



THE VIEW
FROM
THE
STUDIO

ROGER WILSON



HOUSE FOR AN ART LOVER

THE VIEW FROM THE STUDIO

PROFESSOR ROGER WILSON

"I was learning something from the painting of Cezanne that made writing simple true sentences far from enough to make the stories have the dimensions that I was trying to put to them. I was learning very much from him but I was not articulate enough to explain it to anyone. Besides it was a secret."

Ernest Hemingway

THE STUDIO (OR BETWEEN TWO STUDIOS)

We have known Professor Wilson for many years, since his time as Dean of Faculty of Art and Design at Manchester Metropolitan University, and then as the Head of Chelsea College of Art and Design before he began working in Glasgow as the Head of the School of Fine Art. Admirably, considering the scale of these academic roles, Wilson has not only maintained his artistic practice, but also continued to develop that practice with an extraordinary intensity. He truly is an inspiration to those around him, including the staff and students of the different institutions, which he has led. Whilst discussing this text with Stuart Mackenzie we soon realised that one (and there are many) of the most enduring memories of our time shared with Roger in Glasgow would be at the close of day, with the music on the Bose turned on, the door to his studio very much remaining open, when the painting began. We were able to clearly recall how often students working in the neighboring studios would be drawn to the music and long discussions on painting, in all its manifestations, would ensue late into the evening.

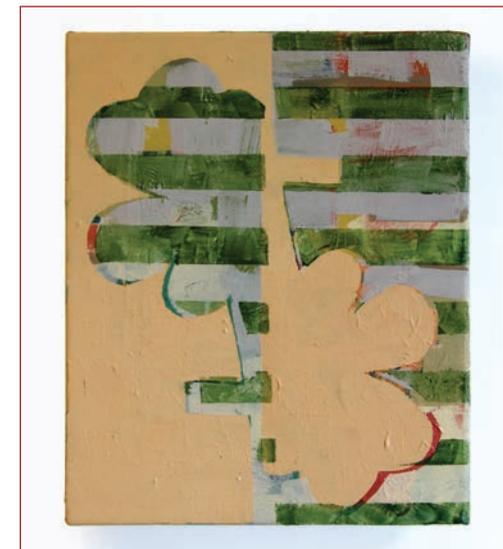
The paintings in the show were initiated whilst Professor Roger Wilson was the Head of the School of Fine Art at the Glasgow School of Art. During this period he was based in Studio 53, one of the extraordinarily beautiful professors studios on the top floor the Mackintosh Building. At the same time Wilson worked from his studio at home, on his farm in Lancashire, and the recent paintings in the series titled 'Bridge' reflect the double location of rural Lancashire and the City of Glasgow – in effect a bridging of these radically different worlds – constructed through the studio based activity of painting. 'The view from the studio', is an extremely apt and befitting title for the exhibition reflecting this intense activity and the spilt locations and the extreme differences between those two environments.

THE FACTICITY OF PAINTING (OR ABOUT THE STUFF)

Roger Wilson is a painter in the purest sense, uninterested in fashionable orthodoxy, his paintings present a portal to a different and special place, a place of elegant dignity. These works speak silently in mysterious forms like tectonic plates elusive, shifting, morphing, becoming. Overt references to the outside world do not reside here; this is a mercurial world that transcends the ordinary.



Salt and Scent



Sweet But Unseen

Paint is by nature unpredictable, it cannot be entirely harnessed; it is a transformative process with an infinite range of possibilities. These paintings are hard won, no shortcuts are taken, they are the result of direct engagement with the process and a vast amount of knowledge both contextual and practical, developed over many years, are evidenced in works of complete believability. These are visual realisations in paint of a very high order and should be given our complete contemplation and attention. We witness destruction, construction and reconstruction. The act of painting is very evident, the visiting and revisiting, works always in flux the paint gives to the touch of the artist yet resists through the time of the work.

