Man’s conscious and unconscious contribution to the environment: an exploration through drawings, paintings, prints and philosophical diary

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MAN'S CONSCIOUS & UNCONSCIOUS CONTRIBUTION TO THE ENVIRONMENT.

An exploration through drawings, paintings, prints and philosophical diary, one man's reaction to chosen images from his surroundings.

BY FRANK COOK

A Master's Thesis by research

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Philosophy of the Loughborough University of Technology 1983.

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I am entirely responsible for the work submitted in this thesis, that the original work is my own except as specified in acknowledgements or in footnotes, and that neither the thesis nor the original work contained therein has been submitted to this or any other institution for a higher degree.
'One Year' : A catalogue of drawings, paintings and prints created during 1982/83 as part of a course of study leading to a higher degree at the Loughborough University of Technology.

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Screen print
September 82
For the first two or three weeks I suffered a feeling of anticlimax, almost guilt. This feeling was inexplicable, particularly in the light of the many aspirations and hopes within the opportunities made available to me by being given this year to refresh and widen my own creative awareness.

It was an even stranger phenomena considering the positive stride forward I felt my paintings had taken in more recent times. I have always worked consistently (at time prolifically) within the limits and constraints imposed by full time employment. The more so in late 81 early 82 with a series of paintings and prints produced from the collected drawings made in Weiskirchen, Germany in Oct 81 and culminating in an exhibition at The Bosworth Gallery in the spring of 82.

I experienced a sense of despondency before making a start on any images even though I had confident proposals to work toward. I could see my visions but it seemed they were unobtainable, beyond my grasp. The drawings I produced revealed a fumbling inept use of material, contained as little sensitivity as those of a child and were as lifeless as the works of an amateur struggling to express himself.

Amongst those early drawings was one produced not far from my home; at first sight, an impressive mixture of man's ineptitude and autumn nature at its best. Scaffolding supports at sharp perspective grew from the ground to hold giant advertisements. Only the backs of these structures were to be seen, one catching the morning sun, reflecting it with mirror bright intensity. Hedgerow, shrubs and trees acted in contrast to these intruders. The subject held great possibilities, still does, but I was unable, even after hours of work to make it live. A day wasted? or a necessary step to go forward to resolving the visions of my mind.

Another prospect presented itself soon after this abortive attempt in the form of potato pickers working in the early morning sunlight beyond the edge of a spinney. The quality of light was the most important factor, it streamed from beyond the workers, who became blue grey silhouettes in the middle distance and low key colours nearer to. The spinney took on blue and green and brown hues, with briar and nettle lacing the scene together as one unit. I chose to work on the spot and did so for two days, using watercolour acrylic and gouache. There was obvious difficulty in interpreting the bustling activity of the pickers, machines and
boxes, but these were minor compared to obtaining the subtle quality of light present, (quite fortuitously consistent throughout both days, strong sunlight combined with gentle mist) contrasted with the strength of the foreground.

The choice of material (for ease of working out of doors) was perhaps the mistake. Mistake because I consider the work to be inferior (in retrospect) failing to capture the quality of the moment, the drama of the trees, or to comment on my personal reaction to it. The result lacked the iridescence of the moment and was to remain a chalky matt lifeless image. It may well be suitable for a further study in another material but I fear it belongs with other drawings done at that time, a mere stepping stone toward resolving my thoughts.

One important fact revealed itself at that time, which crystallised with thinking on it until it dominated. Some of those early drawings (and earlier works) had dealt with subject matter where the real image or purpose of the picture was partly concealed or overlain by other elements sometimes quite alien to that image.

Here lay the key! Now how to use it?
September 82

With these thoughts circulating at all times, everywhere I looked support for them seemed evident. One such image presented itself as I came from my vegetable garden one day. My mind a turmoil of busy thoughts the familiar scene before me took on quite a different aspect.

The rear outer wall of my workshop is painted a very pale cream colour, against this grows a Virginia creeper, resplendent in its brilliant reds and oranges denoting the season of the year all too well. Beautiful in itself, I had paused to consider it further. I became aware of its relationship to the wrought iron gate and the area of foliage beyond. The juxtaposition between the strength of colour beyond the gate caused by the deep shadow, cast by the workshop upon the hedge, trees and garden, was quite remarkable. The wrought iron gate ran as though continuous with the wall surface, upon which played the late afternoon sun, converting the elderly black paint with its touches of sienna rust to a gentle purple grey.

A familiar subject was transformed into a whole vision worth commenting on.
As I worked it became clear to me that there were three main values to be considered. The gate, as a barrier to be seen through yet not interrupting what lay beyond but holding it together like stained glass supports do in a church window; the wall, as a solid, offering its pale contrast to the multiple textures of the adjacent dark area; finally, the strength of tone and texture of trees and hedge leading to a focal point in the part visible sunlit wall at the furthest point of the garden. I worked in water colour, gouache and acrylic as with the potato pickers but to better purpose.

The resulting work was a small but interesting composition. Dominance was given to the wall, taking up two-thirds of the area treated with simplicity in order to give more purpose to the gate with the textures revealed through its sections as an array of lower key colour. The lattice work of spaces kept my attention. The symmetry against the natural composition fascinated me. Each space was a picture in its own right. My mind wandered toward the production of a screen print for it seemed a natural way of producing the whole and yet allow for the overlay of the wrought iron gate to bind together each of the individual images.

The colour separations in preparation for the print. I chose to work in six colours, probably without necessity, to obtain the greatest variety and increase the subtlety of my original conception, trying to simplify yet embellish the decorative qualities present. Separating colour one from another whilst working in black and white is fairly difficult; in consequence the work took several days using process black directly to tracing paper ready for final photographic transfer to the screen.

The basic composition differs from the original in that I chose to emphasise the gate with its rectangular images contained within the larger rectangle of the gate itself. The top extremity of the print formed by the curved top of the gate. Nothing appears outside the perimeter of the gate thus capturing positively the significance of its position as a barrier through which one sees.
October 82

I had, I felt, made the first steps toward resolving some of the million and one thoughts held in my mind, yet still laced with much uncertainty.

One Friday morning, having completed the colour separations, but still considering the next steps, I was seated at the table in our small dining room. Almost facing me was a print, produced by my wife some years ago. It has always been a personal favourite. The subject a horse (or at least part of one) moving wildly from left to right, treated with abstract expressionistic qualities, reminiscent of Marc. Dark blue greens form the bulk of the composition, illuminated by a dancing vibrant red mane giving form to the surging movement.

The door adjacent to the wall bearing the print, wearing a lace curtain against the glazed upper portion, was ajar. The sun streamed through. As though with two pairs of eyes, I saw as though for the first time, a vision of great complexity.

The apertures of the curtain allowed light to spill in small, yet regular, patterns across the surface of the print imposing an exciting formality to the whole. The wall to the side and below the print received the pattern of light, out of focus, a soft diffusion on the raised wallpaper. The remainder of the wall appeared to be in a gentle cream grey shadow offering some similarity to the reflected colours of the remainder of the door and wall on the surface of the print.

I could not resist the temptation to make a drawing of the image before me. There was a little reluctance in that it necessitated some interpretation of my wife’s print, but this was offset by the reasoning that the image perceived was inseparable from my new-found thoughts where the
main subject is often seen through, beyond or obscured by other factors. On further reflection, I felt that in this instance both the print and its unwanted surface adornment were of equal merit.

The fervour I felt was akin to fundamental child-like excitement.

The drawing led immediately to a painting on canvas, carried forward by the impetus of my feelings. The most obvious element, the print, was interpreted very quickly, boldly executed, set at a slight angle to introduce a gentle perspective and to eliminate the flat front view. I had ideas on the manufacture of the lace overlay but was at a loss for a time on the rendering of the wallpaper with its subtle imagery. It occurred that I might use the actual wallpaper then paint on to its surface. I cut the paper to size and roughly blu-tacked it into position. The resulting contrast between the stark whiteness of the paper and the painted surface of the canvas was very disturbing. I tore the paper away, destroyed it, and left the workshop distraught.

A day or two passed whilst the alternatives were considered. I liked none. The wallpaper dominated my mind, surely I could make it work? On an impulse, late at night, I re-cut new wallpaper, prepared the rear surface and canvas with contact adhesive. With fingers firmly crossed and moist brow it was hastily position. Equally quickly I primed the new surface and almost without looking at the result retired to a restless night.

