

# Learning From Others



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**MARK MAKING AND MELANCHOLIA IN PAINTING:  
A LANGUAGE FOR VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE MELANCHOLIC**

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**PRACTICAL STUDY: LEARNING FROM OTHERS**

**APPENDIX 2.1**

**to the thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements of Bath Spa University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**School of Art and Design, Bath Spa University**

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## **Appendix 2.1**

### **PRACTICAL STUDY: LEARNING FROM OTHERS**

## 2.1 Learning from Others

In an earlier era aspiring artists would have undergone an apprenticeship with intensive mentoring from an established artist. Part of this apprenticeship would be the practice of master copying that often continued even when an artist left the atelier and became established in their own right. Even 30 years ago I remember seeing students with easels in art galleries/museums in front of old master paintings looking for inspiration and advice. Today with access to quality colour reproductions online and in text books this practical engagement with paintings has all but vanished.

I decided to try and learn from working artists in the field of my studies by attempting my own copies. With the benefit of high quality reproductions in books supplemented with seeing works of the artist first hand to examine technique I set out to learn from their approach and to try and incorporate aspects of their methods into my own practice.

The choice of the 10 key artists and their work was driven by the findings of Appendix 1, making sure that I had a broad range of working methods and styles deliberately choosing some that were outside my comfort zone. It should also be noted that all 10 work from photographic sources of one kind or another so I am dealing with an 'authenticity' of feeling that is yet another step removed from the source.

**Conclusion:** These exercises proved very valuable for a number of reasons, some unexpected. The concentration required helped me learn how to unpack a painting and find what was interesting and useful to reinvent. I had worried that my individual touch would suffer but instead the immersion in the gestures of others informed my own practice and improved my understanding of 'formal' properties such as the use of space. Some of the more expressive works enabled me to evaluate the importance of 'authenticity' to the content of the painting, showing that expressive marks can contribute to the melancholy aura of a painting even when that expression is inauthentic. Finally, copying Jenny Savile's 'Pause' helped my understanding of how the use of abstract marks in the figuration defers the reading of the painting leaving time (room) for the viewer to project emotion onto the image.

**Cross reference:** See also the introduction to Section 4.2 (Expressive Mark Making) of my thesis.

### **A2.1.1 'One' (Copy of work by Michael Borrëmans)**

**Objective:** Explore the process by which Borrëmans constructs the painting, in particular his use of paint to fill the interstices of the canvas weave. I was also keen to try and replicate his use of exaggerated gestural marks and glazes, both of which signal that the image is a painting and in particular reference the work of Velázquez.

**Conclusion:** Although it lacks the 'punch' of the original I was very pleased with the copy. By trying to get the background colour right I unintentionally softened the original brushwork under an opaque glaze resulting in less differentiation between the subject and the ground than in the original. I needed to get it right first time, as the effect hinges on the different treatments of subject and ground and the glaze connecting the two. I learned a lot, particularly about preparing the canvas which could be a useful alternative to my own method.

The melancholy of the painting derives from the nostalgic references of a subject being taken from an old photograph and the narrative of frozen concentrated inactivity suggesting an existential crisis. This is supported by the temporal disconnect suggested by running the brown glaze of the table top through the figure.

Although it isn't as technically proficient as the original, I believe it does convey the same sense of melancholy. This in itself was an important discovery as it separates the mood of the painting from the authenticity of the marks and sites it in the suggested narrative and formal properties instead.

**Cross reference:** See Section 5.1.1 of my thesis for more on how Borrëmans use of context supports a melancholy reading of his work.



**'One' (Copy of work by Michael Borrëmans), 2009**  
**Oil on Canvas 70x60 cm**

### **A2.1.2 'Rückenfigur II' (After Michael Borrémans)**

**Objective:** Another exploration of the back of a figure, the Rückenfigur, to evaluate whether a realistic 'Atelier' style is most appropriate to the subject. The figure is from my own photograph but the style of painting and the implied temporal disconnect caused by the table top both reflecting and going through the subject is borrowed from Borrémans.

**Conclusion:** The journey was difficult and not one that I am keen to repeat. I don't think I managed to deliver a finished painting that matched my mental vision. Despite two attempts at the painting I failed to achieve any gestural marks that would lift it from the ordinary. Basically my lack of practise and skill let me down but I didn't feel any sense of harmony with the method of working at all. However, I did get a finished piece at the end and conclude in retrospect that my failure to evoke Borrémans' style of painting detracted from the meaning as the contextual reference to gestural mark making was lacking.

The question I should really ask is given this realistic version as a benchmark, could I do the painting in another style that would make the melancholic message clearer and more pronounced despite the modern clothing? I don't return to the same image but try the motif of the 'rückenfigur' in a variety of styles.

**Cross References:** See Section 5.1.1 of my thesis for more on how Borrémans use of context supports a melancholy reading of his work.





**'Rückenfigur II' (After Michael Börremans), 2011**  
Oil on Linen 40x50 cm

### **A2.1.3 'Architecture and Morality' (Copy of work by Glenn Brown)**

**Objective:** The plan is to develop a technique for reproducing something similar to Glenn Brown's swirls of colour, including white, by relying on transparent glazes and the white of the primed canvas. The goal is a flat but gestural version of his painting, not to interrogate his method of working which is the antithesis of heartfelt (authentic) gestural mark making, but to improve my own technique developed in 2005.

**Conclusion:** Very pleased with the results, looks great. A slightly more pristine surface would have helped the initial glaze but it is a minor point. Feel I have an interesting approach to producing Brown's flat illusionist rendering of thick impasto and expressive brushwork. This fusion of my method with his allows scope for me to introduce my own expression into the marks, yet still underlines that the painting contains the essence of its own death – references works by other artists, surrealism and as a bonus contains one of my favourite motifs, dying flowers. What is missing of course is that I am no longer painting paint so that post-modernist idea is lost, but an important breakthrough for me nonetheless.

The next step is to see if I can find my own subjects to paint incorporating luminous glazes, removal of paint and free loose 'expressive' brushwork to examine if the relationship between emotions and painting is causal?

**Cross Reference:** See the end of this Appendix for the methodology involved in making my copy, Appendix 1 page 13 for my 2004 review of Brown's original painting and Section 4.3.3 of my thesis for more on how Brown's method of working uses trompe l'oeil to simulate painterly gestures and consequently comments on expressing emotion despite a loss of authenticity.



