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Malcolm Payne
Pogonology
Contributers

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Malcolm Payne

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In the main event, presenting first on my right, in the black corner in this super heavyweight division bout over twenty-one centuries, wearing black and white, weighing in at one trillion pounds, are the champions Pliny the Elder, Plato, Xenokrates of Sicyon, Ghiberti, Vasari, Winckelmann, Burckhardt, Goethe, Schnaase, Wölfflin, Gombrich, Panofsky, Warburg, Russell, Apollinaire, Hume, Combrich, Wittkower, Ruskin, Freud, Jung, Burke, Lacan, Greenberg, Baumgarten, Adorno, Shapiro, Beardsley, Hauser, Lyotard, Kant, Guattari, Jameson, Croce, Baudrillard, Benjamin, Fried, Steinberg, Read, Rosenberg, Debord, Kusmit, Foster, Žižek, Danto, Lippard, Bourdieu, Burnham, Foucault, Kramer, Krauss, Ettinger, Zeki and Davies, and in the red corner, wearing pale grey, weighing in at 168 pounds, is the challenger.

Your referee for the fight is Socrates. Judges are Marcel Duchamp and Paolo Uccello. The bell may save no fighter, so let’s get ready to gesso, to glaze, to do fat over lean, tooooo scuuummmmblllle!

Imagine an instance when the only evidence of a painting’s existence is through an assortment of photographs, voice recordings of the artist talking about the picture, videotaped interviews and other material forms that confirm a series of activities that took place by an artist whose intention was to produce a painting entitled Punch Drunk.

Would this evidence be sufficient to establish a context for the work qua work?

Could Punch Drunk ever be imagined if the evidence of its being existed as an accretion of left-over, peel-off palettes,
cleaning rags and digital photographs taken of canvas surface detail at various stages of completion? Could this evidence constitute the artwork? What if *Punch Drunk* never existed?

If one follows David Davies’ performance theory, there should be no problem in accepting a trail of evidence — the artist’s doings described above as the artwork. After all, the painting, the outcome or product, Davies asserts, is merely ‘the focus of appreciation’. It is the performance of the work and all that goes with it that is the artwork.

Is it so simple? Let’s look at the following analogy: an artist and fifty-four writers go ten rounds in the boxing ring. Call it a performance artwork entitled *Punch Drunk*. It is the real thing. No punches pulled. Referee, seconds, judges, audience and documentary photographers are all present. The consequence of the event will be a winner and a bloodied loser along with some filmic record of the bout, and of course the ring floor – the canvas – which will retain the bout’s history in the form of scuff marks, bloodstains, wet patches in the corners, sweat, Vaseline and saliva.

Is this then Davies’s theory manifest? Can we, in this way understand the performance, the doing as art, and then appreciate it as art? The work no longer exists, the videotape is not the work, recall of the event is not the work, indeed the artist’s recall of the event is groggy, and so on. The ring canvas is simply ‘the focus of appreciation’.

Is a boxing match as close as we will come to understanding this conundrum? The match is performed, there is no script, gambling takes place on the outcome much as it happens in front of the canvas when painting.

Will the so-called final outcome, the painting materially interfere with a truer reading of the artist’s intentions in the face of the body of collected evidence of the performance? Is the painting therefore a natural outcome of the painting process? Or is the focus of appreciation just another by-product of whatever it is that painters do, no more or less valuable than a bottle of pigment-saturated cleaning turpentine.

In all practical senses, in most if not all cases, empirical evidence, recorded or otherwise, of a painting’s (artistic statement) coming into being (provenance) is missing, gone. The capacity to track back in the face of the object, to move back in time to apprehend the evolutionary stages of the work, in Davies’ words ‘the generative act’ from idea to palette to canvas, or from clay or raw steel to conclusive object, is missing. This means that the painting gives little inkling of its identity as an artwork coming into being.

The question then is: can we fully appreciate (a receptive act) a painting, including its meaning and the artist’s intentions (if that is ever possible) by just looking at it? Is the boxing canvas the artwork?

Don’t ask me. Scratch your own beard.

GOD. 2009. Casein on paper. 560 mm x 760 mm
Buddha & Plato from Word Beards Panel 2, 2009. Acrylic on canvas. 1250 mm x 1000 mm each.
Noted as a controversial and politically challenging painter during the ‘70s and ‘80s, Malcolm Payne, as Professor of Painting at Michaelis School of Fine Art, was loath to support the tradition of painting merely for the sake of it. During the ‘90s and much of the first decade of the 21st century he appeared to eschew the medium almost entirely in his own practice, becoming better known for his conceptualism and forays into a diversity of contemporary media, from computer-generated prints to video.