A compulsive early riser (even earlier on that particular morning) I went immediately to view the results of my spontaneous action of the previous evening.

I was horrified! In desperation oil point was applied very rapidly to begin with and after two or three hours work I knew it would work.

The resulting painting, some days later, bore the contrasting lace reflection to the left of the print and smooth glazes suggesting the doorway edges to the right, giving a vertical movement which complemented the paler out of focus curtain shape on the surface of the wallpaper, which I had set to a contrary angle to that of the print against the wall.
I was well pleased, I felt I had gone one more step toward realising a positive direction.
October 82

On one of my journeys to the University at Loughborough, I passed a small hill, across the top of which grew a long narrow spinney.

Travelling in a car, one simply glimpses. I made a mental note to return by the same route for the skyline had aroused my interest.

Later in the day, on my return, I stopped at the base of the hill to take in more of the qualities of the skyline that had, in a fleeting moment, attracted my attention. I think perhaps it must have been the dark richness of colour against

the pale grey sky making the gaps through, small or large, appear to be more important than they were.

A lane ran around the base of the hill. I followed it for a time constantly catching glimpses of the swathe of trees on the hill top. I eventually came to a place where the tall hedge that often obscured my vision had been cut, and badly at that time, leaving the gaunt stumps of Hawthorne and a few meandering branches reaching outward and along, threaded through with silver strands of barbed wire. Being completely dominated by seeing through one object toward another, the open view beyond
the remains of the hedgerow caused an immediate response.

Below the trees, which were above the level of the hedge, in horizontal band, ran a sea of gorse and bracken violently moving in the wind, (as vigorously as the mane in the print of the horse) deep in shadow, blue and green trying to pull down the fingers of trees pushing into their dense foliage. Beneath the moving sea, but past the hedge, a long grassed field linking the elements together.

I produced a spirited sketch in black and white and on return to my workshop set about an oil sketch to develop further the major elements with which I had been confronted.

I chose to allow the trees to reach the edge of the small canvas and in so doing recognised the similarities in their positive and negative qualities to the lace curtain reflection in my previous painting.

The similarity ended there, for within the development the horizontal bars of trees, bracken, field and hedge opposed the more vertical nature of the print reflections.

An insignificant, discarded red enamelled bowl, further reddened by rust, rested at the base of the hedge linked by its colour, the lower horizontal portion of the picture with the upper portion. A dark subject matter that probably very much influenced me because of the season of the year.
The clarity of my vision at this stage quite surprised me. I was dominated by the visions of the central theme. Everything I saw made me more and more aware that I saw most things through beyond or reflected in other surfaces. This, connected to the other aspect of the central theme by an inseparable thread concerning mankind's influence over the landscape particularly through his unconscious contribution, thrilled me in an indescribable manner.

One dark, wet, November morning driving through 'Stoney Stanton' for quite a different purpose to creative ideas, gave me the opportunity to see something that gave tangible evidence to my new thoughts; a first time gelling. Approaching 'Stanton', to my left ahead, lay a factory/office block. Tall, black and stark. It was constructed of brown/black perspex windows bound in with plastic horizontal and vertical frames. On this approach the office block was an edifice of the architect's inspiration, gleaming, overpowering all around.

As I passed, the image changed. The office block disappeared to be replaced by the reflection it threw back. A glimpse was
sufficient to alert my senses. I drove by, turned and slowly returned, parking almost opposite.

With 'one pair of eyes' I saw the architect's building, well designed, beautifully constructed yet cold and monumental against its landscape backdrop. My other 'pair of eyes' saw only the reflection which had become part of the essential fabric of the building. The gently illuminated landscape made dramatic the reduced tones of the typical overpowering Leicestershire sky.

The image had many facets. Strong horizontal and vertical bars that were the frames to the vast panes of the windows; the gentle illumination of the strip lights on both first floor and in the foyer entrance that were the only visual evidence of the buildings interior; the fluttering flags reflected, constantly attracting one's attention; the angle of the canopy awning covering the main entrance and pavement, that reflected the rest of the building to the right into a curved distorted emblem due to the imperfection of the perspex. Enamoured by all I saw, I produced a sketch in ink wash with chalk and penline over. I did not attempt to go for detailed information, merely the spirit of all I saw.

I returned home and whilst my mind was filled with all I had seen I worked for the rest of the day on a chalk and watercolour drawing. This began with a black/brown wash incorporating a compositional change. There was no wish to produce a work that merely recorded the skills of the architect. Accordingly I took a section of the front face of the building which simplified the arrangement, removed the first letter of the delicately designed gold logo of the company name sported on the canopy protruding over the foyer entrance, into a vertical surface divided in slight perspective, by the strong black window frames in horizontal and vertical units.

The canopy front angled to the right for two-thirds of the composition leading to the distorted reflection that formed the blazen at the canopy's end giving a focal point to the whole arrangement.

The initial wash and division of the surface for this drawing reminded me, in its simplicity, of the work of Mondrian; where his rectangular grids bound in colour searching for differences in tonal depth.
Not for long though! The drawing progressed with chalk and water colour overlays giving character to all the elements that I considered important. The relationship between the subtlety of the reflected landscape against the vast area of sky lightened by the movement of the reflected two flags. (One the company's lemon yellow insignia the other the Union Jack.)

The composition of the picture became more pronounced. The interior lights, the flags, the canopy angle, the gentle perspective all contrived to lead one's eye to the distorted blazen at the canopy edge.

A factor, I considered to be of importance, became apparent as I commenced the third stage of oil on canvas: The brown/black underpainting of the window surfaces must bleed through to affect the tonal low key quality of the entire reflection. The very nature of the thin glazes I use when painting lends themselves to this end.

At this stage it is necessary to diverge for a while.

Because of the particular method I employ in the application of paint to the surface of the canvas, thin skins of paint one over another removed carefully with rags folded, creased or crinkled; or printed on with rags and other surfaces, I often work on more than one picture at a time to avoid time delays. After the application of the under surface to the office block painting another painting was begun.

Being an early riser I am often aware of the effect of the early morning light. Autumn was well advanced by mid-November and on one particular morning the quality of light bathing the land was quite extraordinary. The subject, seen a million times before, took on a new aspect. The bathroom mirror, a simple timber-framed devise from a Victorian dressing table hung against a very decorative wallpaper. Seen at an angle, as invariably one does as you enter the bathroom, the mirror reflects the bathroom window, outside which grows a Rowan tree. The branches were still dense with leaf, yellow and orange, translucently intense because of the Autumn sun. The window frame formed a dark contrast and was partly concealed by the half pulled blind with its scalloped lower edge. A light fawn in colour,
darkened by the intensity of the leaves beyond. The whole image was set at an angle due to the tilt of the mirror on the wall. A final interesting feature was the strange abstract-like reflection appearing in the bevelled edges of the mirror. These were a mixture of leaf, window frame and wallpaper, but suffering much distortion.

I produced a pen and ink sketch quickly and started a painting immediately working vigorously for several hours. Pausing toward the end of the day to sit back and observe the fruits of my labours and to analyse progress made, a more than interesting observation became clear.

The painting being produced was alongside the partly completed office block picture. Near by also, was the first painting of the horse print with lace curtain reflection next to the smaller oil sketch of the hillside at Copt Oak. It was clear that entirely unconsciously a mechanical grid of horizontal and vertical movements was common to all the paintings.

The first, of the print/reflection, was composed horizontally in slight perspective broken by the curtain verticals and door jam divisions.

The second, the hilltop, into strong horizontal bars broken by the gaunt hedgerows.

The third, of the office block, by the strong window divisions.

The fourth, of the mirror, being similar in composition to the print/reflection, had the horizontal quality broken by the reflected window verticals, but more importantly, by the regular blocks of the wallpaper design.

The gentle perspective in all, together with the overriding box grid structure, gave all the paintings a new found unity.
As I continued with both paintings (reflected landscape and bathroom mirror) my feeling was that I had taken a giant step forward. All my thoughts were gelling into a cohesive whole. I felt for the first time, freedom from all constraints, no longer was I making a mere record of something seen but attention was being given to making a personalised statement. My thoughts and feelings, conscious and unconscious, were being revealed through the subject matter in use.