There are so many ways of discussing the activity involved in Wilsons' paintings, which makes the suggestions below somewhat awkward, but they are a response to the objects and the man who made them. We could ask that relatively inevitable question 'what is it to paint?' or alternatively 'what is it that we should paint?' however we would rather propose that what is outlined addresses those questions without having to directly answer them, for these are directly bound into the paintings of Roger Wilson, they embody the work, the processes, the references and the form of the work. Instead, we will look at the work and outline some conjectural propositions in relation to it, in order to open out ideas we have discussed in the writing of this text.



Graze

The paintings (as can be seen in the show) are highly physical, engrossingly tactile and contain a weight that is beyond the actual 'stuff' of the painted surfaces. The activity is highly intuitive; the knowledge of the movement of paint and its translations through a particular language of mark making becomes embedded within the final forms. Wilson acts as a mediator between the external world and the world of the painted surface and this enables the paintings to reflect that which is outside and beyond the studio, whilst also simultaneously exploring the stuff of the material surface.

Often, but certainly by no means always, the paintings are elliptical in form developed in series, they are heavily constructed, and by that we mean that they are densely worked and developed, with layer upon layer building upon and through the surfaces. At times using stencils the layers interweave across one another and this constructs a surface that hides, whilst at the same moment reveals, the time of the work. This can be seen through the embedded layers and also those, which become exposed in a dialectical interplay, or possibly a form of doubling that creates a tension upon which the paintings oscillate. The surfaces fold backwards and forwards and the histories of the surface become revealed, or removed altogether. In essence this reminds us of a form of concealment and suggests a connection to what Martin Heidegger would propose as a method of bringing forth. Essentially this is a form of becoming; a bringing forth from concealment to unconcealment, but in Wilson's painting this is not simply the case. For that which is concealed (and remains concealed) is equally as important as that which is revealed, or brought forth, and this relates to the physicality of the work and its eventual form as a type of spatial subversion. The work plays upon its own time, it is drawn forwards (or out) through the facticity of the stuff, the paint itself, and it is here that the painting really resides. There is no casual form of interference at play here, it is highly organised, yet constructs a visual flexing through which the forms upon the surfaces interplay and in many ways, create an almost musical frisson. The use of the language of painting constructs a poetic interplay across the surface in the way that they vibrate in a twofold tension. A real 'painters painter', an oft used but rather peculiar term, Wilson's paintings reflect a complete immersion in the facticity of painting.

A MUSICAL INTERFERENCE

"When you start working, everybody is in your studio - the past, your friends, enemies, the art world, and above all, your own ideas - all are there. But as you continue painting, they start leaving, one by one, and you are left completely alone. Then, if you are lucky, even you leave."

John Cage

A beautiful suggestion, John Cage delightfully elucidates or explicates the activities of the studio. It is at this moment, a moment within which everything becomes aligned that the activity of painting moves beyond even you, the painter. A moment, within which the temperature rises, the work takes on a life of its own and all that is and has been experienced by the painter coalesce upon the surface.

For many years there has been a lot of discussion, many different propositions and writings relating to painting's relationship to music, in particular jazz music, where terms like improvisation and expression are often used and in many ways the constructs of the most improvisational jazz can be seen to relate to the processes at play within Wilson's work. As mentioned earlier the paintings are often made with music in the background, but it is maybe more the structural (even notational) possibilities that render similarities in the process.

Improvisation here relating to jazz music can be seen as the creative activity of immediate, or in the moment composition. In terms of how this might translate into a painterly activity, particularly with direct reference to the paintings of Roger Wilson, the combination of the painterly activity (as mentioned above, an intuitive method), the communication of raw emotions and the technique of applications as well as a spontaneous response to the external world (beyond the studio) become a methodological strategy that encompasses and offers a space for the work to outgrow the strictures of determination. However, having said that, as can be seen in the work there are elements within the paintings that are absolutely [pre-]determined (the template forms are an example of this as well as the drawn marks that can often be seen through the work or on the sides of the stretchers), and again this can be read as another way of addressing and even constructing the tensions, or frictions of the surface that gives the work such gravitas. So, for that matter it may not be so constructive to use a term like improvisation (although it is definitely at play here), but rather a term like interference? Interference suggests a mode of disruption that facilitates the oscillatory doubling that is evident within the paintings and provides them with such friction.

