through from the Tabula Rasa painting. These forms were tested with the reconfigured conventions and the notion of gravity as narrative. The more that the reading of narrative becomes a convention, the more the content becomes metaphorical. In turn the metaphor becomes the reading of gravity in the Rabid Dogs, displayed in the various stacking, hanging and floating of the objects/forms in the field. (Fig 9-11) Depicting the weight of the objects as pertaining to the reconfigured conventions is informed by light and colour as well as the figure/field tension pictorial device.



(Fig 10)

In trying to harness metaphor as a component to developing and understanding the potential of narrative as an idea causes text to play a more prominent role in the work, particularly to the drawings. (Fig 12-13)



(Fig 11)



(Fig 12)



(Fig 13)

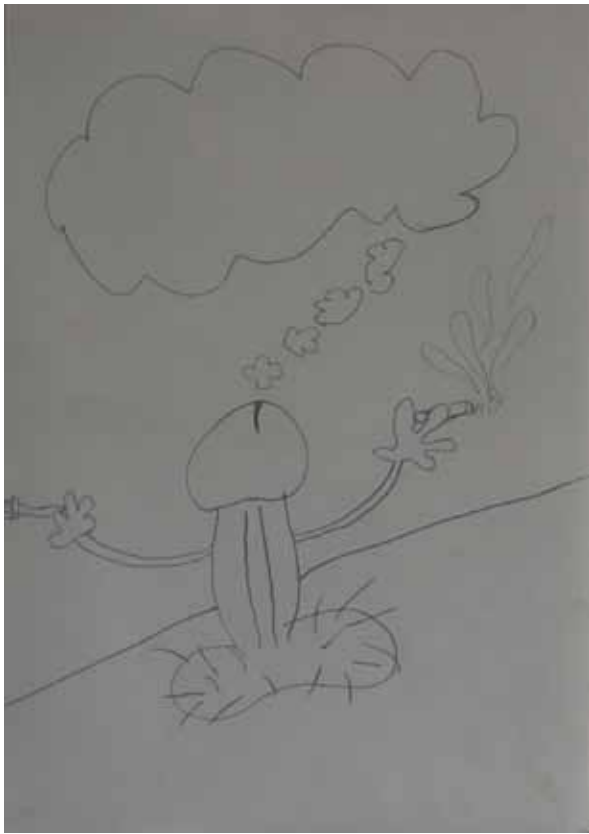


PLATE 42

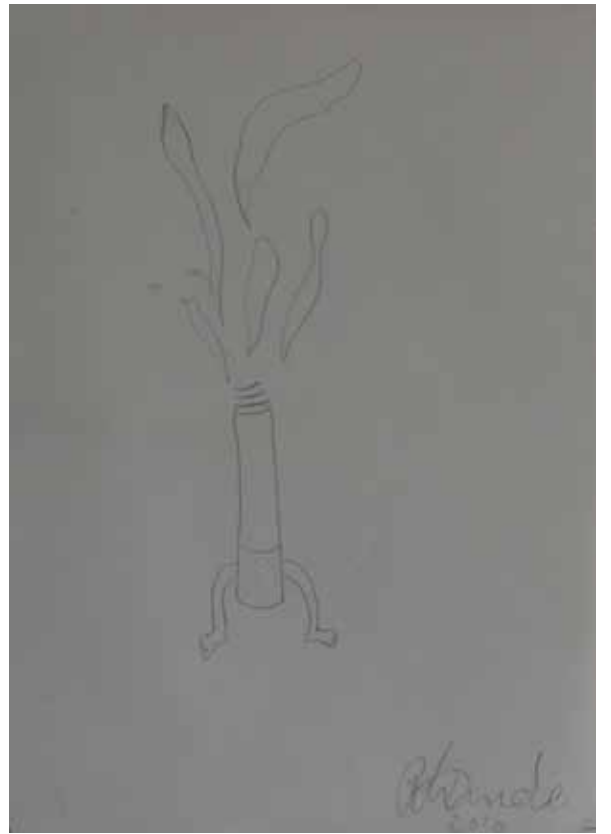


PLATE 43



PLATE 44

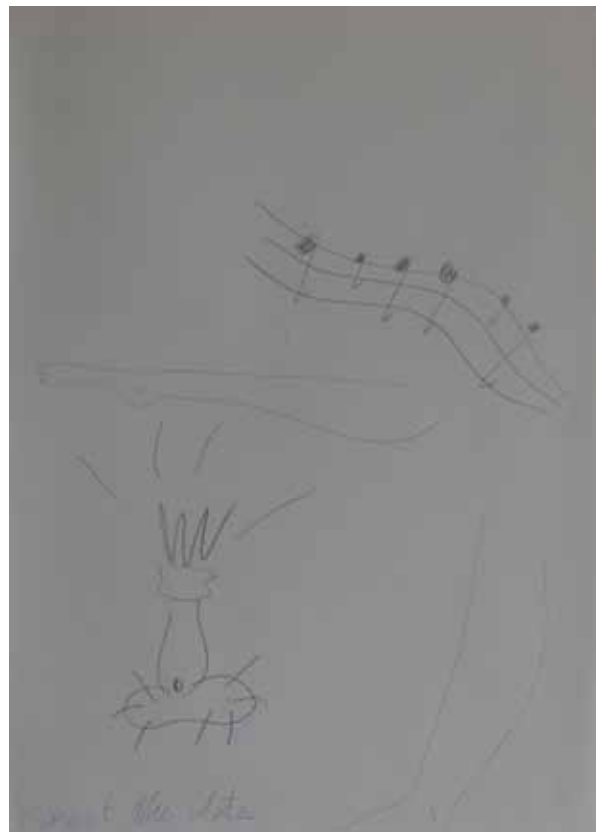


PLATE 45



PLATE 46

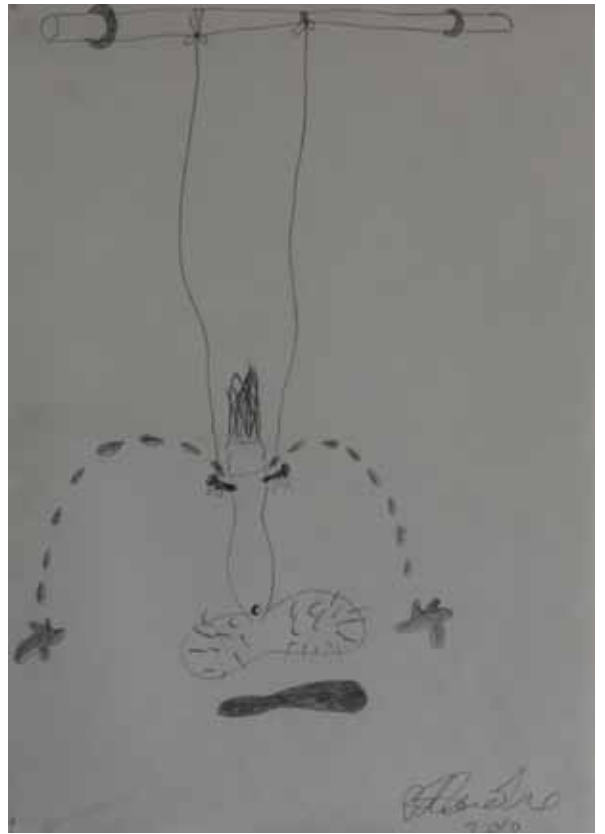


PLATE 47



PLATE 48

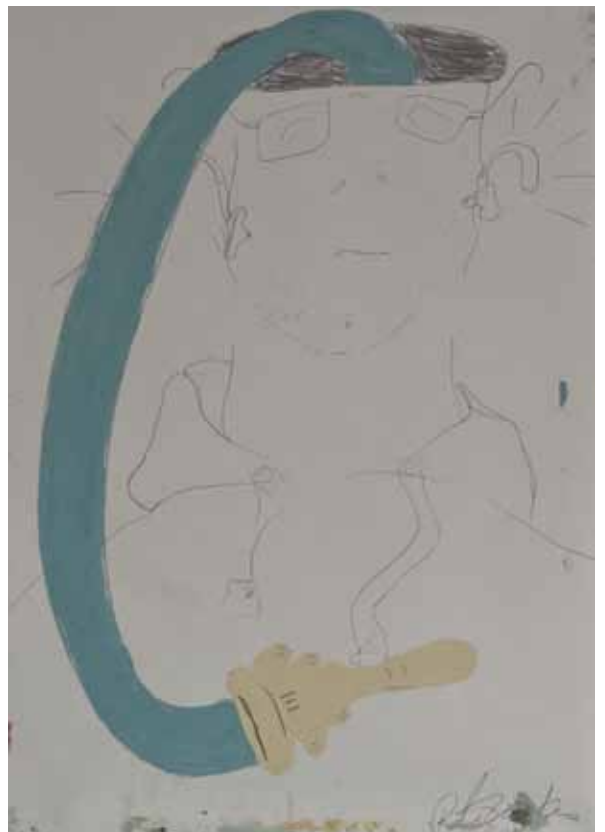


PLATE 49



PLATE 50



PLATE 51



PLATE 52



PLATE 53



PLATE 54



PLATE 55



PLATE 56

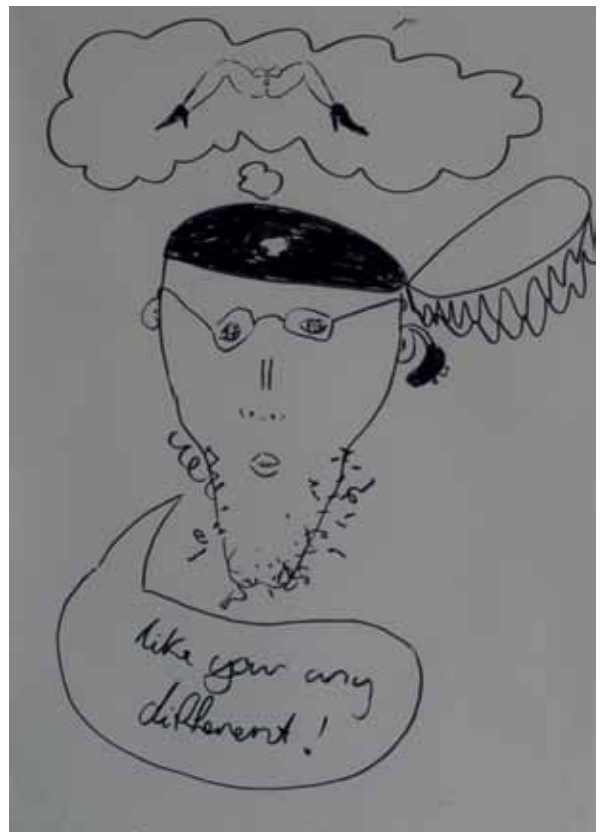


PLATE 57

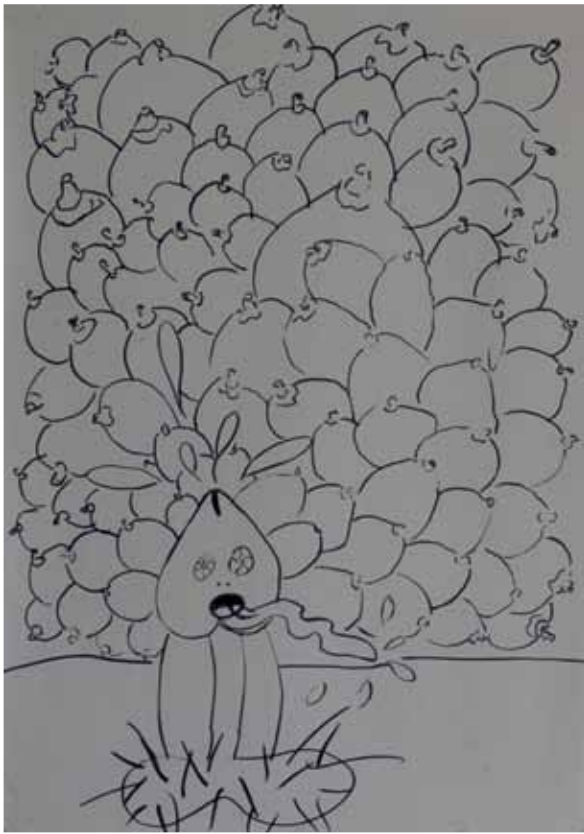


PLATE 58



PLATE 59



PLATE 60



PLATE 61



PLATE 62



PLATE 62



PLATE 62



PLATE 63



PLATE 64



PLATE 65



PLATE 66



PLATE 67



PLATE 68



PLATE 69



PLATE 70



PLATE 71

# THE EVOLUTION OF DESECRATION

## THE DEVIL'S CROSSROAD

Having now a sense of creative direction, or at least a pursuit and reason to push understandings of painting into unknown or unrecognised territory, expressive energies were poured into the need to figure out how to harness and deploy narrative as a device for a more intuitive expression.

