

Sponsored Studio Award 2009

LISA TRAXLER

'Cuckoo in a Nest'

A visual diary with accompanying thoughts.

The following are fragments from my notebook written whilst in residence in studio 22, Art Space.

These notes run parallel to the visual diary - photographs taken of the life of the studio as I worked within it. The work & thoughts in progress translate into this collection of images themselves now memories of this part of my life.

Monday 02 March 2009

Beginnings are powerful stuff - the unknown, the sharpness of the new...

Greeting this opportunity offered to me. Trying to keep an open mind - the ability to let the situation evolve. Keys are handed over, the door closes behind me - alone in this space - what do I expect? What is expected of me? The enormity of what lies ahead. No comfort zone to hide in. I want to feel uncomfortable - to explore the potential of what I can do. A cuckoo in a nest.

Tuesday 03 March 2009

I have been e-mailed a photograph of this space - Brougham Road Chapel in about 1915? The sheer power that you feel from an old photograph - hidden stories, time travel - you almost feel these photographs will start to move & the still, silent figures breathe again, going about their lives - this snapshot trapped forever.

Emptying my mind to concentrate on my work.

'Boundaries can be incredibly useful - a set of references.' From a talk given by Katie Pratt at aspeX, 'Invisible Cities' 03 March 2009

04 March 2009

My dilemma combining my painting & stitched pieces - or simply to start & let the journey & thinking process unfold. Putting the sheets of lining paper up yesterday in the studio & having a scribble was a release valve - broke the 'preciousness' of the space & me within it. Shifting the energy to enable this process to happen - belief in the fact it will? Guidance to travel this.

As Katie Pratt was saying in her talk - the artist has strategies of setting up & producing work - what goes on in the studio & the process is a private very focussed process.

The ability to reach this particular spot or space. Focussing your mind completely but keeping the spontaneity & creative force open.

Not contrived, not going in to a plane of creating 'slick' or over achieved.

9.30am I have been booked to give a talk at the Art & Design University about the exhibition I held at the Eldon Gallery in February. An interesting experience - having to think carefully & vocalize my thoughts on my work & the process of the exhibition.

* note - Katie Pratt talk did inform my approach & thought process for my talk with students this morning.

Light good - photographed chapel.

After talk straight back in to studio.

The studio does not feel quite so uninviting & aloof as yesterday. Downloading photographs start to show a definite dialogue - line, light, yearning for past information that a still, empty room holds - poignant & quite emotional in its fragments of space & shape within it - the leg of the table, empty space of the chair, a whole conversation the floor is having - quite a noise, although within the frequency of paint.

The day folds in on itself - time slipping away, when you are completely unaware of it & you start to become focussed - walking through the fear.

05 March 2009

Sleet, journey to studio was a bugger - I will not be beaten.

Contemplation in studio.

This dialogue of memory - a fine line, resonance & an echoing. The empty spaces hold so much content - a brisling of energy - high wired. At the start each corner, curve, element in sharp focus. How these places & objects become so familiar as to be almost invisible.

The invisibility of familiarity.

How a place or part of a shape of an object can jolt you back to the here & now - the point is a memory bolt, an esoteric place - a fragment of something - shaft of light hitting an object, the shape of something through a window, the way an arbitrary piece of furniture is left - unattended.

Do all objects, places, people hold a memory to them?

Not always visible this memory has to be unlocked, revived, made to become alive again by its association to someone feeling emotive about it.

Time - line - event.

I always consider myself passing through the space. How it was before & then afterwards - the ebb & flow will be a constant after I have passed through.

Have sheets of lining paper on studio wall that I have been drawing on to - collage, stitching, adding lettering - my mind is not focussing on this...

*note - photographs of exploration around chapel - high rise blocks with their windows positioned parallel - lines of stitching.

Do feel slightly beaten by today - the focus left me in the studio so sorted photographs to put on disc - at least something physically positive.

Confidence -

06 March 2009

Photographs - sketch book - shape, line, light - studio day.

Have appointment with Diana (Archive & City Museum) on Thursday to look at archives/photographs etc. from around Brougham Road after WWII? Before - when?