Determination of action within the paintings is interwoven with intuitive improvisational aspects and thus facilitates the conjectural distribution of colour and mark. In fact the use of the word distribution is also important here as it renders the notion of that which is distributed, however, the work is more than a simple distribution of marks, it is instead grown from multiple forms of distribution (and re-distribution) and therefore interferes with any logical form of distribution, instead this is one that is continuously disrupted and re-organised.

In a conversation with Wilson about music and its importance to his approach to work, he stated; "I am reminded of my first experience of a Miles Davis concert. It was soon after the release of 'Bitches Brew' in 1970. The line-up was much the same as for B.B and, as happens on that seminal album, Miles didn't appear for what seemed like a lifetime (I timed it at 14 minutes into the first number!). He wandered in and amongst the other musicians, often leaving them to play sometimes leaving the stage altogether. This



Mirror Image



Souvenir

recasting of the familiar jazz ensemble led by a single authoritative 'voice' always front of stage was like having a pattern without a motif. By the end of the concert it was the playing of Zawinul, Shorter, Holland, Davis et al which registered and a new pattern was established".

THE COLOUR OF THE WORLD

One element that is absolutely crucial within the work is colour. Colour is, as Wilson has said, the factor within his painting's that actually engages with the world, almost as a direct copy. Where the physical surfaces are organic in terms of the methodological approach, colour is referenced directly to the real world outside of the studio. An integral and spectacular feature of nature (or the natural) is colour and this can be seen within the domains of flora and fauna on the land, to the colours of the sea, the earth's surface and even the infinitesimal magnitude of the Galaxy and space beyond.

As mentioned earlier Wilson has his studio in the rather dramatic and remote surrounds of the West Pennines in rural Lancashire, from where he is continuously close to nature – he lives and paints in the very heart of it. The richness of colour is with him on a daily basis and he is direct witness to the complex detail and nuance that seasonal change brings. For Wilson this is crucial, while embracing its aesthetic



Crannog 2

beauty, colour operates in his paintings functionally and as a means of signification. For instance two complementary colours combined in balance result in chromatic tonal grays. It is also a sensory element, where colour directly affects the senses and the painter Francis Bacon for instance is known to have said that he wanted his work to affect the nervous system, in many ways directly related to the colour evident within the work.

The role of colour cannot be underestimated in how it effects our emotions and moods, it is used in therapy, religious ceremonies, flags and ecology, it also represents times of the year and has many references in music (including the 'blues'). The effect of a colour in painting is defined by its context, what it sits next to or on top of, the tone/colour of the ground and so forth. These relationships create the atmospheric conditions of the work and the mood, which can change in extreme, from melancholia to joyous rapture.

We can look out of a window to the outside world or equally reversed into an interior space, an entry point to very different places indeed, but time, materials, structures and colour are manifest in both. The surfaces in Wilson's paintings contract, oscillate and expand and elusive spaces are revealed through Wilson's type of excavation upon the surface of the paintings and the fusion of form[s], compositional arrangements and tone/colour relationships. The viewer is continually invited into this mysterious other space, which is so driven by the colour of the work and within the work. The relationship of colour to the world (within these paintings) is a fundamental element within the multiplicitous layers of the work – it connects the work to the outside world, beyond the methodological and the mathematic (different geometric possibilities for example) interests of the artist.

Although many plants, birds and animals are strikingly beautiful - displaying different colours in magnificent abundance, this is not a purely decorative manifestation. Colour in this context can act as a signifier, a warning, a form of camouflage or even be used as a means of communication. It is colour as a functional entity in its very purest form. Within Wilson's paintings the surface and the use of colour upon or within the surface creates transformational potential through the fact that different lights allow the colours to relate with the paints viscosity, creating new inflections of detail within and through the layered surfaces. These paintings invite us to consider the visual poetics within the work and to physically experience the palpable effects of colour, structure, and paintings visceral materiality.

On another note the maze-like, almost akin to a complex spiders web design of the surfaces that contain such complexities of detail within the histories of the developed

surfaces demand the time to look. They are not straight forward and cannot be simply momentarily received, they demand the viewer to participate and we would firmly suggest that these haunting paintings will stay with you long after first viewing. They are the evidence of the painter's actions and the hypnotic transformations that are the result of the physical and the cerebral act of painting.

