



Madeleine

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A group show curated by Michael Roberts.

Works by Faisal Abdu'Allah, Simon Callery, Prunella Clough, Melanie Manchot, Katie Pratt, Michael Roberts, Scott Robertson, Dillwyn Smith, Robin Tarbet, Andrei Tarkovsky and Paul Tecklenberg.

I just knew it wasn't true.

The swish of silk over the floor, the clank of chain on metal expelling pungent smoke, the quiet mumbo jumbo being uttered in the church wasn't transformation, it never could be. Alchemy, taking the ordinary into new worlds was to happen in Trent Polytechnic's etching room. Peeling back a piece of paper from an inked copper plate, there was magic at work.

Madeleine sets out to subtly explore the concept of transformation, magic and alchemy in contemporary art practice. These seemingly disparate artists are purposively brought together here because of their shared strengths, their fearlessness in ambition, and their journeys with the physical and metaphysical. Follow the trail, it's an invitation, allow the communal sense of transfiguration to reveal itself.

Madeleine is an invitation to breathe.

Coming across Scott Robertson's work, *When The Light Blinds Your Eyes to What Lays Before*, a wry smile appeared. It's an immersive deadpan joke, a delicious poignant conundrum, a quiet drama. The ordinary, a sheet of foolscap paper has been metamorphosed into inert mantels of gold and silver. Preciousness personified, but of no practical use, except that the joke opens up door after door. Rich material indeed but you can't write on them.

Re-watching Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Nostalgia* after a break of many years was a real 'moment' for me. I was transported back to the time, date and place where I first saw it. His films inhabit themselves; they have their own sense of time and space and if you're willing to engage with this languid poetic sensibility they're

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spiritually nourishing. The *raison d'être* of the film is to keep the flame alight, to hold tight with our faiths, loves and endeavours. There's nothing else quite like Tarkovsky's films out there. By chance a few months after initially seeing this film I visited two of the main sites used in the narrative, the thermal baths and the roofless derelict cathedral. Heady stuff, going from one time and place to another and back again.

In Melanie Manchot's video *Cadence*, it was difficult at first to work out what was going on. A small black blob moves out from the base of the screen travelling over a pure white surface to the centre where

it then divides (we're viewing a horizontal monitor on raised plinth). Is this an old-school video game or is it cellular division. Ah hah, as the penny drops, it's a horse being exercised in virgin snow. There's a trainer leading a horse on a long rein, first anticlockwise and then clockwise. After a number of revolutions in each direction the horse and rider regroup and go out of frame tracing the same tracks. Working out the scenario as the brain give shape to the image is satisfying. It's also printmaking in action.

I have a confession to make, I've never actually read Marcel Proust's, *In Search of Lost Time*, but please don't hold that against me, volume 1 is by my side. The title is being appropriated because of its universality of meaning and its references to the moment when art can transport the viewer. These chosen artists are not cookie cuts outs, far from it.

Paul Tecklenberg's video *21gms* deals with metamorphosis. Apparently the body weight differential immediately before and after death is 21gms. Is this what the soul weighs? Does our essence after living a rich and varied life, full of love, losses, accomplishments and failures really come down to the weight of a AA battery or a roll of 35mm film? Dark humour indeed.

Whilst still in the realms of transformation we move from the personal to the universal. Faisal Abdu'Allah's tapestry *Last Supper 1* restores credibility to the drama of the occasion, the cast is black and dressed in Islamic attire. Having been bought up a reluctant Catholic, but never buying into it, I used to wonder why if Christ was from the Middle East how come he was often depicted as some sort of Nordic being with blue eyes. Faisal has no truck with this notion. He asks insightful questions and challenges cherished and outmoded assumptions. In the accompanying tapestry, *Last Supper 2* (not displayed) the disciples are depicted in stylish street clothing, too right.

Nothing is more personal, more relevant, more embedded deep in our core than our relationship to our mother. Through her we come into this world, we carry her essence from the nano-molecular to the shape of our face. Dillwyn Smith's seminal work *Silvering the Cerebrum* draws on personal experiences. At the time of making Dillwyn's mother was journeying through Alzheimer's. He's produced a powerful, poignant suite of prints using a variety of printmaking techniques and dyes drawing on his direct observations of seeing brain matter being dissected at University College Hospitals. A family audio recording has mother Shelagh singing out, 'There's a vision in my memory'.

