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Positioning Still Life by Means of Reference

Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Northampton

2012

Jonathan Guy Chapman

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Abstract

This dissertation is presented as a framing document for a sixteen-year body of fine art practice, centred on the discipline of painting and the genre of still life, and disseminated by means of exhibition. Within it, I frame my practice as being referential in character, in respect of its conscious referencing of historic and contemporary art and art theory, and participation in the trans-historical referential constructs of a genre and realistic depiction. I describe my employment of reference as strategic in that it enables me to position my work in alignment with certain practice and theory and contest the nature of others. I argue also that this kind of referential positioning enables me to reconcile certain disparate artistic or theoretical positions.

Part One introduces the physical and formal characteristics of my work and establishes the contexts and paradigms that it references. It then considers how my practice is deliberately positioned within the genre of still life, and examines that genre's contemporary standing and changed physical nature. It then looks at my work's relationship to contemporary fine art, and, in light of my reliance on painting from direct observation, pays particular attention to the discourse surrounding painting's present close relationship with photographic imagery. Having also established contemporary precedents for the use of reference, historic forms of referencing are examined and compared to those in my practice. The potential benefits and negative consequences of reference are then considered, particularly in relation to Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*. Part One closes with an examination of the factors motivating my increasingly explicit representational language, and the referential context for this type of depiction.

Part Two divides my practice into six groupings and, analysing examples from each, examines where referencing is evident, what practice and theory are being referenced, and how the referencing might affect the meaning of each artwork. The groups are primarily defined by the way in which they first engage with the history of art and its associated theory, secondly, suppress or generate meaning, and thirdly, represented their subjects.

The examples examine referential engagements with 17th century Spanish still life painting, 19th and early 20th century modernist still life, 20th century abstraction and, finally, with more contemporary manifestations of art, art theory and culture. They witness my initial attempts to generate symbolic and associative meaning, subsequent efforts to suppress it in order to foreground certain formal references in the work, and then examine more recent attempts to encourage an uncontrollable intertextual polyvalence. The examples also chart the development of my representational language, particularly its interrogation of the relationship between direct observation and the mediated image. Finally, they describe how my practice's recent migration into photography is definitely not an abandonment of painting.

The essay concludes by stating that I have systematically tested the scope of still life, and found it to be a genre which not only supports my representational and pictorial concerns, but, through its ability to facilitate a multiplicity of reference, has also allowed me to position my practice in relation to any art or art theory I have wished to select.

Positioning Still Life by Means of Reference

Table of Contents	4	
List of Illustrations	5	
Introduction	7	
 Part One: Contexts and Paradigms	 11	
Participation in a Genre	11	
A Contemporary Context for Still Life, Painting, and Fine Art	21	
A Context for Referencing	27	
Context for a Representational Language	32	
 Part Two: The Examples	 39	
Group One (Circa 1994-1997)	40	
Group Two (Circa 1997-2002)	42	
Group Three (Circa 1997-2004)	48	
Group Four (Circa 2000-2004)	53	
Group Five (Circa 2004-Present)	58	
Group Six (Circa 2009-Present)	65	
 Conclusions	 68	
References	70	
 Appendix 1: Selected Exhibitions	 75	
Appendix 2: Chapman, J., & Paraskos, M.,(1996)		Insert - inside front cover
<i>Things in Rows: Recent Paintings by Jonathan Chapman</i>		
Scarborough: University College Scarborough		
Appendix 3: Chapman, J., & Staff, C., (2007)		Insert - inside front cover
<i>Jonathan Chapman: Painting from Life and Photography</i>		
Northampton: The University of Northampton		
Appendix 4: Osgerby,W.,(2000)		Insert - inside back cover
<i>Jonathan Chapman Still- Life</i>		
Glasgow: Roger Billcliffe Gallery		

List of Illustrations

Fig.1.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Three Pails and Three Cards</i> , 1996, Oil on Canvas, 62 x 62cm	7
Fig.2.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Rows of Beakers Mugs and Egg Cups</i> , 1999, Oil on Canvas, 90 x 60cm	11
Fig.3.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Orange Juice Carton</i> , 2009, Digital Print, 49.5 x 32.5cm	14
Fig.4.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Model Cars and Top Trumps</i> , 2000, Oil on Canvas, 60 x 90cm	14
Fig.5.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Art Mugs</i> , 2004, Watercolour, 51 x 73cm	15
Fig.6.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Ink Rollers</i> , 2009, Digital Print, 32.5 x 49.5cm	15
Fig.7.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Radios</i> , 2001, Oil on Canvas, 41 x 81cm	16
Fig.8.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life Plastic Cups</i> , 2002, Watercolour, 56 x 84 cm	17
Fig.9.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Four Glasses on Bessie's tablecloth</i> , 1995, Watercolour, 44 x 30cm	18
Fig.10.	Francisco de Zurbarán , <i>Still Life with Four Vessels</i> , c.1658-64, Oil on canvas, 46 x 84cm	19
Fig.11.	Damien Hirst , <i>Pharmacy</i> , 1992, Installation (Detail)	19
Fig.12.	Cildo Meireles , <i>Tower of Babel</i> , 2001, Installation	22
Fig.13.	George Shaw , <i>The Resurface</i> , 2010, Enamel on Board, 91 x 125cm	24
Fig.14.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Photo-Frames</i> , 2007, Oil on Canvas, 91.5 x 120cm	25
Fig. 15.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Camera Phone Still Life 2</i> , 2006, Oil on Canvas, 46 x 61cm	32
Fig. 16.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Souvenir</i> , 1993, Watercolour, 9.5 x 14.5cm	34
Fig.17.	Arman , <i>Infinity of Typewriters and Infinity of Monkeys and Infinity of Time = Hamlet</i> , 1962, Typewriters on Wooden Frame, 183 x 175 x 30cm	36
Fig.18.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Wendy's Glass</i> , 1995, Watercolour, 30 x 44cm	40
Fig. 19.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Four Mugs and Orange Cutlery</i> , 1997, Oil on Board, 62 x 62cm	42
Fig.20.	Giorgio Morandi , <i>Still Life</i> , 1962, Oil on Canvas, 30.5 x 30.6cm	44

Fig.21.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Five Blue and White Mugs</i> , 2002, Oil on Canvas , 120 x 91.5cm	45
Fig.22.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Day-Glo Beakers</i> , 1997, Oil on Canvas, 44 x 30cm	46
Fig.23.	Francisco de Zurbarán , <i>Still life with Lemon, Oranges and a Rose</i> , 1633, Oil on Canvas. 46 x 84cm	46
Fig.24.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Four Glass Bowls on a Stripecy Cloth</i> , 1997, Oil on Board, 62 x 62cm	48
Fig.25.	Piet Mondrian , <i>Broadway Boogie Woogie</i> , 1942-43, Oil on canvas, 127 x 127cm	49
Fig.26.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Takeaway Tins</i> , Oil on Canvas, 91 x 122cm	50
Fig.27.	Hans Hoffman , <i>Goliath</i> , 1960, Oil on Canvas, 60 x 84.25cm	51
Fig.28.	Willem Claesz Heda , <i>Still Life with Nautilus Shell</i> , 1649, Oil on panel, 49.5x68.5cm	52
Fig.29.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Eight Pairs of Shoes</i> , 2004, Oil on Canvas, 91 x 122cm	53
Fig.30.	Lisa Milroy , <i>Shoes</i> , 1986, Oil on Canvas, 203.2 x 259.1cm	54
Fig.31.	Wayne Theibauds , <i>Black Shoes</i> , 1963, Oil on canvas, 20 x 28 inches	56
Fig.32.	Wim Wenders , <i>Paris Texas</i> , 1984, Film	57
Fig.33.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Champagne and Two Orange Beakers</i> , 2006, Oil on Canvas, 109.25 x 78.75cm	58
Fig.34.	Mark Tansey , <i>Action Painting II</i> , 1984, Oil on canvas, 213 x 254cm	60
Fig.35.	David Hockney , <i>My Mother</i> , 1982, Photographic Collage, 120.70 x 69.90cm	63
Fig.36.	Cornelius Gijsbrechts , <i>Trompe L'Oeil with Studio Wall and Vanitas Still Life</i> , c.1668, Oil on Canvas, 152 x 118cm	63
Fig.37.	Jonathan Chapman , <i>Still Life with Lamp-Shades</i> , 2009, Digital Print, 32.5x 49.5cm	66
Fig.38.	Patrick Caulfield , <i>Pottery</i> , 1969, Oil on canvas, 21.34 x 15.24cm	66

Introduction

Still Life with Three Pails and Three Cards, 1996, Fig.1, is a painting which, although produced towards the beginning of a sixteen-year body of practice, carries most of its visual characteristics and predicts almost all of its theoretical concerns. Brief analysis of this picture is therefore, used here to introduce the aesthetic, contextual and theoretical agendas to which this research has cohered.



Fig.1, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Three Pails and Three Cards*, 1996, Oil on Canvas, 62x62cm

In common with the approximately one hundred artworks I have exhibited between 1994 and 2010, *Still Life with Three Pails and Three Cards* announces itself as part of the genre of still life through its title, although, as will be the case throughout this essay, its title will subsequently be shortened to *Three Pails and Three Cards*. The comparatively explicit mode of representation, which it shares with all my paintings, expects a viewer to recognize that the relatively typical still life vessel forms are interlocked with three cards bearing and therefore referencing, paintings by Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso and Patrick Heron, all of which carry motifs associated with still life.

In 1960 David Sylvester asked Phillip Guston: “What happens if you try to paint an apple?” He replied: “Well, you’ve got Chardin; you’ve got Cézanne on your mind and you’ve got everybody else on your mind” (Sylvester in Gallagher 2003:78). Like Guston, I too cannot

paint anything without ‘seeing’ a multitude of examples of how that thing has already been painted and remembering a multitude of explanations as to why it might have been painted in that way. This consciousness of paradigms and contexts is fundamental to my practice as it informs how I position my artworks, both aesthetically and theoretically.

Three Pails and Three Cards can therefore partly be interpreted as an illustration of my ongoing efforts to position and contextualize my practice by referencing certain historical and contemporary theory and practices that lie beyond the edge of the canvas. Here I introduce my favouring of the term *referencing* as the most flexible way to describe my attempts to establish such perceivable links. I will gradually refine and expand the vocabulary used to describe my acts of reference to include such terms as allusion, influence, appropriation, and intertextuality.

Importantly, *Three Pails and Three Cards* contains the three strategic uses of reference that, alongside its continuous engagement with still life and consistent depictive language, most characteristically define my practice. Throughout my research I have used direct or indirect reference to align myself with, or contest the stance of, certain art or theory; or attempt to reconcile apparently disparate artistic or theoretical positions.

First, in acts of alignment, the three cards depict artworks that have influenced my painting. The central Picasso has a wit and tangibility of form I aspire to. The left hand Matisse has the luminosity of colour I seek. The right hand image is an early Heron, from the period when his worked appeared to combine the visual languages of both representational and abstract painting - a position I have increasingly wished to emulate. This creation of a picture which makes reference to at least some of the influences which have positioned my practice, is an allusion to Édouard Manet’s *Portrait of Emile Zola*, 1868, in which the writer is surrounded by representations of the artworks, books and manifestos that shaped his practice.

Secondly there is a ‘hidden’ abstract pictorial structure of upward and downward pointing interlocking triangles at the heart of this painting. This attempts to contest Piet Mondrian’s notion that the formal composition or “plastic relationships” of a picture will be compromised by the inclusion of figurative or “naturalistic” elements (Mondrian 1919: 282).

Thirdly, *Three Pails and Three Cards* attempts the type of *reconciliations* that are characteristic of my practice. The painting, for example, sets out to combine the aforementioned abstract structures, which I will later define as being part of a modernist tendency in painting, with a pre-modernist mode of mimetic and illusionistic representation. In common with many of my later paintings, it demonstrates the possibility of working simultaneously from direct observation and photographic source material. It tries also to reinvest the now “aura-less” images of mass-produced and bar-coded art-cards with the “aura” and uniqueness of a hand made painting (Benjamin 1936: 512-520).

Finally, in relation to how my practice might be interpreted, *Three Pails and Three Cards*, introduces my increasing awareness as to the instability of post-structuralist meaning. Although as I suggested to Wendy Osgerby in 2000, it amused me to interpret my pails as a metaphorical representation of myself amongst my idols with “nothing to offer but a bucket full of colour.” She interpreted the *Ikea* pails as “replicas of 1950s seaside buckets” with “no value apart from the power to evoke memories of childhood when the summers were hot and endless,” – an interpretation that I had not expected or aimed to engender (2000:6).