**'Architecture and Morality' (Copy of work by Glenn Brown), 2008  
Oil on Canvas 140x100 cm**

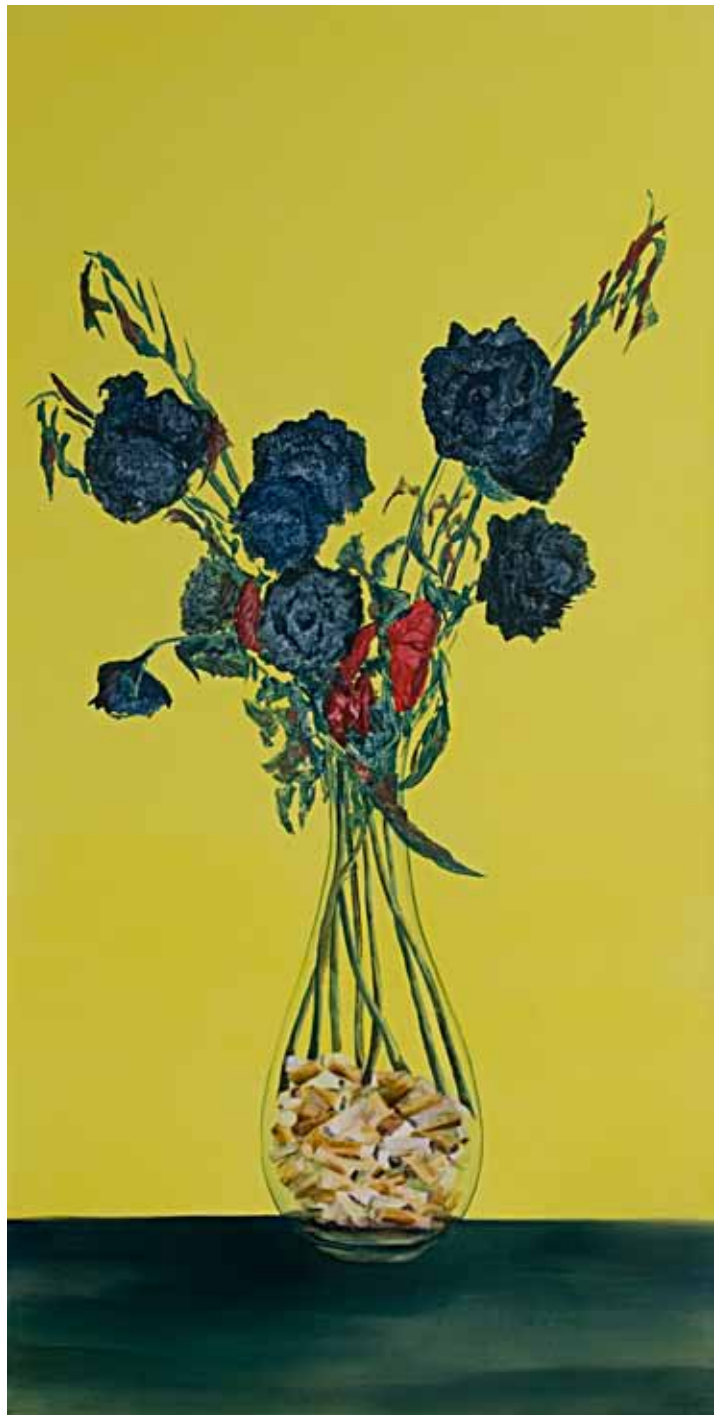
#### **A2.1.4 'Choke' (After Glenn Brown)**

**Objective:** The plan is to experiment further with the synthesis of my own style and Glenn Brown's approach to appropriating an image and painting paint. The image I decide to use is his painting 'Death Disco', 2004, which in turn is based on a fusion of a bad catalogue reproduction of Rembrandt's 'Flora' of 1634 and large monochrome background borrowed from van Gogh's 'L'Arlésienne: Madame Joseph- Michel Ginoux' 1888. Brown also uses van Gogh's palette from the same source, but not the broad impasto rapid brush work.

**Conclusion:** The major faults with my painting are easy to analyse with the benefit of hindsight. The background colour is too uniform, I didn't appreciate the importance of the distressed appearance of the background in Brown's painting until I left it out. The edge of the table is too sharp causing the vase to float rather than sit in an illusion of depth. Finally the clouring of the flowers is too uniform, a nuanced approach would make for a better painting. I wish I had taken the plunge at the time and added a random deep yellow glaze to the background. It would have invigorated the surface and I believe enhanced the melancholic feel of the work and allowed me to soften the rear edge of the 'table'. As it is the painting is too sterile, too controlled, relying on ideas of decay but lacking the emotion I intended to inject in support of the imagery.

Despite these serious faults a valuable lesson was learned. If only I could loosen up and paint confidently I would be better able to judge whether the relationship between emotions and painting is indeed causal. As it was the tentative exploration involved in constructing such a large scale work negated my emotional intention. Smaller paintings with less at risk in the event of failure will help break the paralysing spell and are probably the approach I should take to investigate a possible causal link in my own work.

**Cross Reference:** See Section 4.3.3 of my thesis for a detailed analysis of Brown's painting and the works it in turn references.



**'Choke' (After Glenn Brown), 2009**  
**Oil on Canvas 150x75 cm**

### **A2.1.5 'Black Painting #2' (Copy of work by Cecily Brown)**

**Objective:** I really engaged with this series of works when I saw them and wanted to 'have a go' myself to unpick what made them seem so powerful. Of particular interest is how she combines the imagery of 19th Century academic painting with the palette, framing and motifs of Goya and paints using marks derived from American Abstract Expressionists such as De Kooning and Guston to give a contemporary viewpoint.

**Conclusion:** The painting that started off really badly after making a number of naive errors, but a number of valuable lessons were learned. Most important was just how important the weight of background and the framing of the subject can be to the image. Secondly by attempting to reproduce the look of the original I found a way to introduce thicker paint into my work and keep it consistent with the thin glazes. Thirdly, Brown paints by rehearsing the marks across a number of canvases at the same time, allowing room for improvement, and when something works she can incorporate it in all of them. Surely this reduces the emotional investment in each, weakening any link between authentic experience and mark making? If only I could loosen up and paint as confidently without having the marks of another artist to use as a template I would be better placed to evaluate whether my felt emotion translates to the marks on the canvas. The language has to come naturally before it can be used expressively!

**Cross Reference:** See Appendix 1 page 12 for my 2005 review of one of Brown's original paintings from her series of six.



**'Black Painting #2' (Copy of work by Cecily Brown), 2009**  
Oil on Canvas 152x152 cm

### **A2.1.6 'Blot on the Landscape' (After Nigel Cooke)**

**Objective:** Following a visit to see the new exhibition of work by Nigel Cooke at the Modern Art Gallery, London in May 2008, I decided to undertake a medium sized painting of a caravan loosely based on his painting 'Stumpy's Diner', 2008.

The title of the show was "New Accursed Art Club" and explored the theme of the 'old school' artist being a dead cliché. The word that came to my mind when confronted with these large imposing paintings was bathos, the way one finds an incongruous mixture high and low culture. This is usually associated with poetry, but I think applicable to this use of large skilfully painted statements to depict caricatures of artists. One would think that an artist obsessed with the "Death of Painting" couldn't fail to paint melancholic images, but I cannot say this was true for all the works in the show. I think 'Stumpy's Diner' is a good example of where, for me, the bathos is too strong and the underlying melancholia becomes part of the joke. I started out with my notes on his process that I had gleaned from the exhibition and started with drawings, works on paper and board and samples on canvas to test my approach out.

**Conclusion:** I am less than satisfied with the result. I really like the graffiti trees on the concrete wall that acts as a backdrop to the 'real' content in the foreground. However, this is such a strong idea identified with Nigel Cooke's work that I don't feel able to appropriate or absorb it into my own work. This is a shame because it is the strongest melancholic element and I think without his irony it could be used to more effect. The colour palette follows his original painting, but isn't as vibrant, particularly in the foreground, and doesn't add to the melancholic aura. Whilst the internal light and the open door suggest a narrative, this is nowhere near as strong as that in Cooke's painting with the play on Café Society. Lots of other ideas were trialled though in the process and helped considerably to enrich my own language of marks, in particular the use of multiple glazes to create a brooding atmosphere that is rich and varied.

