

THOUGHTS FORM

Lennon



Folded/Folded, 1972, acrylic paint on/in cotton duck, 9' x 25 yards; photographed in Foley Stret Studio, Dublin 1974.

Weaving/Memory

I've come to see *Folded/Unfolded* as a metaphor for memory; like memories, the images of the poured paint appear, disappear and reappear in the weave of the fabric. The weft disappears under the warp, and then reappears in a different place. The poured paint too appears, disappears from view then reappears elsewhere. The weave promises to unite, the paint promises change.

The Paint

The paint (right) is made from a mixture of pigments and acrylic mediums. Enough aluminium pigment is added to the mixture to keep the dual appearance of aluminium, i.e. to appear to have an inner space of its own even as it reflects the place around and in front of it.

The Synthesis

Changing the formula, from canvas/stretcher-support and paint to just aluminium and paint, a new synthesis was arrived at. Now the paint forms its own weave/ground and colour on the aluminium support. The large brushes and wipers create an appearance of planes; during viewing these may be observed to change in relation to each other.

Childhood Memory: "Lookmaquickquickbeforeit-dries"

When I was seven or eight my mother first allowed me to *paint* the back wall of the house with large brushes from the shed, but only if I used water instead of paint. Painting with the water changed the wall, made it darken and shine. I was anxious that the sun might dry it out before she could see it, or the sun go in and remove the shine. This drama—between wall, water, sun, mother and me—I re-enacted over and over again.



YRB 1, 2013, acrylic and aluminium paint on aluminium, 9' x 8'



Folded/Unfolded, 1972, acrylic paint in cotton duck 9'x25 yards, overall 10' x 18' approx, Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 1972.

Flatness, Drama and the Metonymic

When putting the theories of flatness¹ to the test of my own experience of flatness I discovered it to be full of holes. This epiphany led me to look for a way of painting more true to my own way of seeing.

The ironic nature of flatness lies in its dual nature of appearing only to be flat when seen not to be flat, but irregular, textured and detailed—just as the diver cannot judge the distance to water without ripples. *Folded/Unfolded* (above) was born out of this.

The imperative to resist spatial illusionism without collapsing into the real space of the viewer provided me with an initial drama: the collapsed undone painting. Appropriately, a stop-start again situation came about: a) folded = potential, b) the catenary curve unfolding = becoming, and c) the unfolded outfolding = realised experience. I imagined myself being *in* the paint, flowing freely, making my way through the nets and weaves of the canvas. 'Let it collapse,' I did. It was essential, I felt, to maintain limits, so I abandoned the stretcher support, relying instead on the wall as a given support. But I had yet to find a form to engage with the real metonymic nature of our being.



BRY 1, 2013, acrylic and aluminium paint on aluminium, 9' x 8'.

I have achieved this now in my recent works.

I eventually returned to a *space of painting* finding my own *abstract real space*—the space that *belongs* to the viewing/observing subject. These new paintings neither belong to the space of painting nor to the space of objects. To disengage from a painting of mine one has only to turn away. It is not installation art, it is sight specific. The observers find their own *measure*²—independent of any need to know my motives or reasons other than my realised desire, which is the work itself—and continue from there making their own judgements, following their own desires, like any lover will.

¹: Especially Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried.

²: Measure (le donné) here in this sense meaning that place or part chosen as the beginning or entrance into a fuller engagement in the work.



Aluminium & Graphite Paint Drawing III, 2013, aluminium and graphite paint on card, 32" x 28".



Soaked Folded Cast, 1972, linen, oil and wax, and bronze cast, 16" x 13" x 5 1/2", shown at the Fenton Gallery, Cork, 2006.

