

**Drawing into Landscape**  
**Panel Discussion**  
**Friday 25th August 2017**

Matthew Bowman (MB) - art writer  
Marco Cali (MC) - curator of exhibition/artist  
Amanda Ansell (AA) - artist  
Simon Carter (SC) - artist  
Emily Ball (EB) - artist  
Keith Murdoch (KM) - artist

MB - One of things that is most evident about the exhibition is that in many ways this is an exhibition about spaces, three different spaces. So it's an exhibition about landscape spaces; What is it to be a painter of the landscape? A painter of the landscape, looking at landscape? Secondly, the space of the studio; so these works are primarily for the most part studio based practices, or the final works are studio based pieces. And the third space would be more of a metaphorical space or theoretical space and this is the gap between the landscape and the studio, and the gap between landscape and painting, and I'm particularly interested in this third space. This gap.

So it is often said that any form of representation whether it is drawing, painting or photography so and so forth involves a kind of hiatus, gap, interval, between the original thing and the representation itself. So we don't tend to confuse paintings of landscapes with landscapes. We recognise we are looking at a painting and we often think a painting is different from the actual landscape itself and it is the same of any medium of representation. So we don't tend to talk to portraits of people, for example. What becomes interesting about what all the people in this exhibition are doing, is they are ultimately emphasising that gap. So the landscape artists, plein-air artist, going out with easel, tubes of paint, palette and canvas, and working there directly out in the landscape is a fairly recent thing. This happens more properly in the late 19th century and it begins to happen when paint starts to come in tubes and paints become readily transportable. A tube of paint is one of those great inventions. But before that, landscape was primarily an indoor discipline. And here, in this exhibition, it is also an indoor discipline, but not purely, it is also related to the outside activity. This gap has to come within the painting itself. The preparatory sketches may happen initially outside, but then one has to walk back or drive back to one's studio, set up your paints and canvas and the whole gap of time and space, comes in between. The painting may take hours, days, weeks, or months to complete and as we know the landscape during this time will be ever changing. So I'm interested in these gaps, these intervals which happen. Is this a gap between the landscape and painting? Is this important to you?

KM - Everyone is looking for something different within their chosen landscape. Everyone will interpret even the same landscape in a different way. I suppose that one element of the individual artist themselves is a gap between the two.

SC - Keith you are painting with watercolours outside, some are done inside and some outside, is that right? So you are doing the same activity in two different spaces?

KM - Yes, I'm responding to the same environment.

SC - But the studio painting is not based upon the initial painting?

KM - No. The studio based paintings are more based on the memory of the activity of painting in the landscape. I like the studio work to be connected to the landscape in some way but it doesn't have to be literal.

SC - I go out and make drawings outside. In terms of what they express, they are quite basic, mainly lines and tone, but mainly line and then I reinterpret them into the paintings in the studio. If you do a drawing and go straight back to the studio and start working from that drawing, you are also working with what this drawing provokes in your mind, but if you leave it until the next week, it is gradually becoming more of a drawing you are working from, rather than the memories which are dropping away a bit. So I would say the drawing becomes more important. So I know exactly what you mean with that gap. I don't refer back to very old drawings, but I do like there to be a few days in between, to settle down, so I can see it as a drawing, rather than provoking the memory of what I was looking at.

AA - For me, the feeling from looking is an important part and this happens from facilitating an experience, by going out into the landscape. The actual doing and the activity of creating and evolving the pieces of work, that happens as part of a process back in the studio. So I am considering the physical, the visual, and the emotional connection and I take this away with me back to the studio. The memories, activities, experiences, for example the sense of rain falling around me, whatever is happening at the time, is taken back to the studio. The gap between this experience and the studio painting process can in turn, become the many layers of the painting.

MB - Emily, it is interesting that you are recording an experience as you move through the landscape, so it is in some way an attempt at immediacy. Thinking about paintings being done in the studio, and this gap of time, a gap of space, emphasising the representational-ness rather than a presentation of the landscape. I'm interested in what these gaps or intervals are doing...

EB - Being in the landscape is overwhelming. There has to be a condensing for me of what is important. So, that rapid drawing, that selection of seeing what is important, and that distilling when you are back in the studio, is essential for me, because I don't want to copy what I have seen at all. Also that distance from your experience is vital. Allowing the painting to be what it wants to be back in the studio. This evolution, needs time. I did also try walking the route, drawing whilst walking at the same time and this was very different and didn't work so well.