The formal gridwork of the Couture office block was being broken by the secondary (or perhaps the most important) images presented in the reflection. The consciously arranged movement of the sky, dramatically linking all the other elements together as a contrivance to lead one's eye to the strange blazen distortion at the right hand canopy edge. Over and above these compositional arrangements, the low key tones exaggerated the quality of the reflection giving a new slant to the underlying warmth that, for me, always glows from the landscape even in the darkest of weather. It has always seemed as though light and heat come through from beneath, a transparent film, iridescent, glowing, even though I know that it is always reflected light that the retina responds to.

An artist's task, is to see, react to and by a process of eliminating the unnecessary, create a personal sense of order from an apparent disorder.

There are elements in much of what we all see that are graceful or beautiful, but to act as a recorder is not essential to the creative act. The interpretation or representation of the initial stimuli is of greater significance. Discipline of thought together with control of materials linked with the artist's viewpoints are key factors in the reorganisation of the forms, tones, lines, colours that are the fundamentals of the artists language of practical expression.

Whilst in Germany in the Autumn of 1981 with three other artists, absorbing the influences of a very different environment, a number of intense discussions took place prompted by the type of work one of our number produced whilst we were all working together. The main topic of discussion often concerned the interpretation of abstraction.
The paintings of Ian Carmichael are totally abstract, the abstraction being derived in a purely conceptual manner. He claims his work is determined by his experience of the 'world', not being concerned with outward appearances nor attempting to represent objects or places. He further claims that all his pictures are attempts to express sensations of all kinds received over a period of time. Through the harmonies of colour and form, the paintings are intended to appeal to the mind as well as the emotions.

The resulting works therefore rely on intuitive responses and gestural marks made with the arm rather than the wrist, exploiting the qualities of the medium directly, no attempt ever being made to create the illusion of three dimensional space.

Now, our discussions centred around the validity of conceptual thought, quite abstract in its origins, coming from within (or as Ian Carmichael put it 'being derived from his experience of the world') having no direct connection with tangible objectivity.

It was (and still is) my contention that the premise is too loose (it may be acceptable to the individual but not to all).

Creativity will never be anything but personal anyway but, to have any tangibility, abstraction needs to derive its origins from the reality of what we see, know and understand. There is a process of analysis and deduction based, not only on our experience in the world, but obtained from a reaction to the visual input brought about by direct observation. Part of the representation, to my mind, has always to be present. The quality of light, texture, colour, the tactile nature of any surface, the form of reality, the effect of light in creating atmosphere are all a natural phenomena, ever present, begging to be reassembled, in an order that does not reduce their importance, but gives greater emphasis to their character.

Too much consideration has been given to the so called analysis of fundamentals to the eventual detriment or elimination of many of the prime factors that are ever present.

An awkward and childlike simile would be a car minus some of its vital parts, or less awkwardly the process of modern education, which owes its development to the elimination of the meaningful and true qualities necessary to the growth of human life.
Artist's creations, like education, can only flourish when derived from a well balanced diet. Taking away parts of the whole is an act of vandalism. Creative beauty is the sum total of all the factors present and cannot be expressed satisfactorily in using only parts of the whole. Answers may be found, skill may be demonstrated, certain characteristics may be highlighted in an interesting fashion but it is my contention that the answers are incomplete.

Duchamp's ready-mades were an attempt to question the validity of art and seem to be derived from his conviction that life is meaningless.

Mondrian's grids were achieved in the search for the 'fundamentals' of form and composition and were developed from his theories about the horizontal vertical axes. He eliminated all representation and three dimensional space together with the curved line and any reference to surface texture, dealing only with primary colours with black, white and grey.

Riley's optics reveal the exploitation of line and colour as disturbing elements, seemingly based on mathematical formula, but more often arrived at instinctively.

The list could be endless but those examples serve to demonstrate my point. I, like many others, have learned much from such artists and their investigations but I am still convinced that they represent exercises rather than being more explicit amalgams of the real truth in art.

My own works often contain elements of abstraction, the interpretation of reality that has necessitated giving greater emphasis to certain qualities whilst restricting or eliminating others in the search for an appropriate formula to express those factors pertinent to the given subject matter.

Unlike Carmichael's gestural marks of acrylic on canvas, the more controlled application of my oils on canvas are vital to the gradual building in of the main issues.

Of course, some are eliminated so as not to confuse the important issues. In some, tonal depth disappears to exaggerate form colour and texture that seem to play a greater role in the visual phenomena before me. In others clarity of definition and richness of pattern make it appropriate to reduce minor detail. All in all though, much of what I see is retained, modified yes, but only in the search for the right formula.
All the qualities of technique are vital to, and inseparable from, the conceptual narrative being performed on the battlefield of the canvas.

After the completion of the Couture office block painting and that of the bathroom mirror, I felt quite uplifted and proceeded quickly to two more pictures again working on them simultaneously.

Preoccupied still with thoughts of man's conscious and unconscious contribution to nature's beauty together with always managing to see beyond or through other elements, I spent a day sketching at Breedon Hill in Leicestershire. Breedon church is perched precariously on the remains of a hill top that must represent the last hill in that chain forming the backbone of England spreading down through Yorkshire and Derbyshire with its tips reading into Staffordshire and Leicestershire. I was not concerned with the visual peculiarities or the charm of the hilltop church, but more with the efforts of man in having carved away most of the hillside rich in shale.

From the eastern quarry entrance, one surveys the results of their efforts. A floor base, amounting to several acres, stretching away to
the vertical rock face reaching skyward, retaining all the colours, marks and forms of its natural structure. Undulating beneath this natural edifice, the giant heaps formed gentle hills akin to desert dunes, having varying degrees of colour and texture quite alien to the strata from which they were composed. The fingers of the cliffs reached into the sky, dark, brooding, vigorous with diagonal movement from right to left, having a different energy to the man-formed monument.

I produced a water colour sketch recording visually my reaction to the material before me. I wandered around the locality with interest and produced another sketch on the western side of the hill depicting the contrast between the gentler untouched hillside with the sheer quarry walls. My thoughts remained with the first drawing and so it was quite natural, on my return home, it was the one to be developed further.

Shortly after making a start on the quarry, I also began another painting that had been in my mind for many months. It had similar qualities to Breedon quarry, owing its origins to the time spent in Germany and from one of the subsequent developments.

I have noticed, at times, that I tend to 'home' in and magnify certain subjects visible from afar. I was travelling by coach through the southern part of Germany near the French border, an area rich in forests. The coach passed through just such a forest, wet yet full of Autumn colour in the strong sunshine that had followed the rain. Crossing the brow of a hill, the coach moved down toward the small town of Mettlach. At the near edge of the town, passing under a small suspension bridge was the river Saar in full flood, dirty browns and greens racing from right to left. To the one side of the bridge, towering cliffs of crimson rock, topped by silver birch against a rolling forest, dark, reaching into low hung clouds.

Nothing else existed for me at that point my mind had isolated the vision and converted it to immense proportions.

Persuading the coach driver to drop me at the rivers edge and to return later in the evening for me, I had the opportunity for several hours to make drawings of this amazing spectacle.

The river was being widened to take sea-going boats. The process had called for the removal of the hillside which had created the sheer crimson
and magenta cliffs. I found a spot where the near river bank had also been reformed, as a temporary barrier, squared pig wire held in position by bright cerulean oil drums had been erected. Woven through the wire and straddling the top were strands of red and white bunting to deter the casual walker from venturing further.

The result was quite remarkable. I could see river and cliffs (which incidentally had been draped with fine wire mesh at their upper portion to prevent rock fall, and indeed, had vast smears of reddened concrete across lower portions) through the barrier of conflicting colour.

The sketch led to a painting a month later which was given the title 'Man's Unconscious influence on Nature's Beauty' for obvious reasons.

That painting was concerned with the whole vista whereas the second painting explores more the relationship of oil drums and wire against the horizontal strata of the crimson cliffs. It was interesting as both the Breedon painting and the German painting progressed, how different they became. Although both are dramatic to some extent, the Breedon picture became serene, tranquil, exploiting the
delicacy of texture and closer harmony of colour. The oil drums in the other against such intensity of conflicting colour grew into strong contrasts emphasising to the full the richness of pattern and movement.