On The Reflexive

At the age of 16, Albert Einstein asked himself a question that was to be answered ten years later in *The Special Theory of Relativity*: "What would I see if I were able to follow a beam of light at its own speed through space?"¹ He put himself into his thought experiment. He himself was a part of it, a constituent of the field. "A correct proposition borrows its truth-content from the system to which it belongs."²



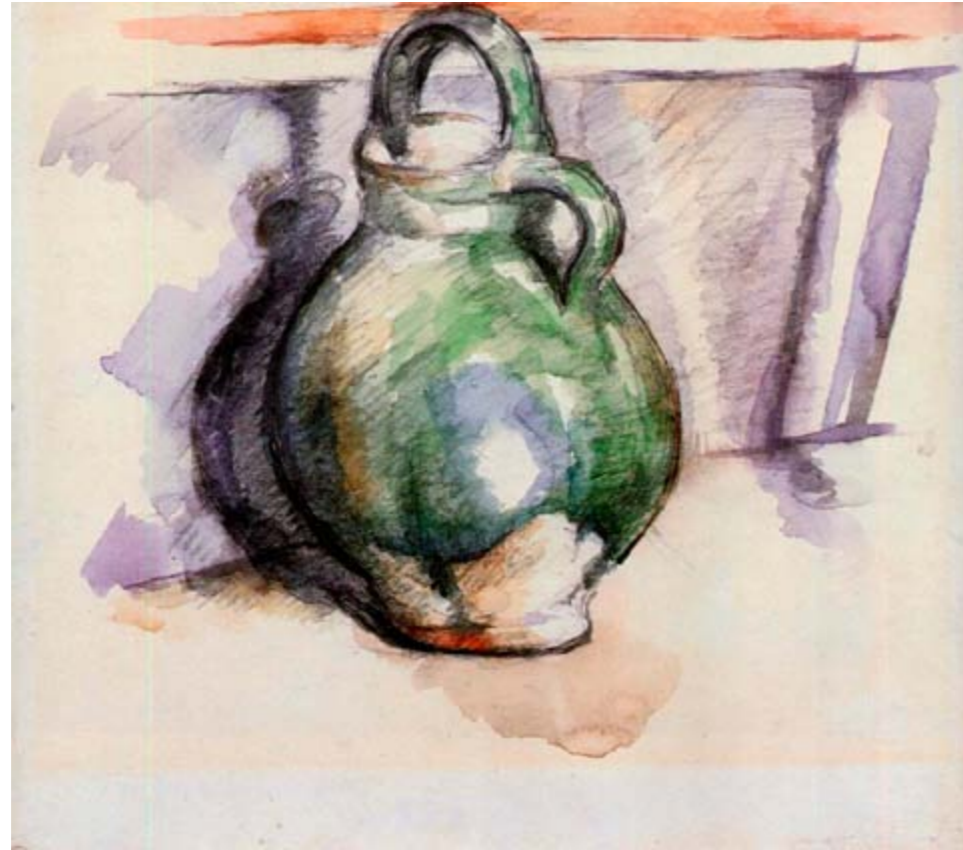
Edgar Degas, *The Cotton Merchants*, 1873, The Harvard University Arts Museum, Massachusetts, USA (gift of Herbert N. Strauss).

The painting is composed of folding frames around the 'cotton' (including a painting of a painting, cropped). Degas presents the viewer an active first-hand engagement in the perception of the painting.

This loosely-handed depiction of cotton, on and in the weave of the stretched material beneath, is reflexive of its own making and its involvement of the viewer in the experience of the painting as a made thing (its focus on observation rather than reality, appearances not knowledge). This is a seminal example of the reflexive aspect of my own work.

¹ Paul Arthur Shilpp, *Albert Einstein: Philosopher-Scientist, Volume 1*, p. 53.

² Ibid.



Paul Cezanne , *The Green Pitcher*, 1887, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, France.

On Cezanne

A compositional device of Cezanne's invention, his culminant (*le point culminant*) is the part of the object that is closest to the viewer's eyes from which he continues around this point culminant building the colour layers to produce his sensation of the colour of the object. The painting construct is his analogy of seeing things in terms of seeing a painting. It is an analogy that parallels the apprehension of the world, the sense of a matter of fact.¹

Cezanne's favouring of hue over value², and the handed brushstroke favoured over the fingering line creates his equivalent sensations in paint—what Hans Hoffman called the push and pull of colour. More and more over the years I have favoured increasingly larger brushes in order to loose one kind of control and discover another, pushing the painting to the surface and into the space of the viewer.

The modulations of the primary colours red, yellow and blue, the local colours for the analogous relationship to the world, came from the local colour of the palette (the Cezanne distinction of representation from reproduction). A painter may only represent the sun's intensity; he cannot make the paint shine so brightly.