Having briefly introduced the concerns and characteristics of my practice, this essay will now divide into two parts. *Part One* will establish the paradigms and contexts around which this research operates. This will provide an understanding of the artistic, cultural and theoretical “interpretive co-ordinates” to which this practice refers and critically positions itself (Staff 2007:3). It will begin by discussing my relationship with the genre of still life and how genre is itself a referential construct. It will then examine how my work relates to contemporary practice within the field of fine art, the genre of still life and the discipline of painting. Having established the contemporary precedents for the employment of reference, I will, to contextualize its employment in my practice, offer a brief history of reference and consider what benefits might be gained for a practitioner through its use. Subsequently I will discuss my paintings’ mode of depiction and argue that, as with any representational language, this is also a referential construct.

In *Part Two*, I analyse a selection of artworks to demonstrate where referencing is evident in my practice and suggest how it might assist in its critical positioning. I will show how individual artworks attempt to align themselves with, argue with, or create reconciliatory hybrids with, particular artworks and theoretical stances. These artworks, which were

published by means of exhibition between 1994 and 2010 (see Appendix 1), are chosen to be representative of the six closely related groupings of research, largely defined by their choices of referents and manner of reference, that divide my practice. Concurrently, I will also examine how possible meanings for these artworks are in part generated by these employments of reference.

Part One: Contexts and Paradigms

Participation in a Genre

The clarity of the representation in both my paintings and photographic works means that I assume most viewers will recognize the objects I select and arrange. Even if this had not been established by their titling, the prevalence of vessel forms and kitchen utensils (particularly in my earlier work), together with their domestic scale, hopefully positions my artworks as 'belonging' to the genre of still life, see Fig 2.



Fig.2, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Rows of Beakers Mugs and Egg Cups*, 1999, Oil on canvas, 90x60cm

I used the word *hopefully* to acknowledge John Frow's point, albeit made in relation to literature, that: "Genre is neither a property of (and located 'in') texts, nor a projection of (and located 'in') readers; it exists as a part of the relationship between texts and readers"(2006:102). I placed the word belonging in inverted commas as I would also agree with Jacques Derrida's belief (once again in relation to literature) that: "Every text *participates* in one or several genres, there is no genreless text... a text would not *belong* to any genre... such participation never amounts to belonging"(Derrida in Frow 1980:230). This is important, as however much I wish my work to participate in the continuing tradition of still life, I also want it to prompt referential dialogues with artworks and culture beyond this genre.

Frow describes a genre as a:

Set of conventional and highly organised constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning. In using the word 'constraint' I don't mean to say that genre is simply a restriction. Rather, its structuring effects the production of meaning; they shape and guide, in a way that a builder's form gives shape to a pour of concrete.... Generic structure both enables and restricts meaning, and it is a basic condition for meaning to take place.... That is why genre matters: it is central to human meaning-making and to the social struggle over meaning.

(2006:10)

Although I find this a useful definition I would suggest that the 'structuring effects' of genre are more challengeable than those of a 'builder's form' and that artistic practice is more challenging than 'concrete'. Also, paradoxically, it is the very fact of operating within the *constraints* of a genre that emphasizes the differences to its conventions that one is able to offer. Similarly, when one makes a work that clearly references another, it is the differences from it, as well as the similarities, that become apparent.

Frow extends his discussion of genre in relation to meaning-making by stating that: "Genre, works at a level of semiosis – ...of meaning-making – which is deeper and more forceful than that of the explicit 'content' of a text" (2006:19). As such it is clear that a *single* text, such as an artwork, when operating within a genre, has the possibility of having its meaning supplemented by meaning carried by other works in that genre. That reference offers the opportunity to supplement or deepen the meaning of an artwork is a belief that is evidenced throughout this research and has been one of the drivers for my practice.

Still life as a *referential construct* relies on an artist providing a viewer with sufficient perceivable referential prompts to paradigms from the history of that genre, to signal that artwork's participation in its continuum. Therefore, my participation within a genre is a key factor in framing my practice as characteristically referential. Norman Bryson suggests that still life is doubly referential, through both the history of its artworks and the history of the objects depicted. He writes:

When modern viewers accept a continuity between the bodegones of Cotán in Renaissance Spain and the café tables of Juan Gris in Cubist Paris, it is not simply the force of a critical category... which links these very different types of painting. Behind the images there stands the culture of artefacts, with its own, independent history. The bowls, jugs, pitches and

vases with which the modern viewer is familiar are all direct lineal descendents of a series which were already old in Pompeii.

(Bryson 1995:12)

In relation to why I might wish to participate within the genre of still life, the words *select* and *arrange*, which I used at the beginning of this section are important. The amount of control that the genre offers over all aspects of the content and organization of a painting is for me significant. As Margit Rowell points out:

A Still Life... often does not exist until the artist decides to constitute the model...The deliberate choice of these objects over others identifies them, in the simplest sense, as 'objects of desire.' Thus the objects of a still life, although they appear accessible, are actually inaccessible, fictional, created; ideal as opposed to real.

(1997: 10-11)

It is therefore important to remember that rather than setting up an easel in front of a casual grouping of vessels found in an actual kitchen, most still life artists carefully select and arrange objects on a table in their studio. For artists such as Paul Cézanne, Piet Mondrian or Georges Braque, the studio table was, I would argue, a rarified place of research and discovery – in their case the site of radical visual analysis and interpretative breakthrough. For me this table continues to offer a uniquely controllable arena for the careful juxtaposition of very particular objects, and provides the opportunity to develop my representational language, test theoretical and aesthetic doctrines and explore the possibility of prompting reference and generating meaning.

Selection and arrangement, indirectly, still play a crucial role in my photographic works, exhibited since 2009. These have deliberately contested Rowell's notion that contrivance and artifice are a defining characteristic of still life. Instead in these photographic still lifes, I have found objects in actual uncontrived arrangements that *accidentally* have formal organizations that reference the contrived arrangements of my paintings, see Fig.3.



Fig.3, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Orange Juice Carton*, 2009, Digital Print, 49.5x32.5cm

If there are objects in my artworks that fit comfortably within the genre of still life, there are also those that appear to challenge narrow definitions of it. From around 2000 the selections become increasingly less traditional, a description I will clarify shortly, with, for example, toy cars, radios and paper aeroplanes regularly replacing the more traditional vessel forms, see Fig.4. Even when conventional vessels such as mugs are selected, these are often supplemented by carrying mechanically reproduced images of foodstuffs or recognizable artworks, see Fig.5. From around 2004, when my work directly addresses the challenge of photography, paintings almost always contain depictions of actual photographs in frames or peeling from the studio wall, see Fig.33.



Fig.4, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Model Cars and Top Trumps*, 2000, Oil on Canvas, 60x90cm



Fig.5, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Art Mugs*, 2004, Watercolour, 51x73cm

It is expected that viewers will see parallels between the objects in my photographic prints and those in the preceding paintings. As in Fig.3, the vessels and food containers are again present, as are the less traditional selections, such as ink rollers in Fig.6.



Fig.6, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Ink Rollers*, 2009, Digital Print, 32.5x49.5cm

My labelling of these selections as *less traditional* needs clarifying, as, I would argue that although they might challenge pre 20th century definitions of still life, they actually reference the type of objects that 20th and 21st century artists have incorporated into the genre, in Pop Art, and with the invention of the ready-made and assemblage.

Rowell notes, in relation to still life, that, "...although the objects are relatively generic, as subjects they are not timeless; their choice is dictated by their place... in a historical and cultural fabric" (1997:9). In my still lifes almost all the objects are contemporary, most obviously those made of recently developed materials such as day-glow plastic, see Fig.2, and Fig.22. This deliberate employment of late 20th and early 21st century objects is in part an attempt to position these works as being ineluctably contemporary.

Returning to what Frow called "meaning-making" (2006:10) certain of my pictures depict less traditional objects that, I felt, might be capable of generating symbolic or associative meanings in the mind of a viewer. In for example, *Still Life with Radios*, 2001, Fig.7, I hoped they would remind a viewer of the news, dramas and music that they transmit or the central position they hold in a family home.

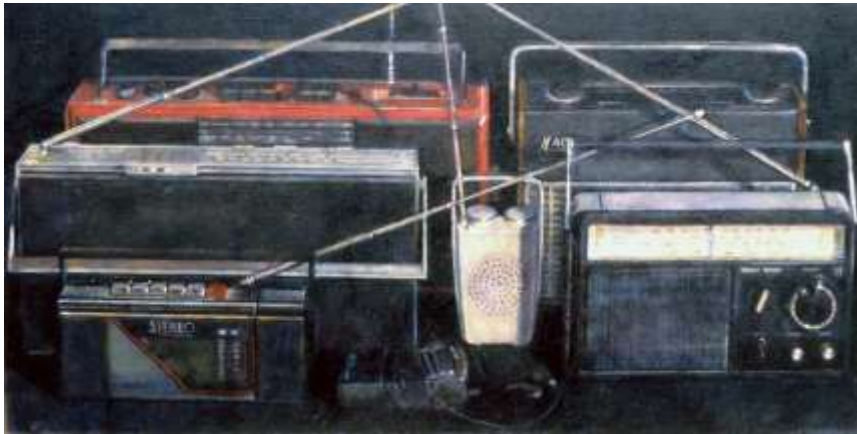


Fig.7, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Radios*, 2001 Oil on Canvas, 41 x 81cm

When I mention the possibility of generating meaning through the employment of certain objects, although I am aware of Clement Greenberg's belief that: "The writer or artist is no longer able to estimate the response of his audience to the symbols and references with which he works"(1939:530), there are still many contemporary artists and writers who express the possibility that objects are able to generate relatively stable meaning. Tony Cragg, for example, notices that recently:

The nomination of banal objects and actions as carriers of important information – the recognition that every object is accompanied by a world of associations and references – has been of great significance. Without this, a soup can remains a soup can, a fluorescent light bulb just a light bulb, and a chair with fat on it remains just that. But with this recognition, we find objects offering up meanings and emotions relating to their literal form,

their metaphysics, their poetry, and their emergence from the natural world or from their origins in nature.

(Cragg in Gallagher 2003:78)

In relation to the paintings of Luc Tuymans, Tony Godfrey observes that:

When we know that they are a lampshade made from human skin at Buchenwald... our response cannot be the same. As Tuymans commented: 'The picture has become urgent, gripping, unpleasant.' Odours can cling to objects like an aftertaste, pleasant or vile: painting can seek to give images the same kind of troubling association.

(2009:345)

Conversely, certain periods of my research explored whether it is possible to depict less 'meaningful' objects, such as plastic cups, in order to allow a viewer to concentrate more fully on the formal characteristics of an artwork, see Fig,8.



Fig.8, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Plastic Cups*, 2002, Watercolour, Oil on Canvas, 56 x 84cm

If some of my selections challenge certain received definitions of still life, the supposition that these artworks belong to the genre, is hopefully reinforced by the way in which the objects are arranged. It is my intention that somebody who is reasonably familiar with the history of still life, will recognize that the way in which I pictorially arrange objects, is reminiscent of certain recurring 'patterns' of arrangement that appear in the genre. The phrase 'my intention' is important here, as it points up the idea that my dialogue with the

genre of still life is absolutely deliberate. Indeed, as Bryson suggests, much of the meaning of a still life artwork comes from how it relates to other examples within the genre, or as he puts it, "...the inflections they are able to introduce into the field of previous work"(1995:11).

In my 1996 exhibition *Things in Rows* for example, the title was intended to draw attention to the lined up rows of objects that formed the basis of almost all the compositions. Although the patterned tablecloths and somewhat elevated viewpoints, see Fig.9, indicate the growing influence of early 20th century still life painting, for me the key reference during this period was Francisco de Zurbarán's 17th century still lifes, such as *Still Life with Four Vessels*, c.1658-64, Fig.10. His, like my still lifes, depicted rows of vessel forms, lined up parallel to the viewer on a shelf or altar like space. As Michael Paraskos noted in the catalogue for this exhibition, "...the full frontal severity with which the objects are presented is so like historic Still Lifes"(1996:6).