Simon Callery's practice is painting but not in the traditional, conventional sense. There's no image and there's no surface paint. The canvas is dyed, stitched together and the supports are visible. The 'stroke' is absent, but feeling for material and resonance is omnipresent. So what are we left with? Process and basic materials being marshalled into an immersive experience that majestically

carries the physicality of making. These are deeply rewarding paintings that operate on the eye and body first and then the intellectual analysis begins.

Katie Pratt proudly works as an abstract painter. Her painting displays the passage of time through painstaking mark making combined with fluid, swift gestures where surface dots, dashes and skitters create a schematic order. Sometimes the paintings look as if they're about to slip away but are held in place by a deep underlying sensibility rooted in past references. Her work marshals chaos into complex systems that give out chain reactions to the eye.

On visiting Robin Tarbet's studio I immediately knew that I was going to include his *Numatic Cube* sculptures.

There's a duality of strangeness and familiarity that creates a fascinating resonance. You know they are cast and have a technological basis, with an almost fossil-like appearance. Are they imprints of lost and redundant systems or have they had a brush with the future? Finally and categorically these sculptures would not look out of place in Tarkovsky's film *Solaris*.

Last but not least in this divergent running order is Prunella Clough. Her work in both painting and print has always been one of my touchstones, someone who always mystifies, delights and leaves me feeling better for the experience, but I know that you know how that feels.

Michael Roberts, 2018

Adèl mien

By Simón Granell

1 All too often the artist feels the need to justify practice through worthy or academic references. As time has passed, I have found it increasingly plausible that formative experiences are the catalyst for work made. Why not? I have several vague childhood memories, all of which have been validated in adult life. My earliest recollection is of a black and white carpet in what must have been a playroom. I was a baby, crawling on all fours, repeatedly tracing with my right index finger the white outline of small black stone-like shapes that made up the design of the carpet. I also remember a red sweater, a Supermarine Spitfire *Airfix* kit. Sometimes I remember seeing a rhythm while asleep, a pulse of horizontal lines descending in time to a rapid beat. I realised much later, that this was the sound of my own heartbeat against the pillow. These rhythms are now a lifetime of painting.

This all sounds very ordinary. We can be a bit scared of being ordinary as it suggests invisibility, that one day we will die and be forgotten. There is also a fear of how extraordinary this might feel. To be so absent as to allow the fullness of experience to come into our lives, unedited, complete. Such a state would surely lead to our drowning.

2 What is happening now has echoes of the past. As time proceeds, one cause leads to another until the outcome resides even in the minutiae of the pilling in my wife's white jumper, each tiny gathering of wool registering the effects of their own journey and history, superficially identical, but unique. This is karma. Not a moral or ethical judgment from an outside or higher agency, but simply a result of one's own actions.

3 Dare I suggest that a work communicates something of its creator. This sounds a bit obvious, but more specifically, that the manipulation of materials used in a work could be capable of transmitting psychophysically to us. Omori Sogen (1993) suggests that x-ray analysis on a molecular level of ancient Chinese calligraphic masterpieces has revealed the effects of the artist's hand on the behaviour of the carbon particles in the *Sumi* ink. If *ki* (energy or spirit) is present during the creation of a work, the carbon particles in the *Sumi* are found to align

with each of the *kanji* brushstrokes. As a natural conductor of electricity, carbon is an ideal material to react to the slightest electrical change in the body.

4 To acknowledge that an artwork has nothing of its own side, nothing intrinsic that cannot be said of something else is to liberate it and to acknowledge its dependence upon us and what we cause it to be. In short, there is no-thing

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other than that which is dependent upon ourselves. Too much criticism of art (and other people, for that matter), focuses exclusively on the external, implying mistakenly, that we are a point of constancy, of orientation around which things and people satellite.

5 Everything is energy, vibration. Anxiously we note this. In the room you are in right now, for example, if you stop talking, you can begin to feel it. Our default is to think it, name it. This is not awareness, because we are judging it rather than being it, and when we hear 'being it', we're suddenly in somewhere called Glastonbury, and we're thinking of incense and saffron robes and we can hear chanting. So, we're not here at all anymore. This is partly because being quiet can make us feel uncomfortable, especially when there are lots of people around. Proper paying attention is awareness without judgement. But when we hear that, again, now I can see bald heads, monks, nuns, words like *Zazen*, *Stupa*, kneeling and of we go again. This takes us away from rather than towards.

6 It is disappointing when the first thing someone says about something is that it is "interesting". *Interesting* is to Art what *nice* is to a person. Eat.

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