Cezanne learned from Pissaro the dialectic of local and atmospheric, the local, i.e. artificial colour on his palette, and atmospheric, colour in the real world.



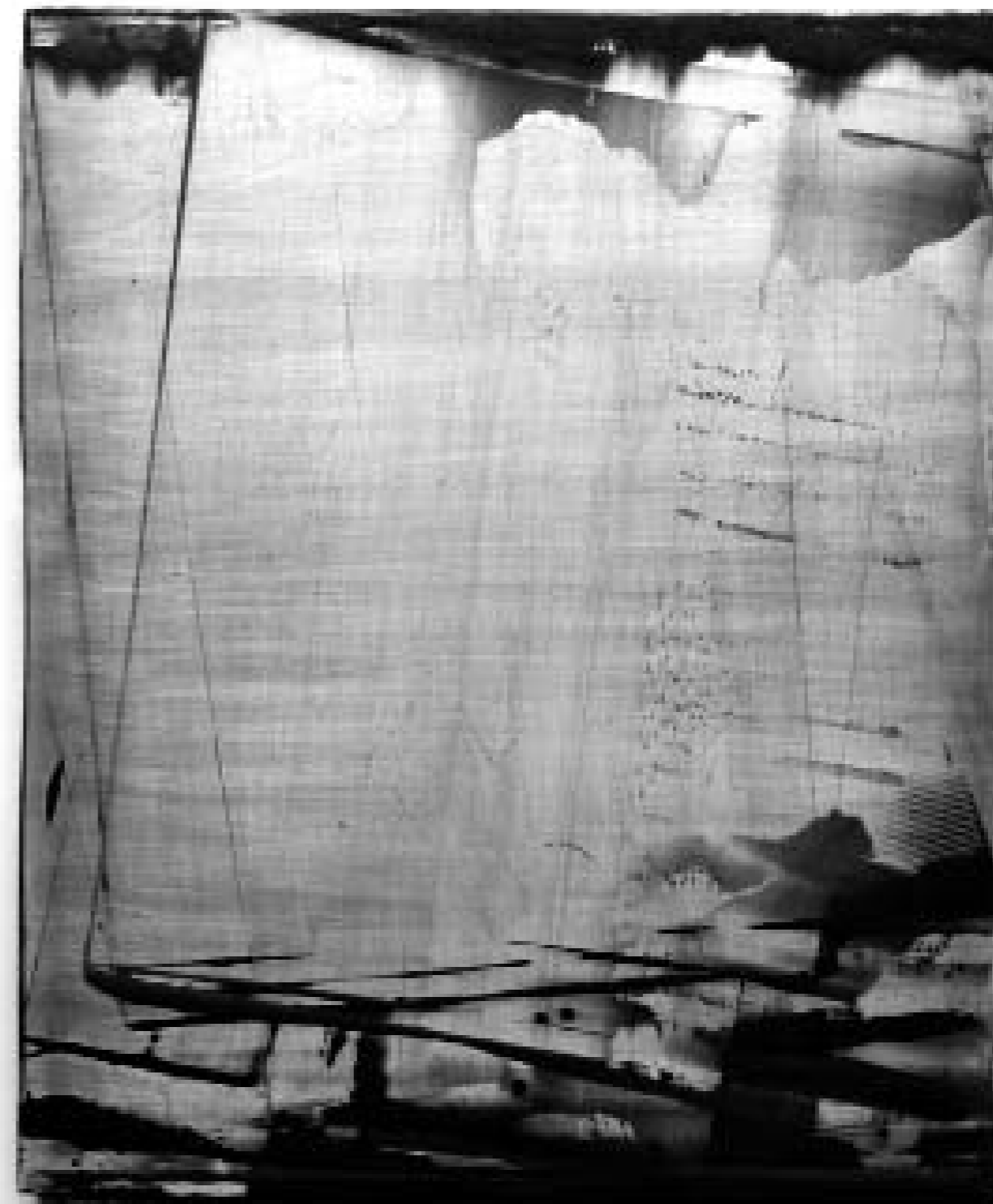
Acrylic Paint Drawing, 01/10/2013, 32" x 28".

¹ I love Rilke's idea of Cezanne's possessionless gaze , that openness to the event, the situation of seeing for itself and for one's self.