Instead of imitating or regurgitating notions already explored and developed in prior investigations, the need to straddle this outpouring of expressive energy and content within the context of a contemporary image becomes paramount.

This outpouring occurred in the form of a large amount of ink on paper work and graphic paintings that showed a seemingly drastic change in direction in comparison to the prior body of work. However this was not so, the stylistic approach changed but the direction just gathered a sudden pulse of momentum that was stimulated by the processes of the previous works.

The Tabula Rasa and the Rabid dog works are not resolving the issue of narrative at this point, so in order to make some sense of the changing developments produced by those series of drawings and paintings, a new perspective is now added in the form of a specific and direct narrative.

This narrative is started by drawing directly from Goethe's Faust. Faust is a ready-made narrative that is easily applied to a contemporary image making process. This is the point where drawing defines the pictorial plane. The series of works developed under the Faust reference enable the freedom to fully investigate the potential of narrative as an idea and all the considerations under the idea of narrative (object, space, light, gravity, metaphor and so on), and as a result define a crossroad to an unknown place that presents two options, only one of which could be chosen.

One was to continue to play around with paint on a mostly physical plane, the other was to take the unknown path and discover a painting method beyond the physicality of manipulating paint. The path of the unknown was chosen and further works from this point began to formulate the conceptual framework of what has become the support for the development of a partly psychological method.

Form makes way for the figure. The figure makes way for a description of the human condition. A description of the human condition triggers narrative as a pictorial device. Narrative harbours the theatrical as a mode of expression. The theatrical stimulates and heightens the effects of the grotesque and the visceral.

It is this basic accumulation of pictorial perceptions that triggered what can be described as a kind of inversion of self.

Triggered by the constant exposure to the drawn mark that made obvious how self-sufficient the pictorial plane is.

Once an image is made it occupies its own reality of sorts, and is not dependent on the painter to dictate how it must be interpreted. It is rather a legitimate entity of its own.



PLATE 72



PLATE 73



PLATE 74



PLATE 75

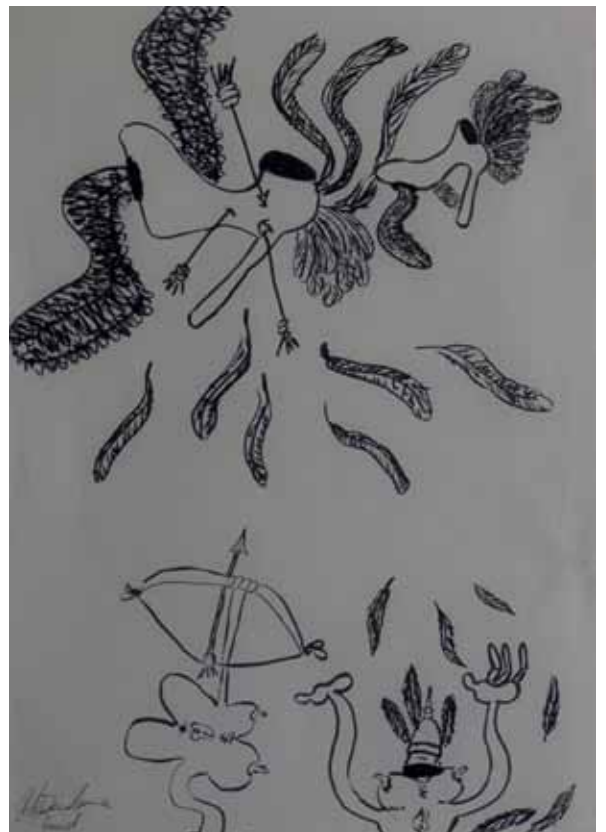


PLATE 76

# DESECRATING THE FIRST GLANCE

My own speculation leads me to believe that the notion of the image comes at a high cost to the painter. Not because of the energy taken to develop the image both mental and physical, but because of the history attached to the notion of the image. A history that has been with us since the dawn of our time.

This cost does not come in terms of whether an artist is successful or totally un-noticed by society. Rather the cost is in the extraction of an image from the depth of oblivion and displaying the undertones of day to day reality and evoking the second glance of any man no matter the education, creed or social status.

How does one take the concept of the image and display it to his fellows as if it were a mirror throwing back an unrelentingly honest reflection of the horrible realities of him. Yet keep the image seemingly contained within its own living breathing reality, to be visited when one is willing to commit to more than just a superficial glance?

After all an image as it is displayed by the painter is just a piece of cotton stretched over some sticks nailed and glued together then paint applied with a hairy stick to the surface.

It is my stance that the realm of the image is the gate way to an inversion of self [ What I mean by self-inversion is: self as a conscious and subjective being becomes inverted. So the conscious becomes the un-conscious and the subjective becomes the objective. I.e. the unreal becomes real]. A simple way to describe the realm of the image in a way to help further the first glance into the second is: to imagine the sticks, glue, cotton and hairy stick and paint that build the physicality of the image as a mental hurdle on a track field. The runner must take a considerable run and leap to be able to clear it.

Imagine the human imagination is the runner, physical reality is the hurdle, the pictorial plane as the track and the stadium as consciousness surrounding everything. If the runner hopes to clear all the hurdles in quick time he must be able to focus beyond his surroundings whilst utilising them at the same time.

The description of self-inversion as described prior as a basic chain of thought has been instrumental in the making of a method designed to clear the psyche for the image, so that it can be extracted from the depths of the pictorial plane. There is difficulty in finding a way to clear the psyche of a preconceived determination that in the end dictates the final image - a mode of working that limits the initiation and the intensity of an aesthetic experience.

A solution is found by desecration of the idea/content/ego. Whatever it is that the painter has in mind has the potential to take over the painting process and thus become the content of the painting. To commit to this is to merely decorate rectangles with imposed ideals. This kind of image making does not entice, trigger or enhance an aesthetic experience; rather it can hinder it completely.

The function of desecration is not to destroy the original idea (as there needs to be something tangible to shape and begin with) but the idea must be defaced and defiled, rendered unrecognizable so as to obliterate the shackles of the limited gaze of the first glance.

(When I talk of the 'first glance' and the 'second glance' I am talking about the first glance as outside of the pictorial plane and the second glance as the beginning of the inversion of self from the perspective of the artists hand trying to penetrate and manipulate the pictorial plane).

The idea of the pictorial plane as a tool of inversion is a complex and difficult concept to describe as a method used in a painting practice to penetrate itself. In order to elaborate on this idea there needed to be freedom to mould and play with this concept as if it were of plastic - an impossible task as what is real is real. How do you describe and develop what is real with the seemingly unreal as a tool?

The shift from zero momentum to forward momentum was in the framing together of the heuristic method of problem solving with the scientific. The result was the development of a system to prepare and still the thinking process in order to be able to draw parallels between reality, the imagination and the pictorial plane.

This task is achieved by negotiation between the tangible and what can be represented of the psyche or human imagination by using a system of symbols, which are adaptable and have multiple meanings depending on how or where they are described within the pictorial plane. These symbols are developed using ink on paper.

The negotiation eventually becomes a process of desecration as the ink drawings develop and play a twofold roll in the image. One as the first port of call and the other as the point of departure into the pictorial plane. At first you are drawn to what you think you can recognize or what seems familiar. then you have to think of yourself in context to what you have recognized and responded to, as the recognised object has a sybolic reference to a desecrated narrative.