**Cross Reference:** See Appendix 1 page 17 for my 2008 review of one of Cooke's original paintings from the "New Accursed Art Club" exhibition including my observations on his technique.





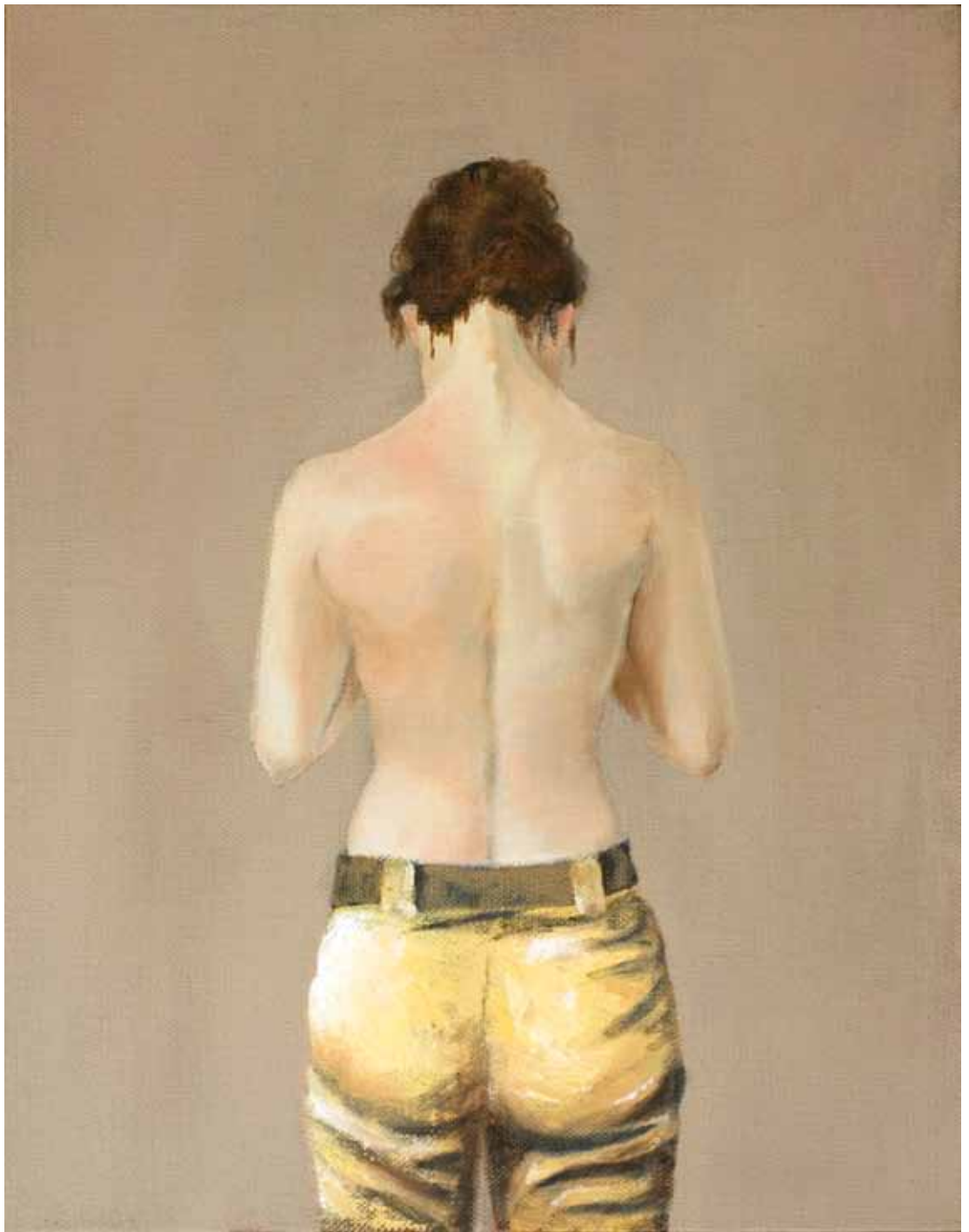
**'Blot on the Landscape' (After Nigel Cooke), 2008**  
Oil on Canvas 80x100 cm

### **A2.1.7 'Rückenfigur I' (After John Currin)**

**Objective:** One of my personal objectives is to find an appropriate approach to painting the back of the figure – the Rückenfigur. I have chosen to explore the style and mark making of John Currin as the first step to see if it would be helpful. I work from a photograph of the back of a friend and take the colours and proportions of his 1997 painting 'Heartless' 44 x 36 cm, as my guide.

**Conclusion:** An immense amount of work and a painting I am pleased with at the end of the day. Does the painting stand muster with the Currin original? I certainly lack his confidence and knowledge, and was finally getting there, but it became clear early on that the distortion of his figure and use of the caricature of a face is crucial to the power of the painting. My version lacks both these elements and consequently is a nice painting rather than a melancholic one. Perhaps if I was to redo the image as an anorexic with a wasted figure and a large head then it would work, but this is not an issue I wish to address. I have learnt a lot from a standing start, but in my heart I know that this style of painting doesn't work for me.

**Cross Reference:** See Appendix 1 page 21 for my 2003 review of Currin's original painting and Section 5.1.2 of my thesis for more on how Currin's paintings rely on narrative elements and caricature for meaning and how in his later work the contextual references have become less important than his proficiency as a painter.



