A SUMMING UP

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Painters are now free. They are under no obligation to work in a particular way. There are no labels, and no -isms. The fuss, the charge of betrayal, that was made when Philip Guston returned to figuration towards the end of his life in 1980, now seems absurd. The only thing that actually matters about a painting is whether it works *as a painting,* quite independently of any narrative possibilities, and quite independently of whether the palnt has been made to resemble anything outside the paint itself.

Almost all my work is derived from a particular part of a particular sand-dune system bordering Tremadoc Bay at Harlech, North Wales. The work ranges from direct statement about the view, to more general statements about space and light.

Looking West from Harlech Morfa 1959
Oill on Canvas, 27x86cm

Day by the Sea 2014
Acrylic on Cotton Duck, 12x45cm

The preoccupation with this particular terrain is clearly on account of having lived in it as a child followed by regular and extended visits thereafter. Harlech Morfa has been the starting point for studies in a wide variety of media in a wide range of approaches: graphite, Indian Ink, conté, chalk pastel, oil pastel, linocut, collage, oil paint, acrylic paint and watercolour.

I started painting non-depictively in about 1989. I think I felt the need to be free of the particular appearance of any particular thing. This was idea-less activity with paint, paint moved about with nothing in mind, somehow waiting for something to happen. As Patrick Heron has pointed out, however, the abstract painting is an ideal impossible of achievement, the human brain being hard-wired to make literal sense of visual input.

To take a case in point; the painting ***June Break*** of 1993 was a product of this random activity

June Break 1993
Oil on Cotton Duck, 9.5x31cm

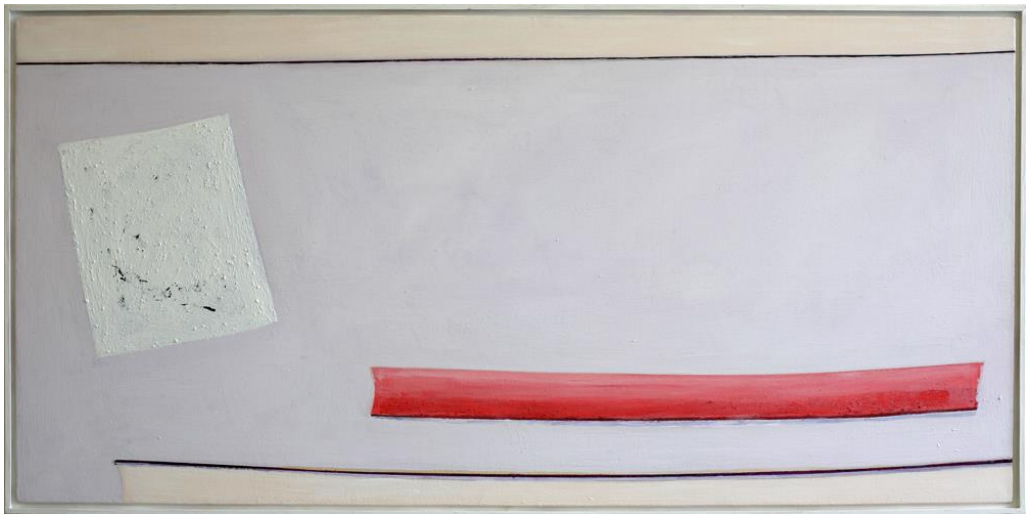
On seeing the work the Scottish painter Fred Pollock said it reminded him of wet seaweed clinging to a rock by a rock-pool. Well, why not? And it was about this time that ***Morfa Walk*** of 1994 appeared, of its own volition, being one of the first somehow to suggest the Morfa, due to its naturalistic colouring rather than its composition.

Morfa Walk
1994 Oil on Cotton Duck, 15x38cm3

Since those years, following a switch to acrylic paint, the paintings have tended towards greater clarity and simplicity. Isn't life already complicated enough – why add to that?

As Chopin commented (to Delacroix): ***Simplicity is the final achievement***. Likewise Guildhall musician Norman Anderson (to CB): ***To play Semplice requires the highest possible artistry, a long way from straightforward vacuity***.

In Wild Terrain 1994
Acrylic on Cotton Duck, 33x138cm



On the Island 2015
Acrylic on Cotton Duck,73.5x152.5cm

The search for simplicity extended to a series of conté drawings of sand-hills made between 2000 and 2019. Conté, harder than charcoal but softer than graphite, cannot easily be erased, so drawings which fail have to be jettisoned. The final body of work consisted of over fifty drawings, all made by looking from south to north via west from about a 20 x 20m square of Harlech Morfa..

Path through the Dunes #1 2000
Conté on 300g /gpm paper, 20x29.5cm

Dunescape #2 2019
Conté on 300g /gpm paper, 16x23cm

In recent years there have been two main types of work. The first involved a return to Indian Ink, not much used since the early 1960s. A series of drawings made from the same view: ***Forty One Approaches to a View*** 2022 was the result, followed by two further sets of sixteen drawings each: ***A Story from the Clouds*** 2024, and ***A Story from the Marram*** 2025. All 73 drawings were the same size, 14x21cm, made from the same site, mainly looking west across Harlech Morfa.

Sand-hill at Harlech 1961
Indian Ink on 160g /gpm paper,20x35cm

Marram Grass 2022
From: ***Forty One Approaches to a View***
Indian Ink on 160g /gpm paper, 14x21cm

The second body of work was the use of watercolour, again not much used since since the 1970s. Watercolour was chosen solely on account of its challenge. Painting non-figuratively involves a continuous process of decision-making and with watercolour there is much less manoeuvrability than with other media. All these watercolours, to my eyes at least, are still somehow derived from the Harlech maritime, though it is not at all necessary for an observer to know this. An obvious way of evoking a sense of landscape is to incorporate a pronounced horizontal component in the composition. This has been avoided.

Dunes and Sea 1978
Watercolour on 160g /gpm paper, 7x19cm

Playtime (Croquet) 2020
Watercolour on 300g /gpm paper, 17x34cm

In conclusion to this outline aesthetic, it may be worth pointing out that J.S. Bach commented that music which is not about something outside music can never be beautiful. I personally simply cannot think of achieving a nice arrangement of colours as an end in itself; colour is about means rather than ends, for me, about space and light. The observer will get from a painting what he/she brings to it in the first place, and that is all. But with an open mind anything is possible.

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