Fig.9, Jonathan Chapman, 1995, *Still Life with Four Glasses on Bessie's tablecloth*, Watercolour, 44x30cm



Fig.10, **Francisco de Zurbarán**, 1598-1664, *Still Life with Four Vessels*, c.1658-64,
Oil on canvas, 46x84cm

I would argue that this austere ‘things in rows’ compositional device has become part of the ‘DNA’ of the genre of still life, and trans-historically appears in works by Jean-Baptiste-Siméon-Chardin in the 18th century through to Giorgio Morandi, see Fig.20, and Lisa Milroy, see Fig.30, in the 20th century. Beyond painting it also appears to be referenced by Damien Hirst in what I will shortly argue are three-dimensional ‘still lifes,’ such as *Pharmacy*, 1992, see Fig.11.



Fig.11, **Damien Hirst**, 1965- , *Pharmacy*, 1992, Installation (Detail)

My selection of objects and choice of arrangements, which directly or indirectly reference the history of still life, should therefore, be understood as a deliberate attempt to participate in that genre. As Bryson points out: “Still life painters designed their individual

works to appear *as* still life...” and using the term *series* rather than the term genre adds, “...still life paintings were made to enter the still life series” (1995:10-11).

A Contemporary Context for Still Life, Painting, and Fine Art

Less than ten years before the beginning of this body of research, whilst I first explored the genre as an undergraduate, Robert Cummings wrote that: "It seems to me that still life subject-matter does not have the scope and potential of the other genres." Although he added that it, "...can have something to say which is more than a descriptive list of its individual items," he continued to assert that it does "...not have the ability to tell stories, as does History painting; to comment on human nature and individual personality as does portraiture; or to enlarge our relationship with physical world we inhabit to the same extent as landscape"(1985:251). Cummings provides a typical definition of still life that, I believe, underestimates the genre's scope.

In his key text on still life, *Looking at the Overlooked*, Bryson provides a context for its lowly status and encourages greater critical discussion around the genre, stating that:

Although the genre of still life is as obvious a piece of our basic cultural furniture as history painting or landscape... It has always been the least theorized of the genres... discussion of still life remains oppressed and inhibited; it was virtually strangled at birth in the academies that relegated still life to the lowest level of art, and it is still marginalized in today's professional art history. There is room, then, for more work on still life; to speak plainly, it is under-interpreted.

(1995: 8-10)

Although in 2012 there remains a paucity of literature that directly and critically discusses the genre, New York's Museum of Modern Art's 1997 survey exhibition *Objects of Desire: The Modern Still Life* and Tate Modern's 2000 decision to place a quarter of its exhibited stock under the thematic umbrella of *Still Life/Object/Real Life* have perhaps raised its cultural standing. As these exhibitions made manifest, and as Tim Marlow puts it, still life, "...is the subject that has perhaps undergone the most radical transformation in the twentieth century," and now has an "expanded definition" that includes "objects and real life," including sculptural practices such as readymades, assemblage, casting, and installation (Marlow 2000). As Flaminio Gualdoni suggests, "...the accumulations and assemblages of actual objects that characterize the work of 20th century artists such as Arman, Joseph Beuys, Cornelia Parker and Damien Hirst can be read as a form of 'estranged still life'"(2009:27). These artists, and others such as Fischll & Weiss, Tony Cragg and Cildo

Meireles, see Fig.12, all three-dimensionally explore the arrangement and connotations of recognizably still life objects and consequently provide an abundant source of critical debate and aesthetic influence. Meireles' repetitious deployment of found objects that echoes the many repetitious arrangements by such artists Arman, Hirst and Rachel Whiteread, are undoubtedly an influence on my practice.



Fig.12, Cildo Meireles, 1948-, *Tower of Babel*, 2001, Installation

Although the number of contemporary painters who are critically engaged in still lifes has decreased as interest in the discipline has lessened, such artists as Michael Craig-Martin, Patrick Caulfield and Lisa Milroy continue to demonstrate the genre function as a forum for 'discussing' the changing nature of representation and signification. Richard Noble suggests that Craig-Martin's work asks the following questions:

How is it possible for a certain configuration of line and colour on a two dimensional surface to represent the same thing to two different people? And perhaps even more difficult, why do people think it natural to refer to an image of something (a chair or a bucket), as if it were the thing and not a representation of the thing?

(2004:7)

During the period of this research, the rich tradition of illusionistic representation, formal

arrangement and symbolic communication inherent in historic still life painting was evident in exhibitions such as *Spanish Still Life from Velázquez to Goya* at the National Gallery and *Chardin* at the Royal Academy. The genre's pivotal role in radical 20th century developments in art was made apparent in *Objects of Desire: The Modern Still Life* at the Hayward Gallery and exhibitions of work by Cézanne, Braque, Morandi and Mondrian. These exhibitions, which often influentially reassess historic art, become part of contemporary discourse and consequently an important part of the contemporary context for my practice. As Gerhard Richter stated in 1993: "A painting by Caspar David Friedrich is not a thing of the past. What is past is only the set of circumstances that allowed it to be painted: specific ideologies, for example. Beyond that, if it is any 'good', it concerns us – transcending ideology"(1993:81).

Having provided a contemporary context for the genre of still life, I shall now consider the relationship my work has with contemporary painting and fine art practice. In 2008, Dr Jason Gaiger wrote that the two principles challenges to painting remain, "...the invention of photography and other technologies of visual imaging" and "...from the breakdown of modernism as a sustaining paradigm for the making and appreciation of art (2008:138). He continued by stating that:

If the idea of non-objective painting had run its course, or, at least, no longer seemed relevant to contemporary concerns, how could artists find a way back to figuration without adopting the outmoded techniques of academic painting? After the demise of modernism, what possibilities remained open to painters who wished to make representational images, and how were they to compete with the success of photography.

(2008:138-139)

I would suggest that I am one of those artists who is trying to find a "way back to figuration" across the schism left by the dominance of what Gaiger labels "modernist, non-objective painting." However, part of my method for evidencing the desire to reach back to historic figuration is to "adopt," through reference, certain aspects of those supposedly "outmoded techniques of academic painting". Indeed, as I will examine in *Part Two*, part of my attempts to manufacture a reconciliation between historic figuration and non-objective painting is to combine historic depictive techniques with formal organizations and attitudes to pictorial space that reference certain 20th century abstract painting. I see something similar in George Shaw's painting, *The Resurface*, see Fig.13, in which the garages in a tree lined urban

lane appear simultaneously to reference the frontal formality of a Mondrian and the sublime landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich. Ben Luke describes Shaw's paintings as "beautifully rendered, with rigorous, often near-abstract compositions" (2011:73).



Fig.13, **George Shaw**, 1966-, *The Resurface*, 2010, Enamel on Board, 91 x 125cm

I would also argue that my practice has been profoundly shaped by what Gaiger describes as the challenge of "photography and other technologies of visual imaging." Although my paintings have increasingly incorporated photographs and mechanically reproduced images, they are characterized by a rejection of such imagery as their primary source material and by an absolute reliance on direct observation. Whereas, during this research, the historical importance of working from direct observation was evidenced in exhibitions by for example, Zurbarán, Cézanne, Alberto Giacometti, and Stanley Spencer, examples of respected contemporary artists using such an approach were perhaps limited to Lucien Freud, Paula Rego and Euan Uglow. The majority of contemporary representational painters appear completely reliant on photography, rather than direct observation, as their primary way to view the world and as a subject matter in its own right. The dominance of such painting moved Jerry Saltz in 2005 to propose the "Richter Resolution" which suggested that painting should ban the use of mechanical devices such as overhead projectors to replicate "photographs, film stills" and "snapshots" (2011:183). He asserted that the, "...traditional Warhol-Richter-Walter Benjamin defence for the use of photography in painting" wasn't "just dated" but "shtick;" going on to say that:

These days, much photo-based painting looks the same... Regardless of who makes these monotonous knock-offs, the results are the same: variations on Richter, Warhol, Tuymans,

Polke, Celmins, Fischl, Rauschenberg, Close, Peyton, Doig, Hume, Robert Longo, Lisa Ruyter or any of the initial photorealists.

(2011: 183-84)

I cite Saltz not to support a qualitative judgment against the listed artists but rather to evidence the existence of a new 'academy' – a mass of representational painters deriving their imagery from photographic sources, that I have felt the need to critically challenge. My contribution to this discourse, as demonstrated by *Still Life with Photo Frames*, Fig.14, has concluded, in an act of reconciliation where I have found it possible, in still life, to work simultaneously from direct observation and photographic sources. Here the relatively sculptural forms of the frames allow the photographs to appear flat and three-dimensional at the same time.



Fig.14, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Photo-Frames*, 2007, Oil on Canvas, 91.5x120cm

Gaiger observes that, "...even the most humble snapshot acquires a different status once it is transposed into the medium of paint and presented in a gallery context (2008:142) and offers Ralph Rugoff's argument that:

Painting instills 'a crucial delay' in our response to photographic imagery: it is not only that it takes time to make a painting, as opposed to the instantaneity of the photograph, painting also takes longer for the viewer to process. The 'more nuanced and variegated surface' of a

painting allows for a complex layering of information that ‘ invites the eye to linger, to scrutinize the hundreds of contacts between brush and canvas.’

(Rugoff in Gaiger 2008:142)

That my employment of reference is part of painting’s contemporary discourse can be evidenced by a number of recent contemporary and historical exhibitions. Perhaps most importantly the National Gallery’s 2000 exhibition *Encounters : New Art from Old*, which saw twenty-four artists of international standing make work which responded directly to paintings in the collection. Robert Rosenblum in the catalogue noted that:

[One] of the abiding myths about modern art... would tell us that artists of the last two centuries kept unburdening themselves of the past... this one is both true, and false and something in between. If the history of modern art is taken to begin... in the mid-eighteenth century... then this precarious balance between respecting and destroying tradition is at the very roots of our heritage.

(2000: 8)

Encounters built on the gallery’s longstanding programme of associate artists who were also invited to make work directly referencing the collection. Modern arts relationship with the past was explicitly explored during the period of this research, in the National Gallery’s *Picasso : Challenging the Past* and *Manet: The Execution of Maximilian* and the Scottish National Gallery’s show *Cézanne/Poussin: The Classical Vision of Landscape*.

That reference is very much part of contemporary fine art practice was apparent in the 2006 *Tate Triennial*. Beatrice Ruf, its curator, organized this ‘state of art’ survey exhibition “around the themes of appropriation and repetition” and stated in her exhibition forward:

In current art production there is a distinct tendency towards the reusing or recasting of cultural materials, whether from art history, film, music, architecture and design, or from the theoretical and socio-political domains. Such an approach encompasses painting, sculpture, photography, drawing and performance.

(2006:11)

A Context for Referencing

To understand my acts of reference it is important here to offer a brief historical overview for referencing, borrowing from, and copying work by other artists. I do this to establish that my acts not only reference artworks but also the history of referencing itself.

Michael Ayrton reminds us that during the Renaissance, “...imagery was still largely shared... New ideas were seized upon... as the communal property of the art and without that uneasy sense of copyright infringed...” (1960:16). As someone who works within a genre and wishes to be part of the trans-historic continuation of realist depiction, I support through my practice, the idea of a “communal property of the art,” and will presently argue that both the characteristics that define a genre, and the ‘database’ that is the history of depictive strategies, are ‘communal property’.

Ayrton also suggests that what he calls the “European Tradition” in painting (post renaissance, pre-modernist) flourished through a cross-fertilization of imagery brought about by the copying and adapting undertaken by such artists as Titian and Peter Paul Rubens (1960:13). Although early modernist artists such as Paul Cézanne with Nicolas Poussin, Édouard Manet with Titian and Pablo Picasso with Diego Velázquez all referenced masterworks from this tradition, I would argue that they did so not simply to be enriched by them but ironically to reinforce their artistic independence from them. In the second part of this essay, I shall describe a similarly contestational referential relationship when I discuss my painting *Still Life with Eight Pairs of Shoes*, Fig.29 and its relationship to Milroy’s painting *Shoes*, Fig.30.

Certain accounts of high modernism, typified by Linda Hutcheon, describe it as rejecting traditional models of reference and as a “hermetic ahistoric formalism and aestheticism” (1988:88). Writing at its height in 1960 Ayrton stated that:

We today harbour a prejudice which finds the creation of an apparently original image admirable, the making of a copy faintly discreditable, or at least peripheral to the proper function of the artist, which we see as the expression of an individual personality working in as individual a manner as possible. (1960:8)

Frederic Jameson argued that the “collapse” of high modernism led to a new form of cultural referencing that was to become a defining characteristic of postmodernism. He stated that, “...the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but to the past: the imitation of dead styles” (1992:17). However, this postmodern type of referencing, was not the gradual reverential and referential enriching of paintings’ bloodline that Ayrton describes as part of the “European Tradition” or the still contextually related family arguments of early modernism. It was instead, the often irreverent referencing of cultural iconography, which, separated by modernism, might have little or no relation to the subject matter, style or media of the borrower. Jameson points out that this is what postmodern architectural historians call historicism, a form of reference and borrowing that he describes as, “The play of random cannibalization of all styles of the past, the play of random stylistic allusion... this omnipresence of pastiche is not incompatible with a certain humor” (1992:18). Umberto Eco added that postmodernism recognized, that since the past cannot be destroyed, it “must be revisited: but with irony, not innocently” (Eco cited Hutcheon 1988:90).