PLATE 77

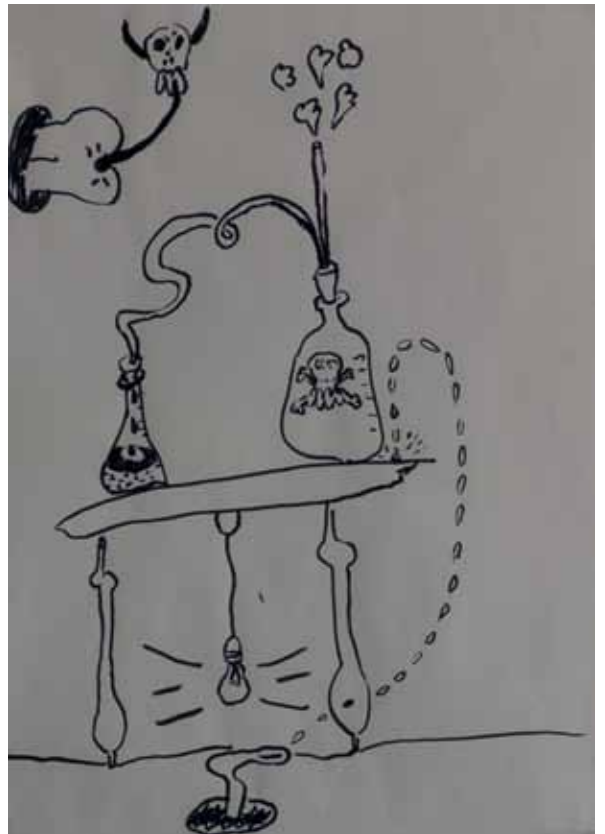


PLATE 78



PLATE 79

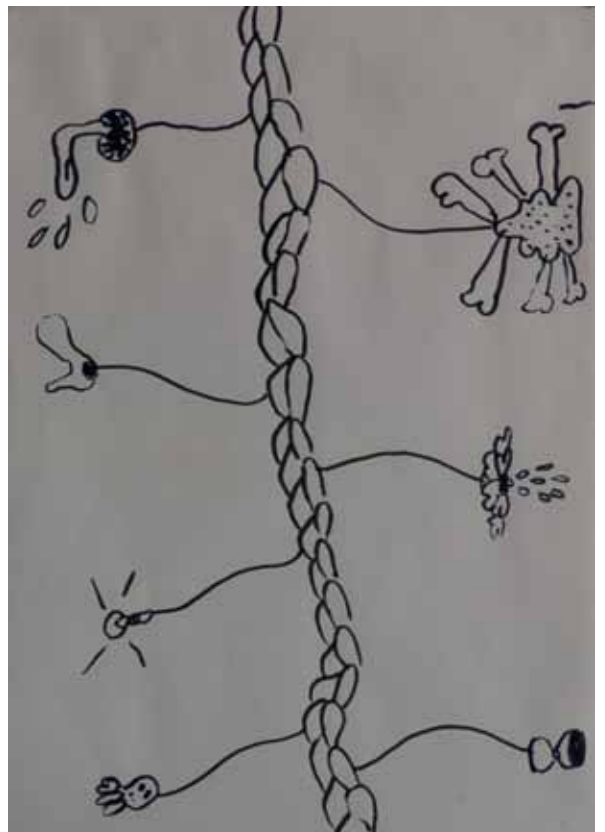


PLATE 80

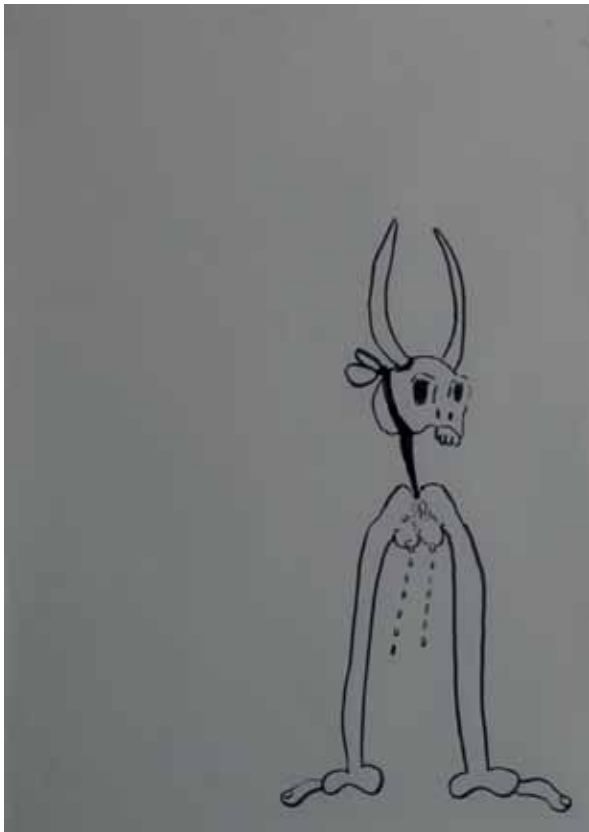


PLATE 81



PLATE 82

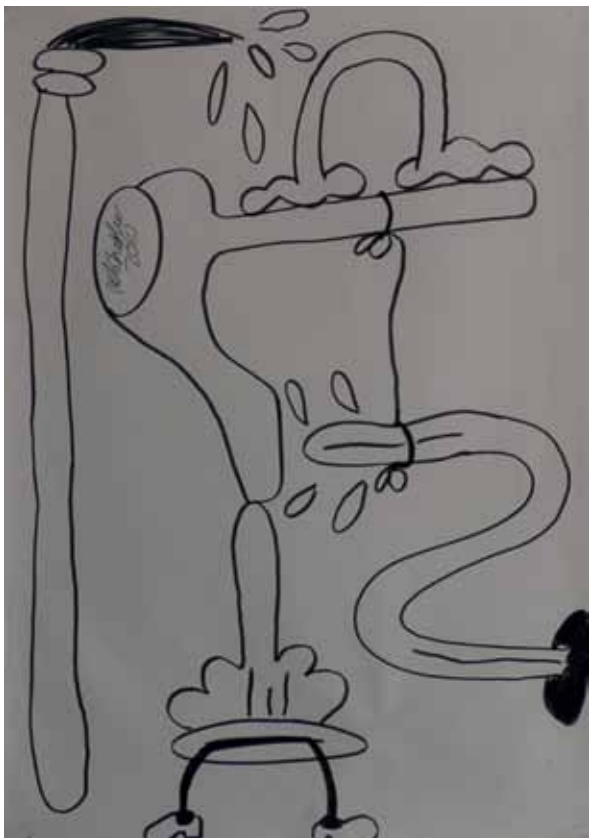


PLATE 83



PLATE 84



PLATE 85

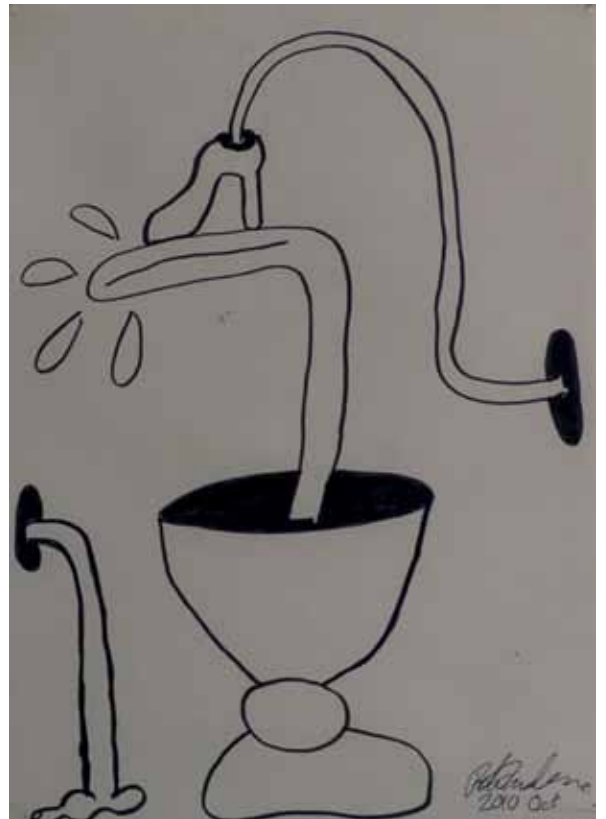


PLATE 86



PLATE 87

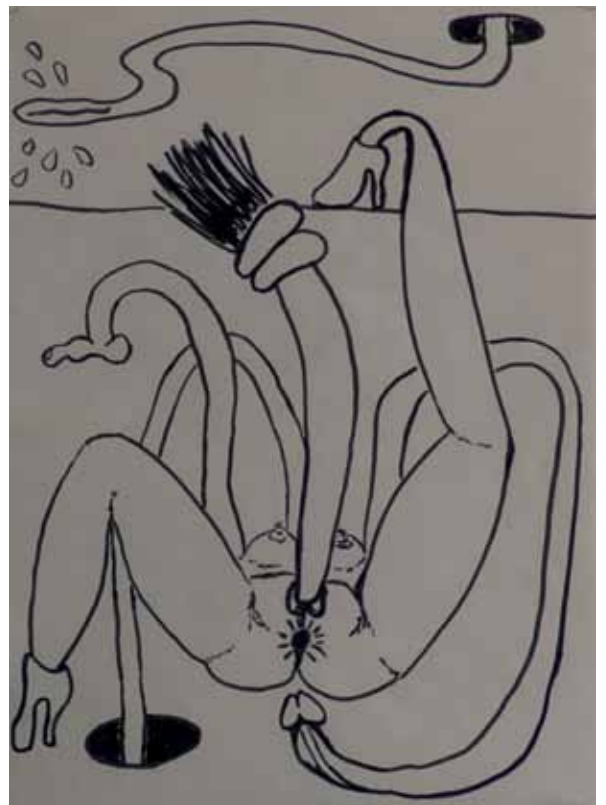


PLATE 88



PLATE 89



PLATE 90

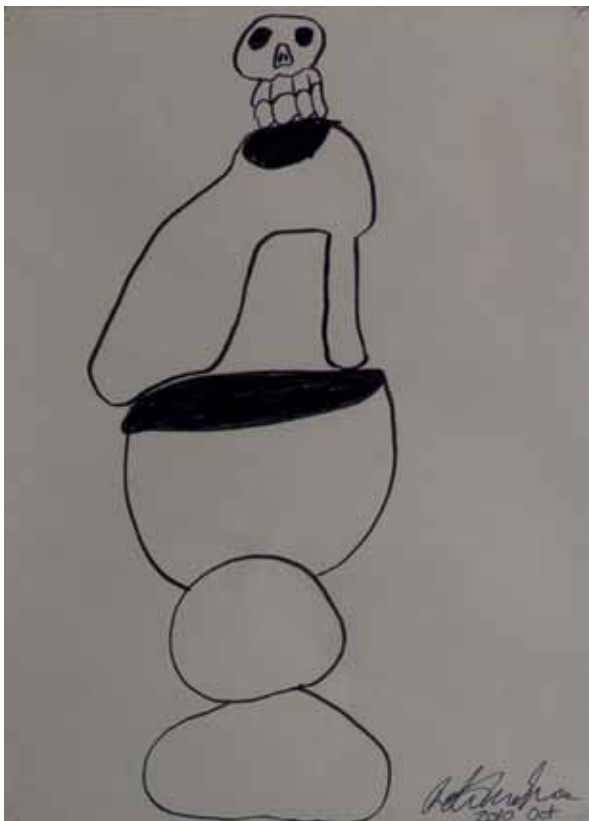


PLATE 91

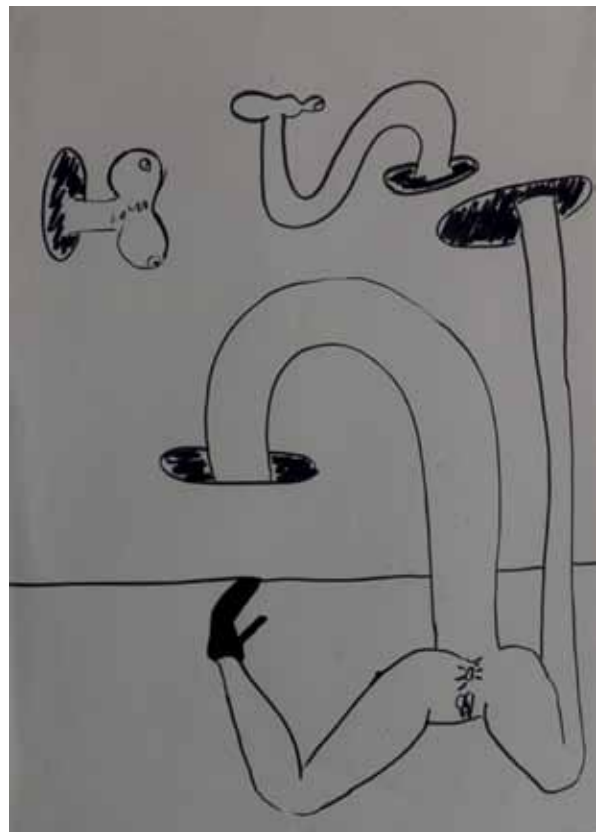


PLATE 92

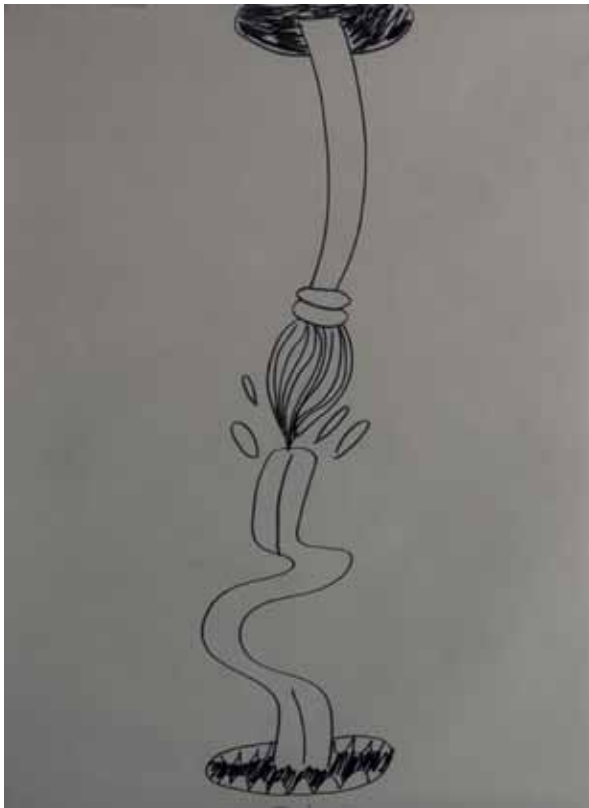


PLATE 93

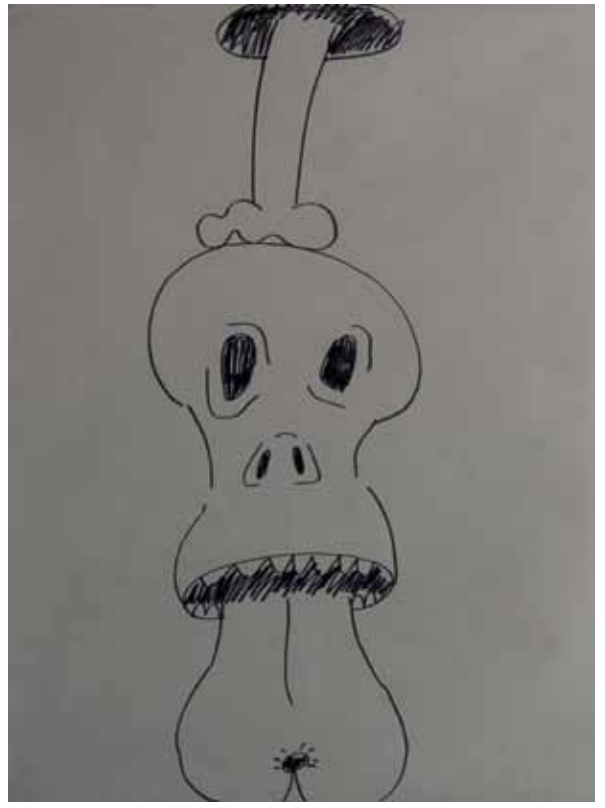


PLATE 94



PLATE 95

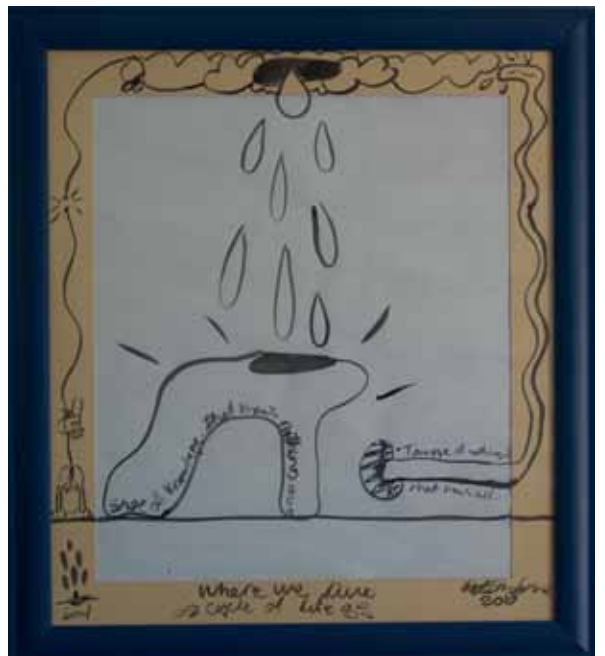


PLATE 96



PLATE 97



PLATE 98



PLATE 99



PLATE 100



PLATE 101



PLATE 102



PLATE 103

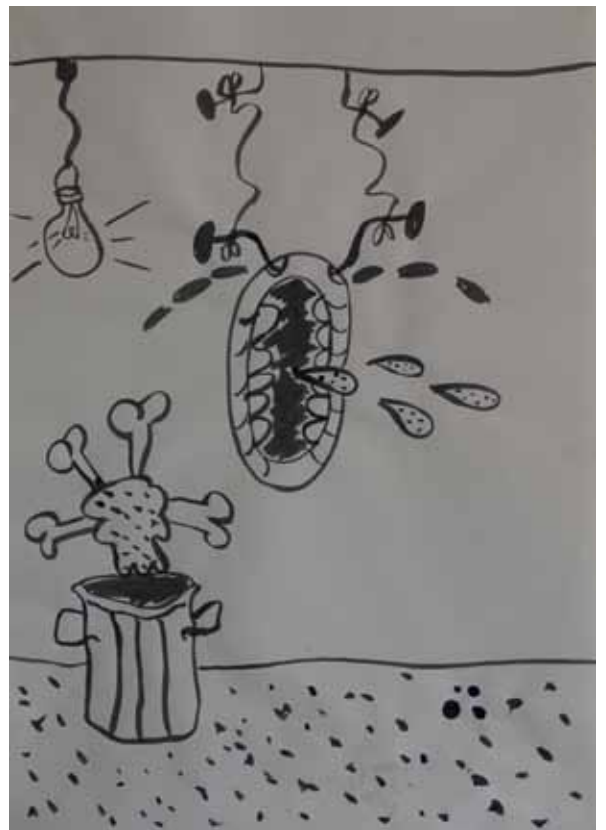


PLATE 104



PLATE 105

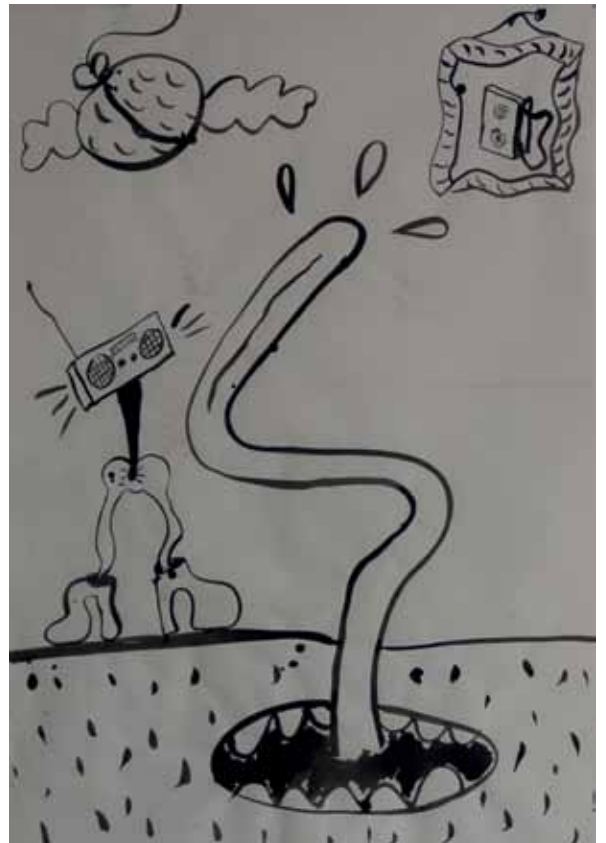


PLATE 106

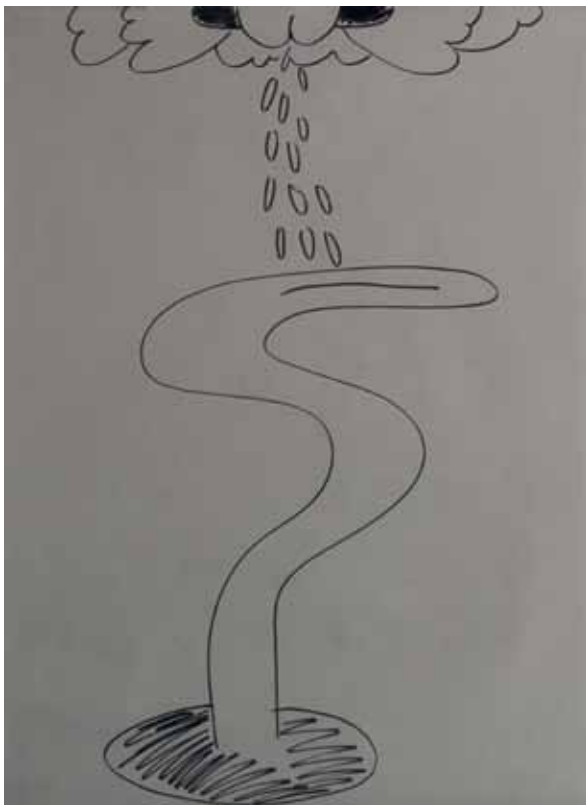


PLATE 107

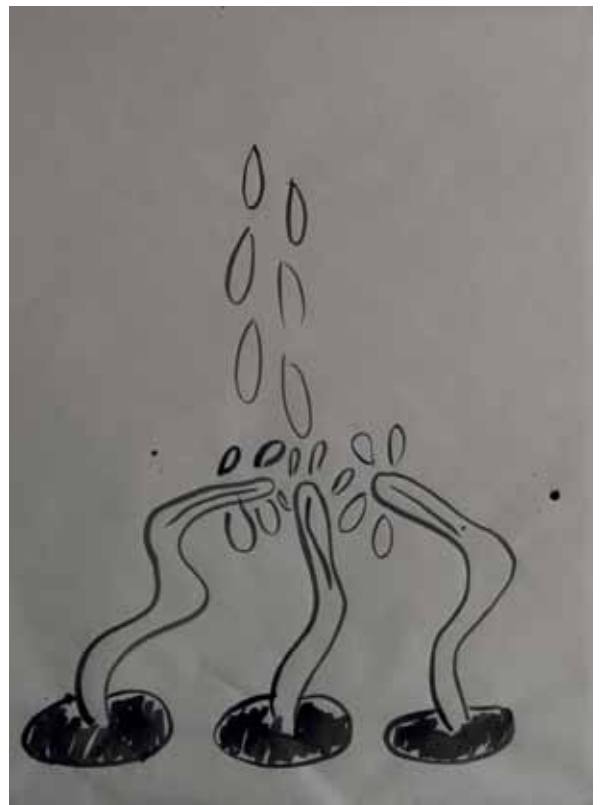


PLATE 108

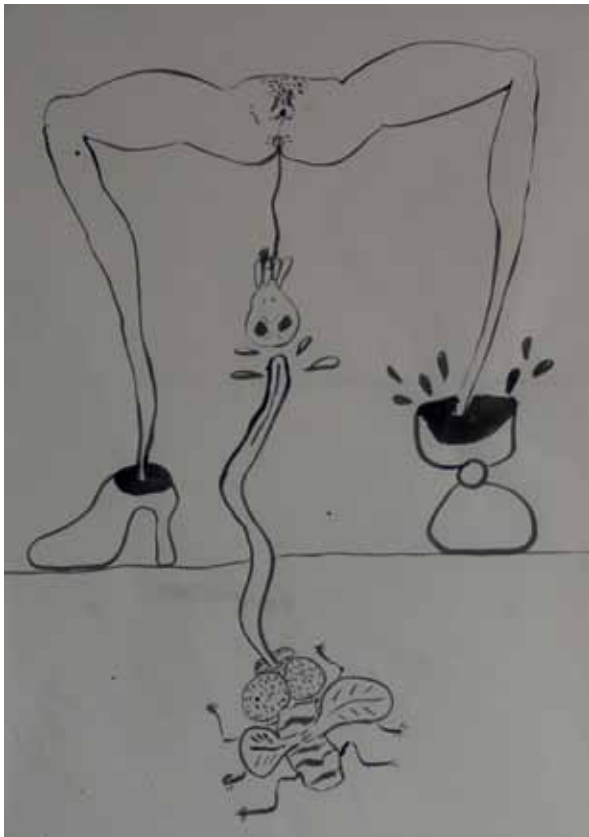


PLATE 109

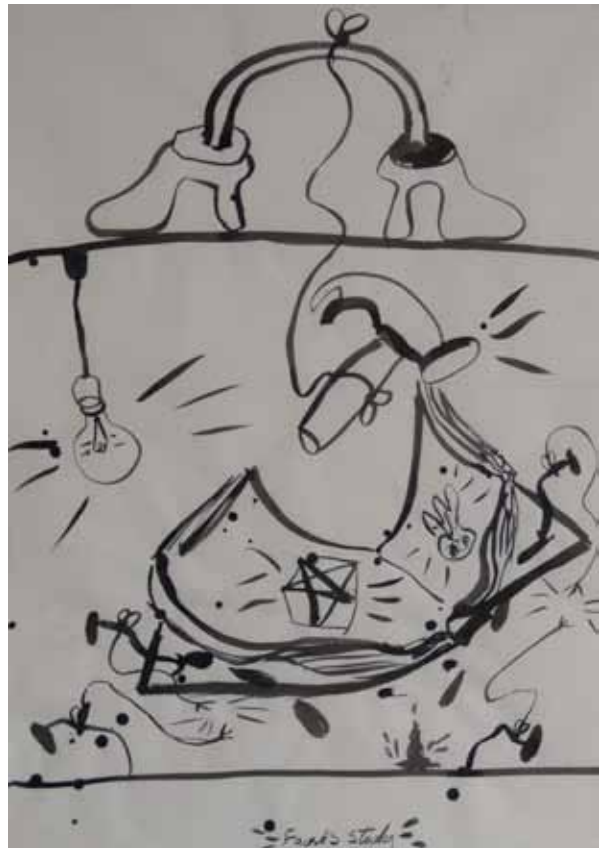


PLATE 110



PLATE 111



PLATE 112

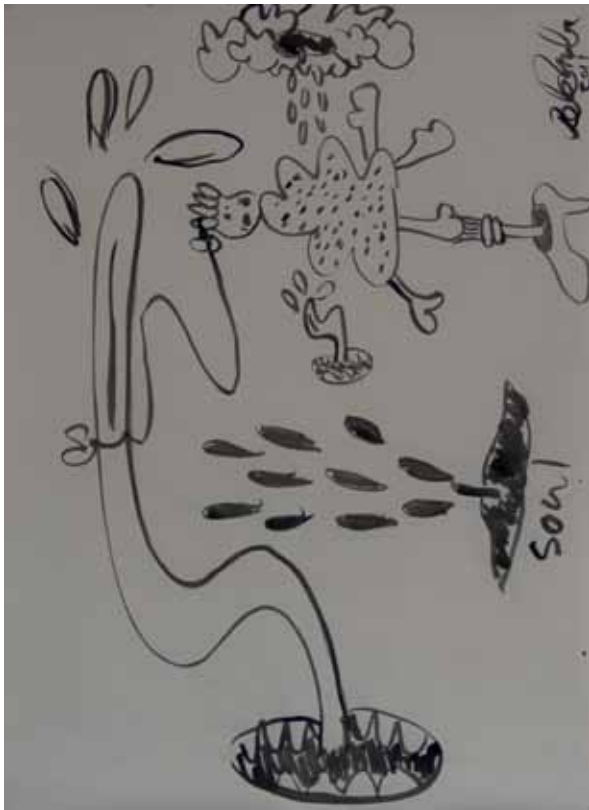


PLATE 113



PLATE 114



PLATE 115

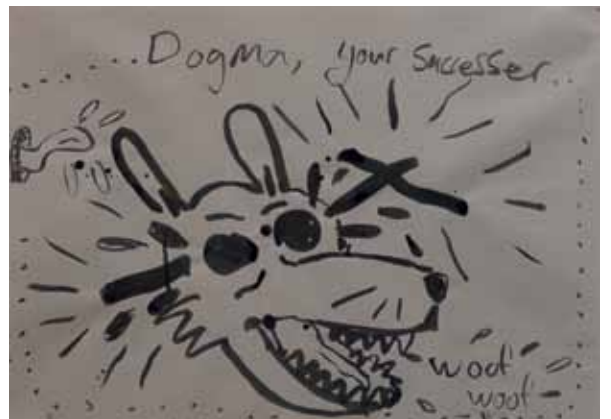


PLATE 116



PLATE 117



PLATE 118