MB - There was a wonderful exhibition catalogue from back in the early 1990's, by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. It was for an exhibition at the Louvre and the theme of the exhibition was self portraiture. One of things that interested him about the paintings, drawings of paintings that he talks about, is what he referred to as this necessary moment of blindness. And for me I think this is something that happens within these works as well; it's the condition of painting or drawing. So for him, he starts off with an everyday example, in which you have your subject in front of you whether it be landscape or sitter etc and you look very carefully at that and then you look at the paper or the canvas to make your mark upon that and at that moment you become blind as to what is immediately in front of you. Another gap happens and this becomes unavoidable, even if it is a gap of one second or two seconds. And so all forms of representation, become in that sense a memory of what we have just seen, rather than what we just see. And we know from our own experience, that what we see itself is fairly complicated, and often fairly mediated. So I remember Simon once remarking, as a fellow glasses wearer, that we might for example get the glare inside of our glasses and I remember Simon you saying that you try to record exactly what you see and that includes the marks and the glares and these become part of the experience.

SC - Yes that's right, for example when you look through your own eyelashes, the light diffracts and you see the difference in colour of light through your own eyelashes. I think we all tend to think the world looks like a photograph, but actually your experience of the world is completely different from that of a photograph. So the way you actually look through your own eyes, you actually see stuff that is happening that is not out there, it's in the space between what is out there and what is in your eye, I suppose, or it is in the eye, I don't know what it is? So Monet when he had a condition with his eyes, he recorded what he saw, having the eye condition. If there is a condition with the eye, is that another gap?

MB - I think so. And another gap is that the landscape is out there outside of us and here we are recording our own experience of the landscape and trying to make sense of that.

EB - You talk about the eye but that is a very small part of what you're experiencing anyway. For me it is the sensation through the body. So the eye, has a certain amount of information I am taking in and I can be as selective as I like, but I have to be absolutely aware of the sensation through my body, my fingertips, the air on my skin, the temperature. That is why it is not immediate. I have to have time to work out what that equivalent is in paint, because it is not a visual thing, out there. That is the other interesting thing which goes into the mix of the observation. That is why with all the work on the walls here, it is intriguing because it is like it, but not like it.

MB - I'm also interested in the historicity of landscape painting. So we have not always painted landscape paintings, and it seems as though landscape become an independent genre sometime around the early 1500's. So someone like the German painter Albrecht Altdorfer is often considered the first true, landscape painter, because before that landscape is a backdrop to action: Jesus, George and the Dragon etc and the landscapes are just the background. But Altdorfer actually carried out a painting of a landscape. This emerges in the early 16th century. What becomes quite striking after that, when you move 200 years on from that point, landscape almost becomes this test of experience, a test of what experience can be, so the main case study here would be Romanticism. So, Romanticism kicks off in Germany around about the 1780's, 1790's, originally a response to the ideas of Immanuel Kant, and taken up by German writers such as Karl Wilhelm Friedrich Schlegel. William Wordsworth, Coleridge and other figures learned these ideas by attending Schlegel's lectures around the time and then came back to England, and this kick starts English Romanticism. One of the great questions of early Romanticism is what is experience? How do we record experience? How do we make sense of experience? And this is a response in part to Kant's idea of beauty and the sublime. Landscape becomes this extreme test. How do we deal with something that is too big? How do we deal with the ocean? How do we deal with these dramatic raging clouds? How do we make sense of things as experiences and then record them as paintings, poetry or even as music and so and so forth? By the time you get to Caspar David Friedrich, he has figures in the landscape, or figures seen from behind, because it always makes it about looking at the landscape, rather than landscape pure and simple. And so here, again this gap or hiatus comes into play. So to ask a question here: When a landscape becomes a painting, does it cease to be that landscape in some sense and what happens in these kind of works?

KM - I try to find out what it is in the landscape that I find interesting. I try to whittle it down to something that is the essence of the thing. The essence which interests me the most about the landscape on a particular day.

