

An event to coincide with the exhibition

‘Transforming Surfaces’  
at ARTHOUSE1, London

(A transcript of the conversation)



*In Conversation:*

*left to right: Della Gooden, G R Thomson, Michael Parsons, Richard Bell, David Saunders, Andrew Bick*

**Facilitator:** Andrew Bick, artist, writer and curator (AB)

**Participating artists:** Richard Bell (RB)  
David Saunders (DS)  
GR Thomson, aka Ray Thomson (GRT)  
NB exhibiting artists not present: Peter Joseph (PJ)  
Hanz Hancock (HH) & Patrick Morrissey (PM)

**Other Participants:** Della Gooden artist & writer of the catalogue essays (DG)  
Michael Parsons experimental composer (MP)

*Transcribers note: This transcription remains true to the substance of the conversation. Some contributions by participants have been re-rendered for the sake of brevity and clarity.*

- **Welcome, introductions and an overview by curator, Richard Bell**

*'Transforming Surfaces'* evolved from an invitation by **Saturation Point**, in 2016, to organize an exhibition that built on the 'Eye and Mind' theme, initiated in 2014 by The Mercus Barn (TMB) project, in the Ariège, France.

As a critical development of this theme, Transforming Surfaces brings together a number of artists who participated in that venture, with a view to sharing this work with a wider audience.

This exhibition is just a moment in this process. It does not claim to be a grand design that would end up saying anything incredibly profound. It's more an opening to the paintings and works we're seeing and experiencing in the here-and-now, which, hopefully, will stimulate a conversation- and it's as much a conversation between these works as between the artists and you, here in the audience.

I will now hand over to Andrew Bick, who has generously offered to facilitate proceedings.

**GRT:** Before Andrew speaks, I would like to propose a vote of thanks to Richard, for curating the exhibition. (Applause.)

- **Opening the discussion: Andrew Bick**

**AB:** I am hoping to do as little as possible, other than ensure all of us have a chance to continue the dialogue that has gone into this show, the essays and statements in the catalogue, and the work on the walls. I think the interesting thing that I would want to start with, which comes from a long-standing interest in the histories of systematic and constructive art in the UK, is how this is woven into the work of the artists in this exhibition. I think it was something you said, Richard, that this exhibition 'is the work of a group of artists, but it is not a group exhibition'.

And, in a way, what animates the works of any kind is the way that people converse about it. There are very particular dialogues going on in this exhibition, so I would want to start with the idea of dialogue, where it takes us, and particularly the relationship between what can be broadly considered as a systematic or pre-conceived approach, with what can be described as and a more intuitive approach. Because it is clear that in this exhibition, and in the catalogue material, the systematic and the intuitive can be considered as a false divide.

So, perhaps we could start there?

**RB:** I think the main element that runs through the work here is a commonality in the use of a systematic method. However, I believe this reflects a diverse range of approaches between the artists. From the installation by Patrick and Hanz, which makes use of a number of mathematical concepts as a means for planning the work, to the paintings of Peter Joseph where there isn't an apparent mathematical methodology involved at all. So, the exhibition is exploring a range of different approaches to a systematic method; where we are all starting from something known, but we do not know exactly what the visual outcome will be- and I think this is true in various ways for all the works in this show.

Della has written a vignette in the catalogue called *'Becoming'* – which I believe is about this tension between what is known at the beginning of the process, and where this process ends up as the finished painting. I think

this is what is being tested here.

**DS:** Well, I was a systematic artist, and although I'm not that systematic now- I do have a method. I've always been interested in chance. I think many of the 'Systems Group' were not that interested in chance, but for me the element of indeterminacy has been essential.

Where I now live, in France, are the prehistoric Magdalenian caves, which date back to some 20,000 years ago. I learnt from the scholars of these caves (who show you around) that this civilization had sort of itinerant professors who knew exactly how things should be drawn, like the horns of a bison for example. There was a formula for each type of image, and the professors went around to enforce these rules.



Altamira, Spain <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Magdalenian-culture>

But the cave painters were also looking at the bumps and cracks in the walls which could interact with these rules. One of the caves near me that you can still go into is called the Grotte de Niaux.

You have to walk some 2 km into the mountain, and you come up against these paintings, which speak directly to you. I wanted to bring this into the discussion to illustrate the relationship between the need for very strict rules that provides a formula and the interaction of chance, which creates the painting.

**AB:** There is something I want to come back to, which we discussed in the interview we did for Abstract Critical, which relates to the painting that you have called August 2017. When I looked at it- I couldn't quite believe it said August 2017. I had thought it would be August 2001 or something like this. So, there would be a time-based accretion of the surface- but this is not the case. Is there now a very different approach to the building of a surface to some of your earlier work.

**DS:** Well, I have a method of building up a surface, but I don't really want to share it because it is a bit mad.

**AB:** That's fair enough. I have heard painters share their methods with others, and then tell them 'please, do not share this with anyone!' So, there is this element in it.

**RB:** The trouble with methods is that sometimes they are top secret.



David Saunders, August 2017, acrylic and chinese ink on wood and gesso, 125 x 100 cm

**DS:** Well, Paul Cézanne was asked ‘*What is the secret of your success?*’ He said, ‘*Avoir une bonne formule*’ (to have a good formula). And he did have a good formula, but it was dependent upon the interaction with nature, and the surface appears out of this.