**'Rückenfigur I' (After John Currin), 2010**  
Oil on Linen 45x35 cm

### A2.1.8 'Healing I' (After Marlene Dumas)

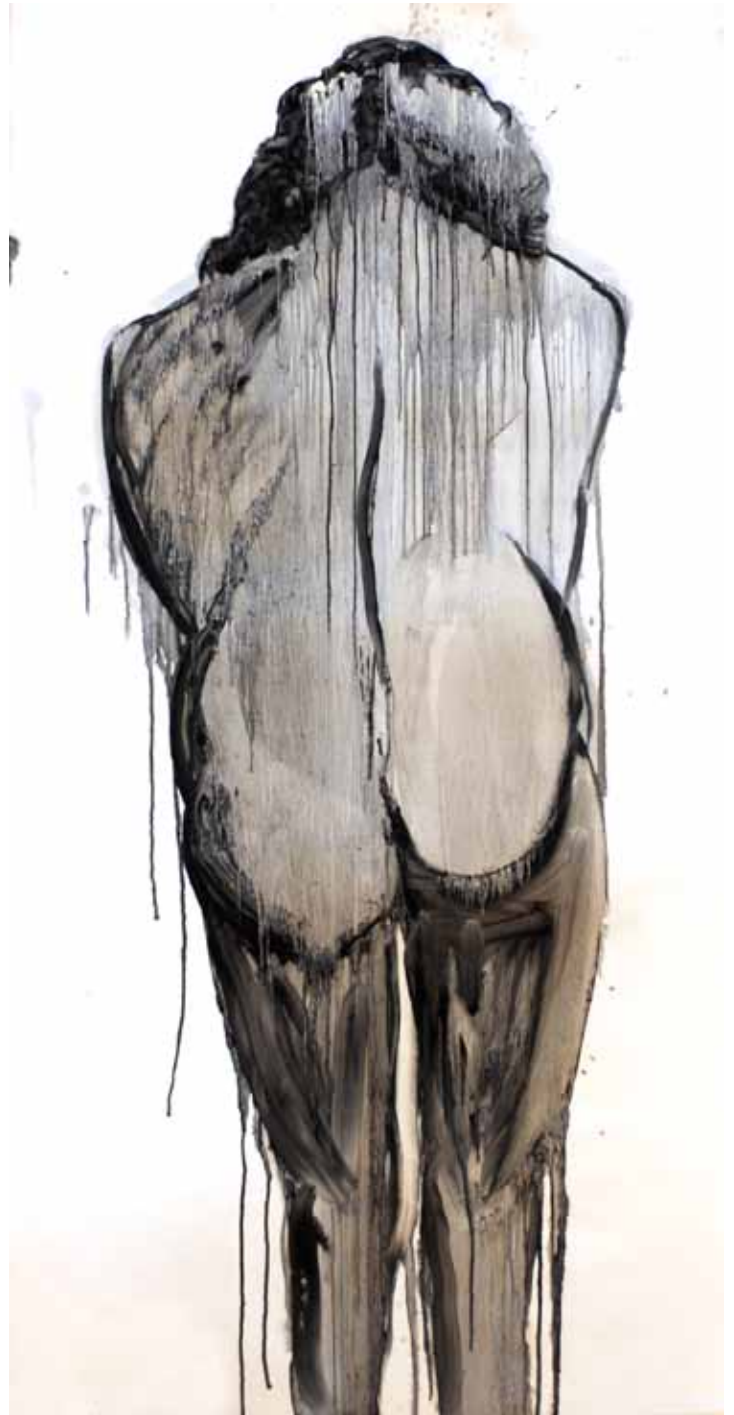
**Objective:** I have been searching for an appropriate language to use that adds to the feeling of melancholy that I associate with the back of a figure and suits my style of painting. Marlene Dumas is one of six artists that I have experimented with to see if there are elements in the way they paint the figure that could be appropriate to my subject. I started examining her approach to making large scale works such as 'Josephine' done in ink wash on paper - I have seen several examples and a video of her working on the series that the drawing/painting comes from.

**Conclusion:** Much better than my previous attempts on small sheets of coated paper, the larger scale and large round brush certainly helped free up my mark making by removing most of the element of control I had over the process. The type of marks are much more in keeping with the subject than those possible with my large flat brushes. I think the treatment adds to the melancholic pose, but I got tempted into outlining again. If I am to adopt this style I need to work more with drawing with the brush in various consistencies of paint and practice diffusing the edge by touching it with a pool of turpentine – a translation of a watercolour technique. I could also consider adding tonal layers on different days – probably getting too 'deliberate'.

I did feel immersed in the mark making and that spontaneity contributed to emotional content of the image. In particular the downward runs of paint can be seen as a trace of a gesture that has passed, suggesting time elapsed and constructing a sense of loss of the original mark.

The biggest problem is the amount of solvent expended on a large image and whilst this is acceptable in a large empty studio it doesn't translate into my own small space. That means either work small (in which case I exert too much control) or I adopt watercolour or ink which is too close to Dumas.

**Cross Reference:** See Appendix 1 page 27 for my 2004 review of 'Stern', one of Dumas' original paintings from the "The Second Coming" exhibition and Appendix 1 page 28 for my 2009 review of her dyptich 'Gelijkenis' that is based on Holbein's 'The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb'. Whilst these are oil paint on canvas she maintains the same loose approach to mark making seen in the ink wash works on paper.



**'Healing I' (After Marlene Dumas), 2008**  
**Oil on Paper 150x75 cm**

### **A2.1.9 'Portrait' (After Chantal Joffe)**

**Objective:** I want to explore Chantal Joffe's work to see if there are lessons to be learned that could be useful for my back portraits. In particular she is very adept at combining thick and thin paint to good effect and although she normally works on an immense scale she does do some small portraits. I thought a small scale piece would be an appropriate place to start, and chose to work from my own photograph of a friend that has been manipulated in Photoshop to the same proportions as Joffe's 'Jeremy' 2008 done in oil on plywood panel.

**Conclusion:** I made a conscious effort not to correct too many mistakes, and with practice it would certainly be easier. The finished piece is more sad than melancholic despite my stretching the face. At the time I was disappointed and disheartened and my notes record "Looks like a bad painting and lacks the impact of Joffe's piece". Now I am not so sure, there is a spark of vibrancy to the work and with more attempts I suspect I would overcome the stiffness of technique and experiment with confidence. My panel is slightly larger than Joffe's, has a smoother painting surface and is mounted flush to the sides. In other words it doesn't look as scruffy, which negates part of the aesthetic of her piece. Like A2.1.8 the crucial element seems to be apparent spontaneity and looseness of marks and as these are totally different styles of painting I suspect this would translate easily into my own style.

**Cross Reference:** See Appendix 1 page 51 for my 2008 review of Joffe's original painting 'Jeremy' including my observations on her technique.



'Portrait' (After Chantal Joffe), 2008  
Oil on Panel 48x38 cm

### **A2.1.10 'Healing II' (After Chantal Joffe)**

**Objective:** As mentioned in A2.1.9 I want to explore Chantal Joffe's work to see if there are lessons to be learned that could be useful for my back portraits and I also want a comparison with A2.1.8. I take the method and colour scheme Chantal Joffe's painting 'Mother and Child' 2008. This painting is 304 x 122 x 2.3cm and on board. Although I am working on a sheet of paper which is smaller and different proportions, it will give me some insight into the process.

**Conclusion:** Interesting. With the introduction of colour I got drawn into blending adjacent areas and softening interior edges – I need to keep Manet in mind and eliminate some of the half tones. Lacks the impact of Joffe's painting, part the size and part the fact that her strength is the emotion she gets into the face with limited brushwork. In particular I made no use of the horizontal brush stroke with thin paint that results in downward runs that are typical of her larger works.

A lot was learned from the examination of the two techniques (Dumas/Joffe) but decide not to try a full scale, 300 x 150cm, version on canvas as it would yield little new insight.

**Cross Reference:** None





**'Healing II' (After Chantal Joffe), 2008**  
Oil on Paper 150x75 cm

### **A2.1.11 - 'Die Aufklärung' (Copy of work by Daniel Richter)**

**Objective:** Another exploration of the figure from the back. Richter's approach is to start with an abstract under-painting that is then only partially glimpsed/revealed as subsequent layers of paint are added.

**Conclusion:** Although it is different proportions (3cm too wide) and a lot smaller than his painting 'Die Aufklärung' ('Enlightenment') 2005 220 x 170 cm it was a useful scale to investigate his process given the relatively straightforward nature of the original. The most interesting aspect of the experiment was the use of an abstract under-painting that is then worked over. Another use of downward-streaming paint that suggests time passed. I must admit that I enjoyed the expressive freedom in the early stages and like the concept of this outburst being partially obscured by image and my smaller facsimile of the original did manage to convey the notion of reaching into the void. This approach has a parallel with feelings being hidden under the outer appearance. This idea is something to consider incorporating into my work in the future but is at odds with the process I have been developing.