² See Hue, V (lightness) and C (colour purity) in Munsell's system of colour notation.



James McNeill Whistler, *Becquet the Fiddler*, 1859, drypoint, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris.



For M, *Ground Aluminium*, 2012, 29" x 16" x 1¼"

The Somatic and the Pictorial Modes

Speechless silence is often a response to experiences of extreme desire or pain, yet can be expressed in the realm of vision. So too can sound. Whistler may have realised that exiting one mode of seeing revealed another: the cello becomes the painter's thumb, the drawing is vigorously pushed to the edges, away from the area of descriptions, the faint erased drawing over the left shoulder of Becquet traces an abandoned measure. Maybe he realised that questioning visual descriptions for sound events was the best way to go about it. To acknowledge the shared common ground of his drawing, and cello playing, (e.g. the arm and hand movements of both), created a movement of modes from the pictorial to the ocular somatic mode.

Ground Aluminiums

Ocular seeing is a primary experience; it cannot be imagined and experienced simultaneously. A ground aluminium is a presence and an appearance. It is a discovery and is the subject of its own immediacy.

In November 1962 I left home and went to London. I was fifteen then and had changed my name to Michael Grendon, 20 years of age. I joined the Green Jackets and was trained at Badger Farm Road, Winchester. In January 1963 my father found me. I was then honourably discharged and returned to Dublin. In April 2011, I returned to Badger Farm Road and had a profound psychological and emotional experience there. Shortly afterwards this experience, of my younger self and my adult self, found a new form in joining together paint and ground (aluminium block).

The dust produced by sanding the aluminium, with added acrylic medium, produced its own pigment = Al¹³ paint.



Photographed with a smartphone

Stanley William Hayter

The precedent for my using the aluminium plates as an active drawing device in my paintings derives from Stanley William Hayter.

I met Hayter through Eithne Waldron at an exhibition of his prints and plates in the Municipal Art Gallery, Dublin in 1973. He showed me how his great innovation from 1926 (i.e. moving the etching plate to the burin), brought a new technique to print making. I attribute the fluidity of Picasso's prints to Hayter's innovation. I believe this new 'moving around the ground' contributed to Jackson Pollock's method of painting.



Futher note on Hayter's 'moving ground'

In the making of the Lens Askews, each additional plate was glued to the one beneath it (i.e. the glue as paint and the paint as glue); the work—being suspended from the wall by a single 1 inch diameter hole in the back—rotated back and forth until it came to rest. This is how the final composition was achieved.



Camac, Arbitrary Colour Collection, 27 part, each 12" x 9", acrylic paint on copper on wood.
 Arken Museum for Moderne Kunst, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2001.
 Permanent collection of McCann Fitzgerald, Dublin.

It was while I was painting an Arbitrary Colour Collection in 2002 that the memory of my childhood habit of looking into the Camac river from the Emmet Road bridge came back to me. Lost in reverie, I was transported back in time to when I was 5 or 6 years old: I loved looking through the storm drain into the Camac. The capstone looked like a sou-wester hat to me. The stone below it on the left is worn shiny from my hands. This place was a friend to me, as exciting as any other friend, and more reliable.



To Varian Fry, Arbitrary Colour Collection, 14 part, each 12" x 9", 2005-2012, acrylic paint on copper.
 Permanent collection of Avenues: The World School, New York.