**AB:** And, in a way, this relates to something that Richard said about visiting Peter Joseph, that it is the way the method or formula evolves over time, which is important. I certainly think that over the time I have known your work, there has been significant change.

There is an interesting point that relates to this, which was the exhibition you did at Andrew Mummery Gallery, and the conversation you had with Peter Joseph at that time. I think there was a convergence between the works he was doing in a show I saw at Mummery Schnelle called ‘*What if it’s all True? What then?*’ and the works you are making now. <https://www.mummeryschnelle.com/pdf/WhatIfPR11.pdf>

But I just want to turn to Ray now, because we were having a conversation about how the surface and edge work in these painting of Ray’s and, perhaps, for him to say something about the relation between what is organized within these works, with what perhaps constitutes a form of gesture’.

**GRT:** Well...

I propose to ignore that question (laughter)

Let me be clear. (more laughter)

My interest in any of this stuff evolved from a brush, a rather unfortunate brush, as it turned out, with a number of artists who had been members the ‘Systems Group’, and a developing interest in structure ... which is a great

course for any visual artist, because people think of art as kind of intuitive, fun, entertainment industry perhaps, but don't necessarily think of it as involving the question of structure. And, more than that, the question of mathematics, within the question of structure.

I began by thinking about the model of structure, which I think was deployed rather unthinkingly by some artists associated with the UK Systems phenomenon, and ... I could find nothing in it which I could agree with. So, I began to look at other ways of thinking structure in terms of painting. I have to stress that I am speaking specifically of painting here, because I have not particularly worked in other mediums. For me, it's always been painting.

I looked through structuralist theories, then poststructuralist theories, and ended up with a kind of definition of painting as a form of non-phonetic writing. This 'notation' comprises formal elements not stemming from the individual, intuitive, expressive etc., etc., subject, but socially made, elements that are impersonal, socially made, squares, rectangles and so on. Measurable things. Mathematics itself is first and foremost socially constructed. But there are other things that are not entirely so, and one of those things is colour. I began to think the relationship between very tight, formally organized mathematical structures ... and colour, which is also very tightly organised, (inaudible phrase).

As Richard has been saying, the question of non-predictability comes into play here. I think the ideal of some of the Systems thing was to achieve the pristine purity of predictability, so that you knew the outcome before you began to sketch things out. I stepped away from this ideal of pre-prescription to try and achieve a 'materialist' inscription- in the matter of painting. I've been more or less involved in the same thing for over 30 years now and I haven't got to the bottom of it.

I think it's important to say that what lies at the bottom of all of this stuff is something radically unknowable- not something there in abeyance, not something waiting to be known, but radically unknowable.

The genius of spoken English is that the words for totality (whole) and nothingness (hole) sound exactly the same. The hole, in this sense, is radical nothingness. And this nothingness is not a temporary state of affairs, something that can be picked up and incorporated into structure at a later date, so that the whole thing 'makes sense'. It will never make sense.

It is important to bear in mind that these two orders, this whole order, this whole(some) order and this holey order, something with holes in it, sort of bounce off each other. And if I had to choose, wager (in Pascal's sense), I would say the hole (nothingness) is the condition of thinking the holy grail of the whole (totality) rather than the other way around.

**AB:** David has just passed me a note which relates to this, and to something we discussed in the interview for 'Abstract-Critical'. I will quickly paraphrase the work that Richard and David did with Jean Spencer (circa. 1980s); which was about developing a new sense of colour modulations.

And this is something that I do want to come back to, on how colour activates within architecture, and I think this is what David described as a "new sensibility of colour modulation that could be both understood and felt, a form of systematisation, that was seen as a transgression by the 'Stalinists'".

David wanted to offer a defence of his position via a translation of his own from Baudelaire's defence of Delacroix, in his critique of "The Salon of 1846"....

*There is no such thing as chance in art any more than in a machine. A happy discovery is the simple consequence of good reasoning in which one sometimes skips intermediate calculations, just as a fault is the result of a false principle. A painting is a machine of which all the systems are intelligible to the practised eye; where everything has its raison d'être, if the picture is good; where one tone is intended to give value to another; where an occasional fault in drawing is sometimes necessary in order not to sacrifice something more important'.*

'OK. Discuss!

**DG:** Well, just to connect that with what Richard just said about the tension between what is known at the beginning and how a painting finishes up ... as well as thinking about Ray's comments on the purity of prediction within the 'Systems Group'. I would agree that applying rules at the outset, which must be rigidly applied throughout, is definitely something the artists here have rejected outright, or have partly moved away from. However, they are all applying limitations and setting boundaries... adjusting the process this way, rather than that way- thereby creating potential. It's inevitable.

Actually, I'm thinking that rules could strangely, be a liberating force when you realise they can still involve choice. If you take one path from the outset, which is to the exclusion of all others – then is that a rule, a decision, or a choice? Once on that path, there will be other turns you can take. You can branch off. Each new rule, decision, or choice... whatever you want to call it... is strangely a narrowing and an expanding of possibility at the same time.

You can, of course, start anywhere and proceed anyhow, and you can then conclude successfully or not, but it seems to me there is a way of engaging with the process that allows the freedom to go forward more acutely if things are excluded or rejected- and not just at the beginning, along the way too.