Although there are facets of my referencing that invite the description postmodern, (for example the increasingly eclectic and simultaneous allusions that I will describe later in *Still life with Champagne and Orange Beakers* Fig.33., mine are reverent acts of reference. Whilst they might challenge the referent, they do not belittle or pastiche them. As Ayrton reminds us, perhaps the most profound reason to reference is, “...the desire to pay homage. In turning to their predecessors and their contemporaries, it has been and is natural to the artist, both in developing his style and from pure admiration, to copy as an act of love” (1960:21).

Having provided a context for my acts of reference, I will now discuss what benefits might be gained through their deployment and in being open to influence. I will also consider what in Edward Bloom’s words might be, *The Anxieties of Influence* (1975).

I am aware that referencing highly regarded artists might be perceived as a way of bolstering an art practice, particularly one that operates in what has been described as a “moribund” genre (Godfrey 2009:334) and through the medium of painting which, Alison Rowley and Griselda Pollock claim has “become subject to chronic ongoing doubt” as to its historical position as the “paradigmatic artistic practice”(Harris 2003:18). Although my practice might benefit through association with such referents as Zurbarán and Morandi, it is in equal

danger of appearing weakened through comparison. I am, however, willing to risk this in order metaphorically to position my work in the 'same gallery' as those artists.

My work might gain gravitas by placing itself at the end of illustrious pictorial bloodlines. John Walker in his 1977-78 *Numinous Series*, painted referential coalescences within which he visually quoted and in so doing positioned his practice at the end of a historic line of balcony paintings by Francisco Goya, Manet and Matisse. In light of my discussing bloodlines, it is interesting here to consider Richard Dawkins suggestion, in *The Selfish Gene*, that certain cultural building blocks, such as "tunes", "ideas", "ways of making pots" and, I would suggest, pictorial structures, are passed on from one generation to the next in a manner similar to the way in which strong genetic traits are passed on within a species. Rather than genes, Dawkins calls these building blocks memes (2006:192-194). The artist Terry Atkinson, discussing a recapitulatory framing for painting, states that:

By recapitulatory, I mean that the individual painter practising painting recapitulates the achievement of a whole historical series of paintings... One has often seen the assertion that the act of painting throughout its history has followed some biological necessity of the species which predetermines the development of the main traits of painting throughout its history.

(2000:150)

For me, the balcony motif or still life 'things in rows' motif, are such memes or recapitulations. To deploy the latter is, as I suggested earlier, deliberately to position my work at the end of the illustrious bloodline that leads from Zurbarán to Hirst.

Discussing the positioning of oneself at the end of bloodlines and in comparison with great masters means that here I must consider my practice in relation to the literary critic Edward Bloom's writing, *The Anxiety of Influence*. This suggested that Milton was such a powerful influence for the Romantic Poets that he either overwhelmed their originality or caused them to fight so hard not to be influenced, that this instead compromised their work. (1975:63-80) I would argue that, for still life, artists such as Zurbarán, Chardin and Morandi carry the same kind of canonical weight as Milton. However, rather than feeling anxious about their influence, it is, for me, the act of engaging with it that allows me truly to feel I am operating within the continuum of still life. Bryson suggests that when Francis Bacon interacted with tradition, "...there is no existence of the anxiety of influence [or] signs of

Bacon feeling his position within a long tradition a burden” (Bryson in Jaatinen 2006:46). Instead of being anxious about my practice being perceived as having been influenced, I am more likely to become anxious if people do not recognize my references and perceive it to be uninfluenced, culturally disconnected, perhaps unsupported. Charles Newman described American literature as a “...literature *without* primary influences... a literature which lacks known parenthood... suffering from the ‘anxiety of *non*-influence’” (Newman in Hutcheon 1988:125).

As Mary Orr explains, Martin Baxandall believes that the reason why the notion of one artist being influenced by another has been perceived negatively is because, “...influence has been seen only monodirectionally as Xs’ influence on Y, where Y comes temporally always after X.” Instead Baxandall suggests the notion of *positive influence*, in which we think of “Y rather than X as the agent” (Baxandall in Orr 2003:83). For this model of influence he suggests a vocabulary that is “much richer and much more attractively diversified” allowing artist Y to, (amongst his many other examples), “refer to... engage with... differentiate oneself from... react to... quote... align oneself with... make a variation on.... revive... emulate... subvert... ” (Baxandall 1985:59). This positive way of thinking about influence is how I would like to frame my referential practices. Orr summarizes his model by stating that: “As opposed to the hierarchical, astral, Bloomian paradigm, the pertinent model for influence here is that it is ‘that which flows into’, a tributary that forms a mightier river by its confluences...” (2003 :84).

Although it is partly the way in which I deliberately synthesize influences that is original about my work, and indeed, adds to the body of knowledge surrounding still life, my frequent use of reference and appropriation means that I feel it important to briefly address the issue of originality. While I have made work without conscious influence or deliberate reference, I do not believe it is possible to say that I have ever made work *without* influence or reference. As Graham Allen suggests: “In a Postmodern epoch... it is not possible any longer to speak of originality or uniqueness of the artistic object... since every artistic object is so clearly assembled from bits and pieces of already existent art” (2000:5). Rather than finding my less influenced and referential works to be more original, somehow ‘better’, I find them to be less complex, less connected, and less full of possible meanings. Indeed, T.S. Eliot questioned why there is the “tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, that [it is] upon

those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else,” adding that, “No poet, no artist, of any art, has his complete meaning alone” (Eliot in Saunders 2006:8).

Context for a Representational Language.

Almost all the paintings in this body of research were made from direct observation of arrangements in a studio. Although these might include actual photographic prints, on the rare occasions I have explored working entirely from a photograph, it has essentially been treated like a thin flat still life object with as much care taken depicting its pixilation and lack of depth as might be depicting the pattern on a curved piece of china, see Fig.15.



Fig. 15, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Camera Phone Still Life 2*, Oil on Canvas, 46x61cm

Although throughout the history of still life, artists have assembled compositions from pre-existing studies, and more recently photographs, it has characteristically provided painters with the opportunity to work from direct observation within a more controlled environment than other genres might allow. Whereas painters working from life in the countryside have to deal with the compromises and uncertainties of topography and light, still life artists can obtain enormous control over the choice, arrangement and lighting of their objects and therefore over the formal characteristics of their paintings. This opportunity for unhurried observation within the stable studio environment has historically allowed the genre to act as an ideal forum for artists wishing to explore representational languages. As Norbet Schneider points out it was the very immobility of its subjects that originally defined the genre (1999:7). This intrinsic stillness particularly assists artists like myself, who are

interested in realism and realistic depiction, as the genre is not faced by painting's inherent difficulty in capturing movement.

I use the words realism and realistic in the sense Kirsten Stemmle does in her 2000 book *Realism*. Here she defines realism as, "The term often used synonymously with Naturalism to refer to an attempt at true-to-life reproduction of external reality" (2000:7). Although the term has become problematized through, for example, its association with 19th century, "painter[s] of modern life" (2000:7), I accept Stemmle's belief that a "realist tendency" has existed in Art since Classical Antiquity, "...in contradistinction for example to idealistically orientated programmes [in the form of] attempts at the faithful depiction of visible reality in painting, sculpture and the graphic arts" (2000:7).

While Richard Wollheim favours the term naturalism, he suggests that terms such as "naturalism, realism, lifelikeness, truth to nature"(1987:72) can be used "interchangeably to refer to the same exclusive property" (1991:118). Marshalling De Hooch and Grunewald, Monet and Latour and Bronzino and Picasso as examples of a trans-historical continuity, Wollheim states that, "...different though they otherwise are [they are all] capable of the naturalistic effect" (1987: 75).

Before I began this distinct body of research, although my representational language shared certain of its characteristics, its emphasis was very different. While I produced representational still lifes, painted from life, any 'naturalistic effect' they engendered was deliberately challenged by surfaces full of brush-marks, paint-runs, and knifed-on impasto. The objects in front of me were used as a pretext for these celebrations of paint with little concern paid to their possible meanings or how an arrangement might relate to the history of still life.

The move towards a more realistic representational language, which coincided with the beginning of this more profound engagement with still life, began in 1993 when I was invited by the Richard Demarco Gallery to participate in a group exhibition undertaken as an act of solidarity to those trapped in the siege of Sarajevo. Each artist was asked to produce a small, unframed work that could be transported to Sarajevo and displayed in the Bosnian National Gallery. I painted a small Turkish coffee pan that I had brought back as a souvenir when I had stayed there in 1990. This was not chosen simply as a symbol of threatened Bosnian

culture, but also as an attempt at *re-presentation* – an attempt to demonstrate that this very object still existed, was still treasured, could be metaphysically returned back to them, re-placed or re-created in the space in front of them. Together with a new concern for the symbolic possibilities of objects, *Souvenir*, Fig.16, ushered in a change of emphasis in my depictive language, in which the desire to create a sense of material presence, of *actuality*, for my objects took precedent over foregrounding a picture's process of construction.



Fig. 16, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Souvenir*, 1993, Watercolour, 9.5 x 14cm

From around 1996, it is possible to detect a further gradual change, from what was still a relatively painterly language to one that was sharper in resolution and arguably more life-like. This change can clearly be seen between my paintings *Four Mugs and Orange Cutlery*, 1997, Fig.19, and *Five Blue and White Mugs*, 2002, Fig.21, which are discussed in the second part of this essay. Although this shift towards an ever more explicit form of realism continued to be driven by my prioritizing the representation of the material nature of an object over the representation of the material nature of the paint itself. Rather than this being seen as a post-modern rejection of modernist attitudes to the painterly surface, it was more an act of alignment engendered by a growing appreciation of the less overt painterlyness of pre-modernist representational painters such as Velázquez, Chardin and Courbet.

From around 2000, the development of an increasingly transparent language was also motivated by my wish to stop a more painterly approach obstructing a viewer's ability to recognize the specific nature the objects being represented and therefore the meanings

that might be associated with them. I use the term transparent here with reference to Leon Battista Alberti's 1435 notion that a canvas should be like "an open window through which the subject is to be seen" (Alberti in Gaiger 2008:24). Although as Gaiger points out: "The window analogy indicates, [that] the painted surface is 'transparent' [and therefore] not something of interest in its own right" (2008:25), whereas my earlier paintings allowed brand names to be impressionistically fudged for the sake of an interesting surface, in order to generate meaning it seemed increasingly necessary that things like branding should be clearly readable.

In relation to my desire for a sense of actuality in my depicted objects, Paraskos writes in his 2010 book on the realist painter Clive Head that in, for example, his 1998 painting *Cologne*, Head, "...creates a new existence, an alternative world [that is] independent of Cologne in actuality, and not a symbol of Cologne, as in a photograph. It is 'Cologne' in its own right" (2010:12). Although I would agree with Nelson Goodman, that even in relation to the most realist of paintings, "I seldom suppose that I can reach into the distance, slice the tomato, or beat the drum" (Goodman in Gaiger 2008:46), if Heads' cities might be considered convincing enough to 'exist' as alternative worlds, I intend my depicted objects to be convincing enough to 'exist' like unreachable objects in the glass cabinets of a museum.

As well as once again alluding to Alberti, the idea of objects behind glass points up the referential, even competitive relationship my depictive language wishes to have with the relatively contemporary traditions of object trouvé, assemblage and installation, where actual objects *are* often arranged in glass cabinets. Other than the albeit fundamental difference that his objects actually exist, it is my intention that a viewer of, for example, *Radios*, Fig.8, might share a similar sense of being faced by a group of unreachable objects as does someone viewing Arman's actual typewriters set behind glass, see Fig.17.