Both will have the title 'Man's unconscious contribution to nature's beauty' because that is a precise and accurate description of what they were. I have, of course, exaggerated all the qualities present to give greater meaning to their importance.
December 82

Reading through the Open University booklet 'Introduction to Art' I noted with interest a brief section concerning itself with contradictory beliefs and terminology as applied by individual artists. It seems relevant to introduce this aspect here in support (and an interesting parallel) of my comments on the interpretation of abstraction.

To highlight the points made at that time I include these extracts from notes by the artists Joshua Reynolds and William Blake:

Reynolds said on the subject of artist invention:

'The mind is but a barren soil; a soil which is soon exhausted, and will produce no crop, or only one, unless it is continually fertilized and enriched with foreign matter... it is by being conversant with the inventions of others, that we learn to think ...
The greatest natural genius cannot subsist on its own stock: he who resolves never to ransack any mind but his own, will soon be reduced, from mere barrenness, to the poorest of imitations; he will be obliged to imitate himself, and to repeat what he has often before repeated.'

In a copy of 'Reynolds Discourses'.

In 1808 William Blake counters Reynolds claim with a rather trite statement of dispute:

'I always thought the human mind was the most Prolific of all Things and Inexhaustible. I do Thank God that I am not like Reynolds.'

Apparently both statements appear to be in complete contradiction to each other. The reader could conceivably agree with either, but it is more likely that he may see some value in both thoughts thus eliminating the contradiction to some extent. Rather than agreeing with Reynolds' sentiment 'ransacking any mind but his own', it is my belief that absorption of material from many sources is required in order to expand and develop, in a creative sense, to higher plains.

Blake's notion of the mind being 'Prolific' is beyond a doubt, without question, but that it is inexhaustible is a nonsense. Reinforcement for my observation can be made by looking at Blake's works; they represent a fund of knowledge (all be they of genius proportions) gained from his own intense preoccupation with religious subjects. He also made an in-depth study of Gothic art which is in itself a rejection of his own thesis.
I suspect that his poor relationship with Reynolds led him to his rather wild claim of the inexhaustibility of the mind to divorce himself even further from conformity and the loathing he felt for it.

Underlying all this and being the main reason for it to enter these pages, is to note the parallel with previous arguments made in identifying abstraction. It is my contention that all ideas/thoughts are derived from experiences seen felt and heard and do not (indeed cannot) exist in isolation. Colour, form, line, pattern, tone etc., are related to reality and remain meaningless individual gestures when so isolated.

All art, whatever the emotional, psychological or intellectual factors, hinges in one degree or another on the artist's perception of the external world.

The artist, be he caveman, Japanese printmaker, European landscape painter or portraitist is not just a mirror reflecting the vision before him, but more a philosophical aesthetic being interpreting some aspects of his own perception.

Perhaps the most minute characteristics of behaviour and form of the animals on which his life depended were the creative fundamentals to the caveman. For the landscape painter, perhaps the very fall of light and atmosphere may have been more intensely felt than other qualities before him. For every individual artist intuition and instinct become inseparable from his historical and cultural heritage that have formed his very being. Nothing, can deprive an artist of his individuality, although throughout history styles and beliefs run parallel.

The truth is creativity is the product of the brain after its dependency on the eye and other senses.
December, January

Both these months were very difficult filled with anxiety and concern for the health of a member of the family. My time was much disrupted with frequent visits to hospitals.

At the same time to complicate our lives further, renovation and extension of our home began. The mild Autumn weather with its delicate mists, golden hues, soft greys, advanced rapidly to the dank gauntness of winter and heavy rain. The J.C.B., removing the earth, churned and milled the ground to dense umber mud, making the building of footings difficult and access to the house near impossible.

I wrote a great deal at this time, bringing the diary of events for the previous three months up to date with various little excursions more philosophical in nature. I had made tape-recorded notes over the previous months which made correlation easier. They also brought the recollections and sensations experienced whilst drawing and painting back into focus. For the first time in my life, I actually enjoyed the experience of committing pen to paper in the act of finding a different form of expression to the easier, for me, visual outlet.

Artists (some anyway) have often resisted converting their personal visual language into spoken or written explanation. I, likewise, normally do not unless prompted by questions. I go part way to supporting the theory that a work of art should speak for itself. L.S. Lowry was just such a person, claiming that comment was totally unnecessary. His pictures with all their implications, were open for easy interpretation by any spectator. He further claimed that if explanation were required he would feel a sense of failure through not having made the various implications of his pictures obvious to all.

As a teacher of twenty years experience, however, I also have much sympathy for the opposing viewpoint.

The use of words are the very essence of communication with the taught. Explanation is the beginning of understanding and perhaps the very reason that groups of artists throughout history have produced their various manifestos.

The clarification of my ideas and thoughts have been essential to me in order to work out the appropriate language that provides the kernel of response. In writing this 'diary' I have been both teacher and student. Teacher in that I have
organised my own understanding, influences, directions in preparation for use at other times. Student in the evaluation of my efforts, the organisation of techniques, together with analysing my every thought in the complex activity of creating an image that has much to say, and for me would provide difficulties in saying 'it' in another way. I recognise all too well the inadequacies of my written voice compared to my visual voice.

In addition to spending a few hours each day writing, I returned to a painting begun a couple of years previously, never completed due to house moving and all that implies, which detached me from the impetus I feel when working consistently, due to the break in time. The basic theme had some relationship to those undertaken in recent months so I did not feel unhappy about reworking it. The painting was of my wife, Christine, sitting beneath a Eucalyptus tree which is the dominant feature. The Eucalyptus spread in profusion in front of a patio and house.

Positive and negative forms are the essence of the structure. Not so much a portrait as an isolated section of landscape with seated figure. It was very much in the underpainting stage which, from the experiences of recent weeks, gave me scope for increased development in the application and removal of paint in my chosen technique. The whole painting changed the leafyness of the tree, grew to clear definition in some parts and remained suggestive in others, having the rhythm of movement often created by the gentle rippling of wind through the branches. The figure too was entirely reworked echoing the movement of leaf through shadows over the face and garment.

The spaces though, remained pale, being in full sunlight acting as a strong contrast to the darker silhouette forms created by the immediate foreground. A main feature of the picture, just off centre, was the trunk and post supporting the tree, dark and lined with grey rippled bark. The grass and reeds to the base and left gave me a wonderful opportunity to introduce much experimental applications of pattern contrasting with the simpler textures in the leaves of the Eucalyptus.

I worked, perhaps, for a couple of weeks, on and off, until I reached the stage of completion that satisfied my visual senses.

I had considered every minute part of the painting many times until each was in tune with the whole.
January 83

This was the first opportunity to return to the ideas for the screen print evolved from the small water colour of the wrought iron gate. A chapter of incidents had prevented a start; delay in the arrival of materials, delay in producing the necessary production of photographic stencils and a degree of domestic difficulty caused by the extreme ill-health of a very close relative. As the problems were resolved, early January presented the long awaited chance.

Armed with screens that had the reproductions of four of the original drawings photographically implanted upon their outer faces, I prepared to print. To simplify, I had modified two of the original six tracings, to accommodate two additional colours, the plan being, by use of thin paper stencils and blue block out to achieve the fifth and sixth colours without the need of two extra screens.

It was not until I actually began mixing colours that the change of plan revealed some unexpected complications.

It was necessary to change the sequence of colours and, indeed, the level of density and transparency. The result was to be, in the end, quite a different image to the original concept. All my original planning and clear direction for procedure had been lost in the new surge of re-arrangement.

Some years had passed since I had last made the opportunity to produce a screen print. The consequence was a lack of rhythm and expertise in the actual printing. I experienced difficulty in getting the correct bed level for a clean distinct pull. However, the flow returned reasonably quickly. It is not worth relating the sequence of colours or the minor involvements that occurred whilst doing so since each remained only a part contribution to the creation of the whole. It is perhaps, worth mentioning though, that on the completion of ten good prints for the first colour, blue, I lightened and thinned the colour to produce ten more of reduced strength. This in effect gave albeit a subtle difference, two separate sets of prints.

The colour quality, consistency of weight, gave a rewarding end product if somewhat traditional in its representational imagery. This in itself is one of the characteristics of all the work I produce. I saw the completion of this first
screen print in much the same way as the early
drawings made last summer; as a reawakening of
those senses and experiences previously felt that
had lain dormant except perhaps through absorption
as a spectator and teacher.