**DS:** My friend, the composer Michael Parsons is here this evening. Michael is relevant to this discussion because he writes music with a lot of strict systematic thought, but his music and the way it is performed allow degrees of freedom for the performers to interpret the structure and make choices. I think we should invite Michael to join the discussion.

**RB:** I will just fill the space a bit whilst Michael takes his seat. It occurred to me there was predominance, I would say pre-1980s, for colour in systematic art to be used more as a code, as a means to articulate and bring into play a numerical or geometrical system. In this way, colour was a secondary consideration whilst the rational order of the organisation was primary. I think these paintings are showing that colour sensation is primary, and that, perhaps, the rationality of the organisation is secondary. Not in a mechanistic sense of one or the other. Colour has a logic and modus operandi, which might not require a secondary rational order to drive it. So, this was really, I think, a significant part of the experimentation in the 1980s.

I have referred in our catalogue to something the artist Jean Spencer said: '*colour complexity supersedes geometrical complexity*'. Although this is very aphoristic, it does encapsulate the thought that colour has

complexities that do not require a mechanical engine to make it work.

And this takes us right back to Paul Cézanne and to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's interest in, and writings on, Cézanne, about how the body experiences sensation, and the physical role of the individual subject. It is a four-dimensional or multi-dimensional thing. It is as much about the spatial-temporal response of the individual experiencing the work, as it is about the making of the painting in the first place. The role of yourselves looking at the paintings makes them happen, and you re- make them. This is what I think Merleau-Ponty was saying.

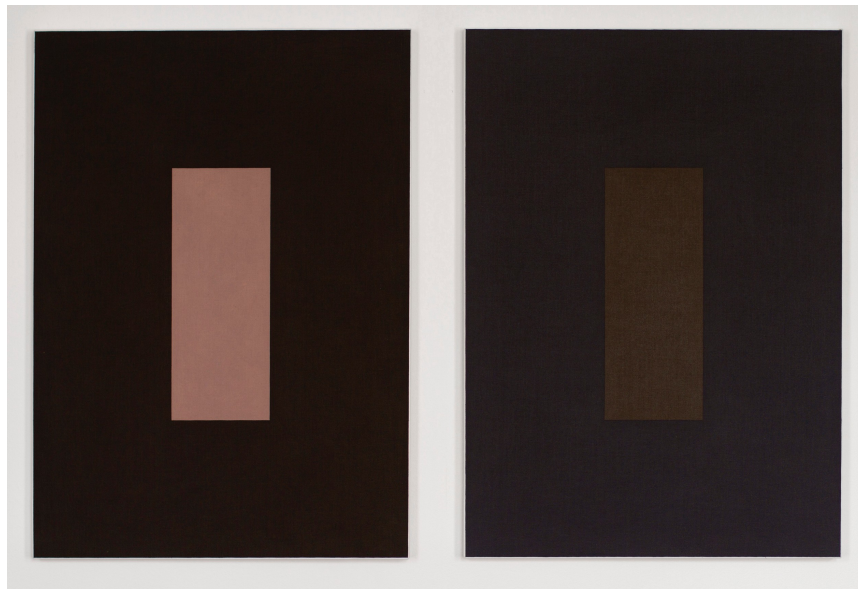
In this way, I think, we can let the word feeling back into the discourse. Peter Joseph would say that 'Feeling is all important to me'. I asked him about this, and he said it is the sensory experience of the painting, and how this resonates with us, or something to this effect. So, it is as much to do with our nervous systems, as with a cerebral response. It is about how we feel the work physically.



Left: Peter Joseph, Turquoise and Cobalt Blue, April 2016, acrylic on canvas, 47 x 38 cm  
Right: Richard Bell, Palimpsest No. 6, 2017, oil on linen, 80 x 80 cm

**AB:** For those of you, who do not know the artists Jean Spencer and Malcolm Hughes, please do look them up. Perhaps Michael would like to come in here?

**DS:** I would just like to say something about Ray's painting first. Everyone will have noticed that there are no bright colours. The reason for that is that all the colours have a part to play, so that each colour is made up of a certain number of colours in a certain proportion to the other colours. And that's why there are no bright colours, but they are very complex colours. The structure appears between all the different frequencies of colours that are combined in a single colour and are in relation to another set of combinations in the colours next to it. I believe that's where the feeling comes from. It's put there by the method used to make the painting.



G R Thomson, Anachromisms 32 (sea thrift, Portrush) 2010-2017  
acrylic on linen, each: 602 x 426 mm

**GRT:** I have to say that I don't have a lot of time for feeling myself.

**DS:** Yes, but Baudelaire is saying that the feeling of the painting must get there without the artist being aware of it. So, you have got it, whether you like it or not.

**GRT:** I'm not entirely sure what this discourse on feeling is really about. One of the many avenues Jean was exploring, before her untimely death, is how a painting is fundamentally unfinished until it is read. And, if there is work to be done, it is in the politics of reading otherwise, so that the practice of reading becomes an open and productive process, rather than a thing where the respondent is positioned as a passive consumer. So, if there are structures and feelings here that people carelessly talk about, might it not be said that a lot of that is invested in the work by the respondent? It's not put there for the respondent to merely receive-retrieve.

Rather, reading as an active process of co-production, of necessity involving at least two actors. The work is shared and irreducibly social. It is not a matter of, I-say-this-and- you-get-what-I-mean, which was a quite destructive aspect of the systems thing, 'underlying' meaning as already-made, pre-scribed, inalterable, universal, and so on, which it was the respondent's solemn duty to grasp.