Fig.17, **Arman**, 1928-2005,
Infinity of Typewriters and Infinity of Monkeys and Infinity of Time = Hamlet, 1962,
 Typewriters on Wooden Frame, 183 x 175 x 30cm

One of the reasons I favour working from direct observation rather than from photographs, is that photography appears to put another layer between the viewer and the subject matter of a painting – a layer of signification that perhaps blocks the possibility of creating a convincing if unreachable reality. As Jameson suggests:

So-called photorealism ...looked liked a return to representation... after the long hegemony.... of abstraction, until it became clear that their objects were not to be found in the “real world” either, but were themselves photographs of that real world, this last now transformed into images, of which the “realism” of the photorealist painting is now the simulacrum.

(1992:30)

My inability to find the kind of unmediated realism I desire, amongst photographically reliant contemporary painters or in the often stylized and fragmented depictions of 20th century depiction, was a further reason why it was often pre-modernist, observational painting that I chose to study and with which to align my practice. The type of pre-modernist realism I aspire to is somewhere between the unwavering analytical stare of Juan Sánchez Cotán and the more painterly but equally analytical gaze of Velázquez. Bryson describes Cotán’s vision as capable of re-educating our complacent eyes about what in our world was “worthy of attention,” as an “antidote” to our “entropies of vision.” He writes that Cotán depicts with a “hyperreality” a “surplus of appearance”, an “excess of focus and brilliance”(1995:64). Bacon stated that the, “...very extraordinary thing about [Velázquez

was] that he has been able to keep it so near to what we call illustration and at the same time to deeply unlock the greatest and deepest things that man can feel” (Sylvester 1980:28).

As much as I write about striving for a ‘transparent’ representational language I also wish for a language that might still have the power to move, or at least reflect, the way I feel about a group of objects. Wollheim suggests that: “Certain paintings have a representational content in excess of what they represent” (1987: 101). When I was painting *Coffee Pan*, Fig.16, for example, I hoped that those I knew in Sarajevo might recognize the care with which the object had been rendered, that the painting might somehow communicate my hopes for their survival.

Importantly it is *not* a stylistic similarity to pre-modernist painters such as Cotán and Velázquez that I work towards. It is instead, the intensity of their seeing that I chase, together with their ability to fix that seeing on to a canvas, seemingly unburdened by personal stylistic embellishment. Although it might be incorrect to describe their depictive languages as transparent or without embellishments, certain artists such as Cotán, possess a language that, at very least, appears to prioritize the representation of subject above the presentation of the artist. Bryson suggests that for Cotán and Zurbarán, painting was an “exercise of humility” that did not, “...invent things for its own sake, or indulge in fantasy or caprice... The constant return to familiar things [was] a mark of sobriety and self-restraint, a refusal to enter into flights of imagination.”(1995:80) Although I have increasingly attempted a ‘transparent’, self-effacing mode of depiction, this should not be mistaken for a complete prioritization of subject matter over paint matter but rather a clear prioritization of subject matter over an emphasis on signature style.

One could argue that the very transparency of Cotán’s or Velázquez’ mimetic language is itself a style and one that is perhaps trans-historical. Germano Celant, for example, states, that a, “...direct take on the world....[a] cold contemplation of reality [and]...of things... based on an observation of the real,” is a trans-national and historical strand in art which begins with Caravaggio in the 16th century” (1999:16). Vernon Hyde Minor points out that Plato believed that an artist does not imitate nature but instead, “always imitates an imitation” (Plato in Hyde Minor 1998:1). Although I could argue that my insistence on

working from observation might lessen the need for me to be influenced by previous paradigms of depiction, I agree with Ayrton that:

No work of art is utterly self-engendered and very few have really been engendered solely as a result of the artist's direct experience of nature. Even to make a life drawing from the nude or a study of a briar patch requires certain terms of reference, and since the adult eye is never entirely innocent, it refers to precedents in the memory.

(1960:8)

Ernst Gombrich adds that:

We could not study the history of art if every artist had been able to start from scratch and to arrive at an independent method of representing the world around him. Art has a history precisely because the methods of constructing an acceptable image have to be developed and have to be learned.

(Gombrich in Elkins 1998:53)

In a passage that appears indebted to Gombrich, Bryson puts forward a developmental model for representational painting that reinforces my understanding that my depictive language is inescapably a referential construct. In the same way as I have attempted formally to engineer my participation in the genre of still life, I welcome the idea that I might also be seen to operate within and perhaps extend the long tradition of explicit realism. Bryson states that in the case of painting:

There exists the vast corpus of technical problems and their solutions... a whole tradition of previous courses taken and of options not fully explored, of systems of perspective, modeling, shading, composition, colour... As the painter takes up his position before the canvas and begins his work, there is an encounter between this complex of practical knowledge and the new situation; under the pressure of the novel demands of the encounter, the complex itself is modified, and its tradition extended.

(1983:16)

Part Two: The Examples

As I suggested in the introduction, my use of reference enables me to position my practice in alignment or contestation with certain artistic or theoretical stances or to attempt to reconcile them. However, the increasingly complex nature of the works means that it is not possible to label each of the following examples as simply being acts of alignment, or contestation, or reconciliation. Although early works might critically position themselves through relatively straightforward acts of alignment, later pictures simultaneously, align themselves with certain artworks, contest the doctrines of others, whilst building reconciliatory bridges between further artistic or theoretical stances.

In order to provide a structure around which to discuss my research, it is, however, possible to divide my practice into six groupings, plus occasional transitional works that carry characteristics from more than one group. Although these groups developed chronologically, absolute beginning or end dates are blurred by a degree of concurrence and by my retrying pictorial ideas – reflecting the developmental, yet organically emergent nature of the creative research process.

These six groupings are primarily determined by the way in which a set of artworks, first engage with the history of art and its associated theory, secondly suppress or generate meaning, and thirdly represent their subjects. In relation to the history of art, in what now appears a systematic chronological manner, the groupings engaged with 17th century Spanish still life painting, then 19th and early 20th century modernist still life, subsequently 20th century abstraction and finally, with more contemporary manifestations of art, art theory and culture. Having initially explored the possibility of generating symbolic and associative meaning, the groupings move from suppressing that meaning to re-introducing it and then encouraging an increasingly open and multifaceted polyvalence. Although, in their attitude to representation, the first five groupings share being painted from life, these groupings are defined first by the explicitness of their depictions and secondly by their exclusion or inclusion of photographic material and interrogation of the relationship between painting and photography. The sixth grouping are photographs.

Group One (Circa 1994-1997)

These paintings reference certain 17th century Spanish still life artists such as Cotán and Zurbarán. *Still Life with Wendy's Glass*, 1995, Fig.18 is an example characteristic of the paintings in this grouping; see also *Four Glasses on Bessie's Tablecloth*, Fig.9.



Fig.18, Jonathan Chapman *Still Life with Wendy's Glass*, 1995, Watercolour, 30 x 44cm

Wendy's Glass featured in my 1996 exhibition *Things in Rows*, the title of which, as I discussed earlier, particularly referenced Zurbarán's depictions of rows of objects placed parallel to the picture plane; see for example *Still Life with Four Vessels*, c.1658-64, Fig.10. *Wendy's Glass* attempts to establish this key referential alignment by employing a similar pictorial arrangement and dark setting. Less obviously, it also references the "many critics" mentioned by William B. Jordan and Peter Cherry who interpret Zurbarán's arrangements as, "...symbolic objects arranged like votive offerings on an altar," particularly in relation to *Still life with Lemon, Oranges and a Rose*, 1633, see Fig.23 (1995:20). The vessels in my painting were created by a girlfriend and had personal significance that I wished to reflect by making them appear sacred. To that end referencing Zurbarán's painting should be seen as an attempt to supplement my picture with the sanctity of another artwork.

The vast majority of my artworks, throughout these groups, use a self-explanatory system of titling that simply lists certain of the objects present in the picture. This itself references the system of titling commonly used throughout the history of still life. This relatively neutral system was not employed to exclude the possibility of associative meaning but

rather to stop a title establishing an 'inescapable' meaning for a painting. The reference to a *Wendy* in this painting is therefore, far more explicit than is characteristic.

Particularly in relation to later groups of practice, *Wendy's Glass* superficially appears to reference a limited range of artworks. The nature of the objects, their arrangement and lighting, the manner of their depiction all reference Zurbarán. Out of respect, for the intensity of his looking, the tangibility of his depiction and the radical rigour of his arrangement, I wished to align myself with him. However, as I argued in *Part One*, as the *Things in Rows* motif is part of 'genetic code' of still life, to reference Zurbarán or Cotán is to reference many still life artists. As Ann Gallagher suggests, the row-like arrangements of Zurbarán and Cotán are an "...important juncture in the evolution of the genre...the unprecedented simplicity of composition and precision of focus on the formal properties of lowly subjects was to influence and presage future developments" (2003:8). In relation to the contemporaneousness of my practice, Godfrey observed that, "...by the start of the 1990s there was a new interest in such painters as... Cotán, whose still lifes, with their austere geometry and sobriety, seemed the product of simultaneously both looking and thinking - of being in the world and thinking of being in the world"(2009:334).

Group Two (Circa 1997-2002)

Whilst retaining their alignment with Spanish still life, these paintings, increasingly reference and incorporate the characteristics of certain 19th and 20th still life painters, who I will argue, had modernist tendencies and prioritized the formal qualities of their pictures over their ability to generate symbolic meaning. *Still Life with Four Mugs and Orange Cutlery*, 1997, Fig.19 and *Still Life with Five Blue and White Mugs*, 2002, Fig.21 are both paintings characteristic of artworks in this group. I will also discuss *Still Life with Day-Glo Beakers*, 1997, Fig.21, as an example of transitional artwork that possesses characteristics from more than one group, in this case group one and group two; see also *Rows of Beakers, Mugs and Egg Cups*, Fig.2.



Fig. 19, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Four Mugs and Orange Cutlery*, 1997, Oil on Board, 62x62cm

My continued deployment of objects in rows means that *Four Mugs and Orange Cutlery* remains inextricably linked with Spanish still life. As the rows of objects in this and other works from this period now extend up and diagonally across the pictures, the key Spanish referent is now Cotán. However, the most important reference or alignment for this group of practice is the still life painter Morandi, see Fig.20, whom Karen Wilkens appropriately described as “that Italian painter of bottles lined up in a row” (1997:7).

Paintings from this and later groups, make reference to a certain interpretation of modernist painting that Charles Harrison succinctly defines in his 2003 essay on Modernism. In it he proposes three framings for Modernisms. First he defines a modernism in relation to the 19th century French critic Charles Baudelaire's call for artists to be "Painters of modern life". Using Manet's *Olympia*, 1863, as his example, Harrison suggests that the painting, "...might count as a work endowed with modernism by virtue of the figurative terms in which it reworks the classical precedent it invokes" (2003:190-191). Secondly, Harrison frames a modernism as an "artistic tendency" most influentially represented by the American art critic Clement Greenberg. He suggests that for Greenberg, Manet's *Olympia*, should be seen as one of the first modernist paintings, "...not primarily by virtue of [its] picturing of circumstances redolent of modern life, but by virtue of the frankness with which [it] declared the [flatness of] surface on which [it is] painted..." (Greenberg cited by Harrison 2003:192). The third framing is a capitalized sense of the word modernism, a Modernism conceived as a critical tradition, not primarily attached to art (2003:194).

Although Harrison's first framing, with its idea of reworking classical precedents has a relevance to my practice that I will return to, it is the second framing of modernism as an "artistic tendency" that I mean when I employ the term. Summed up by Harrison as an "orientation to flatness" (2003:200), it is the common artistic tendency, that he describes Greenberg seeing in works by Manet, Cézanne, Picasso, Matisse, Pollock, Louis, Noland and Olitski (2003:194). Along with a gradual compression of pictorial space, this modernist tendency is also, for me, the prioritization of evidencing process, media and formal compositional relationships above the desire to represent the naturalistic appearance of things, or generate symbolic or associative meaning. It is this understanding of modernism that I have sought to reference, to assimilate and at times contest.

The references to certain modernist still life paintings in *Four Mugs and Orange Cutlery* primarily are that although there is an increase in the number of rows of objects, any possibility of a significant increase in the pictorial depth of the picture is counteracted by a characteristically modernist increase in the height of the spectator's viewpoint. The altar-like shelves in my earlier paintings have become the tilted up tables of Cézanne's still life with that supporting table now simultaneously the rear wall of the picture.