**Cross Reference:** See Appendix 1 page 74 for my 2004 review of Richter's original painting 'Gedion' 2002 including my observations on his technique albeit different to that used in 'Die Aufklärung'.



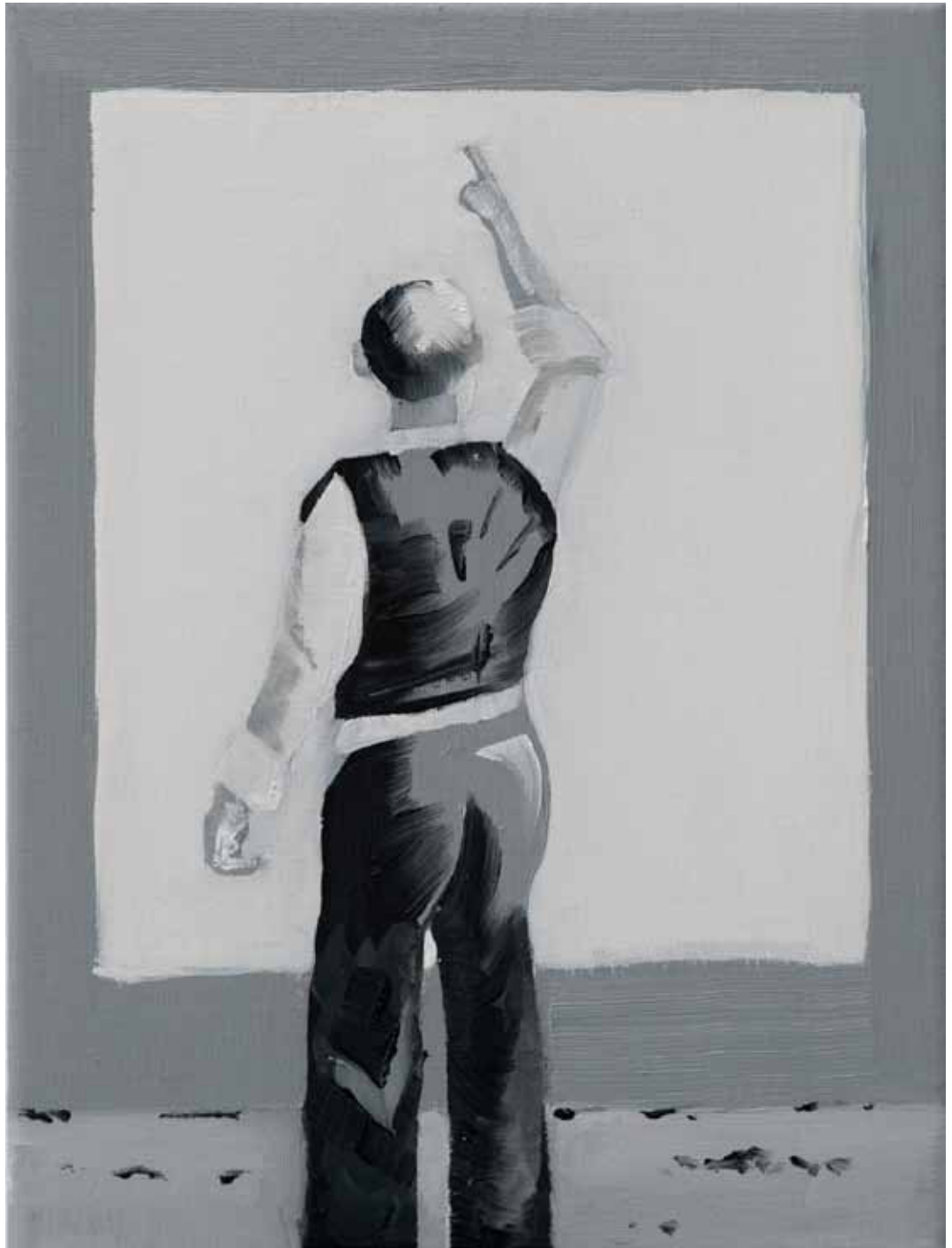
**'Die Aufklärung' (Copy of work by Daniel Richter), 2008  
Oil on Canvas 100x80 cm**

### **A2.1.12 'Figure from the Back' (After Wilhelm Sasnal)**

**Objective:** A motif I have been working with for 10 years but I have yet to resolve a style of painting that enhances the melancholy implications that I believe are inherent in the loss of identity implied by the figure seen from the back. This exercise was to try a painting influenced by the style of Wilhelm Sasnal as he has done a number of paintings of backs that I admire for their melancholy connotations. I particularly wanted to examine how Sasnal simplifies tonal information from a photographic source, so rather than a direct copy of a Sasnal painting I work from a small photograph of Lucio Fontana about to cut into a canvas hanging on the wall of his studio.

**Conclusion:** A good start and I could envisage painting in this style albeit with thin transparent paint rather than opaque paint. As a subject a group of paintings of the backs of artists done in this manner – about to make a mark- could be of interest, but I think I would like to do them just a little larger to allow more flourish with the marks. The most significant lesson is how much impact the small abstract flourish (sometimes Sasnal excels at) can have to disrupt the reading of the subject and although I didn't achieve it here it is something I explored in my later caravan studies (A2.3.1 100 Monochrome Studies on Canvas and Panel).

**Cross Reference:** See Appendix 1 page 79 for my 2005 review of 'Girl Smoking (Anka)' 2001, Appendix 1 page 80 for my 2007 review of 'Tarnów Train Station' 2006, and Appendix 1 page 81 for my 2009 review of 'Untitled (Kacper and Anka)' 2009. These reviews incorporate my observations on Sasnal's method of working.



**'Figure from the Back' (After Wilhelm Sasnal), 2011**  
Oil on Canvas 18x13 cm

### **A2.1.13 'Pause' (Copy of work by Jenny Saville)**

**Objective:** I really admire how she has progressed as an artist and deeply aspire to be able to paint in such a free painterly way. I know a lot of the impact derives from the scale of the work, but hope that my more modest attempts might give some valuable insights – particularly into how abstract marks resolve themselves into a representation from a distance but revert to just marks close up. I can't help feeling that this conundrum is at the heart of my project to use mark making to support and convey emotion and feeling.

**Conclusion:** It was hard work and took 8 months from start to finish but I was pleased with the result despite it lacking the grand scale of the original with the figure looming larger than life. Using thicker paint was very challenging, but once I gained confidence the marks began to become more 'expressive' and the change in textures added a richness and interest to the surface. It was also interesting that I think I managed to paint with some degree of emotion even though I was copying another artist's work.

