

Indefinitely Recursive

- talking back to myself.

I have always found it easier to argue than to agree, and in this body of work I seem to have picked a fight with everyone. Simply to make figurative art at the beginning of the twenty-first century is effectively to imply that I have something to add to the work of Bacon, Breughal, Carravagio, Cezanne, Corot, DaVinci, Degas, Delacroix, Freud, Hogarth, John, Magritte, Manet, Michealangelo, Munch, Picasso, Praxiteles, Phidias, Raphael, Rembrandt, Rodin, Rubens, Seargeant, Titian, VanGogh, Velaquez, Vermeer, Whistler et al, which is a claim of breathtaking arrogance. Not content with this, every piece in this exhibition is to some degree an attack on ideas that are widely accepted in contemporary culture, so not only am I having a go at the greats of my profession, I'm saying that I think my contemporaries across society are mistaken as well.

Yet if no one ever had the arrogance to criticise the work of those who had gone before, progress would be impossible; and this is true not only in the arts but in every field of human endeavour. Without social criticism there would be no Welfare State or NHS, women would be second class citizens and the slave trade would still be with us. Without intellectual criticism there would be no scientific method, and we would still believe, as did the intellectuals of the Middle Ages, that the works of Aristotle were the last word in understanding the physical universe. Without the claim 'I am right, and all those who went before me were wrong', change would cease and tradition would rule the world.

In making art I claim only to add to what has gone before, not to refute it, but this is still an enormous claim to make and requires a level arrogance that is not normally regarded as a positive character trait. Motivation is seldom rational, and ultimately I make art because I enjoy doing so; but do I need to be quite so unpleasant about it? Couldn't I make work that expresses a positive view of the universe and celebrates all the good things in life? The short answer here is no, I can't, not because the enterprise is not worthwhile but because it is beyond my abilities. The whole cast of my mind is critical, constantly preferring analysis to enjoyment and always looking for what is wrong and what I don't like.

But criticism tends to be recursive. I cut the ground from under my own feet, and then realise that I must have been standing somewhere to do so, so I cut away that ground, then I realise that I must have been standing somewhere to do that...there's no possible end.

Whether the whole enterprise is worth the effort, I have no idea.