

I'm going to keep this as conversational as I can. Why? Because I was asked to write about my own work for this exhibition guide and it feels right under the circumstances, besides, some things are off limit to me; comparing my work to Picasso's to start with.

I have my hands in the dark of course (Milton Avery, James Cowie, Enzo Cucci, Ernst Lüdwig Kirchner, Piet Mondrian ...), but to write about my work for you through them, to create analogies with them instead of with other natures - with things seen, and heard or felt - would be to perhaps mislead you. I'm not sure. What I am sure of however is I don't want this piece of writing to tidy things up. Making art is a messy, bewildering, flighty, improbable, confusing, and sometimes desperate way of spending time with yourself (in lieu of others) and I'd like the writing to somehow reflect this.

In the exhibition there are paintings on canvas, and paintings in clay, and the exhibition is called *domestique*. In French, *domestique* translates as "servant". Each work has a title as well.

The title of the exhibition alludes to where the work is made. My home. (In the living room, at the kitchen table. I don't have a studio, another place where I make work). And to the type of work itself. It also refers to *helpful* relationships, to cooperative industry.

The word *domestique* was first used in professional cycling as an insult directed at Maurice Brocco ('He is unworthy. He is no more than a *domestique*.') following a stage of the 1911 Tour de France, in a decade when it was a race for individuals not teams. It's now commonly used to refer to those cyclists that make up the mass of the contemporary peloton, cyclists who work for the benefit of their team, who help their star rider win races. And if I brought such an idea to the art world? Thought of a different creative relationship between the artist and the visitor to the gallery? The artist a *domestique* to the viewer?

The title of each work is for you, and for me. For you, it's to help you *look at* the painting, not *read it*. These paintings are not rhetorical surfaces but imaginative spaces in which *to see* and *be seen*, however difficult I grant you that this might be. Once I complete a work, the title helps me to put it somewhere (in a field, at sea, in 1974, in a room ...) but while it's being made it pulls me, first one way and then another, as just one element of many in the crucible of material and imaginative correspondence which co-exist in me when I settle to work.

A friend once gave me a piece of advice. We were talking about a clutch of poems that she had read for me. She said, "... think of the title of a poem as an additional line ... get it to do a bit more work for you". This is the way I think about titles for my paintings. Sometimes they name a thing, *Haybale*, or a person or activity, *Surfer*. Sometimes an encapsulating word or phrase in which is embedded the fine grain of autobiographical and cultural reference, *Kozmetika* (*cosmic ethics*; the window into a ruined cottage in Bunchrew, Invernesshire; Archimedean geometry; or the self-titled album by a Serbian experimental rock group, the members of which had been at the forefront of avant garde activity in Belgrade in the 1970's, and had previously been known as *Dijamantski Psi*, *Diamond Dogs*, taking their name from the title of David Bowie's eighth album, released

in 1974, and the first album I recall buying). Or sometimes a sensation, *Le sillage de parfum*.

The paintings on canvas are oil paintings. I use nothing else (oil paint, a brush, sometimes a little linseed oil, onto a white acrylic-gesso ground). The canvases and ground are prepared for me by a friend, and always to the same dimensions. I take a fresh one from the stack when I wish to paint (in much the same way that I get a fresh sheet of paper when I sit down to write), place it into one of three easels I have in rooms in the house, and paint. It's not that exciting ... until, that is, the first daub of paint is made on the surface, until the space of the picture takes over, however momentarily, from the actual space of the room in which I sit. I will always start a painting somewhere, with some reason and something in mind, but I always end it surprised, somewhere unexpected.

First, an autumn, then a winter and a spring, looking up from an armchair at the sky between the branches and leaves of a great oak tree; beauty on either side, beauty without alternative. The sky sometimes rising very far away, then, in the spring, the tree grows over it, completely hiding it, though I feel it glinting somewhere off behind the leaves. Living things don't all require light in the same degree and this goes for each of us as well: *Harp (After Piet Mondrian)*. The paintings configuration influenced too by the work of Hans Arp and Milton Avery.

The clay's are different, they take more time to make. Each one is made by hand, an original form, if only a simple rectangular tablet. I roll out a lump of clay on the kitchen table and cut it to size (with an old knife, greaseproof paper, an empty wine bottle). I then draw into it, cover it with cloth and set it aside for about six or seven weeks to dry and harden. (I store bread in old pillowcases in the same way; the clay can breath, can exhale and slowly change character). After this, after it has dried, I'll work into it with paint.

*'I wrote your name in the sand / the sea washed it away / I wrote your name in the sea'*The inscription is John Stammers', from his collection, *Panoramic Lounge-Bar* in which he presents the reader with a world of seascapes, pop icons, old masters and run-down English coastal towns. I've been to Bridlington, Sewerby, Flamborough Head, and because of family, I'm familiar with Saltburn-by-Sea in Tyneside. In April, from its pier, I watched nine surfers in the water ... waiting ... Waiting. Waiting. For what? A wave? From some notes: '... someone painted this place once and never touched it again ... white-grey polyprop chairs ... the white of your skin, the dark rings under your eyes ... white bread bacon and ketchup sandwiches ...'

And in Anstruther (on the east coast of Scotland), "How did life come between us *mon cher*?" And so *Surfer*, in canvas and in clay, came onto the waves of being.

Kevin Henderson, Perthshire, Scotland 2014, for the room text, for *DOMESTIQUE* a solo exhibition, The MAC Belfast 28 August – 19 October 2014