FORMS AND THEIR MEANINGS (OR THAT DOUBLE MOMENT)

"Painting from nature is not copying the object; it is realising one's sensations."

Paul Cezanne

We have referenced the term form throughout this text, in relation to the form of the work and the forms within the work, but it is essential to optimise this usage, and explore it further in relation to the time of the work as well as its important, in fact crucial relevance, to forms beyond the work. For, whilst these paintings feel very much of this time, they also create the sensation that they could easily be of another time entirely, a time outside of itself. In many ways this is harnessed through the doubling tension of the surfaces, an approach constructed through modes of interference and harmonisation, creating forms, which directly relate to nature, growth and morphological possibilities.

The paintings often relate to geometric forms embedded in the organic and reference a biological like growth. Referencing a recent exhibition at the University of Dundee, Wilson's work was described as having 'the characteristics of a self-generating organism'. The material development of the work through organizational strategies, moments of interference, geometrical distribution and fluid, morphic form establishes the strategies employed within the work and generates paintings, which in their own right, do not look like organic forms (at least not in the sense of a copy), but rather become organic in their own right and this is embedded in the processes at work within the work.

It is for this reason that the external (the outside, and in this case it refers to organic and natural forms) that links up random and arbitrary elements in a creative mixture of chance and necessity, in essence a new method for engaging with the outside, a new way of inventing that organic or natural outside in an intensive and vital topology that folds the outside into the inside – opening things up from containment allowing the form, the painting, to be brought forth in terms of a morphological process of determination, distribution, and interference.

As Wilson outlined in his proposal for this exhibition, 'paintings are grown, over time, generating new hybrids but with the trace of earlier personalities still present', this description perfectly outlines the growth of the paintings, however we would contest that actually there is so much more at work within the work.

STUART MACKENZIE RSA & PROFESSOR ALISTAIR PAYNE

25th July 2016



Bridge 1



WAYS & MEANS

The work in this exhibition was generated from two locations. Its source, however, is hard to quantify or categorise given its variety. I find the sources for paintings in both the conventionally memorable and the entirely unremarkable. From a shadow cast, an imprint, a stain to an architectural element and an odd tree. I observe and record. I also invent through drawing, eccentric systems to breed painted area and form. But having found the source I don't paint it, I turn my back on it, and project it forwards to the studio.

So whilst the two studio/locations possess individual qualities and exert different influences which I see manifest in the paintings they are of the same type of environment and offer me something that no other physical space does, a home for my internal dialogue, encapsulated by W.B. Yeats 'We make out of our quarrel with others, rhetoric, but out of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry'.



To fuel my task I am equipped with materials and tools gathered and adapted over many decades. An archive of work and volumes of writings and drawings plus a constant flow of books 60% art, (1) 30% poetry (2) 10% other (3) and, very importantly, music (4) are as essential as turpentine. The studio becomes over time a glomeration and a residue, as some stuff sticks and some is eroded, it accommodates both the consciously retained and the casually attained items of the bricoleur. This is as much the result of time as it is of critical determinacy. I never had a plan but a faith, planted in my mind quite early on, that if I applied and informed myself I would find an artistic/stylistic and entirely individual artistic identity. It didn't happen. Instead I came to recognise a sub-pattern, something more akin to scent with added pace and rhythm and that is what I strive to connect with. Of course time is instrumental as something to be both taken and appreciated.

"I forget what it is I would rather be doing..." the opening line from 'A Perfect Hat' in the collection of poems by John Ashbery 'A Worldly Country'. My preferred interpretation of this phrase is of the state of mind where the overwhelming and enduring significance of what you are and do renders the memory of any previous existence, direction or preference irretrievable. This is helpful not only as it supports my view that forgetfulness is actually the exercise of selective memory and, possibly, a memory whose capacity has

been exceeded. It also recognises a preference born of practice, or at least of repeated activity. It's not a habit (I have those as well), nor is it a routine that has got out-of-hand. It is, for me, the condition of the studio.