The final reward was the surge of energy and
enthusiasm felt for the next product already
present in my mind's eye.

For twelve months or more, the blue oil drums and
pigwire with the colourful bunting against the
red hand-carved cliffs along the river Saar in
Germany, had dominated many of my thoughts,
floating into vision with obsessive regularity.

In a spare hour or two somewhere in the difficult
Christmas period I had produced a small water
colour sketch in an attempt to sort out my
thoughts in preparing for a print.

The most predominant features, perhaps, being
mulled over in my minds eye were the strong
horizontal bars created by the immediate fore­
ground, the river, the cliffs and the area
atop the cliffs. It seemed appropriate to
exaggerate these qualities. Additional
factors necessary for consideration were the
colour strength and contrast, crying out for
harsh bright treatment with immense richness of
textural pattern. In reality it was this image
extracted from the German landscape, that began
the pathway to my twin themes; Mans contribution,
conscious or unconscious, with the realization in
myself of always seeing through, beyond or reflect­
ed images in the overlapping relationship between
what I see and what I think.

The small watercolour not a very important work,
was an attempt to isolate these factors yet draw
them together intrinsically to weld a whole unit
of expression.

Having experienced the difficulties of using a
pre-planned photographic method in the production
of the 'Wrought Iron Gate' I chose to make this
one by considering each colour with its subsequent
screen preparation quite separately.

I was in need of forging a greater link between
my paintings, especially the painting of the Saar,
and the techniques used in producing them with the
methods to be employed in producing this silk
screenprint.
I spent a week experimenting with, for me, new techniques, in order to establish a keener relationship between paint application and the resulting textures with the problem of breaking, what in screen printing is a potentially flat colour, albeit broken into pattern by a formal process. I needed to be able to 'draw' to provide half tones with that sense of freedom any direct method of application has over that that is to be reproduced. Besides, since all my paintings seem to be more concerned with taking off paint to produce qualities particular to me, it seemed even more important to achieve this on the screen.

I could have opted for a 'touche' method using lithographic materials on the screen, but decided that the results could well be too like the lithograph or a drawing in semi waxed chalk.

Most of the experiments were failures.

I tried diluting the block out blue then printing into it with absorbant paper and rag to remove parts, but ran into difficulties with getting the consistency right to prevent the blue running back to re-cover the areas from which it had been removed. However thick or thin the blue was, made little difference to successful control. Other approaches were made but none gave me the type of
control I wished to have. I wanted the freedom of application yet the control that did not have the 'hit and miss' tendencies so far tried.

Several days went by with consistent failures until the method, later to be refined, came to me in a moment.

I had been hindbound by the accepted traditions of processing screens not having seen the obvious. In my paintings I apply the paint by brush in thin layers then remove part of it with cloth or paper to create the controlled qualities I require. I adapted this process by reversing it. Different dilutions were used and by making direct applications onto the screen with differing cloths and paper interesting qualities were achieved.

According to the dilution rate together with the varying quantity of blue stop out on the paper or cloth, results not unlike those achieved in my paintings were obtained and what's more, were totally controllable. That was fine for general areas of free drawing incorporating large surface areas and for smaller suggestive parts that needed delicate texturing. It was also successful in producing half tone qualities, because, where the blue was most dilute, having been applied delicately, ink when printing, was allowed to pass through but in a vastly reduced density. A problem still remained with the production of finer detail and with areas needing greater definition or clarity of drawing. This was resolved in two ways. The first was obvious by applying the blue with a brush, drawing in a manner similar to that employed in all my other works, giving a further degree of control and another step toward finesse. There would obviously be areas where this approach would be impracticable since much of any detail with screen printing requires to be printed. To achieve this the drawing process has to be one of dealing with the negative rather than the positive, often not being so much part of the fluid process of drawing, merely a filling in task behind the positive areas of the design. It was clear that a touche like method would be required. I have already explained the reasons for not wishing to use lithographic materials so it became necessary to look at other processes.

As a free-lance Graphic Artist I have on occasions used Latex as a method of creating a resist on paper against water colour or ink. It occurred to me that a similar method might be usefully employed on the screen. The latex did in fact lend itself
to application directly to the silk surface, drying quickly and being easy to control in the drawing with a variety of applications from direct, with a brush, to printing it on as with the dilute versions of the blue blackout. When dry, it became a simple procedure to cover with blue, resisted by the latex, to form a thin block out film. Removal of the latex proved even simpler, gentle pressure with a firm smooth plastic block peeled it away with ease. Any remaining residue dissolved with thinners, normally used for dilution of screen inks or cleaning the screen after printing.

At this stage I felt confident enough with the weeks experiments and refinements to begin the second print. It began with the notion a four colour print might achieve the qualities I had in mind (this later became seven, providing variations to the original idea).

I made a very rough drawing in order to obtain the compositional proportions necessary with the increased scale. From this, being the largest volume of colour, I chose to print the red first incorporating the major band of cliff face under colour, the river warmth (leaving the area clear designated to the blue oil drum), and finer texture under the position occupied by tarmac. No allowance was made, from the outset, for the pig wire or bunting for I felt this could be obtained by printing an opaque white at a later stage. The colour was semi-transparent, being pale in tone to allow for over-printing. Apart from the rectangular form allowed for the oil drum, the image was relatively flat and simple.

The second colour was to be blue requiring a greater degree of drawing in the oil drum portion and that of the movement in the river water to suggest the first elements of motion from right to left of the swollen fast moving river Saar. With the printing of this blue, again pale in tone, even more so than the cliffs beyond, the whole basis of the original concept appeared unrefined with no definition of any consequence, but nonetheless specific in its basic form.

The third colour, perhaps, was to be the most important, with the greatest degree of drawing, pattern and texture. This was to be a green acting as the linking element for all the parts.

It was thin enough, yet green enough to create sienna when overprinting the red of the cliffs, yet dense enough to enrich the water movement already created by the previously overprinted colours.
The blue oil drum, apart from green to its rim, was left untouched.

For every colour I print, I make proofs to ascertain the requirement for correction if necessary. In this instance a very pleasing thing happened; I had spent perhaps a couple of days producing the worked screen, using every conceivable method I had devised to provide the qualities important for the prints progress. On printing the proof, it was quite clear to me that there was sufficient drawing, complete with half tone qualities, to stand as a print in its own right. I printed several for this purpose.

Similarly when printed over the first two colours it contributed well to the prints growth toward the final image providing the major backbone of my ideas.

Spurred on by this minor success in control of the drawing and printing, I went on to the fourth colour, black, which was to provide the rich pattern for the tarmac surface and part of the oil drum rim where I wishes to create a contrast with the reflected light produced by gathered rainwater.

The combination of red, green and blue with the black over made a rich surface contrast with the delicate shades printed previously.

I was, at this stage, uncertain about the purplish swirling movement of the river surface which had come away a little too much from the original conception of a brown/green. Before going on to the next colour I decided to modify a portion of one of the screens in use (I always tend to work in pairs of colours just as I work on pairs of paintings) to print an extra darker green to soften the rich colour movement of the Saar. If I had not made the colour quite so dense it might have worked. It was not to be, however, the original three colours were far superior. I only printed five of the set of prints.

It was obvious at this stage that the blue oil drum although complete in form but still flat in colour, needed attention to give a greater juxtaposition with the development of the print as a whole.

A paler cerulean was used in conjunction with a broad cross hatch drifting outward at the sides to reveal the richer cerulean beneath and showing the eliptical nature of the oil drum.

To create yet another variation I also printed this blue onto one or two of those made of the third colour only. The effect was simple yet striking. Two pastel shades, one richly drawn, the other
flatter embellished with texture contrasting well with the whiteness of the paper. A reasonable deviation.

It was now time to consider the pig wire and bunting which I had left until the end in order to avoid the complications of registration when so many colours were being used, and also to avoid the unnecessary and difficult business of trying to produce a lively flowing drawing through small negative spaces.

The latex development came into being at this stage on a newly degreased screen and from a separate line drawing especially made for the purpose. I carefully applied the latex to provide the positive for the wire. Painting on the blue block out followed, and when dry, the latex removed. The image was clear sharp and precisely what, to my mind, was required.