His return to the tradition of canvas and pigment thus came as something of a surprise – perhaps even more so as he entered the terrain again with a singular, isolated image that he has stuck resolutely to – that of the beard. Manifest in one of two forms, the beard appears either as a floating shape in the middle of his canvases or as a name in bold, black text sprouting hair.

These idiosyncratic renderings might seem merely absurd, a point that Payne’s statement that he ‘doesn’t take art particularly seriously’ appears to reinforce. However Payne’s self-admitted enjoyment of ‘the seriousness of the game’ posits something more, and the scale and number of the works exemplify both his tendency to jest and his dedication to playing the consequences of the game through.

Payne’s use of the abstruse term ‘pognology’ for the series reinforces the sense of arcane knowledge informing his choices. The term also creates a sense of studied focus that demands the viewer’s speculative reflection. Why beards? What relevance might the image of a beard have in/on the field of contemporary painting?
Kurt. 2008. Acrylic on canvas. 2000 mm x 1600 mm
In order to reveal some of what the beard might cover, it is perhaps best to start with the fairly obvious: a beard is commonly understood as a sign of adult masculinity. According to R.W. Connell’s studies of hegemonic and multiple masculinities, he/she\(^6\) notes that ‘mass culture generally assumes there is a fixed, true masculinity’ and such ‘true masculinity’ is ‘almost always thought to proceed from men’s bodies – to be inherent in a male body or to express something about a male body’ (Connell, 1995: 45). Thus the beard appears fundamentally to epitomise, or even vouchsafe, masculinity.

Painting, while not necessarily associated with masculinity in the public imagination, was sometimes overtly avoided by feminist artists in the ‘60s and ‘70s because of its association with patriarchal power. Given the ejaculatory manifestations of Jackson Pollock (‘Jack the Dripper’ as \textit{Time} magazine framed him in 1956) that claimed centre stage of American 20th-century painting at the time, it is perhaps not surprising that it was deemed a terrain possibly irredeemably contaminated.\(^7\) The binary divide between male-female, active-passive (artist as male, female as model), was so well entrenched in the arena of painting that it became a central site for gender discourse. That Payne enters the field in the first decade of the 21st century sporting his beards and little else may thus, in this context, be seen as highly retrogressive.

However Payne’s hirsute framing of painting, rather than securing the terrain for/of masculinity, destabilises it. A pensive man strokes his beard. The painter’s brush strokes the canvas and is its own form of cogitation. In Payne’s images each stroke creates a separate strand of hair, which, with constant repetition, amasses to conjure a beard. The manner of this conjuring however, like all sleight of hand, needs careful scrutiny.

Payne’s beards are not naturalistic, either in their isolation or in their treatment. While he often works from photographs, his rendering of the form of the beard is not photographic, nor is it particularly painterly. Using thin acrylic paint he eschews the expressive mark with its autographic individualism and replaces it with one that is highly stylised, one that evokes the graphic clarity of the practised sign writer. One is reminded of Magritte’s seminal (pun intended) ‘Ceci n’est pas une pipe’.*9 Things are not what they seem – the picture is, after all, only ever a sign, never the thing.

Payne engages with the signs of painting. Contemporary painting is embedded with layers of history. Payne hence pointedly chooses his mark/s from within the tradition of painting. The graphic functionality he uses here evokes Pop Art, and its repetitive regularity brings Warhol’s statement of the desire to ‘paint like a machine’ to mind. This is an approach designed to undercut the hierarchy of high and low art, the unique versus the mass, but complicated by the fact that there is a contradiction in terms embedded within the handmade mechanical stroke. Each hair, mimicking the automatic mark, is in fact still individual, made by Payne’s hand, even as he eschews such particularity.

Part of Modernism’s failure was this very inability to secure a single position. Just as, for instance, Pollock was never able to create total flatness in his work as each overlaid drip or splatter created an optical
Stuart. 2008. Acrylic on canvas. 2000 mm x 1600 mm
sensation of depth, however minimal, neither were any of the other Modernists, despite dedicated focus, ever able to attain complete autonomy for their works or ideas. It is Modernism’s failure that has continued to inform much of the nuanced production of artistic practice since then.

The vacillating play between the particular and the generalised operates throughout Payne’s series of beards. While many of the beards are sourced from actual bearded men whom Payne has photographed (Kurt, Stuart, Ed and Mathew amongst others), none are directly identifiable from the images. Not only does Payne eradicate the individual, but he also creates a curious effacement of men in general as his beards frame no facial feature leaving the space within vacant.