EB - It matters to me that there is still a sense of that specific place. When I am painting, I have to make judgements about whether that shape, that colour is doing what it needs to do, and it is not just an aesthetic decision, there is a truth about it; so the quality of a shape, the quality of a colour, the way it is placed, they are all communicating back a sensation of a specific place and only I would know that, but it matters to me, so those infinitesimal judgements are being made all the time. I have a problem with landscape being viewed romantically, I don't think there is anything Romantic about it at all. I think nature is pretty brutal and it is a very unpleasant experience sometimes being out there. If you sit out there in the landscape for long enough it will grow through you, engulf you, it doesn't give a damn.

MB - I think the word Romantic has changed a lot in the last 150 years. If we think of Wordsworth and Coleridge it was a harsh environment in which they lived with. The word comes from Roman, as in novel and so there is the attachment of all these other ideas to it. So it has become a kind of bad word in a way, because of its misunderstanding or maybe it's a bad word because painters in the 19th Century were actually quite bad and they misunderstood what was happening with original ideas of Romanticism. Which makes me want to rescue Schlegel from all of this stuff, rescue Schlegel from himself, as he did turn into a bad romantic after twenty years.

AA - I would say that my idea of landscape or place is broad because I am concerned with a creative connectedness with the natural surroundings around me. This is mainly because I had quite an interesting journey back into the Suffolk Essex landscape; I lived in London for eight years and then came back to where I was from originally, to do a residency at firstsite. I had a studio in the middle of nowhere and had to walk six and a half miles across countryside to the studio and back again because I had no car and no bicycle. At this time, I would spend a lot of hours in the landscape and consider my journey in more detail. During these walks, I banked a lot of ideas and drawings and it is only now that I am referring back to some of these. It is the exercise of making drawings and considering how they can become a painting and the playfulness of this activity that I am interested in. I will force myself to go out and do some scribbles, make drawings at the side of the river. When I first arrived in my new studio, I still had a lot of old paintings, and I started to overpaint what was already there existing on the canvas. At this point, I needed to find a new methodology of working. I needed a method that was going to excite me and take me forward as a painter. There have been lots of drawings that I have thrown away during this process. This is in part, how the idea for the exhibition first came about; when Marco asked about my process and discovered the existence of all these preparatory, throwaway drawings. Drawings which explore voids, positive spaces, simple forms and lines in the landscape and are made using whatever I have to hand, pencil, felt pen, pastels. By doing my drawing exercises, I have found that I return to a creative connectedness that has triggered and energised new ideas for me. For everyone else, in the everyday, this space doesn't have to be an expansive landscape; it can be a park, a green space at the end of your road, a wildlife area. I hope people have access to these kind of green spaces and this can create some kind of spark of creativity within them too. So maybe what I am saying, is this access to green spaces is the modern day equivalent of what Romanticism was back then, different to the awe-inspiring experience of the sublime landscape.

MB - I am also starting to think about other mediums that have taken landscape and place as a theme. One of my strong interests is photography, the history of photography and a contemporary photographic practice. After the mid 1960s up to more or less the present, landscape became not about an exploration of nature but an exploration of culture. So the idea that the landscape is not this kind of natural place but is actually an accumulation of how we have used a landscape, how we have built over it and so forth. So we get a kind of movement where photographers are emerging in the early to mid 70's, like Robert Adams and Lewis Baltz. These are talking about industrial landscapes and start to consider for example a factory not something as other than the landscape but part of the landscape, for better or worse, working with the landscape. Another place where the notion of landscape has survived as a kind of term would be in literature. One of the greatest writers of landscape in the last two decades is W G Sebald the German writer who wrote *The Rings of Saturn*, a meditation on the East Anglian landscape, as he goes walking from Norfolk into Suffolk. This goes back to something that was mentioned earlier. There is something that we see and we privilege; a tendency to seek in the landscape the visual in terms of how we talk about landscape. But actually other sensory experiences, maybe what we might refer to as the extra visual, or nonvisual elements of the landscape become much more deeply relevant to how we talk about landscape. So to give an example of that... One of the places I am deeply interested in on the East Anglian coastline is a place Sebald talks about - Dunwich. A small village, with a ruined monastery, on the cliffs by the sea. It is fascinating to stand on the edge of the cliff and stare out to sea because Dunwich back in the Middle Ages was a large bustling town, with several churches, and these are now under water. So when you go to Dunwich there is nothing to see and that is the historical result of various geological changes over a number of times, and of course with archeology you have to bury down into the landscape in order to reclaim the past. So I'm interested in what you see is not what the landscape is or maybe it is not the best way of understanding the landscape.

