

Impact case study (REF3b)

<p>Institution: University of Worcester</p>
<p>Unit of Assessment: 34 - Art and Design: History, Practice and Theory</p>
<p>Title of case study: Public engagement with contemporary painting and printmaking stemming from research prompted by responses to Schubert's 'Winterreise' song cycle and John Clare's 'Journey from Essex'</p>
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>This case study describes impact derived from Fisher's practice-as-research, during which, through painting and printmaking, he sought to develop approaches to image making involving narrative structures, and formal and technical methods and procedures, that achieved 'visual equivalents' of the nineteenth century 'texts' of Schubert's <i>Winterreise</i> song cycle and poet John Clare's <i>Journey from Essex</i> (both narratives of walking). The outcomes of the research were publicly exhibited and discussed in a variety of contexts during the period under review, thereby contributing to public engagement with, and understanding of, contemporary art as well as to critical/professional discourses surrounding contemporary painting and printmaking. Secondary impact was derived from the introduction of Clare and Clare's poetry and Schubert's song cycle to many hundreds of people previously unfamiliar with them.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Practice-as-research from which impact was derived was carried out solely by Dr James Fisher between 2005 and 2009, while he was Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at the University of Worcester.</p> <p>Fisher's research involved an attempt to deploy the idea of Thomas De Quincey's 'palimpsest' to orientate the layering of imagery in pictures. The palimpsest incorporates notions of the past through its archaeology, the present in its current manifestation, and the future by presenting the potential for readjustment. A palimpsest, in this sense, is an 'involute construction' in which otherwise distinct objects are combined so that they inhabit each other. Fisher's project to make a visual equivalent of the palimpsestic experience of Schubert's <i>Winterreise</i> song cycle (and subsequently poet John Clare's <i>Journey from Essex</i>) involved consideration of the multi-layered construction of its narrative: as a piece of fiction, the cycle is comprised of layers designed to elicit a particular effect and the resulting narrative is lucid and precise. A first attempt to devise graphic responses to this aspect of the song cycle's construction in its entirety (see Section 3, item i), and its successes and failures, prompted Fisher's decision to use the palimpsest as a methodology for future paintings and prints. A number of paintings were developed in response to the text of a particular song in the cycle, <i>Rückblick</i>. Initially (see Section 3, item iii), this involved layering and manipulation of the song's libretto to form a pictorial field in which to place figurative imagery, thereby stimulating viewers' imaginative construction of a three dimensional model of the space in the picture, placing them somewhere in the location that the figures appeared to be monitoring and effecting their visual journey both into and back out of the painting. Subsequent paintings (see Section 3, item iv) were made in response to Fisher's developing understanding that the interdependency of <i>Winterreise's</i> emotional content and construction was not simply a corollary of the music-text hybrid and would not be achieved in the paintings merely by construction of an 'equivalent' palimpsest. His research, here then, was thus characterised by an advance away from preoccupation with the structural complexities of the song cycle towards an understanding of its emotional content being delivered as an extended space in which the viewer was involved.</p> <p>Through parallel work on a series of mono prints (see Section 3, item ii) Fisher had been able to overcome an initial rigidity resulting from certain procedures in the paintings – especially use of a dotted outline to position figures – by making revisions to his approach that produced a more sympathetic way of reconciling figure and ground. Motifs that embodied <i>Winterreise's</i> narrative space were reassembled to construct its narrative as pictorial space. At this point it became possible to apply what had been learned about the subtleties of submitting the song cycle's narrative structure to equivalent visual organisation, to another narrative of walking – John Clare's <i>Journey From Essex</i>. Submitting a narrative to a set of visual ideas developed to transcribe a different narrative provided a structure through which it was possible to compare the two texts.</p> <p>Fisher proceeded to make a series of large paintings addressing the idea of Clare holding his gaze</p>

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to the horizon, their making guided by a process of seeking an image from within a surface, and deploying a range of processes, materials and techniques to achieve a 'visualisation of arrival' (Clare at the end of his journey and the paintings at their point of completion). (See Section 3, item v). Finally, a further five paintings were made in response to Fisher's dissatisfaction with the capacity of his pictorial imagery successfully to describe the notion of travel: he sought to develop imagery capable of suggesting Clare's mental and physical journey through landscape, from the organic, circular space of his childhood to the rectilinear rigidity of enclosure associated with his adult experience (see Section 3, item vi).

Through the research, Fisher sought to make an original contribution, in painting and related media, to contemporary enquiry concerning (i) real and imagined 'landscapes' and (ii) the possibilities of 'narrative' presented by the movement or positioning of a figure in such landscapes. He conceived of it as contributing to current dialogue generated in other, congruent disciplines (for example, by Iain Sinclair and Patrick Keillor amongst others) as well as to broader debates surrounding use of the figure in contemporary painting (eg as presented in the survey exhibition *Malerei der Gegenwart* – Kunsthal Rotterdam; Kunsthalle der Hypo-Kulturstiftung Munich – in which curators Drs Christiane Lange and Florian Matzner sought to "encourage reflection as to whether there is a feeling of insecurity in society today which has triggered the current trend towards figuration, analogous to the *retour à l'ordre* of the 1920s").