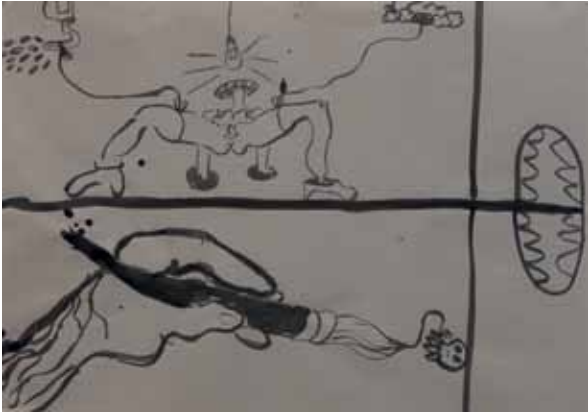


PLATE 119



PLATE 120



PLATE 121



PLATE 122



PLATE 123

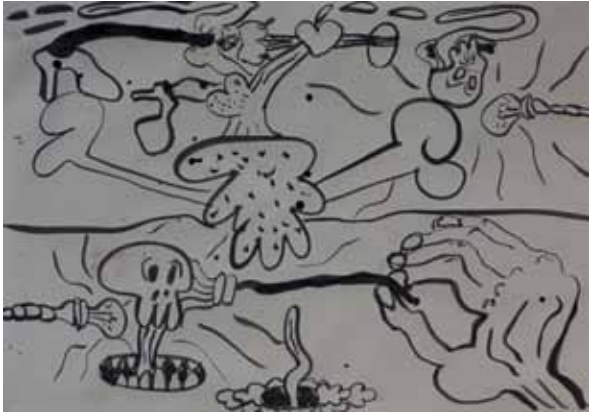


PLATE 124



PLATE 125



PLATE 126

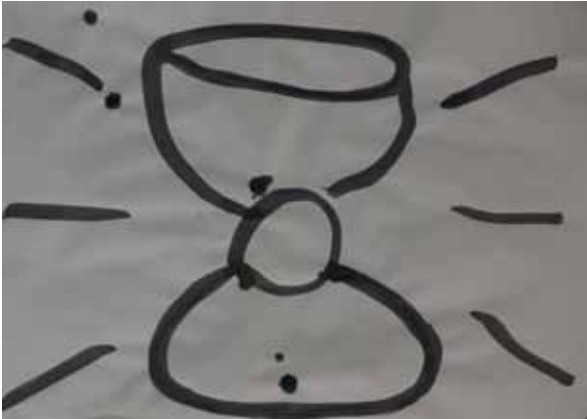


PLATE 127

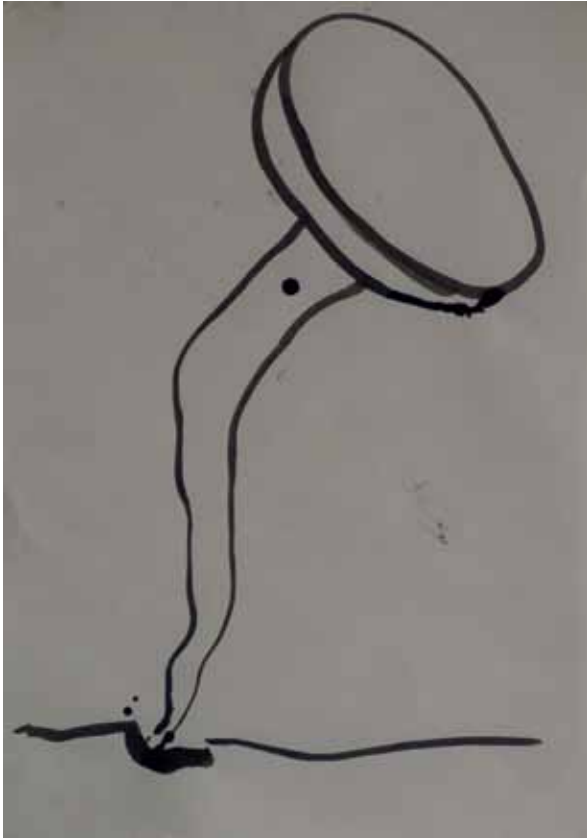


PLATE 128



PLATE 129



PLATE 130



PLATE 131



PLATE 132



PLATE 133



PLATE 134



PLATE 136



PLATE 138



PLATE 139

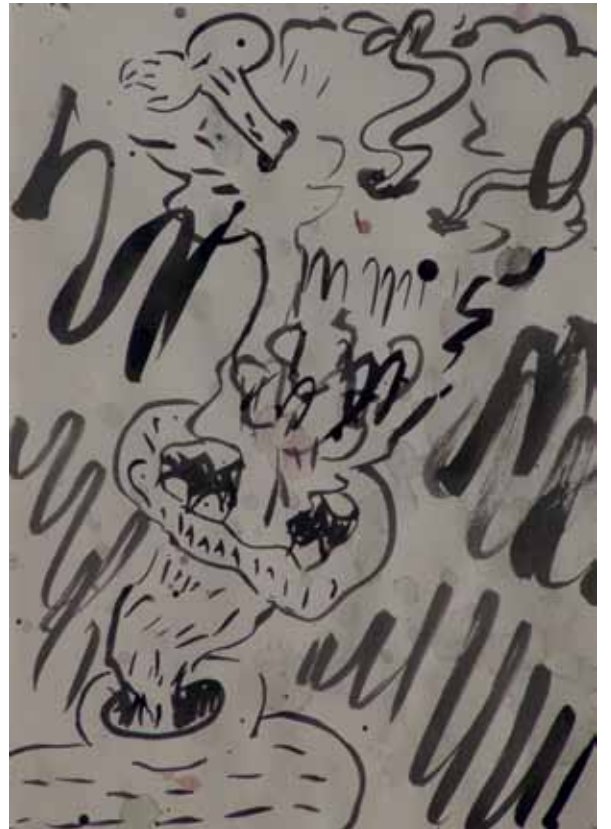


PLATE 140



PLATE 141



PLATE 142



PLATE 143

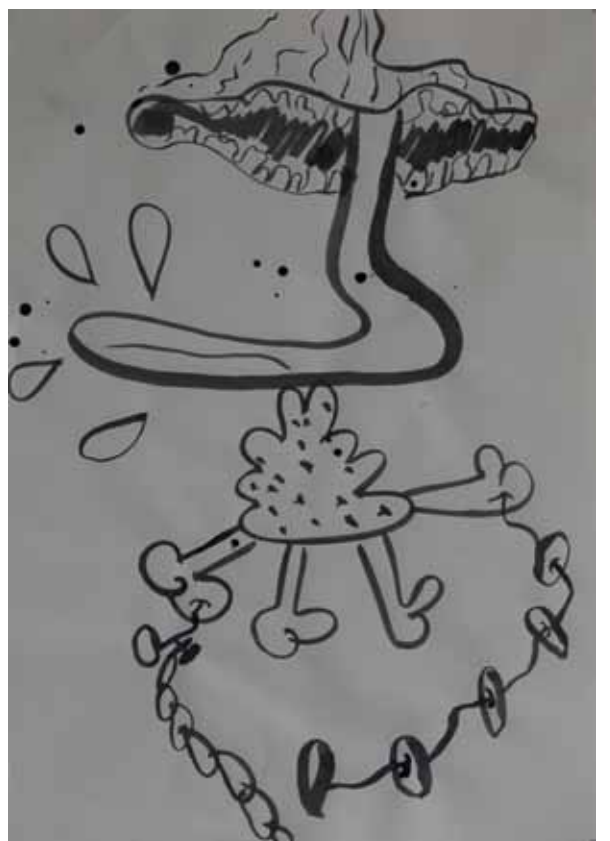


PLATE 144

# CONCLUSION

## FLIRTING WITH INVERSION AND SEDUCING THE SECOND GLANCE

The writings and late works of Philip Guston become paramount when considering the complexities of the pictorial plane. His description of humans being image ridden is an important signifier of how he understood his own relation to image and therefore as image maker:

Coolidge, Clark (ed). Philip Guston: Collected Writings, Lectures and Conversations. California: University of California Press, 2011.<sup>3</sup>

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“There is something ridiculous and miserly in the myth we inherit from abstract art—that painting is autonomous, pure and for itself, and therefore we habitually defined its ingredients and define its limits. But painting is ‘impure.’ It is the adjustment of impurities which forces painting’s continuity. We are image-makers and image-ridden.”<sup>3</sup>

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Philip Guston’s constant reference to Piero Della Francesca’s Flagellation of Christ further informed my experiencing inversion through deciphering an image, to look beyond the inconclusive gatherings of the first glance and to develop into a working method the act of committing to the second glance:

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“A certain anxiety persists in the paintings of Piero della Francesca. What we see is the wonder of what it is that is being seen. Perhaps it is anxiety of painting itself. Where can everything be located, and in what condition can everything exist? In The Baptism of Christ, we are suspended between the order we see and an apprehension that everything may again move. And yet not. It is an extreme point of the “impossibility” of painting. Or its possibility. Its frustration. Its continuity. He is so remote from other masters-without their “completeness” of personality. A different fervor, grave and delicate, moves in the daylight of pictures. Without our familiar passions, he is like a visitor to earth, reflecting on distances, gravity, and positions of essential forms.