EB - If I can pick up on the photography landscape thing; the words you are using are very interesting, archaeological, burying; this has an analogy to the stuff of painting, physical dirty coloured mud, is what we are sliding around, excavating, layering and that is really what it is, smearing this stuff on, trying to find out, observing, what I see out there, watching what changes, because it is not going to stay the same whilst you are

there. The difference between photography and painting; photography is fantastic but in my mind photography is the barrier between you and the subject. You are making a quick image there, where the process of making a painting happens over months, years for some of my paintings and you are doing this excavating, you are going with the ebb and the flow of the painting, of the materials, of the change in idea, the new experiences of the subject.

SC - On the idea of excavating, Keith and I both work by the sea so the big factor you have here, is the tide. So essentially, you have two landscapes.

KM - Yes, one when the tide is in and it is all flat and when the tide goes out, quite a way out, in my landscape, I have this island that appears that you can almost walk over to.

SC - It is almost like when you mark up a canvas and you just scrape it off and do it again which is not exactly how I paint but that kind of thing. It is somewhat like what is happening out in the landscape, that it is covering up and as the tide drops, the marks start appearing. My landscape is mud really; the northern bit of the Essex marshes, the last bit of the Essex saltings. As the tide drops, this giant painting appears and then it goes again, comes again and then goes again.

KM - It is the same for me. Every season is different, every stage of the tide is different.

EB - One of the reasons why I am doing what I am doing is because it is one of the honest ways I can explore the landscape. I don't have time to go out for walks, but I still want to work from it. So there is a truth about the way in how I want to explore the landscape by getting in my car. But for most people that is the same experience too.

SC - Yes and it is comparable to being on the train. I've spent an hour and a half on the train today and it has been through landscape. For most of us, this is how we experience landscape.

MC - You have found a specific way to explore your landscape. These are very familiar places to you and have been for a long time. For many artists what they see outside their window, they don't work from this same thing for years and years. There is a limit of time, experience going on beyond the gaze. So I think what you are doing is unusual, in that respect.

SC - [asking KM], How long have you been working with this piece of landscape?

KM - Specifically this landscape, three years, but the North East, about five years. I have gone quite specific with this particular stretch now.

SC - The bit I've been working from, is about three years now also. It feels like a big adventure, but it is only half a mile away.

EB - Perhaps this is because it is such an engaging, magical landscape, out in nature. Maybe there is a meditative aspect to it; returning to one place, wanting to go a bit deeper and we are all nature, we are connected to it anyway, once you engage. There is nothing quite like the invigorating point in a piece of work where you get bored. So if you have been somewhere again and again, you reinvent it and see it freshly each time.

MC - I think what is important here is the very personal one-to-one with nature, over time aspect. With all of these painters, it is this particular connection with landscape, where we see something different. There is something to be said about going back to the same spot, outdoors. You do this personal journey thing.

SC - Amanda, for your paintings, are there particular spaces you go to outside?

AA - I'm really lucky with the location of my studio space, the landscape I'm drawn to is right outside my window. As you look out you see a part of the river where there is a tight bend and the river changes accordingly. The landscape naturally floods because it is surrounded by water meadow land. The flood water will come within two metres of the studio door and the old building absorbs all of this moisture. I am totally immersed. I am both voyeur and inhabiter of this landscape.

SC - So your work is not about a particular space. For example, I could take you exactly to where I have made the work, and identify that as that. You couldn't take me to the same identifiable space could you? But are your works related to specific places on the river?

AA - Yes small patches and hideouts on this small stretch of river. Here I make drawings which will relate back to experiences at the water's edge. For example, the way the branches of a tree disrupt the water's surface, or the glint of turquoise from a flying kingfisher, or how the wind suddenly changes and then the ripples on the surface of the water alter and switch and perhaps I make some very quick drawings based on that. How the side of the bank erodes, how the silt is building up. There are a number of continual observations. I couldn't say that this

painting here represents an observation that happened exactly here at this point on the river bank. It is more immersive than that. Again, it is taking the activity one step further, beyond the gap and it becomes the activity of painting, the painting which takes over.