3. References to the research

- (i) *Winterreise* – leporello form book monoprinted on kozo paper, 24pp plus frontispiece and colophon, bound by Tracey Rowledge, 2006.
- (ii) *This is How I Walk When I Have Given Up* – 25 mono prints, each 50x65cms, variously etching, lithograph, screenprint, pub EMH Arts 2007.
- (iii) *I Live in Fear* and *Record of a Living Being* – two paintings, each oil on linen, 96.5x101.5cms, 2007.
- (iv) *Her Image will Also Melt Away, Beyond Ice and Night and Fear, You Won't Hear my Step* – three paintings each oil on linen, 138x128cms, 2008.
- (v) *I Quaked Like the Ague; The Air of Highland Mary; Wide Awake Hat; Oh He Shams; Eat the Quids* – five paintings, each oil on linen, 173x157.5cms, 2008.
- (vi) *My Hopes Are Not Entirely Hopeless*, 71x81cms; *Delirium Warms*, 71x66cms; *Host of Snares*, 81x71cms; *Lindenbloom*, 71x66cms; *Your Fate Was Sealed, My Boy!*, 71x66cms – five paintings, each oil on linen, 2007-8.
- (vii) 'The Invisible City' exhibition catalogue including image of Fisher's *Record of a Living Being* (p10) pub EMH Arts, 2007, ISBN 978-0-9554046-3-4.
- (viii) 'James Fisher', pub Campden Gallery 2010, folded card catalogue with introduction by Fisher and 6 sides 4-colour illustrations

4. Details of the impact

Much of the impact of Fisher's book, *Winterreise* (commissioned for an exhibition, *The Pilgrimage Books*, curated by Sheila Farrell for Worcester City Art Gallery and Worcester Cathedral as part of a larger, Arts Council England-funded multi-arts project in partnership with BBC Radio Drama) occurred prior to 2008. It culminated, however, in production of a signed single edition digital facsimile, also bound by Tracey Rowledge, for permanent display in The Hive, Worcester's new multi-award winning University and public library opened in July 2012. The book is presented alongside two paintings by Fisher (see details later in this section). An image of the original book was reproduced in *RA Magazine* (Issue 110, Spring 2011, circulation: 10,000), alongside an article on the 2011 London Original Print Fair (which discussed the variety of forms embraced by contemporary print making), during which Fisher participated in a workshop for visitors.

Mono prints from Fisher's series *This is How I Walk When I Have Given Up*, together with his paintings *Her Image Will Also Melt Away, You Won't Hear my Step, Beyond Ice and Night and Fear, I Quaked Like the Ague, Eat the Quids, Delirium Warms*, and *Lindenbloom* were exhibited as part of Fisher's 2008 solo exhibition: *I Came Here a Stranger*, Eagle Gallery, Emma Hill Fine Art,

London. Mono prints and the paintings *My Hopes Are Not Entirely Hopeless*, *The Air of Highland Mary*, *Wide Awake Hat* and *Oh He Shams* were also included in a second, linked solo exhibition, *As A Stranger I Depart*, Campden Gallery Gloucestershire. Together, these exhibitions attracted 1,260 visitors. They were accompanied by a catalogue, *I Came Here a Stranger as a Stranger I Depart* (ISBN: 978-0-9554046-6-5) distributed in an edition of 5,000, with texts by Fisher and Martin Holman and illustrations of a number of the paintings discussed in this case study. These exhibitions, and the painting *Beyond Ice and Night and Fear* were featured in the editorial for *Galleries* magazine (November 2008), distributed throughout the UK in monthly editions of 17,000.

The painting *Lindenbloom* was exhibited in *Exchange* (also including work by Basil Beattie, Jane Bustin, Zara Matthews and Peter Rasmussen), The Paul Kane Gallery, Dublin, 30th March – 19th April 2008. *Exchange* was featured on 'The View' programme, RTE television, 8th April 2008 (<http://www.rte.ie/tv/theview/archive/20080408.html>) and reviewed by Aiden Dunne in *The Irish Times*, 9th April 2008: "[...] Finally, James Fisher's richly-coloured paintings present us with deceptive surfaces. Appropriated imagery is infiltrated into layer upon layer of decorative patterning – or vice versa. The basic effect is to make us question what we are looking at as the illusion of the picture surface gives way no matter which way we try to read it. Having been diverted, however, we are endlessly entertained by Fisher's juxtapositions of line, pattern and colour. If you are used to thinking of contemporary British art purely in terms of the YBAs, this show should come as an interesting corrective." *Exchange* attracted some 1,250 visitors; RTE's 'The View' programme attracted an audience of 76,000; the Irish Times has a daily adult readership of 321,000.