**AB:** This social aspect perhaps is a good way into the question about how this relates to music, and if there is necessarily the same social question.

**MP:** Yes, of course, it is social. Everything we do is social. Music is a good example of collaboration between composers, performers and audiences. And so that is a good model for what people have been describing. You need performers and audiences to make their own responses. I would say this is so basic that we can almost take it for granted. But indeterminacy brings something more specific to our work over the last 30-40 years.

**DS:** Well, there is of course a sort of metaphor, I suppose, about this- meaning/feeling that is produced in the



space between the work and the reader, listener or respondent.

**MP:** I don't really like the word listener, it's too exclusive; when you are listening to music, you are experiencing it visually as well.

**DS:** I quite like reader.

**A. Unknown:** Respondent's pretty good.

**MP:** Respondent's best for me.

**GRT:** ... because when we talk about feeling, I don't see it as being in the work. I see the feeling as being part of the response to the work

**DS:** Yes, it's not in the work but is produced in the space between it and the reader. When I was at a recent exhibition, I noticed all these people with their iPhones out, and I realised they were just collecting this stuff and not actually in the space between the work and themselves. It has to be an active participation.

**AB:** In everything you have talked about, there is a primacy to attentiveness by the maker and the reader. It's interesting; I was talking to Ray earlier about the work here above the fireplace, which seems to re-site the architecture. And I think it is also the case for Richard's work, which proposes a similar activity. But it is something in a very specific way concerning how we experience architecture, in how it defines our behaviour. There is something particular to this kind of work that lends itself to the architecture.



Left: Peter Joseph, Blue and Dark Grey, July 2015, acrylic on canvas 47 x 38 cm. Right: G R Thomson, Anachromisms 40, 'canard' for John McLaughlin, 2015 – 2018, acrylic on linen, each: 602 x 426 mm



Left: Richard Bell, *Palimpsest No. 8*, 2017, oil on linen, 119 x 84 cm. Right: David Saunders, *December 2017*, acrylic and Chinese ink on wood and gesso, 125 x 100 cm

**AB:** Perhaps we can throw this open now to questions from the audience? (A)

**A1 (Paula Waldron):** Can I ask Della a bit more about the use of rules. I'm interested in how this applies in different mediums such as in writing and poetry, for instance, where certain rules are used to make the poem work well, and some work less well, and this comes from experience and learning. It strikes me that, in the discussion on the use of structure in the artists' earlier work, there has been a struggle to move away from more rigid systems. Do you see this as a struggle and is this change OK? I wondered if you have views on this.

**DG:** I'm not sure if this answers your question, but I was just now thinking that we have been talking about moving away from a closed system, to something more like a dynamic or open system. A strictly closed system is probably more problematic to the creative process because it doesn't allow for change, so I would say a move away from that might be a relief! Although, as Michael said just now, everything is social, and I suppose everything could be described as a system of some sort!

To be more specific, what I mean is that we can have a plan that assumes the process will teach us nothing, that we know everything from the outset. Or we can have a plan that accommodates error, change, and chance. We can plan how to be surprised! A plan, or you could say rules, that assume there is something still to be discovered, gives movement, allows for progress and evolution.

**RB:** I think it is also a move away from simply the word 'systems' - which has become a stand-in for so much. It has very important meanings now in contemporary art histories, in mathematics, in literature, and linguistics ... the context needs to be qualified.

**A2 (anon):** Can I just ask a question? There is a story about Anthony Hill, the well-known British constructivist artist. He would spend two days making a perfect Perspex square, and then, after two days looking at it, he would cut a sliver off. It seems this discussion is about these two things, and I think you are talking about the aspect of cutting off the bit to make it irregular.

**DS:** The interesting thing about Anthony Hill is that he produced art under two names. He used another name called Redo, which was his alter-ego and which allowed him to make work in a Dada, anti-rationalist type tradition as well.

**A2:** The other thing that struck me is that it seems to me you can predict the form of a structure, but you can't predict the experience of it. And one of the reasons for the structure is to get the experience from it.

**GRT:** I think this relates to the kind of things I was questioning ... It's almost like the myths of origin, if I could put it that way ... I don't want to deny the idea of systems – for me it's very important. But what's the shit that's going on before The System institutes itself, as-such? I mean there is a difference between learning the rules of a game, when that game already exists, and all the non-systematisable stuff leading up to the formulation of those rules. I'm interested in this stuff.

**A2:** But isn't that where the experience comes in? Experience is what nudges the thing off balance, slightly off balance and that's where all the shit comes back?

**GRT:** Yes exactly, exactly. My objection to the systems phenomenon was its almost invariable attempt to impose a closure on readings, on the genesis of work, where it comes from etc., etc. In other words, to eliminate what I have described, rather vaguely, as the hole, or the radically unknowable. If you start with the whole, holy totality as-such, everything else is less, other, a fall. So, for the whole(some) reading, the experience of the wall, the way the work references and interrogates the architecture ... the 'apertures' in my paintings and in Peter's earlier work- above all colour- are so many deviations, distractions.