In its archival function it is also the place for the keeping and ordering of images and thoughts drawn from the material and visible world. In a more therapeutic form, painting (the activity rather than the product) is one of few activities that make sense to me. However the emotional strain of any serious creative endeavour would render it a health hazard rather than a therapy. The view from the studio is not a privileged view, it doesn't offer some sort of vantage point rather it is a mental space slightly to one side of the everyday with its numbing routines and absurdities. (Having made that observation I am aware that the view in from the outside would reveal a large amount of dumb repetition while conducting a silent dialogue with an inanimate object!)

For this artist the dialogue is one of ever increasing complexity as the tasks of combining form with colour and form/colour against other form /colours within some personal sense of the desired physical characteristics of the material, what the French call 'facture'. The complexity is essential for, as an older painter, the tendency to reduce the elements of the work and edit the sources to a reassuringly familiar pattern is strong. I am grateful therefore for a restless and critically sceptical aspect to my creative personality that leads me away from always following the same path to discovery.

ROGER WILSON

July 2016

- (1) *Currently catalogues and monographs on the following: Raoul De Keyser, Gunther Forg, Prunella Clough, Joan Mitchell, Albert Oehlen, Piet Mondrian, Terry Winters, Wladyslaw Strzeminski, Basil Beattie.*
- (2) *Poetry: John Ashberry, Hugh MacDiarmid. Stephane Mallarme, T.S.Elliot, Seamus Heaney, Don Paterson.*
- (3) *A miscellany of books on biological order, self-organising systems, landscape and anthropology.*
- (4) *My play list over the last week has included:
'Two New' Mal Waldron and George Haslam
'Floratone' Bill Frisell et al
'Sub-Lingual Tablet' The Fall
Radio Silence' The Neil Cowley Trio
'Hypnotic Eye' Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers
'Athenaeum, homebush, Quay and Raab'. The Necks
'The Seer' The Swans
'Man made object' GoGo Penguin
'Poco-A-Poco' The Ganelin Trio
'The Riverside Anthology' Thelonious Monk
'Aurora' Vernerer Pohjola*

BIOGRAPHY



Professor Roger Wilson is an artist, writer and academic. He has held senior academic positions in universities and colleges for over 40 years in the UK and has been a visiting professor at institutions in the USA and Europe. He was Dean of the Faculty of Art and Design at the Manchester Metropolitan University, Head of Chelsea College of Art and Design and is Emeritus Professor of the University of the Arts, London. Between 2009 and 2013 he was Head of the School of Fine Art at Glasgow School of Art.

Since the 1970's he has exhibited regularly with over 20 solo exhibitions and twice that number of shared and group shows. He has work in many public and private collections in the UK and Europe.

He lives and works on the Lancashire West Pennines.

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Gemma Mannion; managing to make the process seem straightforward takes skill and sensitivity.

To Barbara Cole my partner in art, life and all the untidy stuff in between I owe the most.



HOUSE FOR AN ART LOVER

**STUDIO PAVILION, ARTPARK
BELLAHOUSTON PARK, 10 DUMBRECK ROAD, G41 5BW**

The Studio Pavilion, situated in Bellahouston Park, opened to the public in 2014 acting as an artist's retreat in the heart of the city. The Studio Pavilion is a highly significant addition to House for an Art Lover's ARTPARK Glasgow, Centre for Arts & Heritage. The innovative design enables transformation between exhibition space and artist's studio, giving local and international artists opportunity to produce and exhibit work in a creative environment.

In addition to the Studio Pavilion, ARTPARK Glasgow comprises of a Heritage Centre, dedicated art studios and ARTsheds providing exciting opportunities for artists of all levels of ability. This includes masterclasses and workshops, public talks, events and artist residencies. Our ambition is to create a vibrant artistic community in ARTPARK Glasgow which engages with everyone from the local community to artists of international renown.

**For more information on ARTPARK Glasgow's programme,
please contact our Arts and Heritage Development Officer
at: arts@houseforanartlover.co.uk or call: 0141 427 9557**

www.houseforanartlover.co.uk



HOUSE FOR AN ART LOVER



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