All the paintings and the entire suite of mono prints were also presented in a solo exhibition as part of the 2009 Aldeburgh Festival, at the invitation of composer and Aldeburgh Festival Associate Artistic Director John Woolrich. Presented at the Pond Gallery, Snape Maltings *My Hopes are not Entirely Hopeless* was open throughout the 2009 Festival, which attracted audiences of 21,000.

Fisher gave an invited talk at Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery, *Painting in the Footsteps of John Clare* in December 2010, during which he discussed some of the work stemming from research outlined in the case study. It was attended by an audience of 164.

Prints from *This is How I Walk When I Have Given Up* were selected for *The Northern Print Biennale 2009* (4 July-4 October 2009; Laing Gallery, Hatton Gallery and Northern Print; selectors: artists Stephen Chambers and Kip Gresham, and Senior Curator, Prints, V&A, Gill Saunders; visitors: 95,000). One print was reproduced in the accompanying *Northern Biennale 2009 Print Awards* catalogue (ISBN: 0955584647, 9780955584640). Fisher also exhibited prints from the series as one of a number of artists (including Peter Blake, Damien Hurst and Barbara Rae) invited to present work alongside work selected through open submission for *Bite: Artists Making Prints*, Mall Galleries, London (24 August – 6 September 2011; selectors: Chris Orr, Richard Noyce, Barton Hargreaves, Brad Faine, Paul Codwell; est. visitors c.10,000).

Fisher's painting *You Won't hear my Step* was selected for the Royal Academy Summer exhibition in 2010 and featured in the RA Magazine (issue 107, Summer 2012, p50, ISSN: 0956-9332), where selector Stephen Chambers wrote of Fisher: "His work is a genuine enquiry – exploring a world that perhaps hasn't been seen elsewhere. This is not a typical picture, but it's the rawest. He has a singular love affair with landscape. It's an overtly seductive painting with a large decorative element, which is part of the spell." The Summer Exhibition attracts in the region of 200,000 visitors each year and 100,000 copies of the RA Magazine are published each issue.

The painting *You Won't Hear my Step* was featured in the publication *Royal Academy Illustrated 2010* (Royal Academy of Arts, London, ISBN: 978-1-0905711-56-7, p82) published in an edition of 8,000. (It was reproduced twice, pp11 and 82, and discussed by Richard Cork in his introduction). In 2012, it was exhibited as part of *Meltwater* (Eagle Gallery, London, 5-28 April), which included work by Nick Archer, Denise de Cordova, Tom Hammick and James Fisher and attracted 975 visitors.

The painting *Her Image Will Also Melt Away* was bought for a significant private collection in the USA in 2010.

The painting *Wide Awake Hat* was bought for a private collection in Boston, Massachusetts.

The painting *I Live in Fear* was acquired by the Jerwood Collection (accession no JF138) in 2007

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and installed at the new Jerwood Gallery in Hastings for its opening in March 2012.

The paintings *I Quaked Like the Ague* and *Eat the Quids* were purchased by WLHC ProjectCo. and donated for permanent installation at The Hive, Worcester's new joint university/public library (which has attracted a throughput of one million visitors in its first year of opening since July 2012 (<http://www.thehiveworcester.org/art-collections.html>)).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

RA Magazine (issue 107, Summer 2010, p50, ISSN: 0956-9332) – the public 'reach' of Fisher's work and discussion of it within a wider context of public understanding of, and access to, contemporary art.

Galleries magazine, November 2008, p10 – the public 'reach' of Fisher's work and critical promotion and discussion of it.

Northern Print Biennale 2009 Print Awards pub. Northern Print, Newcastle, 2009, ISBN 9780955584640 – the public 'reach' of Fisher's work; the critical/professional esteem in which it is held; its contribution to public and critical engagement with, and access to, contemporary art.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/paintings/i-live-in-fear-226236> – the public 'reach' and standing of Fisher's work.

'JAMES FISHER. *I came here a stranger, as a stranger I depart*' catalogue published on the occasion of Fisher's solo shows at Campden Gallery and Eagle Gallery, pub. Campden Gallery & Eagle Gallery/EMH Arts, 2008, ISBN 978-0-9554046-7-2 (with texts by Martin Holman and James Fisher, with 14pp 4-colour illustrations) – contribution of Fisher's work to public, professional and critical engagement with contemporary painting.

Liz Gilmore, Director, Jerwood Gallery, Hastings – contribution of Fisher's work to the Jerwood Collection and the role of the Collection in rendering contemporary art publicly accessible.

John Woolrich, composer and Associate Artistic Director, Aldeburgh Festival (2004-2010) – contribution of Fisher's work to stimulating public engagement with Schubert's song cycle *Winterreise*, and of his Aldeburgh Festival exhibition to promoting engagement with contemporary visual art amongst non-specialist audiences with a primary interest in music, and to Festival programming.