All this referential structure is not completely containable within an order of the determinable. Nor is it completely indeterminable either. You always need two. That's why there are always two of these bloody things (indicating Anachromisms). Twoness opens the prospect of making a whole, or a one, or a totality that is non-transcendental. This is important; it must be material, constituted in the materiality of the work and having regard to the specificity of the object, in my case painting. For me, Art is an abstraction. We don't 'create art'. We make paintings, relief constructions ... notes, with stuff, matter. This guy here (indicating Michael), his notations (scores) are not sounds. They're non-phonetic scripts. Then, you have the social thing, where people get together and try to play (interpret) the bloody things. This is what paintings do, publicly perform the pieces of which they are the more- or- less formal notation. Call their interpellation of the play of light the workings out of a system, if you like. Does that answer your question?

**A2:** Sort of. I lost the track a bit.

**GRT:** Me too ...

**A1:** But it does point to the fact that the works never quite get there.

**GRT:** Yes, incompleteness is essential to the work, because that opens a space in which the role of the respondent is more than that of a passive consumer.

**RB:** I think Della referenced this in the catalogue essay- how the process is always in a state of becoming. We all

have a sense of what we do and about the known structures, but we want a new situation, which we are exploring to get to somewhere else.

**DG:** Yes, exploring. The essay *'becoming'*, in the catalogue, was an attempt at understanding Peter Joseph's process- and in respect of that, I have to mention the Merleau-Ponty thing, embodiment. I really wanted to show how it's not just about being on the ground, acting on your own, but about the collaborating world. It's also about rejecting 'high-altitude' thinking. It's the experience of working it out in practice, and not thinking you can look down from above and see all the solutions. You have to get down and dirty.



Peter Joseph  
Left: Ochre, Light Purple, Dark Red, Sept 2014.  
Right: Blue and Dark Grey, July 2015. Both acrylic on canvas, 117 x 38 cm

**GRT:** Yes, there are no privileged vantage points. It is the same as in science, which doesn't have a god's eye view of the universe anymore. The subject of science- qua practitioner- is part of the process.

**RB:** Michael, is there anything you want to say about how your music relates to this?

**MP:** I don't want to talk in detail about my work in this context, as it is really about your work. However, in general, I am interested in the idea of openness and indeterminacy in English experimental music. This derives from the work of John Cage, Morton Feldman, David Tudor and others in New York in the 1950s and 1960s, which became known in England in the 1960s, largely through the work of Cornelius Cardew and John Tilbury. The music is not fixed in advance; scores can allow performers and respondents a range of interpretations, so one performance is never exactly the same as another. Each is unique to its circumstances.

**A3: Laurence Noga (LN):** Richard, I wonder if you can say something about how you brought these works together and the kind of choices you made?

**RB:** It was sort of self-selecting. As I said previously, it grew out of the *'Eye and Mind'* project initiated by The

Mercus Barn and developed through a sequence of exhibitions dating back to 2014. Some of the works here have been shown in *'Ground, Rules, Painting: A Quartet'*, an exhibition curated by DS and hosted last summer by the Lycée Gabriel Fauré, Foix, France. Others have been produced since then. These are joined here by recent works by HH and PM. I think it is also worth adding an important note about Peter Joseph, who some years ago, I might not have thought to be a fellow traveller in an exhibition regarding structure and method. I now think he simply is. The method, which underpins his painting practice, does, I think, express compositional rigor. There is a small collage over there by Peter, which was made as recently as April this year.



Peter Joseph, Collage, April 2018,  
painted canvas and card, 28cm x 23 cm

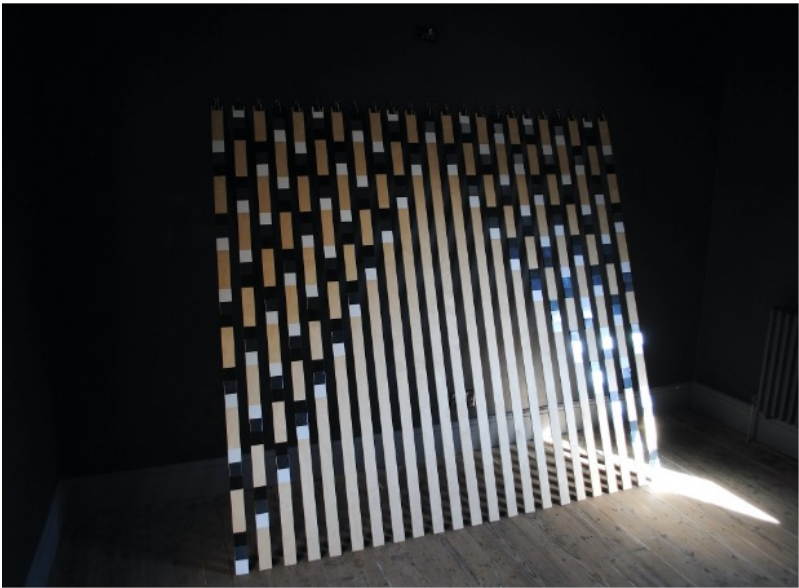
**DS:** People might assume that this collage appears through a completely random process of shapes as though they arrived by accident. But his process is to construct a very specific situation from small swatches of colour and shapes until he is happy with it. Once satisfied with the arrangement, he paints it on a larger scale – rather in the way an old master such as Claude Lorrain might model an Arcadian landscape, to capture the fall of light and the colour variables.