MB - There is a remark you make in the catalogue about the issue of subject. Is landscape more the occasion for the painting, rather than a subject of the painting?

KM - Or a reason to paint? I don't necessarily enjoy the activity of going out. Amanda you talk about forcing yourself to go but I enjoy the results, I enjoy making pictures. I use the landscape and the memory of it just to facilitate making a painting.

SC - I would agree with that. That going out into the landscape is an element I can't control. I like that it is the same places but stuff happens differently each time. I can miscalculate the tides or the weather happens to change and there can be all sorts of things which feed random information into the system. But yes sometimes it is a bit of a drag having to go out, but I do like being outside. Essentially it facilitates the painting. It is this rather than making paintings of the landscape, I think.

EB - I like the fact that the landscape isn't just over there, it's over my head, under my feet, around me I can't get away from the experience I can't compartmentalise it. I am absolutely part of it. I have to be reminded of the cold, the wet, the sun in my eyes, all those things because you need those surprises to animate the work, to animate you.

AA - I wouldn't say it was the direct subject of the final paintings so perhaps it is more the occasion for the painting. However, as I am moving towards abstraction more and more, I am also using colours that link to natural tones you will find in my river landscape. These are earthy brown tones through to deep greens and lime yellows.

SC - When you look at paintings, there is also this catalogue of other painters that you think this is a little bit like this or this. You make a painting that isn't just attached to the landscape, it is attached to the other artists you know about, this baggage of artists that you drag around with you, that inform how you see something or paint something. I was lucky enough to go to Emil Nolde's house years ago on the Danish German border and Keith I can see Emil Nolde's colours in your palette, but it may not be something that you think about.

KM - It's not on my radar.

SC - But there are artists that you look at and they are part of that process almost just as much as the starting off point.

MB - So when we talk about genres such as landscape or portraiture, one would assume we talk about the thing in front of you. But actually very often there is this entire history of mark making or painting as well. So how do we re-see landscape after painting? How do we see landscape through the paintings? There is a shift in what comes first which is important.

SC - When I first went to Los Angeles, I thought this is what Richard Diebenkorn was painting. But it wasn't just the visual, it was the air, how the light dissolves because it is so hot. All of those kind of things. And then when driving, you are thinking this is what Jackson Pollock was seeing and thinking about. The landscape is this never ending thing that keeps rolling past. Here, if you drive in the UK for twenty minutes it changes so much. But there, it just went on being the same, hour after hour. Is that seeing landscape post painting?

MB - I think so. Our eye is cultured. We don't have a natural view of things; culture, our knowledge of things is always primary to our experience. We don't have this immediate perception of something. I don't particularly believe in immediacy and I don't particularly believe in nature in that kind of sense. I think we are always cultural beings in a landscape that is fairly cultural itself. So what constitutes a successful or worthwhile painting is somewhere in the mind. It may not be uppermost, somewhat dormant, but that dialogue with other artists is going to be there and so we can't get away from that, or this back to nature. It is back to nature per se. We are always going to have this distant relationship to it. What becomes interesting when we paint it, is that it plays with that distant relationship and examines it.

EB - Going back to what you said Simon about seeing more than what was there, that you have seen a painting. In my experience when paintings are difficult and you get to the desperate moment and you chuck everything at it, you say that's kind of interesting and you go back and you see your subject. You go off piste and do a weird painting that you think has nothing to do with your subject and then there it is. That's the phenomenal thing. It makes me see better. If I allow myself to take risks, to reinvent it, to push it, it has this extraordinary ability to make me see.

SC - Yes. You wouldn't be able to do that unless you actually painted. You wouldn't be able to go to the beach and just look and look and look. Something has to go down on paper or the canvas and then you can reinvent.

EB - Yes, there has to be a relationship with the subject.

MB - One more question. If people look at your paintings and they don't see place and they don't see landscape, they don't get any of that whatsoever, they just see paint, abstract marks, decoration, is that okay?

KM - It used to really bother me but not any more. The more I have become comfortable with myself and sure of what I am doing, the less I care.

EB - You certainly can't be thinking about that whilst you are painting, or it would be paralysing.