In The Baptism, as though opening his eyes for the first time, trees, bodies, sky and water are represented without manner. The painting is nowhere a fraction more than the balance of his thought. His eye. One cannot determine if the rhythms of his spaces substitute themselves as forms, or the forms as rhythms. In The Flagellation, his thought is diffuse. Everything is fully exposed. The play has been set in motion. The architectural box is opened by the large block of the discourses-



(Fig 14)

Coolidge, Clark (ed). Philip Guston:  
 Collected Writings, Lectures and  
 Conversations. California: University of  
 California Press, 2011.4

to the right, as if a door were slid aside to reveal its contents: the flagellation of Christ, the only “disturbance” in the painting, but placed in the rear, as if in memory. The picture is sliced almost in half, yet both parts act on each other, repel and attract, absorb and enlarge, one another. At times, there seems to be no structure at all, no direction. We can move spatially everywhere, as in life.

Possibly it is not a “picture” we see, but the presence of a necessary and generous law. Is the painting a vast precaution to avoid total immobility, a wisdom which can include the partial doubt of the final destiny of its forms? It may be this doubt which moves and locates everything.”<sup>4</sup>

The story, the subject and the historical context of Piero Francesca’s Flagellation of Christ is well known, but the enigma could be that the physicality of the event is not the subject or the narrative. The history of Christ, his disciples and prosecutors has been prolifically described throughout art history by many painters (and art historians), but none can divert the gaze from the humanistic animal brutality of an apparent event in time; to the unseen and unknowable idea of the inner self or soul (the idea of the unseen self is a manner of perception that harbours the idea of inversion of self) with as much weight and pronounciation as Piero Francesca’s Flagellation of Christ. Cannot inversion be the subject for the image?

It is my own speculation that Piero the artist (not Piero the celebrated Italian Renaissance painter) was rather sceptical of the letters written about the events of Christ. Maybe fascination with the idea of the unseen or the soul was prominent.



(Fig 15)

There lies under the surface of the superficial glance a sense of a constant push, a need to understand one's reality in context to the idea of Christ and Heaven; the ultimate un-knowable to the living. Yet the imagination is constantly trying to describe this, in effect developing a rather legitimate alternate and parallel reality that is thrashed forth from real time reality.

My own reflective ponderings seem to illuminate Piero Francesca's Flagellation of Christ in the light of an outright expression of his own psychological inversion, maybe in search of the divine: unattainable from the superficial flirting's of the uncommitted gaze.

Inversion as I have constructed it is a device, as a vacuum which is in a constant state of desecration of its own essence. As the painter is feeding the inversion, it is his own ideas and images that are being desecrated. True liberation from the constraints of convention that can only sustain the meek is by the desecration of the idea before it becomes an execution of will.

In my work, only once this desecration of the idea/concept has happened can the image be extracted from the depth of the pictorial plane; I do not take a canvas then go about putting an image on the surface of it.

A completed painting is a glimpse into another realm that exists legitimately in spite of the limitations imposed on the 'first glance'. The cartoony drawn mark that is so prevalent in both my drawing and painting, along with the visceral and the theatrical grotesque, is part of the biology that makes up the brutal animal that is barely able to carry the monster that is the human imagination.

The paintings from here on inform the first large works done, endeavouring to put this developing method of physiological inversion into a physical and functional painting method. At the point of painting these works, other paintings that were done were either on a small scale and very literal of the drawings or they were bridging works from drawing to painting and part of a cleansing process prior to committing to the full extraction of an image from the depths of the pictorial plane.



PLATE 145



PLATE 146



PLATE 147



PLATE 148



PLATE 149



PLATE 150



PLATE 151



PLATE 152



PLATE 153



PLATE 154



PLATE 155



PLATE 156

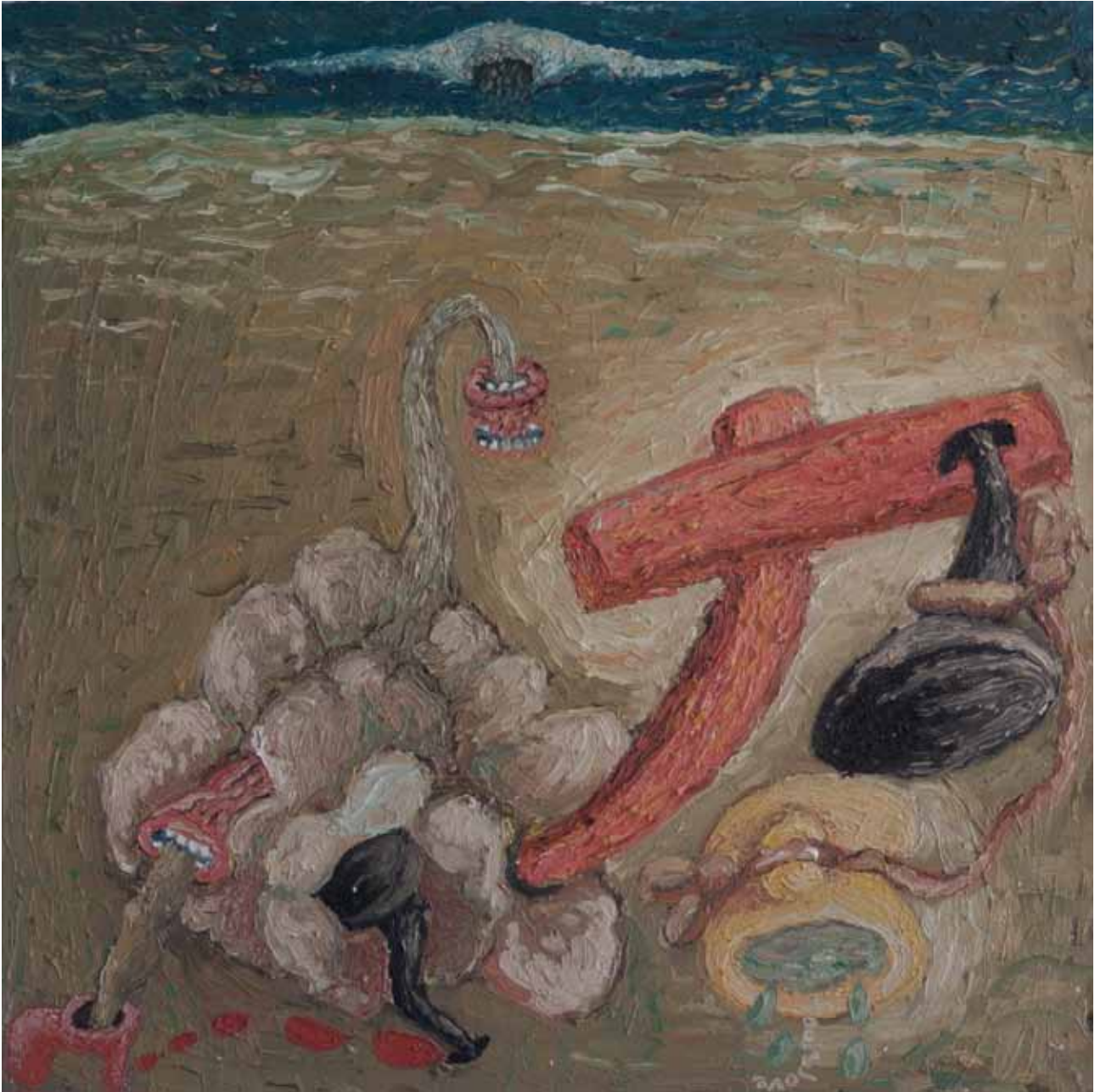


PLATE 157

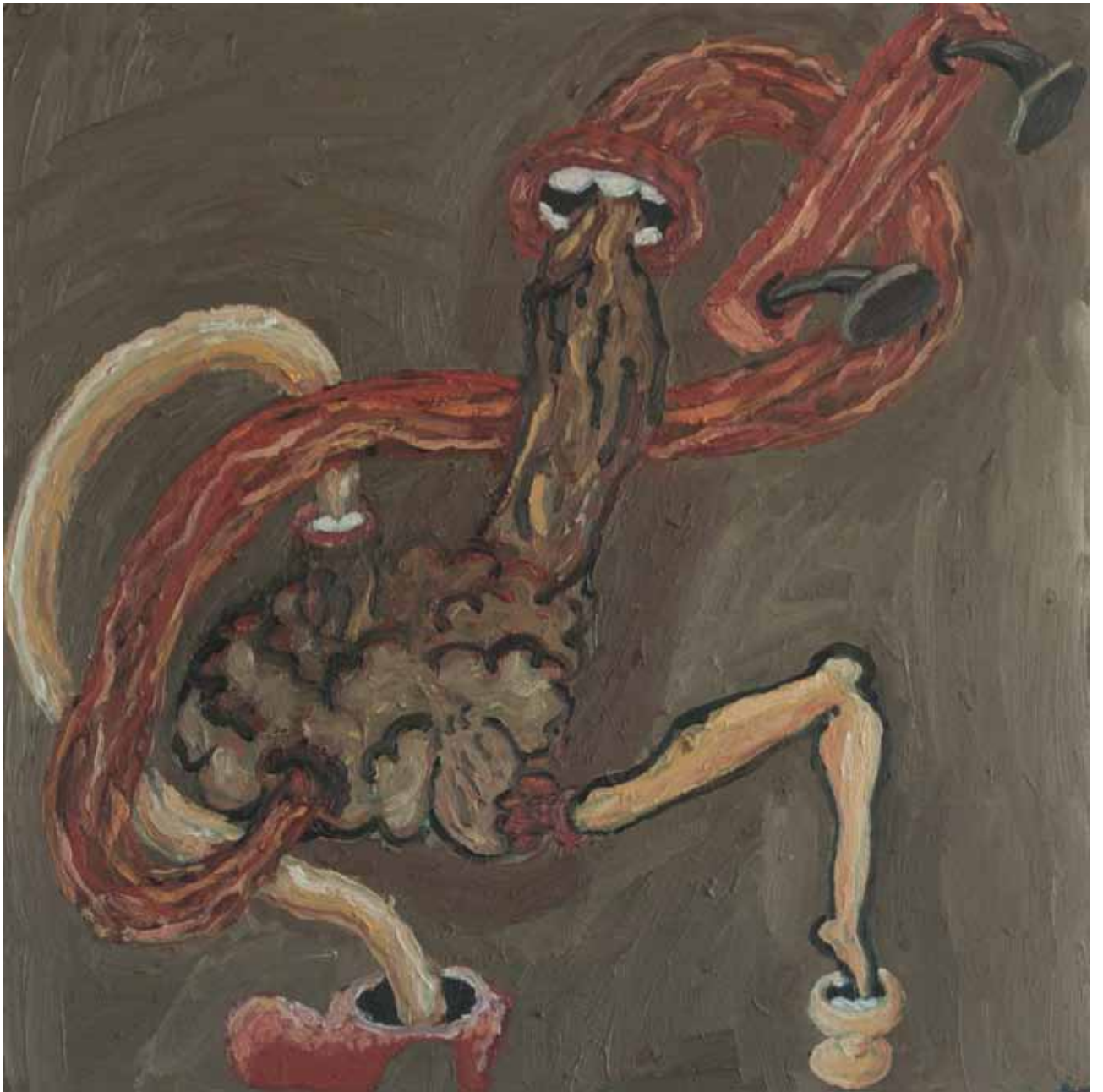


PLATE 158



PLATE 159



PLATE 160



PLATE 161



PLATE 162



PLATE 163

# LIBERATION BY DESECRATION

The next works (plates 164-166) were the first to be created under the idea of this method liberation by desecration. The challenge of these works was that they were the first, there was nothing prior to them that could be referenced and nothing to gauge them by; however that means little in terms of trying out a new approach. Critical reflection was paramount and this was the basis on which these works were made. What these paintings brought to the forefront of this research project was effectively a template on which to further deploy an actual painting method that does involve a kind of psychological extraction from the seemingly elusive psyche. It is this extraction that lends the pictorial plane its perceivable substance. This is the point from which the idea of the method 'Liberation by Desecration' became a definable formula that was first deliberately and concisely executed in the following painting.