Instead of a pure white, I mixed a fairly opaque silvery grey. Against the darker river surface and the very black tarmac base that formed the rivers edge, a rather beautiful contrast was created. Afront the oil drum a more delicate quality prevailed. Again I printed this colour onto several of the variations but not onto others.

Finally I prepared the screen for the last colour, a rich transparent red whose cerise sharpness was to give dramatic emphasis to the angles and fissures forming the sculptured cliff face. Simultaneously, it was used to overprint some of the white bunting rectangles to complete the immediate foreground brightness.

The print, and all its variations was complete. One of the beauties of printmaking for me is the variation of quality achieved in the printing of the various densities of colour which provide many different facets of colour and tone as they pass over previous colours.

Colours three and seven in this print are good examples of the transformation that can occur when thus used. The final red on the cliff face allowed the previously printed forms to stand and yet rendered the brightness of the red down a degree or two in tone. Whereas over the white of the bunting the richness and clarity were paramount.

Certainly the best work (or works since there are several variations) to date entitled 'Mans unconscious contribution to nature's beauty 8' so titled to fit with others having the same source of influence.
I cannot describe the elation felt. In talking with many artists, I have often been struck by their gloom or despondency when they experience difficulties which is not often dispelled even when these problems are resolved. I see and feel all too well the battlefield of creation, often subject myself, to doubt and despondency briefly, but more often, the sense of achievement in having given voice through visual expression to my own perception and distortion of reality, is to me a greater pleasure far outweighing the masochism of disenchantment. I am spurred onward.
February

Toward the end of January and into the first week or so of February, the renovation and extensions to my home began to have recognisable form. Because I was, in part, supervising the construction from my own drawings made during the previous summer, I became, at times, extremely preoccupied with the daily progress (or the lack of it with the winter weather having turned, to icy nights and frosty days).

By slow degrees walls crept up, doors and windows appeared. Nightly, layers of polythene shrouded the latest brick courses for frost protection. The golden purple handmade bricks could be seen vaguely through the overlapping drapes.

Just as I had seen the reflected image of the lace curtain highlighted in the print hanging on the wall several months before, so I now saw the buildings growth through various windows out of which I constantly found myself gazing.

I was aware of many conflicting sensations: pleasure and excitement of the venture through having played the architect, producing the drawings, planning every design detail myself. I had undertaken all the research necessary for the background knowledge concerning structure, methods of building and the current regulations in operation for planning and building regulation consent. Sorrow, for part of the building had been intended for an older member of our family who died after a most painful terminal illness, who would never have the opportunity to live in it: Fascination for the skills of the builders: Fear, for their occasional lapses of concentration, that led to sometimes serious errors. But mostly, pleasure in watching the elements of growth come through all.

Slowly, insidiously, a picture formed in my minds eye. The window through which I looked with consistent regularity, its window ledge, blue tiled, shiny with reflected light held a clutter of house plants and other objects all reflecting in the glass like surface. The blind above the window, the devastation of the garden, the enormity of the extension against a backdrop of chestnut winter branches.

Overlapping all this, the images of the plans, with the mass of detail they entailed, like a veiled curtain, representing the preoccupations with the thoughts of my mind. Concept and reality!
Days of staring and thinking finally led to a drawing in pencil, water colour and bits of discarded tracing paper plans. The subject, of course, as outlined.

The evolution of a complex work came about. The marriage of all my previous ideas on seeing through, man's dominance over the landscape, gentle perspective, horizontal and vertical grids and finally the fusion of idea with reality. The sketch was quite free, with fluid use of all the materials mentioned, but with its interpretation into oil on canvas to be followed by a screen print over the painted surface, I quite quickly realised that a more formal or controlled application of paint was required in order not to be obscured too greatly when covered.

Apart from the construction going on through the window, an important feature was the growth of the still life-like group on the wide blue-tiled ledge. A separate sketch was made in support of this group.

Many painters, past and present, have used this devise for a variety of reasons, often to act simply as a foreground through which the eye is led to the pictures focal point. Other reasons can be substantiated but are usually very individual to the artist. The narrative value of a picture where the objects relate to the overall theme, or forge the connection between, for instance, a person in portraiture, and his trade or profession to convey to the viewer additional visual evidence.

An element of symbolism to some is also discernible as in the works of Gauguin or Redon where the objects are of symbolic contributory merit. In my own painting, I wanted to create a foreground barrier of precise reality for two reasons; the first because it is a natural phenomena to clutter window ledges with the bric-a-brac of domesticity; second, I wanted to highlight the contrast (and none-relationship) between the immediate foreground and the happenings beyond the window.

A third and minor reason could be seen as a distinct follow through from an earlier drawing 'Window, plants and reflections' produced at the start of this year where the use of brown conte on water colour provided the first insights for work yet to be conceived.

The picture proceeded through a series of low tones and textures for the growth of the building outside with brighter darker colours; partly illuminated by a small table lamp with the group of objects, causing a deliberate conflict with the natural light.
advancing through the window, for the still life arrangement.

At its conclusion as an underpainting for the print, the picture had too much clarity and definition and would have been quite unsuccessful if it were to have stood on its own. However, representing only the half way stage I was happy with its development.

Whilst I had been painting, I had also worked into the plan copies of the original drawings for the extension creating half tone qualities which I wanted to transfer onto a screen for printing on to the top surface of the painting.

Disaster struck at this stage. I had dispatched the drawing to the photographers for transferring to a screen but for some reason they managed to eliminate all the work I had done to the reproduced drawing, rendering it back to a line drawing only.

I tried printing it but it bore no resemblance to my vision and near ruined the painting when I had to remove it.

Several days of anxious rethinking were done, heavily marked by indecision. I tried a variety of methods to find an alternative to the screen print over the painting but one frustration led to another.

Then like all things that work, the solution came quite suddenly and apparently uninfluenced by any of the failures.

The solution was found in the overlaying of dense glazes, replacing the half tone qualities intended in the screen print. This gave an appearance similar to the tracing paper overlaid in the original sketch and incorporated the suggested half tones of the failed print.

When dry (quite quickly since I have, as a matter of course, devised a method of mixing a dryer with oil for my medium of dilution to avoid delays when trying to work continuously), I worked over in pen and pencil, simplifying the original building drawings. I had intended to write in the instructional notes but found the drawing and glazes on top of the over worked painting were more than adequate to convey my conception.

The most successful painting to date. For me it contained all the qualities I had hoped to achieve and goes the whole way to describing the complex thought processes involved with ideas and actual reality. Hence the picture's title.
March

The building grew as I worked on 'Idea and
Reality', changing daily until the qualities that
first attracted me had near disappeared, trans­
formed to yet another image.

The rear section of the extension is a single
storey gable end protruding at right angles from
the newly formed section of the main house.

There came a point when the pre-formed roof
trusses were erected, skeletal like, forming the
most complicated positive and negative forms.
Again from a window, a first floor window this
time, the arrangement of forms was quite dramatic
and inspiring.

The pale creamy colours of the natural timber
trusses, about thirty in number, seen at an
angle, overlapped to create triangular forms
enclosing the trees and field landscape beyond
which had low neutral values.

Again the vision of my architectural drawings
floated continuously into my mind causing a
curtain-like screen, transparent over the image
before me.

I, naturally, made a drawing in pencil and
water colour but contrived to do it over a
specially amended copy of the original plans.

The result was better than I had expected being
much influenced by 'Idea and Reality'. Some areas
I left deliberately vague to allow the sharp
clarity of the trusses to be dominant against
darker tones. The mechanical structure of the
trusses also offered a substantial difference to
treatment employed elsewhere. The link between
this entire subject matter with my previous
analysis of man's control or manipulation of the
landscape was most apparent, reaffirming the
positive nature of my chosen direction. Other
elements were there too; the grid of rectangles
present in the plan copy, this time intersected
by the powerful triangular structure of the timber
skeleton.

There was a strong juxtaposition of all the forms
breaking the whole image into a miriad of facets,
inter-relating naturally.

Even before the completion of 'Idea and Reality'
this drawing encouraged me to think ahead to a
print development, but to be simplified.

