

Talk for David Begley Wexford Arts Centre, Saturday August 1st 2015

I met David two weeks ago in his studio in the stables of the beautiful Newtownbarry House in Bunclody. I was struck by the idyllic place and the stillness all around. It was no surprise that I also found this stillness in his work. The place has an air of being of another time, of being suspended in time, a suspension of time that is also present in David's work because - and I am talking about the animations - the animations have no beginning and no end. You enter or fall into the animated drawing - into a palimpsest moment - that picks up on something that has already happened, something that has gone before this moment. As evidenced in the mark making there is already a memory, a trace, a drawing of something made visible. With charcoal David creates this world of semi darkness, a twilight that holds the promise of an undefined world, a semi darkness from which comes the light. Shapes emerge, evolve, transmute, appear and disappear...there are human shapes, animal shapes, anthropomorphic forms, half man / half beast, unpredictable and continuously changing, not wanting or not able to be one or the other, unable to rest or stay, as one moment follows another hinged and pulled together by a minimal melancholic haunting soundtrack written and performed by the artist. We have no idea what the next moment might bring. David lets each drawing evolve intuitively by responding to the image in front of him, that tells him what to do next. Each drawing is a re-action to an earlier one. Each drawing progresses the residue of a foregoing thought, an emotion, a gesture and - like our actions or re-actions in life - they are a culmination, an accomplishment, a sum of all that went before. The things we arrive at in our lives, the present, is a result of where we have been, our past, a result of all the bygone moments filled with experiences and memories, pleasurable ones, painful ones, traumatic and healing ones. Each moment follows another, each imprint an evocation of the previous imprint. Each awareness obliterating the preceding one.

The time element of positioning drawing after drawing is typical of animation and makes us aware of us passing through time, or, of time passing through us. These are two different metaphors that help us think about how we experience time. Thinking about time in David's animated work makes me think about the temporal periphery we are bound by in life. The time of our life is a continuity of experiences, one following another without a break, adding memory to memory, not only making our past larger as we age but also conserving it as an ever deeper growing reservoir that we dip into everyday. Our lives are signified by chunks or chapters of time; a before and after. Childhood, adolescence, school, college time, relationships, the death of loved ones...memory is a powerful influence and source material for artists.

And all the while that moments mount moments, experiences follow experiences - we are breathing. Breathing features prominently in each animated drawing. It appears as an ephemeral gesture, a form, a sound, breathing as a metaphor for life. Most of the time we take breathing as a given thing in the world, we breathe unconsciously, we are

unaware doing it. It seems to happen somewhere in the background of our bodies. of our being, we seem to do it on automatic pilot. It is only when breathing becomes unusual that we become aware of it in all its nuances. Breathing is the prerequisite for life. The moment we are born, the very first breath we take is the sign that we are alive, and we exhale our last breath into life before crossing to the other side.

I read somewhere that on average, an adult human being breathes in and out 12 times a minute. Multiply this with 24 hours and we realise that we take around 17,280 breaths in a day.

Each drawing is painstakingly made with charcoal that David makes himself. I asked him why is it important that you make your own charcoal? You know you can just go out and buy it. In fact you don't even have to go out anymore, you can buy it online. But for David the whole process of finding the wood and cooking it, is a wholesome and visceral activity that heightens the quality and meaning of the material with which he makes the drawings. It deepens the engagement with the work. Willow makes a different charcoal to Ivy that is different to charcoal made from driftwood. Each of these have subtle colour differences and we see this evidenced in the drawings. The importance for David to appreciate the journey of the charcoal before it becomes a drawing tool is to acknowledge that it too has a memory, a memory that informs the artist making the drawing...it too comes from somewhere thus connecting - it and us - across place and time. Everything has a memory and through a continuous energy field everything is connected and with it our memories, determining, conditioning and influencing our present world. A present world that is a site of endless and un-chartable becomings that makes becoming not a capacity inherited by life, an evolutionary outcome or consequence, no, becoming - the process of being, of being in the world - is the very principle of matter itself. The only certainty we know in life is uncertainty itself. We never know what the next moment will bring. And this is how we exit each animation; it unexpectedly stops, just as we were getting into it we are thrown out, out of our comfort zone at, what seems a random moment. Left. Deserted. Stranded. Longing for more.

Anita Groener, July 2015