Mute, the beard, in isolation, thus floats free. Mutating its form, it becomes a frame in which desire or meaning can be posited but never secured.

Despite this, or perhaps because of it, Payne engages some very particular references in this body of work. Works of art, famous men, characters from stories, all occupy his lexicon and inflect the meaning of the series.

*La Barbe Bleue*, for instance, is a mass of blue marks on the canvas that accrues to create a decidedly bushy blue beard. Referencing the classic tale of *Bluebeard*, where a nobleman is in the habit of murdering his wives, its content might, in this context, be wryly described as barbaric. Two sisters eventually outwit Bluebeard, and the tale embodies the often-violent struggle for power between the sexes: a struggle that is sometimes won through trickery or deceit.

Deception and betrayal are popularly identified as characteristic of women. The term ‘masquerade’, for instance, is more commonly associated with women and their societal gender roles. One of the reasons for this is women’s apparent predilection for fashion, make-up and other overt forms of applied (hence artificial or masked) display. Women’s association with the masquerade is traditionally taken as an indicator of an essentially duplicitous nature. The notion of a ‘masculine masquerade’ is more often seen as an oxymoron or contradiction in terms, as masculinity is traditionally couched in terms that indicate the opposite of such ‘deceit’. ‘Real’ men embody the unadorned, the primitive and the direct (Brod in Perchuk, 1995: 13) and the true masculine self is allied with such values as truth, honour and integrity. From this position any sort of ‘play-acting’ would be conceived as a corruption of normative masculine values. However, given that gender is a social construct reinforced through repetitive performance, it is evident that male gender is as artificially maintained as female gender.

Hidden in the etymology of the word ‘masculinity’ is one reason that societal vigilance is seen to be necessary in maintaining normative heterosexual masculine values. According to Paul Hoch (1979), when translated literally, the word ‘masculinity’ means ‘mask’. *Mas* is a shortened form of the Latin *masca* for ‘mask’. *Culus* is the Latin term for ‘anus’ and thus, Hoch proposes, masculinity is more specifically a mask for ‘anality’. Thus ‘the masculine mask is worn in order to achieve a normative performance-orientated phallic heterosexual male sexuality’ one that ‘masks
an earlier, more “feminine” anal eroticism’ (Brod in Perchuk, 1995: 17). Such a need to present a unified front, as it were, indicates that the ‘creation of a strong, unconflicted, masculine imagery is difficult to achieve’. Since the desire to identify with other men is strong, individual men make an enormous investment into mainstream masculinity as a way of ‘fully achieving phallic power’ (Brod in Perchuk, 1995: 17).

One way of doing this is to create codes that one can adopt or don. Uniforms, for instance, whilst worn by both men and women, are more strongly associated with masculine identity\(^{15}\) and masculine power en masse. As has already been elucidated, beards function in a similar way.

However, in slang a ‘beard’ is a term used to describe a person camouflaging something, normally an infidelity or another person’s sexual orientation. A homosexual man, for instance, may date a woman in an effort to conceal his sexual orientation – in effect the woman, ‘the beard’, signals the appearance of heterosexual masculinity. Her presence reinforces, at least in the public eye, what is absent in him. She is, in a sense, a proxy for his heterosexuality. Like a painting, she is a screen for the ‘real’ thing.

That Payne is acutely aware of the game of hide-and-seek he plays across genders is signalled by the allusions he makes in the titling of some of the works on exhibition. A number of works are designated _L’Origine du Monde_ (The Origin of the World). These reference Gustave Courbet’s provocative work of the same title from 1866,\(^{16}\) which depicts, with particular naturalistic precision, a woman’s genitals framed by the bush of her pubic hair. The similarities between this and the male beard as elucidated in Payne’s paintings, if not previously evident to the viewer, are pointedly marked here.

The place of masculine authority and utterance, as exemplified in the biblical phrase ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God’ (John 1:1), has been subverted. _L’Origine du Monde_ points to a source for the genesis of all things as distinctly bodily and female – a view decidedly at odds with traditional Judaeo-Christian values.

Payne is, however, not simply interested in swapping or taking sides. If male facial hair no longer frames the male mouth but frames another orifice, that orifice is potentially any orifice. Sexual possibilities multiply. The brushstroke is its own caress arousing a myriad of forms. In some of Payne’s renditions of _L’Origine du Monde_ the passive form in the original work has been activated to appear particularly voracious. Other works manipulate the shape of the beard until it is virtually unrecognisable as such. In _De Sade_ it almost appears animated – as if gesticulating and showing us its sphincter. Equally perverse is _Maldoror_\(^{17}\) a double configuration in which forms, now only vaguely resembling beards, appear to wrestle with each other.