12 March 2009

Notes from visit to Archive & City Museum.

Miscellaneous:

1. Programme for a Bazaar, 1879
Card for Brougham Road Sunday School, October 1879
2. Photographic postcard showing laying of foundation stone for church extension, 06 June 1912
3. Photographic postcard of Rev. W. B. Lark, President of United Methodist Church, 1910.
4. Photographic postcard of missionaries.
5. Trustee's Meeting Minute Book 22 March 1897 - 14 October 1954

* Note - Census Returns for Brougham Road North Side (with Church).

Street Directories

1867 From map information 'BROUGHAM TERRACE' (a terrace of houses only along this road). The North side of the road (Chapel side) was completely un-built: open land, possibly some of it was the grounds of a large house to the North.

1879 Brougham Road Chapel built & opened, Easter week 1879

(*note - Brougham Road & not Brougham Terrace now).

1886 Late map shows all houses to be built by now on North side of road.

Postcard: Brougham Road, Southsea. The Rev. Honey & Rev. Hancock.

'A BAZAAR' will be held in Easter Week, 1879 in aid of the Fund for the Liquidation of the debt on the above Church & School Rooms.

24 August 1940 near Brougham Tavern bombed.

1958 Brougham Road Tavern closed.

From minutes book:

April 1904 Notes read: 'That we favour installation of electric light.'

06 September 1906 Rev. Alfred James Conibear (first listing of him).

04 September 1907 A trustee's meeting, there were present Rev. A. J. Conibear March 1905
Notes: '24 Hymn books was ordered for use of visitors.'

October 1905 Notes: 'That the present school be raised & classrooms provided upstairs, according to rough plans which was discussed at length. (same page)... A subsequent meeting, it was decided to white-wash ceilings & paper walls of classrooms & Messrs. Barries & Co. were asked to do it.'

19 February 1906 Notes: 'Several informal meetings had been held to examine plans prepared by Mr. Smith, Architect & member. While prepared to approve (with some alterations), could not assine (?) at any definite understanding owing to the fact that the plans presented exceeded the sum by resolutions passed in October.

The present meeting covered the same ground & with the same results.

The following resolution: That we do not proceed to build until we have at least one third of the money in hand required for the whole scheme & that every effort be made to get this sum in two years.' (Extension for proposal enlargement to Church).

13 September 1906 Notes: '... it was decided to purchase one large urn with two taps & six smaller ones. The old urns such as are fit to be repaired for special services. 75 cups to be procured to match plates.'

03 April 1907 Notes: 'The Sunday School & infants room were ordered to be renovated.'

25 August 1908 Notes: 'The previous minutes were not forthcoming & the secretary had to undergo a process called chaff (?) on account of his unbusiness-like action.'

26 August 1909 Notes: Report of sub-committee: radiators for Church, it was decided to have two in lobbies as an experiment in regard to draughts.' (underlined!)

25 September 1911 Notes: Rev. David Bailey - not Rev. A.J. Conibear.

Was he away? Mission postcard this date. . Rev. Conibear, Ningpo, Beijing - Missionary. Last date noted was July 06 1911 for Rev. Conibear.

22 September 1921 Present Rev. A. J. Conibear.

28 November 1923 Notes: 'A new set of crockery with Church Badge was purchased off M.A. Charter who very generously supplied the goods at cost price.'

07 September 1928 Notes: Trustee meeting. Rev. A. J. Conibear present - last listing of him.

October 1954 - Church sold.

KELLY'S Directory of Portsmouth. 1886
Brougham Road, Peel Street to Green Road.

South Side:

No. 2 Luffe John. School.

4 Arnell William. Beer ret.

6 Cannon Fredk. W. Watch & clock maker to the trade.

18 Tribe Thomas. Lodging house.

48 Foster Robt. Gas fitter.

North Side: (as Chapel).
Manchester House - William Harding. Furniture dealer.
Claremont House - Henry & William Evans. Brick & slate merchants.
Brougham Road Congregational Church - Rev. James Horwill.
Granville House - Mrs. Ash.
Talmage House - William Fielder.
Torrington House - Geo Hayden.
Brougham Road Villa - Mrs. Woollett.
Brent House - Alfred Cossar.