The more specific alignments with Morandi that these two paintings typify are in relation to the choice of objects, their arrangement and to an extent their seriality. Although I

appreciated the formal characteristics of the selected mugs, they did not have the personal significance that was characteristic of the objects chosen for my earlier still lifes. They begin the employment of increasingly generic objects during the middle phase of this research. By generic objects I mean ubiquitous mass-produced vessel forms, objects that might be owned by everyone, that were not gifts or souvenirs, and were without personal significance. This was a phase in which vessels were employed primarily as carriers of colour rather than as carriers of meaning, and where the formal arrangement of a painting became more important than the possibility of meaning. It is a period where objects brimming with personal meaning for me, were replaced with more neutral vessels that attempted to be both literally and metaphorically empty. Indeed Rowell notes that for Morandi the neutrality of his objects was important: “Boxes and bottles... were, routinely stripped of labels... as though the painter were striving to distance himself from the particulars of his circumscribed subjects in order to render them as abstract geometric archetypes” (1997:106).



Fig.20, **Giorgio Morandi**, 1890-1964, *Still Life*, 1962, *Oil on Canvas*, 30.5x30.6cm,

Works from this period also reference Morandi's limited 'squad' of objects that he organized in superficially repetitive arrangements. Bryson writes that these 'repetitious' arrangements consist of "interresonating intervals eventually so fine that it takes a lengthy viewing to analyse their discriminations" (1995:98). Wilken suggests they are "relationships of solid and void" (1997:99), with the "poetry he could find in apparently minute changes [being] most apparent when you can compare groups of paintings" (1997:14). In my paintings, it is intended that the intervals between vessels should appear equally considered

and that the interplay between actual solids and voids should be supplemented by the apparent interplay of white square on blue background and patterned mug against patterned cloth.

In order to demonstrate that within my practice ideas for paintings are returned to and reworked, I wish briefly to mention *Still Life with Five Blue and White Mugs*, 2002, Fig.21. I do not use the word *improved* here, as this reworking is rather an act of re-emphasis. In *Four Mugs and Orange Cutlery*, my wish to align myself with 'modernist tendencies' led to paint application being relatively choppy and certainly visible. By 2002 my desire to reference pre-modernist codes of representation and prioritize an illusionistic presence for my objects meant that the process in *Five Blue and White Mugs* is much less evident.



Fig.21, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Five Blue and White Mugs*, Oil on Canvas , 120x91.5cm, 2002

Still Life with Day-Glo Beakers, 1997, Fig.22, is an example of transitional artwork that possesses characteristics from group one and two. Whilst maintaining its alignment with 17th century Spanish still life, it simultaneously attempts to align itself with certain early 20th century modernist painting. It is this kind of coalescence, where two relatively disparate moments in art history are brought together in a contemporary hybrid, that I label an act of reconciliation.



Fig.22, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Day-Glo Beakers*, 1997, Oil on Canvas, 44 x 30cm.

The primary reference for *Day-Glo Beakers* is Zurbarán's *Still life with Lemon, Oranges and a Rose*, Fig.23. Like it, *Day-Glo Beakers* depicts a row of carefully placed vessels running parallel to the picture plane. Although my painting contains five vessels, the cropping of the outside two privileges the three central beakers and attempts to set up a visual dialogue with the Zurbarán. When I use the phrase *visual dialogue*, I mean that viewers might be able to hold in their minds both my painting and its referent and flick between them, comparing and contrasting. Viewers might also recognize that the cutlery in the beakers echoes the leaves sprouting out of the oranges in the centre of the Zurbarán.



Fig.23, **Francisco de Zurbarán**, 1598-1664, *Still life with Lemon, Oranges and a Rose*, 1633, Oil on Canvas. 46x84cm

Day-Glow Beakers' tonal balance and palette simultaneously references and distances itself from Zurbarán. Although the strong oranges and lemon yellows are a celebratory reference

of the actual oranges and lemons in the Zurbarán, the changing of the backcloth from black to white, intense chromatic palette, and interactions between complementary colours are intended to remind the viewer of the colour relationships in Impressionism and Post Impressionism.

The act of reconciliation here is the coalescing of the elevated viewpoint, chromatic palette and evident brushwork from early modernist painting, with Zurbarán's compositional arrangement. Although, as Godfrey observes, it is inevitable that, "...the still life of today is as likely to be made with consumer objects as with lemons and tulips" (2009:348), I was aware that this particular juxtaposition of art historical moments and these consumer objects might generate certain interpretations. If the high status objects in the Zurbarán are indeed imbued with religious symbolism and he himself is one of the sanctified figures of still life, then replacing his objects with a row of mass produced plastic cups might be regarded as sacrilegious; an act of de-consecration, perhaps reminiscent of Manet replacing a goddess with a prostitute in his *Olympia*, 1863.

Group Three (Circa 1997-2004)

These paintings, whilst retaining the referential alignments of the preceding practice, increasingly reference certain 20th century abstract painting with 'modernist tendencies'. Correspondingly, my paintings emphasize their formal qualities and attempt to suppress associative meaning. *Still Life with Four Glass Bowls on a Stripecy Cloth*, 1997, Fig.24, and *Still Life with Takeaway Tins*, 2004, Fig.26, are characteristic of this grouping; see also *Paper Cups*, Fig.8.



Fig.24, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Four Glass Bowls on a Stripecy Cloth*, 1997, Oil on Board, 62x62cm

Although *Four Glass Bowls on a Stripecy Cloth* continues to display a relationship with still life, particularly the tilted modernist table, it also demonstrates my initial attempts to reference artworks from beyond that genre. It was partly my bedecking of studio tables with plaid tablecloths that made me realize it might be possible to incorporate pictorial structures reminiscent of certain modernist abstract painting into my ostensibly figurative pictures. Subsequently, the paintings in this group attempted to reconcile the disparate traditions of non-figurative abstraction with that of explicit representation, which is theoretically problematic, as illusionistic representation traditionally demands an amount of pictorial space that modernist abstraction traditionally denies.

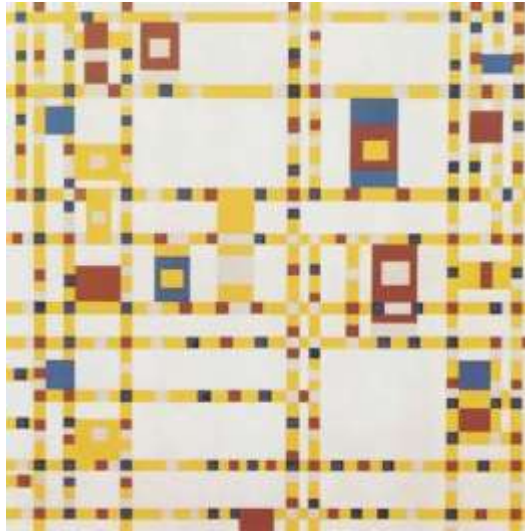


Fig.25, **Piet Mondrian**, 1872-1944, *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, 1942-43, Oil on canvas, 127x 127cm

The key reference for *Four Glass Bowls on a Stripy Cloth* is Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, 1942-43, Fig.25. Although I admire this painting enormously, my contestation with Mondrian's attitude to figurative painting remains a motivating factor for my entire practice.

In 1919 Mondrian argued that:

One cannot express both natural appearance as we see it and plastic relationships with the same determinateness. In natural form, in naturalistic colour, and in naturalistic line, plastic relationships are veiled. To express plasticity in a determinate way, relationships must be represented only through colour and line.

(1919: 282)

Greenberg suggested a similar thing, stating: "Whereas one tends to see what is *in* an Old Master before seeing it as a picture, one sees a Modernist painting as a picture first" (1965:756). Much of my practice since 1997 has attempted to produce compositions where the "plastic relationships," which, in *Four Glass Bowls on a Stripy Cloth* I understand to mean the formal abstract relationships between the ellipses and the similarly coloured lines, are of *equal* pictorial importance to the successful representation of, in this case, four glass bowls on a tablecloth.

Although the four blown bowls were a gift from the same glass-making friend who was acknowledged in *Wendy's Glass*, they were this time deployed as relatively generic carriers

of luminous colour and not as carriers of sentiment. The success of this painting is therefore, not in its ability to generate associative meaning but rather in its ability to reconcile abstraction and figuration, to flip between, or perhaps simultaneously be abstract pattern and explicit representation in the same pictorial space.

Takeaway Tins, Fig.26, again attempts to reconcile non-objective abstraction and illusionistic representation, but this time with a specific type of illusionistic representation. *Takeaway Tins* seeks to celebrate, renew and recover depictive techniques from certain 17th Dutch still life painting and allows them to co-exist with the bold frontal simplicity of certain 20th century abstraction.



Fig. 26, Jonathan Chapman, *Still Life with Takeaway Tins*, 2004, Oil on Canvas, 91x122cm

The vessels in this painting are foil takeaway tins filled with the residue of the oil paint that was mixed in them. Although for an art lecturer, the use of food containers to mix colour is a common sight, I was aware that for many viewers the tins would maintain their associations as bearers of food and, therefore, objects typical of still life. Although I was delighted with these allusions to still life and the process of painting, it is important to remember that during this period, I wished to emphasize my painting's formal qualities in order to reference certain facets of modernist abstraction. The tins were selected because they *actually* were carriers of colour, which, if not 'meaningless', might present a relatively limited semiotic content. Although they offer self-referential meaning relating to the

processes of painting, compared to the glassware in my previous example with their perhaps inescapable sentimental associations, the employment of anonymous mass-produced takeaway tins should be recognized as part of my attempts at this time, to incorporate less textually complex objects.

Key reference for *Takeaway Tins* were the 1960s paintings of Hans Hoffman, which for me are emblematic of modernist abstraction. Although I use *Goliath*, 1960, Fig.27, to illustrate the type of painting I had in mind, it was certain characteristics of his oeuvre rather than one particular painting that I was referencing – it was those Hoffmans that share an optical layering of pictorial space and the arrangement of flat rectangular blocks of colour with their edges parallel to the edges of their canvases.



Fig.27, **Hans Hoffman**, 1880-1966, *Goliath*, 1960, Oil on Canvas , 152.4 x 214cm

Takeaway Tins attempts to remind the viewer of Hoffman's work in a number of ways. First, in the studio, the arrangement was tilted towards me to a greater extent than in my previous modernist tiltings. This almost completely removed any perspectival angling towards vanishing points and allowed the tins to appear front-on with their edges parallel to those of the canvas. Secondly, the top layer of tins mimics the way Hoffman 'hovers' rectangles of colour in a manner that "requires that we see some planes of colour in front of other planes" (Wollheim 1987:62).

Where my painting attempts to reference 17th century Dutch still lifes is through the depiction of the takeaway tins. Although not the high status vessels of the Dutch paintings, these shiny food containers provide the same kind of depictive challenge as the ornate silver in, for example, Willem Claesz Heda's *Still Life with Nautilus Shell*, 1649. My contemporary silver containers were deliberately placed against a referentially black background and lit to create sparkling highlights. They were then painted utilizing such pre-modernist methods as under-painting and glazing.



Fig.28, Willem Claesz Heda, 1593-1680, *Still Life with Nautilus Shell*, 1649, Oil on panel, 49.5x68.5cm

Group Four (Circa 2000-2004)

Without forgoing my concern for formal composition, these paintings deployed objects such as shoes, toy cars and radios which, contrary to those in the previous groupings, might be capable of generating rich associative meaning. These less domestic arrangements contest Bryson's and other critics', labelling of still life as a "feminine space" which has the "male artist peering into a zone that does not directly concern him," by depicting collections of objects more typically belonging to boys or men (1995:136&170). The collections also make reference to artists outside the discipline of painting such as Arman, see Fig.17, and more recently, Cornelia Parker and Damien Hirst, with their repetitive deployments of actual, often non-domestic, objects. References become more numerous and often from beyond the genre of still life, the discipline of painting, and indeed, Fine Art. Although these paintings are again simultaneously acts of alignment, reconciliation and contestation, they are increasingly driven by a wish to contest contemporary attitudes to representation. *Still Life with Eight Pairs of Shoes*, 2004, Fig.29, is characteristic of the paintings in this group; also see *Model Cars and Top Trumps* and *Radios*, Fig.4 & 7.



Fig.29, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Eight Pairs of Shoes*, Oil on Canvas, 91x122cm 2004

The primary reference for *Eight Pairs of Shoes*, is Lisa Milroy's 1986 painting *Shoes*, Fig.30. Although my picture is happy to align itself with a masculine version of its subject and its modernist frontality and grid-like rows, my explicit realist language intends to contest the somewhat cursory illustrative nature of Milroy's depictive style. This is a style that allows

her depictions to act only as signifiers for shoes rather than having the sense of actuality that one might get from, for example, a Cotán. Paraskos argues that since Magritte's declaration in *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, visual images have become "no more than a hieroglyph, with a picture of a pipe operating in exactly the same way as the word pipe"(2010:11). Also whereas Milroy's painting has the white background typical of contemporary artists such as Vija Celmins and Luc Tuymens, my picture is its formal opposite, with a black background referential of 17th century Spanish and Dutch still life. The idea that a painting can simultaneously laud and contest aspects of another artwork is important in my practice, and relies on the belief that it is possible to simultaneously present one's own artistic agenda and that of the referent.