I obtained more copies of the amended plan giving
strong half tone forms identical to the one on
which the drawing was produced. The first colour
was to be slightly transparent blue grey to allow
the images of the plans to come through. Loosely worked, using all the new techniques that I had devised, to create the building structure and the surrounding landscape, particularly the giant chestnuts immediately behind the extension. When printed the result was precisely as I had imagined it might be. The two greys in complete harmony. I also chose to print several of this first colour on white paper, giving a second variation.

The quality was starker but just as acceptable except for one area to the left of the main building structure which was far too dark and full with minimal texture or pattern.

I quickly worked a second screen, using white, not unlike the actual colour of the paper, to re-introduce a broken quality of grass.

The third colour took several days of preparation in drawing on the screen, being the mechanically precise formation of trusses in perspective overlaying the building beneath and the landscape beyond. I used the latex technique with a little touching up to gain a further degree of accuracy. I simplified by eliminating the three dimensional edges to the timber sections to produce a more appropriate (in contrast) linear movement against the darker backdrop. The colour was almost skin colour, pale yet opaque. It worked on both variations, although to my mind, better on the darker prints produced on the plan copies.

I had reached the stage where my mind and my actions were of one accord. My life if a complex one, always working at something new not always related to my work as a painter, yet I was surprising myself with a greater clarity of focus never before achieved.
April

Easter interceded. A holiday break was in order, intended as the much needed total break that we, as a family needed, which turned into an information collection period for me.

We chose the Isles of Scilly, a once regular haunt of ours particularly the small island of St Martin's on which we had spent several weeks at a time over many summers but had not been for five years.

On this occasion we went to Tresco, the more 'tropical' of the 'off' islands, a haven of peace and isolation.

There had been a time when all my paintings were based upon drawings produced on Scilly. On arrival there again, memories were rekindled, inspiring afresh the awe I held of the crystal clear air, the clarity of colour and the natural harmony of man, nature and the elements as one.

During the first two or three days of unwinding, indulging in good food, sampling the walking, clambering the rocks, riding the sea, not a creative thought crossed my mind. On about the fourth day on one of our family walks, we passed a group of bulb farmers (the one important industry of the islands) engaged upon the spring task of potato planting. Using smaller machinery than on the mainland, with part of the work done by hand, the process took on a very controlled regular appearance. The furrows had the precision of having been drawn by ruler with strong sunlight causing shadow which gave extra emphasis to their straightness. Other fields around bearing different crops or the evidence of neat rows of unused daffodils and other flowers, had a similar aura of organised regularity over and above that visible on the mainland.

From that point on I carried my sketchbook and a few materials which had inevitably found their way into my suitcase before departure.

A number of images attracted me in the remaining days which have (and will) led to further developments.

One especially attracted me. A particular characteristic of Scilly are the tall hedgerows of Pittisporum sometimes reaching skyward, dwarfing the stone walls bordering the small fields. When walking some of the thus enclosed pathways of the cultivated areas one is compelled to look through the gaps at the landscape views beyond. One such gap allowed the rows of early potatoes
previously planted in two fields end on to each other stretching into the hillside, to come into sight. The foliage growth was small, young, and very green. Above this natural perspective was one of the few clumps of trees, still rich in the mauve greys of late winter before spring growth fills them with lightness. Other fields some pastureland surrounded the two which had seized my attention. I was instantly preoccupied with my usual thoughts on how to use what I saw.

Before the entire scene, as I have described, stood the man-placed barrier of hedgerow, welding the whole into one unit. A sketch was made from which a print grew at a later time. This sketch had all the elements, again, to which I had been working, mans conscious, or unconscious manipulation of nature often contributing to its beauty, the main subject matter partly obscured by an immediate foreground and the natural formation of rectangular grids both horizontal and vertical interrupted by gentle perspective.

Other sketches were produced on the subsequent days, as stated, each heavily influenced by these main factors.

A splendid row of tall pines, leaning dramatically after the onslaught of many years of Atlantic gales, caught my attention at another time. To their right, through a field entrance, looking obliquely across them, were a row of the regular little fields. One a brilliant splash of yellow narrow forming a line, electrifying the darker colours around. This sketch too was destined for further development.

Another, more spontaneous drawing, only connected to my main theme by the obviously man-made jetty on 'St Agnes', another off island in the group, was produced. This, in black and white, recording the scale changes in the rocks arranged in wide finger sweeps jutting into the sea. The texture and rhythm of the water, the drama of the sky, heavy, laden with moisture behind the more regular obviously man-made quay.

The break, being short, was only sufficient to record a few things but long enough to point in fresh but not unrelated directions.

The two prints that followed took several weeks to produce being multi-coloured required careful consideration for each overprint.
The first, of the pittisporum hedge against the potato fields began with the decision to print dark brown/grey first, allowing the sky to take on the appearance of the last of night (which indeed it was since I had produced the sketch at dawn). It required much drawing using my new techniques, leaving white paper wherever green was needed in bright clarity. The print, after the production of this first colour, almost worked as a single colour, in fact I kept five of the sequence for this purpose as with a previous print.

Nonetheless, I continued with a transparent green that darkened the brown in overprint but remained fairly intense when overlaying the white. A purple grey third colour was also printed to achieve the stone wall in the immediate foreground beneath the first showing of the pittisporum hedge. Also the hillside beyond the potato field was richly textured offering strong contrast with the flatness of the sky.

A fourth colour, grey and more opaque, enriched the hedge giving greater clarity to its form. Finally I manipulated this screen by removing the blue block out with minute splashes of water to increase the foliage of the hedgerow.

I like both the variations, the first colour on its own and the subsequent growth to the full five colours giving expression to all my plans.
May

Following immediately from the screen print 'Fields and Windbreaks' I proceeded with another print prompted by the sketch produced on Tresco of tall pines seen edge on. In retrospect, there were a number of qualities observed at the time that grew in proportion with the passing of time. These were concerned with the height and colour of the trees, seen edge on and appearing to be one tree, a mass of lines and texture in grey greens; the slight angle of the ground, divided in Scilly's typical fields, sloping gently toward the sea; the bright line of yellow daffodils unpicked from the early flower season, and the remains of the stone wall edge that had formed the gateway to the farm fields.

I played with the composition until I had a balance that suited, I thought, the sense of scale exaggerating the size of the trees with the smallness of the fields. These were only small sketches since I prefer to work directly onto the screens.

The first colour was to provide the under tone for the trees, wall and some of the fields together with being the area of sky left visible through the gaps in the trees. I mixed several greys varying in transparency, pulling them through together. I have frequently worked in this way producing an overall flat tone on which to work.

Colour two, a brown mauve grey appeared after considerable work on the screens. Application was mostly by card edge, laying on to the screen lines of blue block out together with a brush for finer lines. When printed the enormity of the tree was quite obvious as was the definition of the wall remains. If anything I had made the colour too dark with insufficient broken edge forming the perimeter of the hundreds of branches. I had deliberately left some areas unprinted in order to receive the green of the next colour especially those that would form the fields.

The screen for the green was similarly worked introducing further texture and line. The colour was sufficiently transparent to darken the greys of the trees yet remain lighter across the original paler grey.

Both second and third colours had been printed in a small set, creating a separate variation, the impact of which left me quite undecided about their quality. The green embellished the foreground precisely as I had wanted it to, giving
subtle richness to the textural quality of the whole. The trees, however, had been overpowered, drifting away from the neutral values that had been part of my original vision. As a consequence I introduced another grey at this stage, roughly half way in tone, between the two previous greys. The screen had been worked with latex applied almost entirely with card edges, increasing the textural quality intending to capture the roughness of the bark and thrust of branches. Not quite translucent, it allowed a little of the previous green to be revealed and broke the surface into a contrasting texture with the foreground area and flatter fields. All that remained to do was the introduction of yellow to be overprinted, semi dense again to exaggerate the daffodil strip in the middle distance. A little trial and error in the mixing prevailed but a suitable quality was finally achieved.

Not as good as previous prints, having grown too dark overall but interesting in its textural richness.
June

I have spent almost a month writing. Attempting to give as much expression to my words as I have in my paintings and prints. An automatic consequence of this action has been that ideas in progress for further works have been delayed yet ever present bringing home to me all the anxieties and fears I always have experienced in never finding enough hours in the day to do everything I want to.