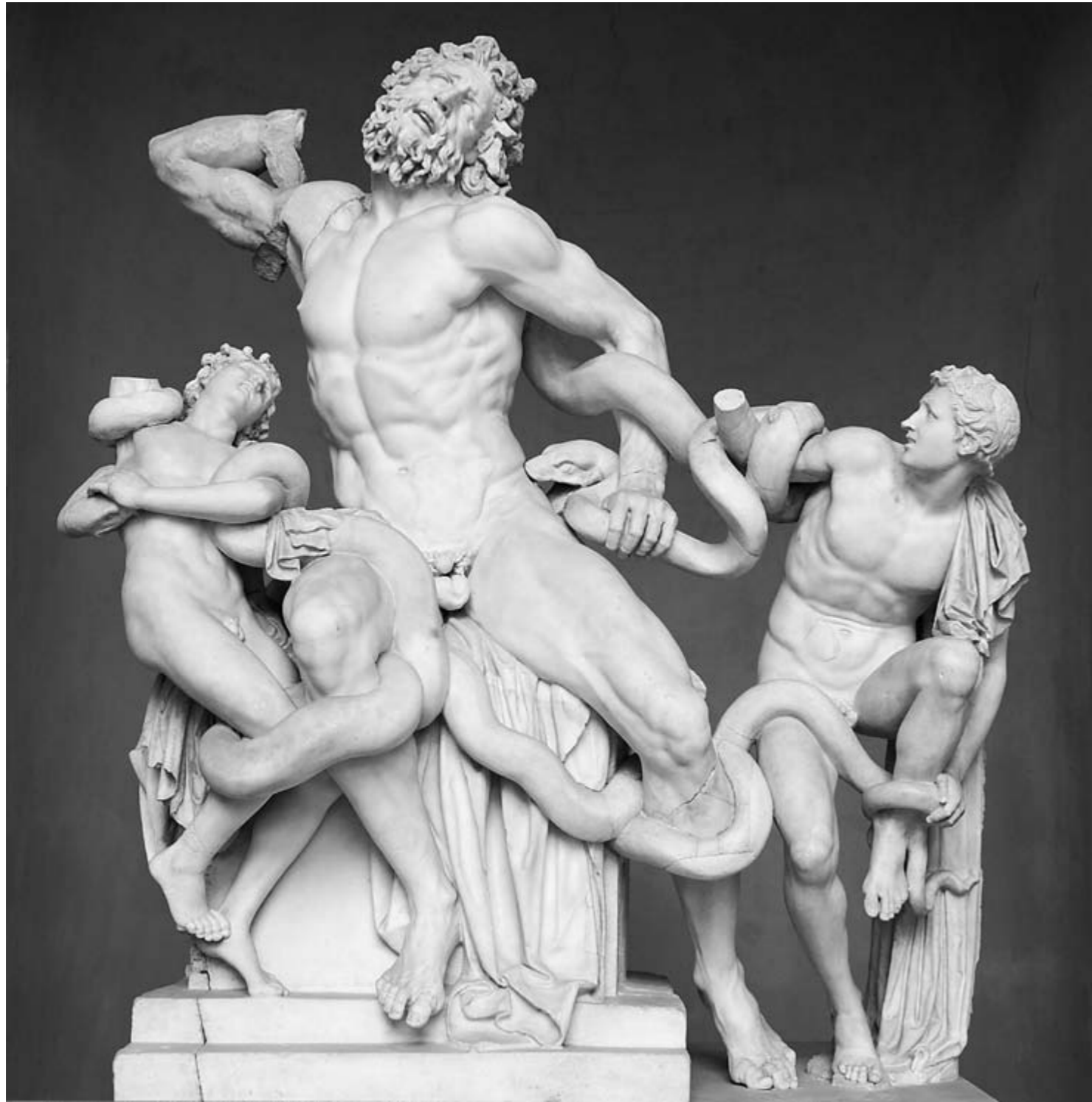
On Varian Fry (1907-1967)

Varian Fry¹ rescued some 2,000 people from the Gestapo over a three year period, 1940-1941. These include Marc Chagall, Max Ernst, Franz Werfel, Heinrich Mann, Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, Arthur Kroestler², Jean Arp, Hanna Erendt, Andre Breton and many more of whom went on to create the vital post-war modern art movement, especially in New York.

It was the conflating the inner world of subjective experience and the outer world of knowledge that produced the facist mentality. The main thrust of the new modernism was to distibguish between these two kinds of knowledge.

¹ I recommend his book, *Surrender on Demand*,

² Arthur Kroestler's book, *The Act of Creation*, had a profound influence on me, especially his model of fine art as an *in-fold*, i.e. complex thought in simple form.



Laocöon, Vatican Museums, Rome.

The National College of Art

I first saw the Laocöon sculpture¹ in May 1963 at the age of 16 when I entered the main hall of the National College of Art in Kildare Street. The staircase snaked down like two arms and, on the landing above, visible behind the banisters, I saw this great sculpture: magnificent, dramatic and full of fight, my fight—it seemed to me. The dramatic moment chosen from Virgil's poem *The Laocöon* made static, the moment chosen when most full of potential; too late and the drama is gone. This powerful metaphor of life, each person struggling to live while also entwined in the struggles of others².