KELLY'S Directory of Portsmouth. 1923

Rev. A.J. Conibear (United Methodist) - 62 Cottage Grove, Southsea.
Last listing in KELLY'S 1928.

16 March 2009

Just get on with it - let the confusion go.

17 March 2009

Studio 22 - photographs taken in first week. Started to look through & process information in front of me. Start with the very first photograph taken of studio space, on first day - on the wall, expand, grow the story. The line of thought - around the room, out into the corridor, down the stairs, out of the chapel, a walk through the streets that surround the chapel. Nestling quietly amongst the high rise giants - its history trailing back - the craters left by the bombs encouraging these new high rise homes. Shape, line, light, information on past & present juxtaposed against each other. Torn.

The steady shapes emerging from the photographs - real, now, present, yet a heavy air of history, a weight of time, passing through - the stitch of the windows enveloping, embracing, suffocating the Chapel?

18 March 2009

The more familiar you become with a place the less you see it. The photographs I took in the first week are a sharp reminder of my first days at Art Space. Now walking around with my camera it's as if the edges have softened, less news. I am being drawn to the tower blocks, their force, grace & beauty towering over the buildings nestled below - keep catching glimpses of the Chapel through the blocks of flats, the eyes looking out.

Studio today - quite uncomfortable at first - a push to do & be doing. Lining paper, stitching & couldn't resist the pull of the paint.

19 March 2009

Studio - looking over work from yesterday. Shadowy, space, arches, memory lines - tracing through thought & archive the specific site, place, lines, boundaries, mapping the actual site. Placing emphasis on these surrounding areas to create shapes/shadows - paper stitched, canvas painted - the journey enclosing them together.

Sometimes the stitching follows the line of the image on the photograph. Sometimes the stitching follows the edge of the photograph or the rip the paper has left, the trail, the edge - quivering, not sharp, out of focus, grasping at a memory that is fleeting & escapes. Is paper more forgiving than fabric? The tears & holes that struggle & appear seem a natural sacrifice for the piece to evolve.

23 March 2009

Studio - stitching canvas, lost in paint, paper, stitching, glue - line & space, proximity, depth, emotion.

Something real & unfocussed about the torn paper & then its fulfilment when it is transferred & attached to the painted canvas - the solid structure yet enabling the two to meet.

24 March 2009

City Library, Portsmouth.

Hampshire Telegraph & Sussex Chronicle. 1879+

30 March 2009

Studio - how the bombing piece of work is progressing. Practical issue of attaching stitched pieces to canvas - needs to be canvas?

Better for paint application & finish of piece. Finality to it? How important is this then? - think through process.

How I translate this research - sift through the layers, bombardment of information, intrusion, one thought overlapping the other. Clarity is needed to enable me to unravel, dissect, sift the layers of information from past & present.

Perhaps the piece I was working on today was holding too much information - pouring out, unable to choose the required parts.

31 March 2009

City Library. Information around the time of Brougham Chapel opening & retirement of Rev. Conibear. Photo & text found, Hampshire Telegraph 31 January 1936.

Studio - working on canvas piece from yesterday, contemplation - seeing how positioning light shapes drawn from studio spaces can simplify information - important layer - flat white shapes.

At first I cut these shapes from white painted lining paper & placed on areas of the collage. Deciding to tape around shapes, remove, paint space within - flattening but giving depth? Need to look at this again tomorrow.

Chapel windows, shapes of light hitting the floor. Relevance to all the information received so far.

02 April 2009

Shadow - intimate spaces traced - layered on to the whole piece.

1. Canvas this way
2. Other canvas shape/light shapes first & then layered on like objects

3. Pre-occupation with translating pieces on to the canvas - mark making to create. How to go about this
4. Work on bags, layer the photographs to remember
5. Walking back to studio through the housing estate - a fleeting moment, a split second & I was tumbling through my history, back to my grandmother's flat on the council estate - the kids in the playground off in the distance, the shapes of the well tended gardens, care & attention given to each tiny plot. Pride, worth, community. I was a little girl again, playing in the garden, walking through the front door - granddad getting something from the kitchen cupboard, the handles on the units - so familiar, the knowing & belonging.
6. That's it - that feeling of knowing because I belong as I walked through, the powerful poignancy of the action, fleeting yet so deep. Moving me to remember.