**DS:** It is actually stranger than that, I can tell you; he collects all the bits of card and colour tests on bits of canvas he has made over the years. There is a pile of hundreds of these scraps of canvas. Della wrote about this in the catalogue essay. This trying out of the relationships by cutting up these bits that he then assembles as a collage and then scales up by drawing this out as pencil lines that copy the cuts of the original collage edges on the large canvas. There is method in the madness.

**LN:** I would like to know if the show was hung intuitively in a way, or if there was a plan.

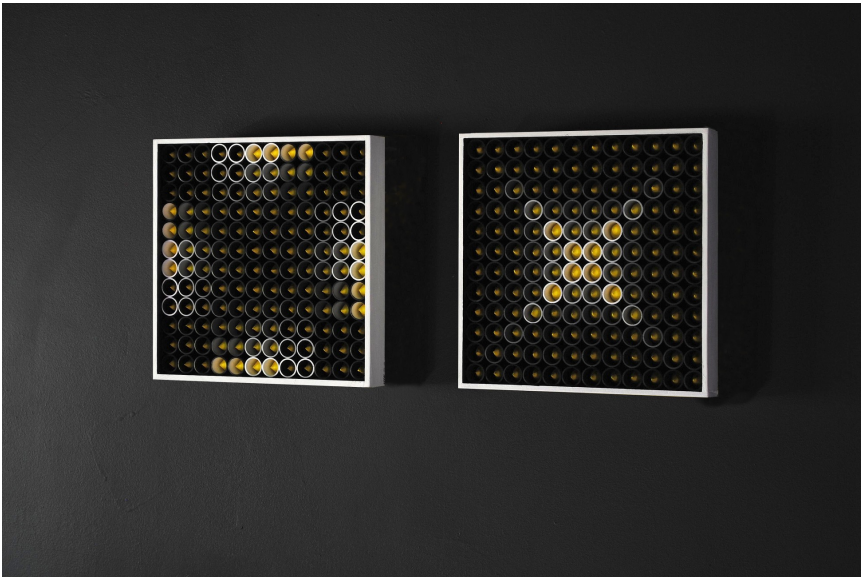
**RB:** The exhibition is a very deliberate ensemble, which, as it happens, has undergone a number of transformations along the way. I believe the collaborative work of PM and HH engages with systems that are experienced spatially in three and two dimensions, as well as temporally – through the sequencing of moving

video images. These interacting mediums constitute a site-specific installation that makes use of the lower illumination in the adjoining gallery room.



Patrick Morrissey and Hanz Hancock Installation: *'Chromatic 3'*

This installation is perhaps at one end of the exhibition spectrum, whilst Peter's and David's working methods, which are specific to painting, are probably at the other. All these works are in this exhibition to test these questions of spatial and temporal transformation, at once regulated and open to chance and change.



Hanz Hancock, Mourning in Yellow 2 and 4, mixed media, each: 25.4 x 25.4 cm

**A4 (anon):** I just wanted to go back to what you said about feeling, which seems to be somewhat contentious. And I want to add in the word sensation – and to what extent feeling is about sensing. I am interested to know if sensing here is to do with a rhythmic experience of the world, and the world around you.

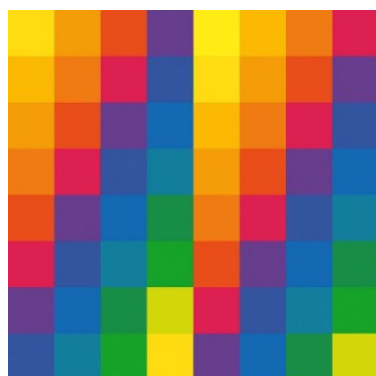
**DS:** Well, I would like to talk about Malcolm again here. He had a very interesting idea – he was fascinated by prime numbers and I think I'm right in saying that nobody has yet devised an algorithm that is able to generate prime numbers to infinity. The intervals between prime numbers can never be regular. And this fascinated Malcolm and me, i.e. how you can have something that is rule-bound but is also irregular.

**GRT:** If I might pick up on this a bit ... I mean obviously in my work and in more mathematically inclined work, there are always questions of repetition and difference. I have in mind the emblematic image of modernism, the square divided by the regular orthogonal grid ... a method of organisation that was supposedly non-, or anti-narrative, anti-nature and so on.

I recall in the midst of reading a reproduction of a modular, serial painting by the Swiss concrete artist Richard Paul Lohse, one of the interesting things Jean [Spencer] pointed out was that, although the grid was completely regular ... Obviously, there is a strong pictorial rhetoric going on, in which the spectrum colours making up the whole, appear equidistantly stepped: yellow; redder yellow; redder redder yellow, and so on ... Suddenly, Jean said, 'he cheats', because one of the steps was not regular, not equidistant. It could only not be regular, a misstep, in order to make the pictorial rhetoric work. Jean's seeming accusation of malpractice turned out to be a compliment from one painter to another.

That's where, some decades ago, I started to think what I now call the double economy. Not one. There are always a minimum of two economies, regular and irregular, rhythmic and arrhythmic ... The extreme mathematising tradition tends to see only a single 'underlying' structural master economy and finds it difficult to think two orders, particularly orders that are often abrasively in contradiction, one with the other.