'Painting considered as an imitative art can express ugliness; painting considered as a fine art will not express it. Aristotle (in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*) writes "we are sensible of enjoyment when either we can learn from the copy (what each thing is) or when we can conclude from it that it is this or that object."³

I spent two years studying it while drawing from the *antique* before doing life drawing. Favourites were the *Venus de Milo*, Donatello's *David*, *The Dying Warrior* and *The Discus Thrower*. From these, I learned classic rules of beauty and composition, the ordering of small, medium and large parts, the IOS⁴ lines of beauty, and the complexity of shadows and reflected light, dark at the edge of shadow, light inside of suggestion and what to leave out... initially I drew everything—dust, scratches and chips of wear and tear—to the amusement of my teachers



26/9/13, *Dailies*, 2013, newspaper, stamp, staples and card, 32" x 28".

Maurice McGonagle and Sean Keating (though for different reasons). McGonagle, allowed me to resist his planer-painterliness for the chiseled-like cross-hatching technique that I preferred.

My way of seeing the world was forever changed the day I became aware of the spaces in between things: objects are negatives when space is seen as positive. Later, I became interested in the way Brancusi⁵ cut into space to reveal an object and how Carl Andre⁶ would cut into an object to reveal space. And Frank Stella's working space and literal/descriptive dialectics were of major importance to me.

1 Original in the Vatican Museums, Rome, was attributed by the Roman author Pliny the Elder to three Greek sculptors from the island of Rhodes: Agesander, Athenodoros and Polydorus; the one in Kildare street was plaster cast.

2 See G.E. Lessing's essay *The Laocöon*, 1766.

3 Ibid, 1879 edition, George Routledge & Sons, London, p 179.

4 It was believed by the ancient Greeks and Romans that only combinations of the straight line, the circle and the arabesque were beautiful.

5 Constantin Brancusi, *Endless Column*, 1918.

6 Carl Ande, *First Ladder*, 1958.

Curriculum Vitae

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

Royal Hibernian Academy, Atrium, Dublin, 2014
Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris, 2009
Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin, 2009
The Arken Museum of Contemporary Art, Copenhagen, 2003
The Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, 2002
The National Gallery of Ireland, 2002
The Gallerie Wienberger, Copenhagen, 1999
The Galerie Lahumier, Paris, 1996
The Irish Museum of Modern Art, 1995
The Ulster Museum, Belfast, 1995
The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, 1993
Annely Juda Fine Art, London, 1989
Orchard Gallery, Derry, 1980
David Hendrix Gallery, Dublin, 1970, '74, '78, '80
Oliver Dowling Gallery, 1982
Triskel Arts Centre, Cork, 1979
Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 1972

COLLECTIONS

Avenues, The World School, New York
Pallant House, Chichester, West Sussex
Ulster Museum, Belfast, N. Ireland
Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin
Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery, Dublin
Trinity College, Dublin
Kramarsky Collection, New York
The Fogg Museum of Fine Art, Harvard
R. Stella, Paris, France
M. Ortiz, Sevilla, Spain
Scott Tallon Walker, Architects, Dublin, Ireland
Dr. Ronald Tallon, Architect, Dublin, Ireland
M. McConn, Belfast, N. Ireland
C. McCreanor, QC, Belfast, N. Ireland
Dr. David & Teresa Sinclair, England
C. Wall, Vancouver, Canada
M. Douglas & C.Z. Jones, New York
Anne Bousiema Hoflaan, Rotterdam
Cris and Lorie Drugan, Ohio, USA

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

RA, London, 2012 (by invitation)
The Drawing Centre, New York, 1999
The Pursuit of Painting,
Irish Museum of Irish Art, 1997
L'Imaginaire Irlandais, Paris, 1996
Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil, 1996
A Sense Of Ireland, London, 1980

For interviews, articles and artist's notes
see the About page on the artist's website
www.ciaranlennon.com



Ciarán Lennon, ANCAD Hons. Comm.
Elected to Aosdána (Irish Academy of Arts and Letters) in 1993.
He was born in Dublin in 1947 where he lives and works.