Fig.30, 1959-, **Lisa Milroy**, *Shoes*, 1986, Oil on Canvas, 203.2x259.1cm,

When in *Olympia*, 1863, Manet explicitly appropriated the pictorial structure of Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, 1555, and transformed its goddess into a 19th century prostitute, it seems clear that he expected his audience to recognize the reference to Titian and remember the original painting's narrative. That it is possible for an artwork to assimilate a referent's formal identity and context, and then simultaneously revere and critique it appears an important characteristic of early modernist reference that has continued into the present. As Donald Kuspit writes:

[Manet] superimposed the modern on the traditional, creating a kind of contest between them. Modern reality seemed to win and dominate, but traditional art was hardly a

submissive loser, for his reference to it gave his paintings a mysterious “gravity” and depth. Indeed, it supplied the skeletal substructure for his modern scenes. Manet was clearly torn between modernity and tradition: his paintings were a subliminal homage to traditional painting as well as a parody of it.

(2000:12)

It appears that certain motifs become popular vehicles for this type of simultaneous appropriation and critiquing. The balcony motif, for example, enabled early modernist artists such as Manet and Matisse to critically position themselves, in respect of their attitudes to pictorial space, in relation to Goya’s earlier depiction of the motif. Certain of these motifs, such as the reclining nude, have become trans-historical with Tracey Emin’s unmade bed, as much an example as those by Titian or Manet. I would argue that such motifs have become like self-contained ‘micro-genres’ with their own associated critical contexts, paradigms and contestations.

For me, as a still life artist, the depiction of shoes is one such micro-genre that offers a wealth of referential co-ordinates to align with or be against. To paint shoes is to attend a trans-historical conference about painting shoes, where the speakers include the artists Van Gogh, Warhol and Milroy, and the theorists include Heidigger, Shapiro and Derrida.

As this group of practice wished to experiment with the generation of meaning rather than with its repression, I also chose the shoes as a motif capable of this. Particularly in relation to Van Gogh’s numerous shoe paintings, there seems a consensus that shoes can be read as a form of self-portrait – a representation of personality and even of mood. Adam Gopnik, for example, describes Wayne Theibauds, 1963, painting *Black Shoes*, Fig.31, as, “...a pair of worn dress shoes that invoke Van Gogh’s famous, highly autobiographical Pair of Shoes, [and] stand symbolically for the artist himself, casting himself in an uncharacteristically melancholic light”(2008:22).



Fig.31, **Wayne Theibauds**, 1920-, *Black Shoes*, 1963, Oil on canvas, 50.80 x 71.10 cm

The idea that images of shoes might contain decipherable meaning was famously contested by the theorists Martin Heidigger (1976), Meyer Shapiro (1994), and Jacques Derrida (1987), in their essays on Van Gogh's *Pair of Shoes*, 1886. Even if viewers contest the notion that representations of shoes can carry communicable meaning, it is apparent to me that the motif, at the very least, carries the memory of a historic theoretical debate about the possibility of meaning.

I also intended that *Eight Pairs of Shoes* might reference cultural employments of shoes beyond Fine Art. In Wim Wender's film *Paris Texas*, 1984, we see the central character Travis watching an aircraft taking off. As we follow the aircraft, the camera pans along a seemingly endless row of neatly paired shoes that he has just cleaned. As well as appearing to be a gesture of thanks towards the family who have taken him in, the shoes also seem to reflect Travis' unexpressed desire to once more move on. It is a scene that I remember as clearly as if it were a painting, see Fig.32.



Fig.32, **Wim Wenders**, 1920- , *Paris Texas*, 1984, Film

I acknowledge here, that many coming to this picture will not have recognized this particular filmic reference. However, my deployment of shoes was intended to encourage the type of open, viewer driven intertextual connectivity, that I will discuss in the next grouping, and which would be likely to provoke a multiplicity of references in the mind of a viewer that I could in no way predict.

Group Five (Circa 2004-Present)

Whilst maintaining certain alignments from and directly referencing preceding research, these paintings endeavour to reference more contemporary art and art theory. References are ever more numerous, again not limited to still life, painting or Fine Art. Characteristically, pictures enter the contemporary discourse surrounding the relationship between painting and photography by being made simultaneously from observation and photographic sources. To that end they almost always include depictions of photographs or postcards. This group is also defined by its exploration and referencing of certain notions of post-structuralism. This sees my practice attempt to be textually richer and capable of generating a multiplicity of potential meanings; particularly in mind of Roland Barthes' belief that deciphering text can be, for the audience, a pleasurable experience (Orr 2003:36). *Still Life with Champagne and Two Orange Beakers*, 2006, Fig.33, epitomizes a painting from this grouping; see also *Art Mugs* and *Photo-Frames*, Fig.5 & 14.



Fig.33, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Champagne and Two Orange Beakers*, 2006, Oil on Canvas, 109.25x78.75cm

The key reference for this painting is Manet's 1863 painting *Dejeuner Sur L'herbe*, with which it shares its theme and my perception of *his* desire to produce textually and

referentially rich artwork. Although, I will suggest *Champagne and Two Orange Beakers* also makes perhaps traceable alignments with David Hockney, Wayne Theibaud and Cornelius Gijbsbrechts, it is its alignments, reconciliations and contestations with aspects of post-structural and post-modern theory that are its prime concern.

The desire to include more references and more directly engage with contemporary theory meant that I aligned myself with the post-modern notion of bricolage. Craig Owens defines this as "...the combination of fragments of quotations from other works in a single work of art" (Owens in Evans 2009:14). Julie Saunders adds that, "...this purposeful reassembly of fragments to form a new whole [is] undoubtedly, an active element in many... postmodernist texts" (2006:4).

On one level, *Champagne and Two Orange Beakers*, attempts to be a reflection on the illusory nature of actual events, in this case a picnic. Although a viewer would not normally know this, other than the bought again Bakewell tart, the objects in the painting, are the actual objects from that picnic. These were arranged in my studio within the illusionary context of a landscape created by joining photographs taken from the actual site of the picnic; à la Hockney. This already fragmentary 'landscape' is deliberately undermined by the depiction of these photographs peeling from the actual studio wall, reflecting the flame from the actual candle, and by carrying the shadow cast by the actual bottle in the studio. The inclusion of objects that are inherently ambiguous in scale, such as the half bottle of champagne and the unusually large Bakewell, further challenge the illusion that this is a real picnic in an actual landscape.

These admittances of artifice, and contradictions of what are anyway, painted illusions, were a deliberate attempt to unsettle and complicate what was ostensibly a simple representation of a picnic. They also allude to the postmodern artist Mark Tansey, Fig.34, whom Linda Hutcheon describes as creating paintings that "...both inscribe... the authority of realistic representation and ironically contradict... it" (1988:228).



Fig.34, **Mark Tansey**, 1949-, *Action Painting II*, 1984, Oil on canvas, 213x254cm

However, depicting a picnic, most importantly gave me the opportunity to make an enigmatic painting that might enter a dialogue with Manet's famously enigmatic picnic painting, *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*. Alan Krell describes it as "...a sophisticated mixture of ambiguity, tease, [and] homage...[that] continues to challenge and confound"(1996:34). He also points out that it is "...first of all, is a studio piece... and not... executed *en plein air*" (1996:28). *Champagne and Two Orange Beakers* similarly plays with the creation of an exterior space within the interior space of the studio.

Krell describes *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* and other paintings by Manet in the following way – and I believe it is possible to apply these characteristics to *Champagne and Two Orange Beakers*. He suggests that:

In our postmodernist times we may happily accept the instability of meaning, but even so, when confronted by *A Bar at the Folies-Bergere* and other images by Manet, we often feel a need to ask, 'Well, then! What is it?' Realist art which fractures, distorts, and manipulates; one which appropriates from older art and popular imagery of its own day, which makes visual puns and which destabilizes the act of looking.

(1996:200)

In the first part of discussing *Champagne and Two Orange Beakers*, I have also claimed a depiction that "fractures, distorts and manipulates" realistic representations, and hopefully

encourages viewers to wonder what exactly they are looking at. I will, in the remaining part, claim that my painting similarly references historic and contemporary imagery in order to generate a deliberate abundance of unstable meaning mindful of certain aspects of post-structuralism.

Champagne and Two Orange Beakers, together with other paintings in this group were to an extent theoretically driven by Barthes' post-structuralist understanding of meaning and in particular his use of the term intertextuality. If we accept Barthes' notion that an artwork can be read as a patchwork or organization of texts, intertextuality is, as Julia Kristeva first defined it, the understanding that such an organization is not a closed system, which can be read in isolation, but is instead, a complex mosaic of deliberate and unwitting references to and dialogues with, other texts (Barthes 1977; Kristeva 1980). Allen suggests that: "Intertextuality seems such a useful term because it foregrounds the notion of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life" (2000:5). Intertextuality is the concept that best represents my belief that artworks can participate in dialogues with other artworks and can receive and re-transmit parts of other artworks' meanings. Although the term originated in literary criticism, it has become part of the vocabulary and tool kit of art theory and criticism. Allen notices that, for example, Wendy Steiner has little problem employing the term to describe a multitude of interrelationships in the discipline of painting:

The intertextual features of painting can take us from the manner in which some paintings, such as in diptychs and triptychs, are completed by others, on to 'quotation' by painters of culturally recognizable styles of earlier schools or individual artists. The ability of painters to parody styles and gestures suggests a profound intertextual level to the pictorial arts.

(Steiner in Allen 2000:176)

The framings of intertextuality that I find most pertinent to the way in which I conceived of my painting during this period are by Kristeva and Barthes. Kristeva suggested that a text possessed two axis – a *horizontal axis* that connects the author to the reader of the text and a *vertical axis* that connects the texts to other texts (1980:69). In his book *Mythologies* Barthes proposes a similar idea when he argues that a sign has the ability both to denote, i.e., represent something, and simultaneously to connote, i.e., suggest associations with or remind us of other things (Barthes cited in Allen 2000:84). As such, it is possible to consider

the horizontal axis as the convincing representation of a set of objects in front of a viewer, and that which the painting denotes. The vertical axis is the one along which referential or intertextual dialogues take place, with these being the painting's connotations and meanings.

In *Champagne with Two Orange Beakers*, there is an image of a cake with a candle in it. The realistic nature of its depiction means that along the horizontal axis I 'expect' my audience to understand that I am denoting a birthday cake. However, my expectations of the audience, in respect of the vertical axis that theoretically cuts through the cake, are far less rigid, far more open in respect to what allusions they might recognize and what references they might choose to bring to the image, and what therefore, the cake connotes or means.

As the painter and the 'author' of the work, the actual cake reminded me of those in Theibaud's still lifes, and to an extent, I rendered it with an economy that might underline that link. However, it was the image of the candle that I considered might be most permeated by possible connotations. In the genre of still life its presence might remind the viewer of *Vanitas* and *Memento Mori*, where depictions of flickering flames were placed amidst objects that reflected wealth and merriment, reminding viewers that at any moment they might be snuffed out and separated from that wealth. I also imagined a viewer might consider how difficult it would be to depict a flame, and compare my depictive skills with those of Gerhard Richter working from a photograph, or George de la Tour, working like me, from life.

In my mind, these horizontal and vertical axes run across this painting like graph paper. The picnic's illusionary background, created by depicting an actual patchwork of assembled photographs, wishes to connote Hockney's *Joiners*, see Fig.35, as much as it denotes the countryside. The small section of that 'joiner' which hopefully appears to peel forward from the studio wall, may remind the viewer of the role *tromp l'oeil* played in the history of still life, and Cornelius Gibrichs' painting *Trompe L'Oeil with Studio Wall and Vanitas Still Life*, 1668, within which the depicted still life appears to peel forward towards the viewer and reveal the wooden bars of its canvas stretcher, see Fig.36.