The double economy is perhaps one way of addressing a question posed earlier about the difference between ... Yes, what Lohse- who was, I believe, critically aware of such matters- describes it as the difference between sensation and ... He had two terms ... Yes, experience and information were the two words he used. So, if you imagine the grid as achromatic information, onto which has been laminated the experience of colour, you have the double economy at work.



R P Lohse, Acht vertikale systematische Farbreihen, 1955 – 1969 (for illustration purposes)

**A4:** So, you get the push-and-pull thing, which takes us back to the Merleau-Ponty thing of the Body and the Eye and how one influences the other.

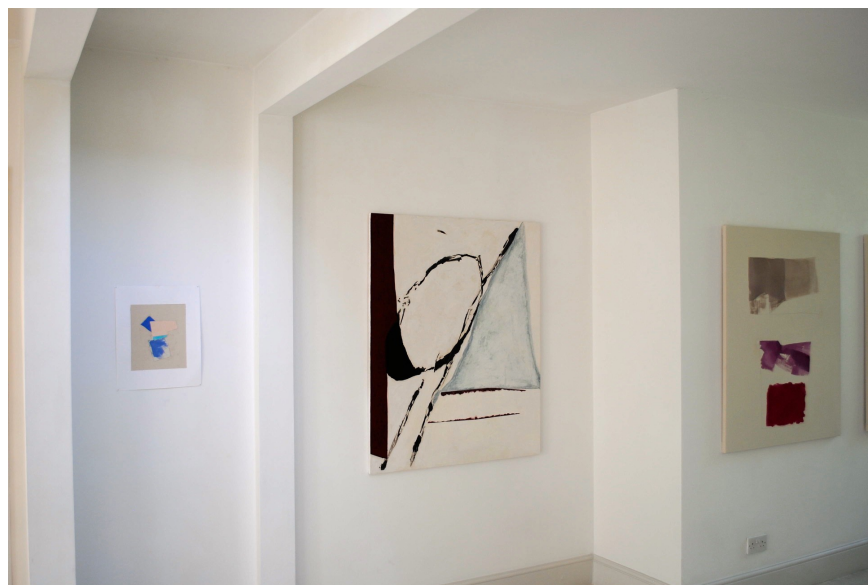
**GRT:** Exactly ... And these two 'moments' are quite often in tension.

**DG:** To get back to your addition of the word '*sensation*' (acknowledging the questioner) ...I'd really need to know what you mean by that. For me there are so many other words that come along with '*sensation*'...such as '*perception*' and '*consciousness*'. So, I think it a bit restrictive to think about it in isolation... as if it's just the senses picking up on something 'coming in'. Don't get me wrong, it **is** very special, but it's fleeting, it's quick and sudden, and other things happen.

Immediately after a sensation, consciousness takes over and starts organizing what 'came in'. It decides what to do with it, considers how it can align it with anything we already know about. It does its best to box it up, repackage it. Basically, we get hold of a sensation and then corrupt it and by the time we've finished, the sensation is degraded. We've dropped the ball, something is lost.

Something that Husserl was interested in is how artists can perhaps wind back this kind of artifice. How the work of our consciousness, our need to organize and make 'sense' of things can be peeled away.

**GRT:** I agree with that. Other terms would be signal and noise, for example, and a desire to have pure signal minus the noise; which never works.



Left: Peter Joseph, Collage. Centre: David Saunders. December 2017. Right: PJ, Ochre, Light Purple, Dark Red

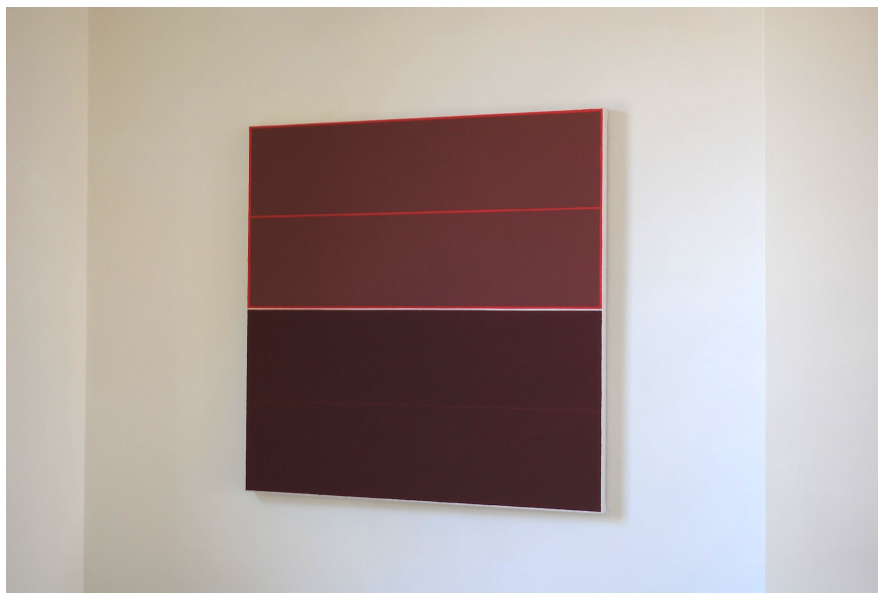
**A5 (Justin Baron):** There have been a number of companies recently that are creating new music technologies and intelligence, and demonstrating the importance of new IT applications. I was wondering if there are equivalent computer programmes that could produce works like these. Whether it is just the application that is



important and the need for method and structure. If so, in the context of people who say 'I don't know about art but I know what I like', would they need to know about the structures and methods to really get something out of it?