Whilst painting I gained a much better understanding of how important the marks are to maintaining and reinforcing the tension of the composition within the frame and not just painterly realisation of the skin. It is certainly true that every mark has a perspective. Did I manage to come close to the depiction of maimed and scorched flesh that Saville achieves in her painting with brush and knife? No, not even close, but I was pleased that the illusion in paint worked well enough that the eye was able to piece together the fragments and try and make sense of the whole. I do think that even my 'synthetic' expressive brushwork added to the presence of the finished copy even though it called for me to play a role rather than express my own personality. Would I be able to paint a 'melancholic' self portrait of my own from scratch in this style? I think I lack the confidence, but with preparation and practice it should be possible. Crucially I believe that the style of painting (the fragmented loose painterly marks, the colours, the closeness of the subject to the edges of the canvas and the monumental scale) would also be totally appropriate and would enhance the melancholic aura of such a painting.

**Cross Reference:** See the end of this Appendix for the methodology involved in making my copy, Appendix 1 page 82 for my 2004 review of Saville's painting 'Reverse' 2002-3 and Section 4.2.3 of my thesis for how Saville's approach is appropriate to her interest in bringing inner neuroses to the surface rather than just painting an outward personality.



**'Pause' (Copy of work by Jenny Saville), 2008**  
Oil on Canvas 140x100 cm

#### **A2.1.14 Faith (After Jenny Saville)**

**Objective:** In 2008 I did a small scale copy of a very expressive portrait by Jenny Saville called 'Pause' (A2.1.13). The challenge was to try the same approach to a portrait of my own (on a modest scale) and see if I could make it work without an extant work for guidance. The subject/emotion was to be one of failed religious rapture and my objective was to evaluate if this approach to painting suggested a melancholic feeling to an ambiguous portrait.

**Conclusion:** I like the painting a lot and although it lacks some of the variety of marks (downward runs/dribbles of thinner paint) in 'Pause' I thought it worked both as a composition and as a melancholic image. Encouraged, I am planning a much larger version 200 x 140 cm to test whether I could sustain and improve on the marks on a larger scale and evaluate the effect of larger than life on the viewer. However, the work was adjacent to the work I was doing on a copy of Holbein's 'Dead Christ' in the studio and the observation was made that 'Faith' looked like a portrait of a dead woman on the mortuary slab seen from above. I am still considering the implications of this interpretation and wondering whether I should do further work (include irises, alter the grey skin tone/ background) on the portrait prior to committing to a large version. Unfortunately a studio wasn't available in 2012 – gripped with indecision I do nothing.

**Cross Reference:** See Section 4.2.3 of my thesis for how Saville's approach is appropriate to her interest in bringing inner neuroses to the surface rather than just painting an outward personality.





**'Faith' (After Jenny Saville), 2011**  
**Oil on Canvas 95x70 cm**

### A2.1.15 Dead Christ (after Hans Holbein)

**Objective:** My initial objective was to do a contemporary update of Hans Holbein the Younger's painting 'The Body of the Dead Christ in the Tomb', 1520-22 30.5 cm × 200 cm that is in the Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel in a loose expressive style using thin semi-transparent paint.

**Conclusion:** The first sketch was encouraging, but the predominance of the Viridian made the image look very sepulchral (clichéd). Nevertheless the random marks ensured a lively surface and as a process it felt promising enough to try again. The second attempt overcame the problems with the colour, but it was too light in tone. I had been concerned that introducing thick opaque paint would kill the surface. In fact this didn't happen mainly because I was able to keep the marks fresh and avoid making corrections even though my drawing was off (the chest is almost too high to be unbelievable). Despite this I reverted to the original palette for the large version, but took care to use less Viridian. I liked the result although the perspective of the figure and the box are a little confusing. I also felt that I had managed a moving copy (replacing the context of the original with a street dweller) using my own approach to mark-making, that referenced the Holbein for those that knew the original.

In a test of whether my marks have made the image more melancholic than if I had mimicked Holbein's style as well I think the answer is no. If I crop the cardboard box and just leave my painted figure, the original is much more harrowing. Alternatively when the Holbein is seen within its frame, it looks just as if the side has been removed from the tomb and we have the convincing illusion that we are looking at the factual body of dead Christ. As Julia Kristeva has remarked "There is nothing more dismal than a dead God" and the meaning of the painting can be interpreted as the loss of belief in the resurrection (the tomb isn't empty) and consequently loss of Faith. It is Holbein's skill and vision in articulating a 'real' likeness or icon, that makes the painting so melancholic. A faithful representation of the dead body of a man taken from a cross with the head thrown back in suffering (rather than with the customary traces of beauty combined with the agony on the cross). My expressive interpretation doesn't even begin to come close and I decided not to pursue the image on canvas.

**Cross Reference:** See Appendix XX for the methodology involved in making my copy. Kristeva, Julia (translated by Leon S. Roudiez) Black Sun 1989 Columbia University Press, New York 8



**'Dead Christ' (After Hans Holbein), 2008**  
**Oil on Paper 75x150 cm**

### **A2.1.15 Dead Christ (after Hans Holbein)**

**Objective:** My interest in the Holbein painting was re-awakened when I saw two paintings by Marlene Dumas ('Gelijkenis 1 & 2' 2002, Oil on Canvas 60 x 230 cm) at the Punta della Dogana, Venice. This diptych by Dumas is based on the Holbein painting, one a facsimile or simulacrum, drawing a power and melancholic aura from the original, the other partially based on a tabloid image of Michael Jackson sleeping in his oxygen chamber (in an effort to stave off his own mortality). Clearly the paintings have to be read as a pair (Gelijkenis means Likeness) and perhaps she is emphasising that despite our culture elevating our media icons to the status of gods, giving them delusional ideas, their mortality is unavoidable. Her canvases are slightly longer and deeper than the original, making them less claustrophobic spaces for the figures. They are painted in a style instantly recognisable as Dumas; the figures the white of cold porcelain tinted with shimmering pastel washes at the extremities, the ground thin, rich dark glazes, sketch marks in pencil and biro are evident and the painted features are crude, but recognisable. I decided to tackle my own version in two ways. Firstly with a grisaille under painting that would provide a framework (that was lacking in my first attempt) for thin glazes and secondly with thick bold expressive marks.

**Conclusion:** The bold expressive approach using thick opaque paint just didn't seem appropriate for such a static subject, the narrow sliver of flesh gave little opportunity for anything other than longitudinal marks. Faced with these difficulties I felt intimidated by the original and that I was going nowhere. On reflection a way out of this might have been to retry adding more variety of marks into the space around the figure. Perhaps I had been too quick to dismiss this approach and paint over it; I need a sense of the claustrophobia above the figure and the stone cold feeling of stiffness of the pall on which it lies. A look at the early work of Baselitz and the later work of Guston might prove instructive. I still have the painting on a stretcher and might find heart to re-visit it after further research. The 'Holy Grail' of an expressive grisaille under painting that I can then glaze with transparent colours remains as elusive as ever despite my concerted efforts. I can see what I want to achieve in my mind's eye, but the practicality of doing it evaded me again. I will have to re-apply myself to this problem and try other approaches.

**Cross Reference:** See Appendix XX for the methodology involved in making my version, and Appendix 1 page 28 for my 2009 review of Marlene Dumas dyptich 'Gelijkenis 1 & 2'.