PLATE 164



PLATE 165

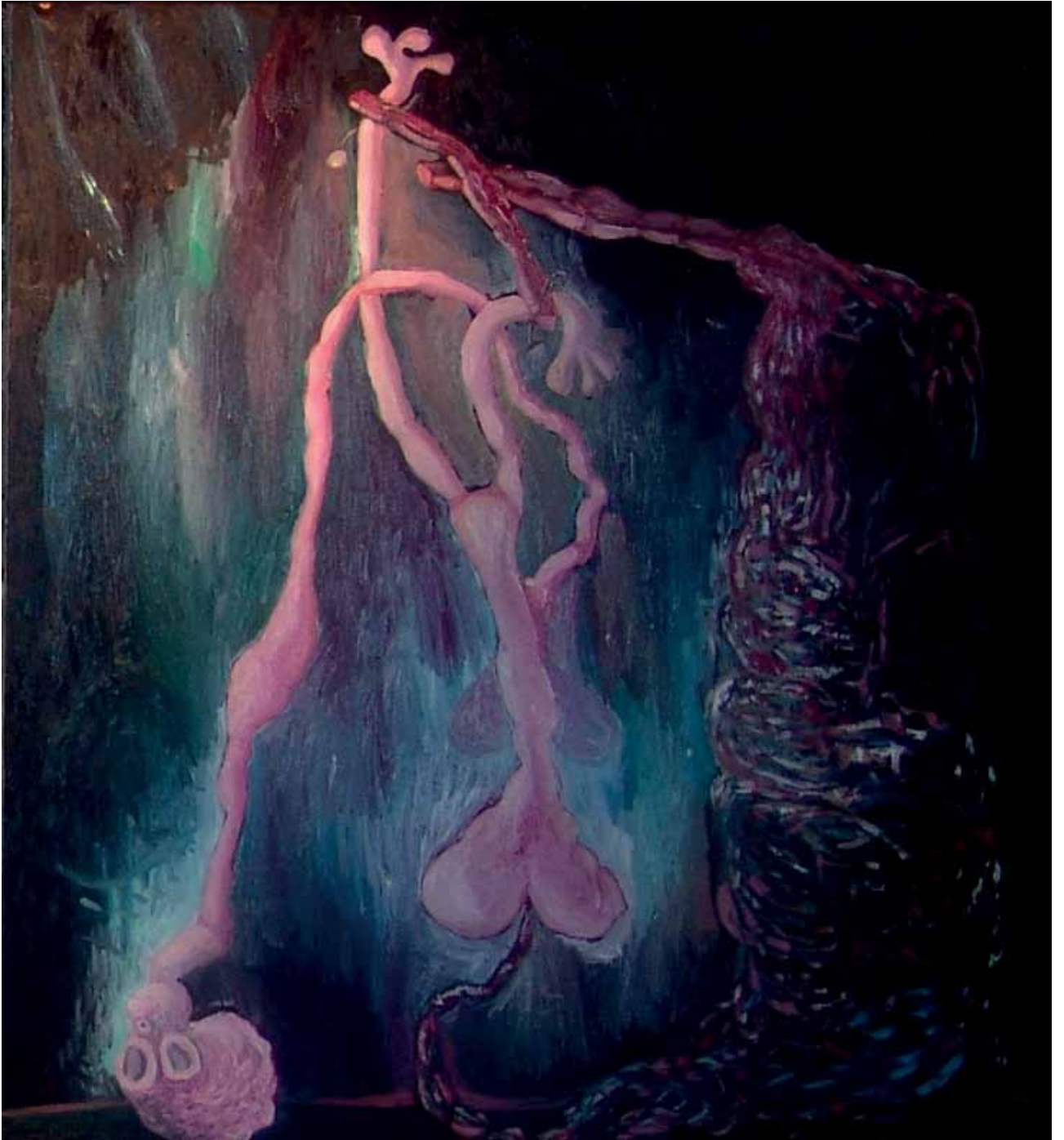


PLATE 166

# PUNCH AND JUDY

The painter's only conscious contribution to this painting (plate 167) is the adoption and execution of a set of pictorial painting devices that take care of all the technical considerations of painting. That often consume concentration and centred focus of the physiological component to painting. Having access to tangible painting tools that exist outside of the pictorial plane gives the painter ample opportunity to let go of the outcome of the painting, so that instead of conjuring up content or subjects to place on to the confines of a support (the canvas), the painter can instead focus those energies onto using the 'tools,' freeing valuable space for the psyche to become informative to the process.

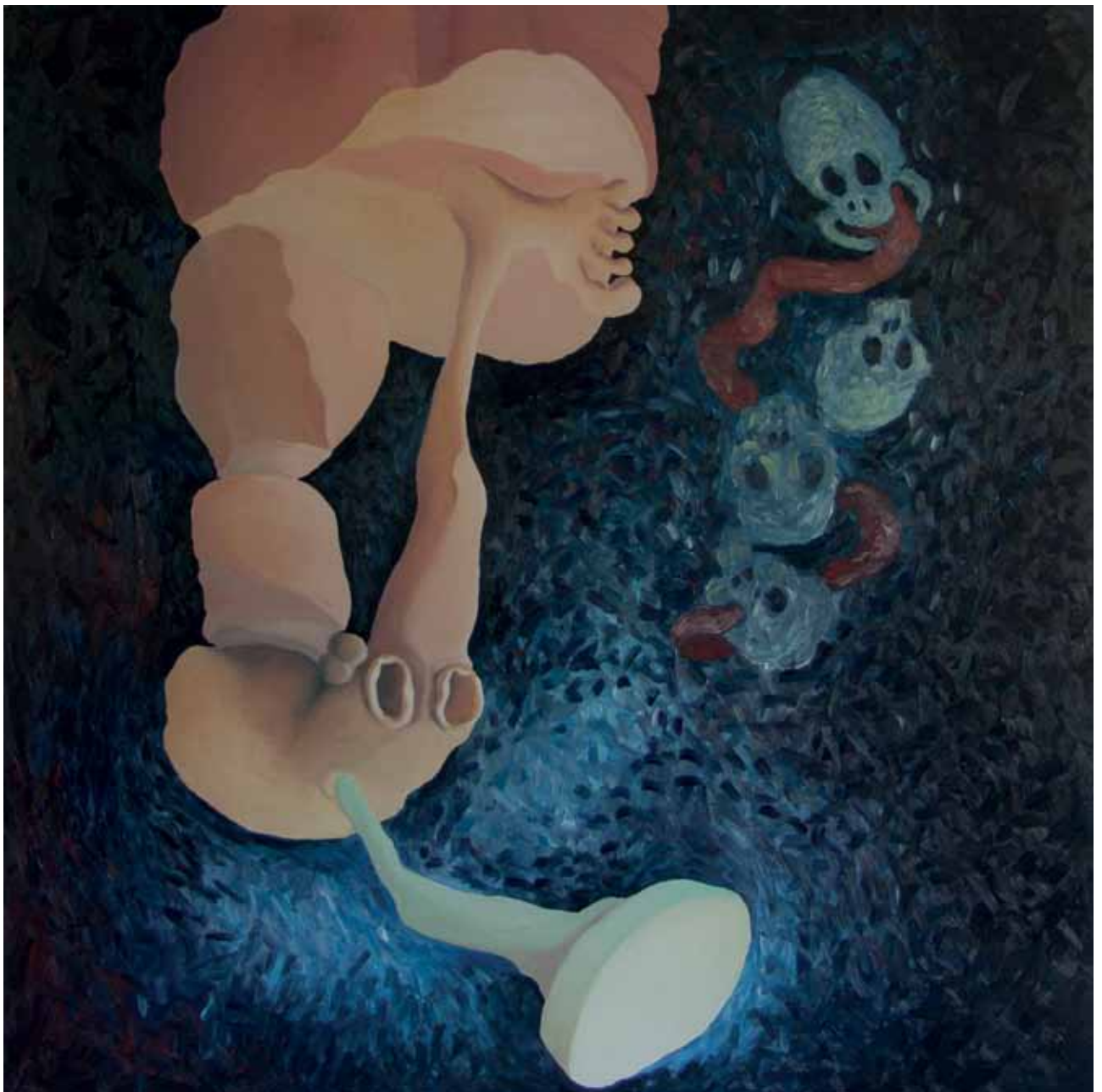


PLATE 167

The obvious technical issues between the transition of the figure and the field of this painting (plate 167) are irrelevant; this painting is a proposition, it is specific to the execution of the method. Part of the process is to let the paint inform itself - that is to say that the painting is extracted from the pictorial plane not placed onto it. The term to 'extract' cannot be considered a physical act of extraction (although it partly is); it is more of a physiological extraction achieved by a contrived diversion of the conscious mind.

The painter can now begin to clear the cluttered and chaotic terrain of the 'first glance' and begin searching for a split in the membrane (of the 'first glance') and move into the realm of the 'second glance'. A psychological inversion happens upon this ground, initiating an aesthetic experience through the process of painting to a method derived in essence from the reconfigured conventions.

The proposed outcome of this aesthetic experience is that it is on-going. But it also illuminates new ways in which narrative implications can be read in a painted image.

I propose that this is done by the method 'Liberation by Desecration', and evidence is in the necessary psychological commitment to the pictorial plane which is achieved via the desecrated idea and 'first glance' thus letting the un-descriptive inform the narrative.

This in turn initiates a committed gaze (the 'second glance') as the various components of the image cause a reaction in the psyche. Resulting in the comparison of itself to the content of the painting and the image it contains.



PLATE 168



PLATE 169



PLATE 170



PLATE 171



PLATE 172



PLATE 173



PLATE 174



PLATE 175

# LIBERATION BY DESECRATION METHOD

- Develop a specific narrative through a process of drawing
- Desecrate the narrative through a process of drawing until a set of distilled 'symbols' are left
- Execute these 'symbols' using the 'reconfigured conventions'
- Continue to deploy the 'symbols' in the painting until the painting and the image it contains is no longer familiar and recognizable to the painter.
- Reflect on what it is that has been painted and analyse quickly the content that is not familiar
- Without pause continue painting a new canvas; discard from the conscious mind the critical review of the previous painting using the 'symbols' and 'reconfigured conventions'

A painting developed under this method is an extraction from the pictorial plane.