Alice Kettle talk at aspeX. Carving with scissors
She says: 'Acquire self-believe about your own work.'

17 April 2009

Connecting - connection.

Crossing the bridges to get to the next part of the journey.

Sometimes these bridges are little pebbles over a chattering brook, sometimes the bridge is already made strong, sturdy - travelled over many times in confidence. Sometimes the bridge has to be made with a fallen branch or a stone placed carefully - sometimes over water, sometimes over muddy puddles. Sometimes the bridge has easy access, at other times branches & undergrowth obscure it or the water is too rapid, the banks too wide to bridge & then an alternative route has to be found. Often the more effort & energy required to cross a certain bridge the feeling of satisfaction & achievement is greater.

20 April 2009

Studio - feeling apprehensive & confidence low after having been away from it for a while. Working on smaller stitched canvas today - doing what?

* note: touring project, new website, axis web, Homegrown exhibition, Hyde Abbey Submission.

30 April 2009

A lived environment.

07 May 2009

Feeling: like being put in the top of the class at school & struggling to keep up - all so new, pressure, amount of new information to process - seems almost unobtainable. A very steep path ahead. Always confronting the uncomfortable - restless.

13 May 2009

Re-looking at bombing map. Found recipe book (40's/50's) cook electric. Reading women's volunteering during WWII - map of Brougham Road - connection with strength of Chapel still standing - strength of women, kept going, men away - these women were in the line of atrocities

- puncture lines around Chapel. Books collected (salvaged) by WVS (volunteer service) some distributed to troops, others pulped.

14 May 2009

Studio - all consuming this idea of WVS - books, domesticity/women at home - mapping the roads around Brougham. Realization of places where incendiary & bombs dropped. Map this on desk - space - here - in this place connecting the building - all those people, all those meals to be cooked, the domestic purpose, blown away - released - all the days coming home to have dinner - not coming home, rations, no home, gone - space - what once was.

Create this using the desk already placed within the room - thread - memories, places, situations.

Puncture / unravel - leaving the information open - not held together with the stitching - the echo of a memory, holding the space, ready to escape or fall away - somehow capturing & holding it.

15 May 2009

One panel on floor, crumpled, left, heavy with resonance of space, memory. Reference to toilets in designing, capturing raw state with buildings, photo-copies of high-rises, stitched, pencilled, stencilled, painted. Causing routes & pathways, allowing for fall of material, shape to settle. Stitching to echo - previous uses of buildings.

16 May 2009

Strung/threaded/stitched.

Towers/stress/fear.

Overwhelming/overpowered/not heard/mute/sigh.

08 June 2009

Work that could inhabit the space.

The life of a space - multiple interpretations, space explored.

17 June 2009

Books - 'in demand as salvage to meet the demand for scarce paper & to stock libraries for servicemen.' (Women at War 1939 -1945)

Services for the modern home. 1930's household electricity in the uk. Malnutrition in England, 1936.

The web: trace of somebody, drawing with thread, subconscious gestures. Traces & resonances - distillation, exposure, risk.

01 July 2009

Pondering space.

Thought: strength & fragility of paper.

Lightness of touch. Fragility & its aspect to rip, tear, dissolve, change, morph - strength from wood, trees - binds, incorporates, stitch is given a voice - drawn with stitching.

09 July 2009

The piece floats within the space, anchored to its place by the criss-crossing intricate threads - a web of memory. This tentative line of history the piece commands - a delicate thread from there to here, poignant & powerful with memory.

I'm working it out.

07 August 2009

Opening the door of studio 22 for the exhibition leaves me feeling exposed - once my retreat, my room of safety - emptied of all my surrounding materials to the space it was when I first entered. The desk resting back where it first stood with the unattended chairs - waiting & still. The transition of physically & mentally carrying the pieces produced out of that safety space for all to see & ponder.

Exposed - I am here.

Lisa Traxler, August 2009