Fig.35, **David Hockney**, 1937-, *My Mother*, 1982, Photographic Collage, 120.7 x 69.9cm



Fig.36, **Cornelius Gijsbrechts**, 1610-1675, *Trompe L'Oeil with Studio Wall and Vanitas Still Life*, Circa 1668, Oil on Canvas, 152x118cm,

When I made *Champagne with Two Orange Beakers*, I was consciously positioning my practice in relation to both practice and theory. As well as aligning myself with Manet's enigmatic *Déjeuner sur l'Herbe*, an image bristling with connotations and references, I was aligning myself with Barthes and deliberately making a painting dense with intertextual

reference, some perhaps discernable and others more difficult to know – a bricolage or weave of texts that might operate in the way Barthes suggests a system of texts operates and should be received:

Woven entirely with citations, references, echoes, cultural languages... antecedent or contemporary, which cut across it through and through in a vast stereophony... to try and find the 'sources' , the 'influences' of a work, is to fall in with the myth of filiation; the citations which go to make up text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet *already read*: they are quotations without inverted commas.

(1977:160)

Group Six (Circa 2009-Present)

It is important to emphasize immediately that these photographic works should not be seen as an abandonment of, or disillusionment with, the discipline of painting, or indeed, the positions I have taken within it. Instead, as well as offering a way to interrogate painting, the genre of still life, and the nature of my practice from outside the discipline, the exhibiting of photographs has provided me with a way 'politically' to signal my continuing difficulty with the idea of trying to paint realistically from photographic sources. They should be seen as the logical concluding act in a longstanding critical engagement with the process of working with photographic sources that has, up until these photographs, been conducted from within the discipline of painting. The photographic works allowed me to demonstrate my belief that painting's reliance on photographic source material devalues both photography *and* painting. If these recent images are formally interesting and critically engaging as photographs, then they should stay as photographs. There is for me, no inherent increase in their potential profundity to be gained simply by copying them in paint. As an artist who wishes to re-present the sense of tangible objects surrounded by tangible space, once the profound responsibility for freezing time and compressing space has been given to a camera, the hope of re-presenting that sense of object in space, that sense of realism, of actuality, is irretrievably lost.

Although the photographic works align themselves with many of the same references as my preceding work, their fundamental difference to that practice, other than the fact that they are not paintings, is their depiction of *found* still lifes rather than carefully arranged ones. As I stated earlier, in so doing, they contest Rowell's belief that still life is defined by being, "...fictional, created; ideal as opposed to real"(1997:10-11). *Still Life with Lamp-Shades*, 2009, Fig.37, is a characteristic example of this grouping; see also *Orange Juice Carton* and *Ink Rollers*, Fig.3 & 6.



Fig.37, **Jonathan Chapman**, *Still Life with Lamp-Shades* , 2009, Digital Print, 32.5x 49.5cm

This Parisian shop window was originally photographed in 2004. It was not taken as an image to paint from or at that moment one to be exhibited. I took the photograph because the white framework armatures that appeared to draw their absent shades, reminded me of Michael Craig-Martin's and Patrick Caulfield's, linear representations of still life objects, see Fig.38.



Fig.38, **Patrick Caulfield**, *Dates, Pottery*, 1969, Oil on canvas, 21.31 x 15.24cm

Although the original photograph had always for me contained these and other references to Zurbarán's rows and Richard Estes' reflective windows for example, it was only when I was able to employ *Photoshop* to manipulate the image, that I felt it to be as referentially eloquent and formally organized as one my paintings. Most significantly, this software allowed me to rotate the plane of the window so that it ran parallel to the picture plane. This enabled me to emphasize the frontality of the picture by making the shelves run parallel to horizontal edges of the image, thus reinforcing the reference to my earlier *Things in Rows* arrangements. *Photoshop* also enabled me to saturate the colour to levels more reminiscent of my paintings and emphasize the 'drawn' white lines of the armature frames. It was important that these alterations were unnoticeable, in order not to break the sense of tangible reality that I want in both my painting and photography.

Although the existence of these photographic works was to a large extent motivated by the desire to disentangle representational painting from its reliance on photography and let a photograph stand as an unpainted photographic image, their constant references to painting and use of image manipulation means they are not as distinct from my paintings as I had imagined they might be. As Gaiger observes:

Not only have technological advances allowed photography to achieve the scale, brilliance of colour and compositional complexity of oil painting... but the transition from photochemical to electronic and digital formats permits a degree of intervention and manipulation that stretches the notion of the photographic towards the painterly.

(2008:104)

CONCLUSIONS

Early in this essay I cited Bryson's suggestion that there was room "for more work on still life" (1995:8-10) and Cummings' doubt about the "scope and potential" of the genre (1985:251). To an extent these quotes identify the motivation that lies behind this document and my practice. For sixteen years I have systematically tested the scope and potential of still life. As well as exploring its ability to provide a framework around which I can deliver interesting compositions, develop my representational language, and perhaps say something about the nature of being alive, I have continually tested whether still life will allow me to enter critical dialogues with art, art theory and culture, both inside and outside the genre. What I have sought to demonstrate in this essay and through my artworks, is that still life has enormous scope and potential and is a genre through which I have been able to position my practice and critically engage with any aspect or moment in art or cultural history.

It is the genre's ability to facilitate direct or allusory reference through the incorporation and combination of certain motifs, representational languages and pictorial structures that has allowed me to engage in critical dialogues and position my artworks in alignment with theory and practice I support and in opposition to that I might wish to challenge. This type of positioning has also enabled me to attempt to reconcile certain historical, theoretical and formal dichotomies that have appeared in Western Art since the late 19th century, such as the fracturing of painting into abstract and representational. These referentially driven alignments, contestations and reconciliations, are a key part of the structure around which I have defined the nature of my practice.

In retrospect, it is apparent that my research has engaged almost chronologically with the history of still life from its beginnings as an independent genre to its present day manifestations. Although my artworks have remained recognizably still lifes, my practice has broadened from a pre-occupation with the work of 17th century Spanish and early-modernist still life painters, to an engagement with certain abstract painting, to work which addresses the diverse nature of contemporary Fine Art practice, and aspects of postmodernist and post-structuralist theory. Importantly, the pre-occupations of one period of practice have been added to the agenda of the next, allowing my work not only to

refer outwardly but also to maintain a reflective referential dialogue with its own development.

I have, through these artworks, attempted to reassert still lifes' modernist role as a forum for serious perceptual, representational and formal experiment, and its pre-modernist credentials as a genre perceived to be capable of expressing understandable meaning. I have engaged with the debates surrounding the possibility of communicating meaning by exploring the repression and expression of symbolic and associative meaning, and, more recently, by attempting to initiate 'unstoppable' chains of intertextual meaning.

In relation to the discipline of painting, I have critiqued, and to an extent integrated the contemporary predilection with working from photographic sources in a practice that also defends and reasserts the worth of working from direct observation. With regard to painting's ongoing attempts to reconcile its historic representational traditions with the discoveries of abstraction, I have created hybrids that allow the pictorial structures and limited pictorial space typical of certain modernist abstraction to co-exist with the type of illusionistic representation and deeper pictorial space found in pre-modernist painting. I have attempted to invest pictures constructed in a communicative and democratic language with a level of perceptual rigour, formal sophistication and theoretical engagement that is perhaps not associated with contemporary realist painting.

In order to both reinforce what has been a referential framing of my practice and suggest that my pictures might have an existence for those who fail to detect their allusions, I will finish by quoting from Wendy Osgerby's essay on my work:

Even without a detailed and systematic analysis of the many references in Chapman's paintings, references to the past, to childhood, gender, and to art itself, it is abundantly clear that within that representation of the phenomenal world 'that which is out there', within the over arching concerns of formal composition and technical accomplishment... are skeins or residues of something else, something more personal, more intimate. This other life, that which is not 'out there', speaks through the estrangement, and incongruity of familiar things.

(Osgerby 2000:8)

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Appendix 1

Selected Exhibitions

- 2011 *Jonathan Chapman Still Lifes 1994-2010* (Solo Exhibition)
The University of Northampton Gallery
- 2009 *Still: Exploring the Dialogue Between Still Life and Photography* [Curator](Group Exhibition)
The University of Northampton Gallery
- 2007 *Jonathan Chapman - Recent Paintings from Life and Photographs* (Solo Exhibition)
Roger Billcliffe Gallery, Glasgow (Private Gallery)
- 2007 *Jonathan Chapman - Paintings from Life and Photography* (Solo Exhibition)
Nuneaton Museum and Art Gallery (Municipal Gallery)
- 2006 *Stuff* (Curated Group Exhibition)
The University of Northampton Gallery
- 2005 *The Hunting Art Prize Exhibition* (Panel Selected Group Exhibition)
Royal College of Art, London
- 2005 *Recollection* (Curated Group Exhibition)
Rugby Art Gallery (Municipal Gallery)
- 2005 *Inanimate-Contemporary Still Life* (Curated Group Exhibition)
Chapel Gallery, Ormskirk (Municipal Gallery)
- 2005 *Jonathan Chapman - Recent Paintings* (Solo Exhibition)
Roger Billcliffe Gallery, Glasgow (Private Gallery)
- 2004 *Jonathan Chapman - Still Lifes* (Solo Exhibition)
Gallery 58, Northampton (Private Gallery)
- 2003 *Singer & Freidlander/Sunday Times Watercolour Competition* Exhibition
(Panel Selected Group Exhibition)
Mall Galleries, London (Private Gallery)
- 2003 *Food & Drink* (Curated Group Exhibition)
Roger Billcliffe Gallery, Glasgow (Private Gallery)
- 2002 *Drawing from Experience* (Curated Group Exhibition)

- Roger Billcliffe Gallery, Glasgow (Private Gallery)
- 2002 *Research in Progress* (Selected Group Exhibition)
University College Northampton Gallery
- 2001 *Jonathan Chapman - Recent Paintings* (Solo Exhibition)
Blackheath Gallery, London (Private Gallery)
- 2001 *Jonathan Chapman - Recent Painting* (Solo Exhibition)
Medici Galleries, London (Private Gallery)
- 2001 *Singer & Freidlander/Sunday Times Watercolour Competition* Exhibition
(Panel Selected Group Exhibition)
Mall Galleries, London (Private Gallery)
Leeds City Gallery (Municipal Gallery)
The Sculpture Gallery, Manchester Town Hall (Municipal Gallery)
Royal Birmingham Society of Artists (Municipal Gallery)
- 2001 *Open Exhibition* (Panel Selected Group Exhibition)
The City Gallery, Leicester (Municipal Gallery)
[*Arthouse* Sponsorship Artist Award Winner]
- 2000 *Jonathan Chapman - Recent Paintings* (Solo Exhibition)
Roger Billcliffe Gallery, Glasgow (Private Gallery)
- 2000 Jonathan Chapman - Still Lifes (Solo Exhibition)
Reynolds Gallery, Edinburgh (Private Gallery)
[Critic's Choice: Visual Arts THE SCOTSMAN Newspaper 26th September 2000]
- 2000 *Richard Demarco, 70/2000 : The Road to Meikle Seggie* (Curated Group Exhibition)
Edinburgh City Arts Centre (Municipal Gallery) [Official Edinburgh Festival Exhibition]
The Stanley Picker Gallery, Kingston University
Oxford Brookes University Gallery
- 2000 *Jonathan Chapman – Still Lifes* (Solo Exhibition)
Middlesbrough Art Gallery (Municipal Gallery)
- 2000 *Jonathan Chapman – Still Lifes* (Solo Exhibition)

University College Northampton Gallery

- 1999 *Rentrée* (Selected Group Exhibition)
The Stanley Picker Gallery, Kingston University
- 1999 *Singer & Freidlander/Sunday Times Watercolour Competition* Exhibition
(Selected Group Exhibition)
Mall Galleries, London (Private Gallery)
- 1998 *Singer & Freidlander/Sunday Times Watercolour Competition* Exhibition
(Selected Group Exhibition)
Mall Galleries, London (Private Gallery)
Phillips, Hepper House, Leeds (Private Gallery)
Manchester Museum of Science and Industry (Municipal Gallery)
Royal Birmingham Society of Artists (Municipal Gallery)
- 1998 *Object as Subject – The Contemporary Still Life* (Curated Group Exhibition)
Roger Billcliffe Gallery, Glasgow (Private Gallery)
- 1996 *Things in Rows* (Solo Exhibition)
Boardroom Gallery, University College Scarborough
- 1993 *Witnesses of Existence* (Selected Group Exhibition)
The Stanley Picker Gallery, Kingston University
Demarco European Art Foundation, Edinburgh
Obala Gallery, Sarajevo
Bosnian National Gallery, Sarajevo