**DS:** Well, just a word on that. I was one of the founders of the 'Systems Group', and I think there was a need at the time for the transparency of a system, so you needed to know how it was done. I now actually think this was wrong. The idea of check-ability, that you check it through and, if it all works, then it's ok. But no, it's not really how you get there. Perhaps the early work of that period does have some merit, but if it does, that's not it.

**RB:** The physicality of the work is important. The physical and time aspect of the painting practice in making the work, I think, is a type of performance. You have to perform the painting. And then, the second performance, which we have been talking about in relation to MM-P's aesthetics, is the double articulation- where you re- perform the painting in response to the physicality of the surface, colour, light and everything that's gone into it, a second time. In a way, you are doing it over again and bringing it alive. This is a transformative process.



Richard Bell, Palimpsest No. 5, oil on linen, 80 x 80 cm

There is a video installation in the other room by PM and HH, which I think is fascinating and is derived from algorithms. But it's a different physical experience in this spectrum from what's going on here.

I also just wanted to point out the relevance of the poems by the English metaphysical poet John Donne (1573-1631), which have curiously made their way into this exhibition. We have included two older catalogues of work by Peter Joseph, which can be seen in the vitrine. Looking through these, I noticed that he had included a passage by Donne on the nature of light. We wouldn't normally associate Donne with work of this tradition. None of this was known to Della, who nevertheless signed off her essay in the exhibition catalogue with an entire Donne poem, entitled '*The Extasie*' !



Vitrine: Notebooks, sketches, preliminary studies, colour trials and exhibition catalogues selected by the artists

DG: And choosing that poem was a very off-hand thing initially. I just thought this is a poem I like and, in relation to this show, it feels right. I also suspect it very much influenced the way the essay took shape.

RB: When we were talking about the poem, about why you thought it important to include it, I think it was this paradox between the metaphysical aspects of Donne's poetry, and the physical nature of the work; and yet how, in the *The Extasie*, the meaning is conveyed of how everything returns back to the body. And we felt that

this really chimes with MM-P's thoughts on Cézanne, referenced in the foreword to the catalogue:

'Quality, light, colour, depth which are there before us, are only there because they awaken an echo in our bodies and because the body welcomes them.' (*Eye and Mind*, 1964)

GRT: The only proviso I would make in response to the last question, is that no one approaches these things without knowledges, devoid of experiences. Much as we

may desire to be empty subjects when we look at these things- fortunately or unfortunately, depending on your politics- actually, there is no such being.

But no, it's not essential, it may be desirable but it's certainly not essential to know about the theories, structures, whatever, first. I think above all these paintings are designed with an eye to some form of aesthetic pleasure- which is not divorced from the social production of knowledges. Perhaps, a certain strand of the systems tradition has placed too little focus to that. Maybe that's something that remains to be contended with.

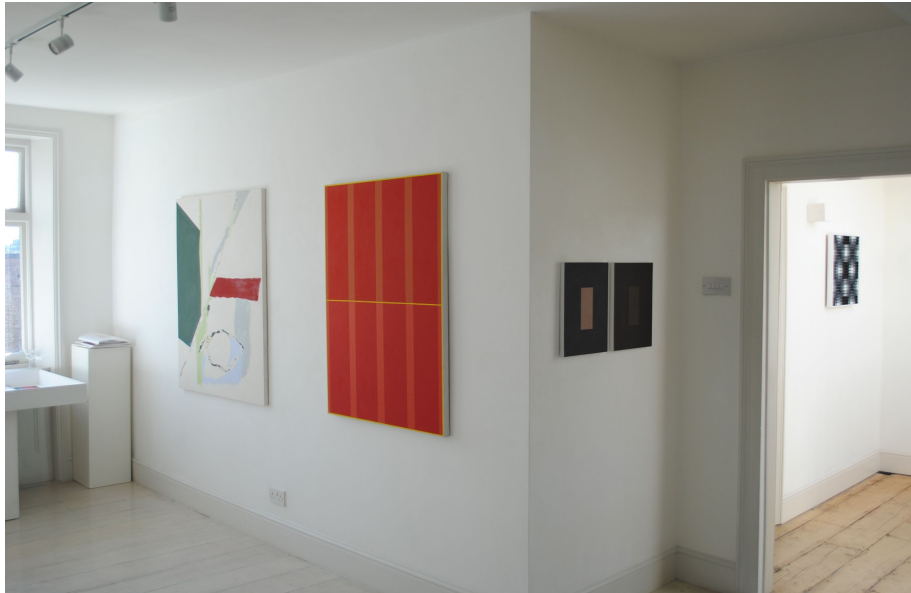
AB: Thank you all very much, and to the artists for making this exhibition possible. (Applause.)



AH1. facing south, L to R: Richard Bell, Peter Joseph, RB, vitrine, David Saunders, Richard Bell, G R Thomson



AH1. facing north, L to R: Peter Joseph, G R Thomson, Richard Bell, G R Thomson



AH1. facing south-west, L to R: David Saunders, Richard Bell, G R Thomson, Hanz Hancock, Untitled, mixed medi

***Acknowledgements.***

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*Photos by Richard Bell, G R Thomson and Rebecca Fairman*

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