The pictorial plane is not subjugated. the extraction of the pictorial plane is aided by a set of tools that are developed specifically to distract the conscious mind, by means of keeping it occupied within a set of conventions that contain distilled links to the psyche.

These links to the psyche are represented in the product of the desecration of the original concept, idea, or narrative. The narrative is desecrated under a prolific drawing process (ink on paper).

Once the desecration of the original narrative has occurred, the content produced by this process will be executed without strain on the conscious mind, but keeping the conscious mind occupied enough not to get overly familiar by the process. This distraction of the conscious mind aids the initiation of the 'second glance'.

It is within the state of the 'second glance' that psychological inversion is initiated..

Upon this terrain lies the entry to the pictorial plane, accessible by the on-going inversion of the psyche. This is the ground that the extraction can begin.

# SUMMARY

Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois, and Benjamin Buchloch, *Art Since 1900* New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004.<sup>5</sup>

The pressure to move away from the traditional medium of paint has increasingly risen, as the way that society looks at images changes with new waves of digital and conceptual considerations. This impact ebbs and flows but the digital generation diffidently consider paint a traditional convention rather than a tool for modern investigation. What about the image, what about narrative, and what about how we read meaning from an image? Where do these kinds of subjects stand as the ability to explain contemporary art becomes less and less credible?

Hal Foster of Princeton University states a question that I think remains open:

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“Are there plausible ways to narrate the now myriad practices of contemporary art over the last twenty years at least? I don’t point to this period of time arbitrarily: in the last several years the two primary models we’ve used to articulate different aspects of postwar art have become dysfunctional. I mean, on the one hand, the model of a medium-specific modernism challenged by an interdisciplinary postmodernism, and, on the other, the model of a historical avant-garde (i.e. ones critical of the old bourgeois institution of art such as Dada and Constructivism) and a neoavant-garde that elaborates on this critique ... Today the recursive strategy of the “neo” appears as attenuated as the oppositional logic of the “post” seems tired: neither suffices as a strong paradigm for artistic or cultural practice, and no other model stands in their stead; or, put differently, many local models compete, but none can hope to be paradigmatic. And we should note too that the methods discussed again here – psychoanalysis, Marxian social history, structuralism, and poststructuralism – are hardly thriving.”<sup>5</sup>

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The failing structure of the primary models that art critics and art theorists use to articulate contemporary art to both scholars and to the masses has become increasingly noticeable to a newer generation of contemporary artists. This has in my opinion become ammunition for contemporary artists to produce explosively loaded images. Not explosive in the sense that the artist in the 1980’s and 1990’s were with the re-emergence of the figure, and a return to a more human and social narrative, rather in the sense that the confusion is in the lack of ability to explain the last 20 years of contemporary art is the ammunition - subtitles become explosive content, reconfigured history both recent and ancient become explosive, political and social commentary become not just frustrated expression as was common in the 1980’s but an

on-going narrative and saga, as society plunges further into destructive living and denial of consequences for the next generations. The next generation on the other hand become even more destructive and deny even more, as the world at their feet becomes more and more a product of lust and fashion and instant communication. This is the terrain of which an artist of my generation has inherited. The work produced has become a hotbed of old ideas and new. The ideal is that there is no ideal. The successes are that everything is just varying degrees of failures. The idea that we have become enthusiastically optimistic about nothing at all has become everything. I believe this is the conundrum in which painting festers today. It is neither here nor there in terms of popularity or importance; one could say it is under the radar of contemporary concerns as a subject.

A common title attributed to a person who calls one's self a young figurative painter is this: a new romantic or neo romantic or one submerged in a romantic renaissance of painting. Whatever the case, figurative is a key word here, a subject that is fundamentally concerned with the pursuit of a tangible knowledge of the human condition. The term figurative as a canopy envelops a succession of key concerns for a contemporary painter. Here are some of my key questions: given a long history of the painted figurative image, how can previous modes of expression be utilised to find alternate or new ways to read meaning from the painted image? What is image in context to perception? Is narrative fuel for the development of subject or content? Or is narrative the product of subject or content? Is narrative the product of the image or perception of the viewer?

Out of this line of enquiry come some important key words as follows:

Convention

Aesthetic experience

Image

Pictorial plane

Perception

Narrative

Selfhood

Inversion

Conscious and unconscious

Objective/subjective

These are probably the most important points of consideration. It was the reflection of what the implications of these subjects, theories and ideas might have in the reading of painted narrative that developed the concept of desecrating the narrative in order to see beyond a face value and paint an image from deeper within the pictorial plane. That is to say that rather than just painting an image of processed content, that is, you see something, you experience it, then you paint it (there is no deeper meaning or new potentials in this kind of approach to the image), you work with the idea that you already have seen it and you already have knowledge of it, and that experiencing it is merely the recognition of the seen. So rather than the image being influenced by the experience of seeing it, the experience of seeing it is the beginning of an investigation into a potential narrative. That is to say that the experience of seeing something is not inspiration for content, rather the experience of seeing it is the tip of the iceberg of a collection of already experienced knowledge. The way that the method Liberation by Desecration functions is to un-submerge that iceberg, even if it is only some of the way. Painting from deeper within the pictorial plane is not a rehashed version of the abstract expressionist pursuit of the sublime.

Here I quote Phillip Guston in a conversation that he once had with some of his students, in response to the sublime theme in abstract expressionism in the 1960's.

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“Beauty and truth and God the sublime, takes care of itself. I mean, there's no problem. You don't have to paint the sublime. It's like, we all talk with God, and God tells me: “Look, you sing about what I make, you know? Don't fuck around; don't try to be like me. You sing about what I make.”<sup>6</sup>

---

I take the stance that it is necessary to work with tangible reality in order to discover or rediscover what lurks within the backdrops of the mind or the subconscious mind. The method of Desecration by Liberation that I have been practicing by, works to (in my opinion and experience by using it to paint with) disable the intensity of a normal state of consciousness, at least in context to looking at the imagery of the mind and the thinking of image making. The results of my experimentation and implementation of this method show in my analysis that this is achieved simply by the nature of desecration - by developing a narrative over time or put differently, to accumulate the tangible then taking that content through a process of desecration and rendering it down to its raw essentials, leaving behind a synthesised and potent form of the original content, bringing to the surface more of the submerged iceberg. The more narrative there is to desecrate, the more ammunition there is to work with.

Once there is ample desecrated content, the plunge into the pictorial plane can begin. Desecrated narrative works as a double-edged sword, one is to move beyond the forefront of consciousness, the other is to continue to move from a normal conscious state and advance into what I have come to call the area of the second glance. This is not an unconscious state but rather a state of conscious inversion of self, where the unconscious becomes conscious, and the unthinkable becomes thinkable in context to the idea of the image and making an image. This works simply by having the content already developed to a highly synthesised point, but this does not imply that the image has an already developed content.

It is in plunging within the pictorial plan that the image is painted not in the thinking of where to place content - thinking of such things has been exorcised through the desecration process. In essence the desecration of the tangible narrative provides liberation from the confines and limitations of a normal state of consciousness simply by freeing the conscious mind from thinking of processes within the realm of conscious making and doing. It is in the potent synthesised ammunition that painting from deeper within the pictorial plane is executed, as the narrative is already within the psyche, so the desecrated content and the state of inverted self allow the narrative to unravel within the depth of the pictorial plane.

There is no new way to paint and there is no subject left un-painted. So what is the point of painting at all? This is the dilemma, seemingly for every generation of painters that has ever been and probably is to come. I quote Jackson Pollock: "Damn that Picasso. He's done it all. What's left to do?" It seems to me that the art world is only really just beginning to get over the repercussions caused by his work. And I believe that Picasso himself in his days of youth stood shaking in the shadows of his predecessors wondering how he was going to move forth.

My stance is that there is no painting today that is not representational painting and with every new generation and every new technology, inevitably comes an altered or altogether new perception of where to find a narrative. Over the last 20 years an enormous shift to the digital world has taken place, and in particular in the last 10 years the whole idea of the image and narrative has almost completely become a solely digital language. That is to say that there is a generation moving in that do not know narrative or image as something not from the digital realm.

Here I make my case for contemporary figurative painting; the vocabulary used within visual language is fundamentally different than it has ever been before because of the digital age. Contemporary painting today is re-working the experience of old art in its own language. I would say that that statement works for me like fuel to fire; I share the more tactile understanding of narrative of the last generation but also the visual understanding of the image or the realness of things that the digital generation generate from a virtual realm.

The idea of the image as a legitimate entity of its own is not a new one. Phillip Guston in his later work was interested in representing the realness of things in his images, not rendering an object to make it look real, rather duplicating reality and in doing so possibly developing a kind of hyper-reality. Consider Peter Saul's work across the board; I make connections from my work to his in the unrelenting pursuit of developing a pictorial language that intensifies the potency of a narrative as a self-regenerating device, capable of expressing a bigger picture.

George Baselitz's work, particularly of the 1980's, thrust forth the idea of the desecrated figure, as a means to express an on-going discourse between the real world and the image. This is a legitimate device that I have used to develop a set of pictorial tools that have a hand in the way that I apply paint. The eerie placement and illumination of the figure is reminiscent of a George Condo of the mid to late 1990's, traced back to Rembrandt. A strange and at times conflicting combination and placement of colours derive from a study of the pallet of Claude Monet and James Ensor, also developed by the exposure to caricature through television and comic books over a life time, for example, Robert Crumb, 2000ad, The Simpsons, Ren and Stimpy and so on. The caricature-like lunacy, used as a device to express legitimate, loaded comments, is akin to a multitude of contemporary artists but in particular close to that of Barry Regate, Alexandra Hoda or even Ryan Mosley. Add to the list infinitum.

Understanding the nature of narrative from deeper within the pictorial plane is an ultimate goal. Although I have not completely achieved this, I have most certainly expanded significantly on previous understandings, through developing a method that in essence works to filter meaning from reality and connect that meaning with the idea of image residing from deeper within consciousness, and linked with the idea of selfhood. What does this mean? Well as I understand it, it means that I can paint from an unending supply of subject, that there is no need to find a 'thing' or a reason to paint. I have taken influence from past painters and enriched my own ability to read narrative from the painted image. I believe another painter can apply the same method and receive a similar kind of result.

If I were to elaborate on this research, I would further investigate the subject of perception in context to selfhood and the idea of the image. But for now I have discovered a way to continue to paint contemporary images without the dilemma of what to paint about.

# FINAL WORKS



PLATE 176



PLATE 177



PLATE 178

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# LIBERATION BY DESECRATION

Peter David Malone

# ABSTRACT

To commit to painting is to commit to the unknown within the fury and destruction that is the product of the modern consumer. Painting's role in society has become little more than crude interior decoration or a means to produce mediocre imagery for bad advertising.

The dilemma of the painter is not so much about finding a justification to paint; but rather it is 'how do I paint freely within an un-supporting and self-consuming environment?' This question is the frame work that supports the research question and title; this is the beginning of an inversion by practice.

The exhibition proposed within this text is not a description of a painter's processes (the description of do's and don'ts or successes and failures etc.), it is instead a collaboration between a painter's need to use oil paint as a mode of expression of the seemingly un-descriptive psyche. Together they plunge into the depth of the pictorial plane, in an attempt to find forward momentum within the realm of painting via the manipulation of perception. The manipulation of perception is what contains the parameters of the method that is the pivotal subject to this document.

The function of the text that makes up this document is to narrate and guide, not subjugate. The structure of the narration starts with the original research question then proceeds through a body of work consisting of photographs of oil paintings, water colour paintings and ink drawings as the research develops and changes. The final pages of the document will present a specific method of inversion, titled 'Liberation by Desecration' and the final exhibition of oil paintings created under that method.