

THE JACKDAW

The following piece is a description of my practice written for the independent art magazine The Jackdaw . Published April 2020.

'I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged' writes Peter Brook at the beginning of his seminal book *The Empty Space*'. Like a theatre director, I too endeavour to make an act of theatre. First I set the stage. In this case the stage is a piece of painted plywood approximately two by three feet, upon which a ceramic object with cylindrical bottom and long long neck is placed in the foreground. As it is solid and robust, I feel it will serve well as a kind of corner stone to the whole composition.

Next I choose an antique rusty metal oil can and place it further back but towards centre stage. It is characterful with coned body and comical spout. A number of objects are then placed next to it but are quickly abandoned until at last a green square bottle with chipped rim is placed; the contrast between aged rust and the green glass immediately sets up a lively interplay.

This encounter might be enough but the scale of the canvas demands more and another object is introduced. This time it's a bluish transparent plastic Evian bottle: it reminds me of the tall glass skyscrapers that now puncture the London skyline. Shimmering and imperious, it becomes the pivot of the composition. I decide though that something is still lacking and I place a small glass tucked in behind the bottle. Although it hides in the shadows like a shy child, I feel it creates enough interest for the eye to be momentarily intrigued without being distracted completely from what's going on centre stage.

This theatre starts to look promising and from here I might proceed with making a separate drawing first to help decide the overall composition and the size and shape of the canvas. All work is done from careful observation and whether I'm drawing or painting, it's through looking and feeling the subject that intuitively creates the appropriate mark. The process is one of adding and taking away, scraping back and reapplying. Adjustments to both the arrangement and the painting will continue until some kind of conclusion is reached.

This 'stage' or arrangement could be just an object on a plinth: a single lemon for instance , displayed like a museum exhibit for all the world to see. Or it could be the studio floor, where a cacophony of mismatched objects of differing characteristics sprawl out, seemingly pushing and jostling for position. 'In the Round' shows a large round table top placed on the floor. In

'All Blues' however the scene is more sedate where each form is confined to their own space in a row like notes on a sheet of music.

However, whatever the painting is trying to express, whether its a scene of serenity or utter chaos, the underlying structure remains the same. The aim is to find a way so that every component is integral to the other and to the whole, otherwise everything will inevitably fall apart.