**'Dead Christ' (After Hans Holbein), 2011  
Oil on Canvas 60x230 cm**

### **A2.1.16 'The Connoisseur' (After Michael Börremans)**

**Objective:** After writing section 5.1.1 of my thesis I gained a better understanding of both the methodology and meaning behind Michael Borrëmans work. Consequently I felt it was worth another exploration of the back of a figure, the Rückenfigur, to evaluate whether I could replicate the melancholy mood in his work in a subject of my own. The figure is from my own photograph but the style of painting and composition is borrowed from Borrëmans. I will work on very fine portrait linen rather than the coarser weave linen I used in A2.1.2 'Rückenfigur II' (After Michael Börremans).

**Conclusion:** At the second attempt I got very close to the look of a Michael Börremans painting except in one respect. His brush strokes are deliberate and confident, and it was the final highlights on the arms in particular that let me down. Yet it is just this manner of confidence with loose flourishes that Borrëmans references the painters such as Manet and Velásquez that he admires, lending his paintings a revenant sense of contextual melancholy.

**Cross References:** See Section 5.1.1 of my thesis for more on how Borrëmans use of context supports a melancholy reading of his work.



**'The Connoisseur' (After Michael Börremans), 2013**  
**Oil on Linen 80x60 cm**

**Appendix 2.1 Cont.**

**PRACTICAL STUDY: LEARNING FROM OTHERS**

**SELECTED METHODOLOGIES**

**A2.1.3 & A2.1.13**



### **A2.1.3 'Architecture and Morality' (Copy of work by Glenn Brown)**

**Method – Paper Support:** I started on Monday 4th August 2008 with a 140 x 100cm paper double coated with Spectrum Thixotropic Primer and lightly sanded with dry fine wet & dry paper on hard block. My palette was Titanium White (W); Cadmium Yellow (W); Prussian Blue (S) diluted with thick and thin glaze as appropriate using linseed oil.

The first problem was trying to get the right colour of grey green for the background. After a lot of experimenting I decided the simplest was with Prussian Blue and Cadmium Yellow with white to get the tone. It is my intention to add a green brown glaze over the top later. I grid up the photograph [#1], and working from this, mark the outline of the shoulders in thin green with a #8R. I then try adding the opaque green to the background with a #12 Hog Filbert but the paint doesn't glide well and the surface looks very patchy [#2]. I add more medium and switch to a 30DVR and finish the background. I wipe out areas where I estimate the flower heads will go and add an extra layer of undiluted Spectrum Thixotropic Primer to the shirt area to give a 'faster' less absorbent surface [#3] and leave to dry.

Not sure what my strategy is going to be for the flower heads. Ideally I should pull back to the white below, but this isn't going to work on the paper! I check the accuracy of my painting against the original. Strange how asymmetric the shoulders are, but fairly accurate. The space I have left for the flowers are not bad either, do I draw them with pencil and add the background around the outside?

**Method – Small Sample on Canvas:** I probably went about this the wrong way round entirely, should have painted the flowers first and then done the background. I think the best plan is to start again on a fully prepared canvas but rather than go for the full painting start with a section of flowers [#6]. I cover a 30 x 30cm fixed stretcher (#1022) with 12oz Dyers Mill cotton duck (see Journal 20th March 2008) and then apply 2 coats Spectrum Acrylic Primer. The surface is sanded and then primed with 2 coats Spectrum Thixotropic Primer, wet and dry sanding between after each layer. I select Cobalt Blue (W); French Ultramarine (MH); Burnt Umber (MH); Scarlet Lake (A) for the palette and a thick glaze using linseed oil as the medium.

### A2.1.3 Continued...

I mix a thick green glaze from the Cobalt Blue and Umber. I apply a layer of turpentine overall using a 30DVR and then apply the green glaze with the same brush, working the paint across the surface to vary the tone. I generally aim for darker at the edges, lighter in the centre [#4]. I then start to pick out the leaves using a #2R and turpentine, wiping the brush each time with a rag. I then switch to a #4LF to vary the size and type of marks and start adding in a brown glaze that is varied by adding touches of Ultramarine [#5]. I use the tip of a #6R (don't have a #4R) to enhance the white of the more prominent leaves and then add in a touch of blue and some red with a #2R. Sharpen up some of the earlier quick brushwork and leave to dry [#6].

Might be interesting to glaze over the top to enrich the surface and pick out the details again, but very pleased with the results, quite a relief that I could still do this as it has been so long. Have forgotten one or two wrinkles, such as how extra medium can be used to soften the edges, but generally it all came back.

**Method – Full Size Canvas Support:** I cover a 140 x 100cm fixed stretcher (#1048) with 12oz Bath Spa cotton duck and then prime with 2 coats Spectrum Acrylic Primer. The surface is sanded and then primed with 3 coats Spectrum Thixotropic Primer, wet and dry sanding after each layer. The surface was far from perfect as I used up remnants from two tins of the Thixotropic primer, but good enough to paint on. I select Cobalt Blue (W); French Ultramarine (MH); Burnt Umber (MH); Burnt Sienna (MH); Cadmium Yellow (A) for the palette and a thick glaze using linseed oil as the medium.

On Thursday 2nd October 2008 I mix a thick green glaze (single cream – drips off spatula) from the Cobalt Blue and Umber, bluer than that used for the sample. Using an overhead projector and a transparency of Glenn Brown's painting, I draw the outline of the figure with blue crayon. I apply a layer of turpentine over all the background using a 60DVR and then apply the green glaze with the same brush, working the paint across the surface to vary the tone [#7].

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### **A2.1.3 Continued...**

I had intended to aim for darker at the bottom, lighter at the top, but I had mixed the glaze too thick and had to progressively add more medium to keep it workable as the turps evaporated. I then start to pick out the leaves using a #6R and turpentine, wiping the brush each time with a rag. I then switch to a #6LF to vary the size and type of marks and start adding in a brown glaze that is varied by adding touches of Ultramarine. I switch to a 20DVR as the leaves get larger and then the 60DVR in the neck of the figure [#8]. I really enjoy the fluidity of the mark making and allow plenty of scope for my own expression without being too tied to the original painting.

I use the tip of the #6R to enhance the white of the more prominent petals [#9] and then add in a touch of sienna and a little yellow with a #2R. I sharpen up some of the earlier quick brushwork as I work the yellows in and add a #4LF to vary the strokes [#10]. I then mix up a loose mixture of the umber and blue and load the 60DVR with medium and then work some of this into the shirt, adding more turps and medium as I go. I add a little of the yellow/brown mix to the right hand shoulder. I reinstate the whites of the collar and with a #6LF add in the shadow detail around the collar and for the buttons. I pick the buttons out with a #2R [#11]. Apart from the shadow behind the shoulder I think it is finished and leave to dry – 6 hours solid painting. Once it is dry the plan is to add an umber glaze at the bottom of the canvas.

By Tuesday 7th October 2008 the paint is dry enough to glaze and I mix Burnt UMBER and Cobalt Blue in thick medium more towards the brown than the blue this time. I apply the glaze with a 60DVR to the shadow areas around the shoulders. I then add just medium above this with the same brush progressively working out the paint in the brush until it is clear medium from about half way up. I cover all the painting apart from the shirt and neck in this way. As I work I blend and soften the edges and marks with an 80DVB and finally wipe off over spill onto the collar with a soft tissue dipped in medium [#12].