The extension to the house are reaching the final stage of completion (several months overdue) and continue to interrupt my time, thoughts and patience. Our furniture (most of it anyway) lives still, in the rented porta-cabin, leaving us with sparten dust laden accommodation, our irritation showing more distinctly with the passing of each day. The new studio, with its dark room cellar, taunts in its incomplete condition, calling out to my need to evacuate the old workshop cluttered with too many stored objects making work on any scale difficult.

I have no doubt, however, that the enormity of developing my thoughts in the written word, to continue my self imposed programme of creative activity to span the few remaining months, will in retrospect, be less horrific than it all appears at the present time.

The present scribbles are to be typed. Thoughts are now required, whilst I wait for their return, for an expansion into areas of related concern. I shall continue to paint as I compose the appropriate directions.
Earlier in this diary whilst making observations on the nature of abstraction I made reference to reactions to visual input from direct observation being the key factor in the process of analysis and deduction. I further suggested that too much consideration has been given to the examination of the so called 'fundamentals' acting to my mind detrimentally in the creation of the whole; whereas to flourish, artistic creations are born from a well balanced input of information from many sources. By far the most important, of course, are the visual elements, but like Ian Carmichael's 'experience of the world' even the smallest part of data stored in our complex memory banks, from past or present, is likely to find its way, when relevant, on to the creative surface of the canvas. Mostly controlled, but some elements like biological specimens bearing trace elements of other minor but necessary structures, appearing from the depths of the artist's intuitive centre.

I also drew a parallel with education, somewhat briefly and extremely trite, but none the less deeply felt and based on the experiences of twenty years of teaching. I suggested that education had experienced a decline (particularly in the secondary sector) due to the elimination of many prime factors fundamental to the process of learning and the eventual forming of a whole person. Whether or not the following is relevant to my own creative aspirations as outlined in this document, (as it happens I consider it is since I believe the very essence of teaching well owes much to the teacher's own specialist and general understanding with his ability to analyse and subsequently translate in a form that is meaningful for his students and some help to their eventual development). I feel it necessary to elaborate further on that earlier critical comment.

The general pattern of society, its growth and direction, seems to owe much to the confusion of ideals emanating from economic and political needs with a resulting influence and pressure being applied to education at all levels to react to those self inflicted needs.

A turmoil of conflicting requirements creating anything but the right situation or material for the appropriate expansion of young people into a maturity capable of being adaptable yet giving emphasis to their natural strengths, talents and interests.
To my confusion, I confess, in the past few years, many new directions in art and design education have been introduced which have not entirely contributed to the production of better material, better and more adaptable people or in drawing out natural strengths, talents or interests for the final merging into adult society. On the contrary, the opposite seems to be more likely, for the perpetrators of the 'new directions' have, like some artists producing abstract works, divorced many of the complexities quite natural to human life from the content of the curriculum.

Perhaps I am a traditionalist in the sense that I recognise the need for an order or priority in learning. The expansion of the mind, intelligent development and adaptability are dependent in the first instance on having the fundamental or principal knowledge in-built from the outset.

The three R's and the other elements aimed at expanding all the senses, including an appropriate code of behaviour, trust, truth and encouragement of enjoying any form of useful participation are not as 'old hat' as many claim, they are the foundations of 'knowing' on which control in maturity is based.

In a sense I am very much more for a materials and skills based education as opposed to one solely of ideas (although it is essential to incorporate both) for I feel it imperative to the expansion of future ideas to have the corner stone of knowledge already implanted on which ideas and ideals can spring.

The other way about is more likely to strengthen and affirm inadequacies causing frustration and apathetic tendencies. Allowing people to be confronted with their skills provokes interest and enthusiasm.

It would be easy to misinterpret these words and argue that frustrations and the stifling of ideas are more likely to ensue, which is true, if strict adherence to skills override totally any individuality. The two must go hand in hand. Great encouragement must be given to the formulation of new ideas during every stage of education on a par with establishing methods of understanding, thinking, learning and communicating.
Someone (who, I cannot remember) said, 'We should teach the adults not the children' implying that many problems may well be removed from childhood behavioural problems by giving parents a greater ability and range in their grasp of nurturing the development of their child.

Throughout my experience in the teaching service I have been participant in and witnessed many approaches to this theory during day and evening, but very much on a part-time or short course basis. Now, it seems to me that this is insufficient for societies needs and is all too often centred around 'activities' and 'entertainments' which although are of importance should be the vehicle for wider expansion.

Countrywide, over the many years of educational development centres of learning have appeared in all urban and rural communities from the humble village school to the large school, college, or university campus. The weakness lies here. In any year these establishments lie dormant and empty, being used in a traditional manner, day and portions of evenings only laced with an occasional weekend specialist event using one small portion of the total available facility. I have not worked out the proportion left throughout the year in any one establishment that is not used by full or part-time students, or for other purposes, but I would guess at close to 50% of the potential time available for use remains unused in any one. At this point I am not thinking in terms of design education only but throughout the whole potential spectrum of education.

In industry, particularly the larger empires, much time has been given to considering methods of increasing production, using a variety of methods from incentive schemes to majority use of available buildings, resources and labour.

It is my contention that greater value could be achieved throughout the educational spectrum by changing its image from a service industry to one of productivity. If one were to keep open and staff these places seven days a week all the year round for sixteen hours a day, a 'flexi' time shift system offering more courses and opportunities for all could alter the very pattern of life.

Such a 'flexi' system could be regional and/or national, corresponding to the pattern of local industry, be it productive or service type.
The barriers that separate 'work' from 'learning' could be reduced. Encouragement could be more easily given to work experience situations, youth opportunities, vocational training and strides made in changing the whole nature of supply and demand made effective.

If we saw life as 'life' and not as separate units of education, job, leisure, etc., if the total arrangement of availability in work time, learning time and leisure time were totally re-assembled to widen the available opportunities. If! Directions, opportunities, judging the needs of an entire society are ideals probably beyond our reach and becomes the more so when one considers the enormous financial involvement such a suggestion might inflict upon an economy with so many in-built shortcomings.

A proposition for better brains than mine particularly since my thoughts are restricted mostly to visual conceptions.
July

Quite apart from writing and making all the other arrangements necessary for typing, copying and binding for the thesis-diary (for which this is likely to be the last entry, apart from a visual documentation and analysis of all the works produced) another print has been conceived and produced.

I am very conscious of time running out and priority will have to be given henceforth to the visual works living in my mind's eye but as yet unborn, and will remain unspoken about until the final exhibition.

The latest work has been derived from one of the Tresco drawings produced during April. The subject matter referred to before concerns the planting of main crop potatoes in the narrow field strips prevailing on the island. The size of the fields, the opportunity to control the planting to a greater degree than on the mainland, gave sharp distinct ridges, precisely drawn and arrow-straight. The main field in the immediate foreground was below the level of giant dunes skirted at their edge by the dead winter bracken and grass several feet high. The remains of two gnarled old fence posts stood erect to one side. Other fields surrounded, neatly divided by the cropped hedgerows. The scene was one rich in texture and pattern, with low key colour due to the type of light and the season of the year. I shall use the subject for a painting but as a forerunner I chose to develop it first as a screen print in two colours.

It seemed important to exaggerate the half tone pattern with the dramatic richness of texture. I worked for several days on the first screen using all the methods devised throughout the previous months. It is worth noting that the screens before printing, with the various tones of blue filler, are interesting in their own right as pictures, revealing soft monochromatic treatment and variations to the surface.

I had a pre-conceived notion as to the colours, a soft grey brown purple for the first, overlayed with a darker version of the same colour for the second. The day I printed the first colour was exceptionally hot, so I reasoned that more retarder would be necessary in the ink to prevent premature drying.

For the first time I completed a short run without difficulty with no variations in the quality of each successive print. An interesting phenomena.
The quality of texture and tone were much as I had anticipated but clearly the second colour was essential for tonal depth.

A week later, after preparing the screen, I printed again to complete the work. Far better than the previous print which had become too dark in tone and vastly over-worked. The control of man over the landscape with the remnants of hedge and fence before it related to my main preoccupation throughout this last year.

At the final exhibition and through the visual record contained within this diary it will be plain to see the links both compositionally and conceptually between each of the individual works and the whole as a collection.

As an individual I have learned much, progressed a little and found a great deal out about my thought processes and how I might relate them to the arena of teaching.