### **A2.1.13 'Pause' (Copy of work by Jenny Saville)**

**Method:** I will paint a large sketch on coated paper first and then try a 1:2 (approx.) scale painting on canvas. Referring to a large format book of her work which shows several photos of her studios, I make the following observations about her technique:

[1] She surrounds herself with not just photographs of the subject, but with large oil sketches on paper exploring composition, depth and colour; and photographs and book illustrations of body parts related to the interpretation she intends to give the finished painting. The result is very much a transformation of the original photograph.

[2] The studio is littered with newspaper with large deposits of paint perhaps for drying out the oil, numerous large plastic pots of mixed paint, large colour swatches on paper, colour samples experimenting with combinations and brush marks, notes on painting sequences and a variety of brushes, usually in a paint pot implying that she uses one for each colour.

I started in April 2008 by projecting a "photoshopped" image taken from a reproduction of Jenny Saville' painting 'Pause' [#1] onto 150 x 105cm paper double coated with primer and lightly sanded with dry fine wet & dry paper on hard block. As the size of the original canvas is 305 x 213cm this is approximately 25% of the surface area. I painted the outline using Burnt Sienna in thin medium [#2].

Thought about method of attack and decided to go for the background first adding some Titanium White tinted with a little Naples Yellow. Added a little of this tone to areas of the body and left to dry. Continued painting the background by mixing and applying the following sequence: Naples Yellow and Viridian; Prussian Blue and Cadmium Yellow; and Prussian Blue and Burnt Sienna [#3]. I added the flesh tones to the body using Titanium White, Burnt Sienna, Viridian and Naples Yellow in various combinations. I then reinstated some of the marks using a mix of Prussian Blue and Burnt Sienna.

I added the reds to the face using layers of Chrome Yellow, Alizarin Crimson and Scarlet Lake in thick medium. Finally I added some blacks using a mix of Alizarin Crimson and Viridian [#4]. Rather than continue to paint the detail on the hands I stopped at this point and turned my attention to a canvas version. The sketch will provide a useful point of reference through this next stage.

### A2.1.13 Continued...

Looking at the photograph of her painting it is hard to tell which she does first, the background or the figure. The preliminary work on paper has given me a little insight into her actual sequence of working. My guess is that she works backwards and forwards i.e. both. My guess is that she paints a series of interlocked coloured squares as the very first step and then paints the figure over the top, modifying the tone and colour of the background as required to make the figure project or recede.

With this in mind I make a start on a 140 x 100cm canvas doing the outline as before [#5] but this time I try and lay in the blocks of background colour from the outset. I get started on the background and draw the rough outline of the rectangles with a blue crayon. I use neat Spectra gel (to give body) as the medium and a #12HF to apply the paint. I apply a pale sky blue as a rectangle behind the head, deliberately painting over the figure. I then mix a neutral grey and apply this and then a beige [#8]. It was like painting with chewing gum and I suspect that for this first layer she uses something a little thinner, perhaps just the paint and turps to the consistency of double cream. I then switched to the blue-greens and tried various mixes of Prussian Blue, Cadmium Yellow and Burnt Sienna with Titanium White and Blue with Lemon Yellow and White but found it hard to match the reproduction exactly especially as it is a sunny day and the light kept changing. I just used turps to thin the paint [#6]. Already it looks quite different from the previous version on paper.

Rather rashly (as I am sure Jenny Saville doesn't use one) I do a tonal under painting using Burnt Umber and French Ultramarine in turps. I apply the paint very thinly, almost just a stain and then add a bit of more concentrated paint with the same brush. I use a rag and a hog filbert dipped in turps to make corrections, in particular washing back to lighten the tone. I work all over the figure in this way and leave to dry [#7].

Mixed up a variety of yellow greens using Titanium White, Naples Yellow, Viridian, Burnt Sienna, Burnt Umber, Cadmium Yellow and Spectra gel. Applied these with a #12HF and #4HF as loosely as possible considering that I had to keep referring to the photograph. The antithesis of expressionism. I mix Cadmium Yellow and Titanium White and thin medium to give a very thin opaque wash and then scrub this with a clean #12HF over the rest of the figure, light and dark. A quote keeps coming to mind as I do this "Every mark has a perspective". Think it is important to work the whole surface at this stage for this very reason – I can fine tune later [#8].

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### **A2.1.13 Continued...**

Each day I feel a sense of trepidation about starting, something to do with being pleased with the progress so far and being apprehensive that I will take the image backwards not forwards. Mix Titanium White with a little Naples Yellow and turps and apply to areas of the camisole top and dab bits around the figure. I then vary the hue by adding small quantities of Umber and Viridian, thicken the paint with Spectragel and paint with both. I mix some Cadmium Yellow with the white and paint on the belly, shoulder and forward arm. I then mix Titanium White with a little Viridian and add to the pants, the top left background, and small areas of the body, all with a palette knife. I vary the hue with some Ultramarine and Umber to near grey and add to the pants in a similar manner. I mix some umber with thin glaze and add this tone to the rear arm, the undersides of the breasts and the shadow on the pants [#9].

I thin Alizarin Crimson with turps and then mix in some Viridian to darken. I paint with a #12HF but the paint is too thick so thin further. Carry on painting over all the red areas, the intention being to add thicker redder paint subsequently. Then working with a #2HF and a soft cloth I remove paint with turps to suggest volume through tone. Thought it was going to be too dark, but in actual fact works a treat. Mix more green into the dark red to get black and working very thinly add some detail. Now well beyond the stage in the attempt on paper and it is so much more convincing. Finally feel that the mood is starting to come through and definitely feel it is as much about the play of the colours against each other as it is about the marks [#10].

Hard starting again after such a long break. Was very tentative at first and this is probably not a good passage of painting. Mixed Cadmium Red with turps and applied with a #2HF to the face and hands. Then to vary the colour I mix in Alizarin, Burnt Umber and Cadmium Yellow and carry on in the same areas. Doesn't look quite right and I believe that whilst the paint on the hands is supposed to be thin and dry it is thicker and richer on the face. I mix the same range of colours with Spectra gel and apply with a palette knife, and #4HF & #2HF brushes to the face [#11]. Looks better albeit a little strange, perhaps the surface will look more uniform once the paint dries. Plan is to paint the dark thin layers on the background tomorrow and then tidy up the darks and lights on the face and hands.



### **A2.1.13 Continued...**

Started out mixing Viridian with a little Alizarin to darken it and thinned with turps I apply it to the background. Was a bit too thick and even, so intervened with more turps and a rag to break up the surface a bit. Varied the tone with some burnt umber and stained the shadows behind the figure with the same brush and then wiping most of the paint off with a rag. Mixed a black with the Viridian and Alizarin and then added more definition to the hair, was too much again, so thinned using a #4HF and turps and then decided to broaden the forehead with some white and Naples Yellow. Then working with the black and a #2R I reinstate facial features and details on the right hand. Make some additional marks with the thick paint on the bustier, the pants and the right arm using a mixture of the palette knife and a #12HF. Thin some Burnt Sienna with turps and add some tonal details to the pants and shoulder. Think I am finally finished. [#12]

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