It is Payne’s freedom as a painter that allows him to mould the world as he sees fit. So it is perhaps no coincidence that in the second series of works, in which he abandons the visual form of the beard, he inscribes the names of iconic males associated with making the world as we know it. Socrates, Muhammed, Allah, God, Galileo, Mao, Satan, Szilárd\(^{18}\) and Elvis – the bold, black text of their names sprouts
sparse hairs – the remnants of beards marking the names with masculine, if not god-given, power.

Upsetting the neat canon of absolute male power that appears to run throughout this series is a pair of paintings with the words *Mommy* and *Daddy* (2009) respectively. Of equal size, and equally hairy, the distinction between things here again becomes fuzzy.

Despite the apparent reiterated focus of his subject, Payne thus appears to refuse to adopt a singular position or approach. Playing the range of painterly effects he sometimes sets his beards on flat colour backgrounds while in other works the full gamut of painterly effects are called into play. Letting the paint drip, run and splatter, Payne engages both the performance of masculinity and that of painting, claiming the terrain whilst at the same time undermining that which he claims.

Understanding that representation in painting is a re-presentation of the original towards which it gestures, Payne mixes figuration and abstraction, the painterly and the graphic, genders and hierarchies. Painting allows him to configure and reconfigure what he will with an autographic mark that reads like a machine production. Ostensibly his topic is beards but these in their own right mask issues of gender, painting and ultimately creation.

Viewer beware – Payne’s work, like the bearded ladies of the 19th-century travelling freak-shows, cannot be taken at face value.

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**Endnotes**


2. Video is sometimes understood to be a part of the ‘expanded field’ of contemporary painting. Payne participated in international forums such as Video Brasil (2001) and Worldwide Video Festival in Amsterdam in 1998, 2000 and 2002.

3. Strictly speaking, beards are the facial hair under the mouth (a moustache being that which is above it) and Payne represents both. For the purposes of concision in the text I have used, as Payne does, the single term of ‘beard’ to cover both.

4. Payne has made over forty paintings of beards.

5. The term is not included in the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.


7. Much performance art by female artists in the ‘60s and ‘70s arose from this concern.

8. The phrase comes from a painting titled *La Trahison des Images* (1928–9), translated as ‘The Treachery of Images’ or ‘The Treason of Images’. It depicts a pipe under which is written ‘Ceci n’est pas une pipe’ or ‘This is not a pipe’. Magritte’s point is that although the image resembles a pipe visually, it is only a representation of a pipe.

9. While ‘barbarity’ indicates a severity of cruelty or brutality, ‘barbarism’ indicates a misuse of language and, by association perhaps, an indication that one is
culturally lacking in refinement. During the time of Peter the Great (1682–1725), French was spoken in the Russian court as a sign of culture. Payne’s use of French titles may well signal his lack of barbarism.


11. This is notwithstanding periods when male adornment was as elaborate as female such as during the Tudor, Stuart, Elizabethan and Restoration periods, when men wore padded, laced and structured clothes of considerable flamboyance, and the Georgian era, when men wore embroidered stockings and make-up which included powder, rouge and lip colour.

12. In 17th-century Russia it was traditional for a man to wear a beard. At that time it was believed that a person was born in the likeness of God and it was deemed heretical to overly modify one’s natural appearance. Beards not only symbolised masculinity, but were thus also akin to godliness. In 1698 Peter the Great initiated a radical programme of modernisation for Russia, part of which included updating fashion and the promotion of a clean-shaven face. Beards were outlawed and forcibly cut off; or, if men kept them, they were fined.

13. Acting is not seen as a manly art, but as ‘tinged with unmanliness’ – ‘a real man should not have to depend upon art for his virility’ (McLove in Brod in Perchuk, 1995: 18).

14. This is similar to the Arabic ‘maschara’ for ‘masked person’ (Hoch, 1979: 96 in Brod in Perchuk, 1995: 17) or ‘maskharah’ also Arabic for a jester or man in masquerade as well as ‘mascara’ or make-up – mask. It links also with ‘mascus’ or ‘masca’ Low or Late Latin for ‘ghost’ (Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary, 1983).

15. The classic phrase ‘a man in a uniform’, stereotypically uttered admiringly by women (or homosexual men), would generally be understood to refer to the military or the navy – these institutions are embodiments of masculine power. Whilst other men (and women) wear uniforms one would not expect the same response to a busboy or station ticket collector, equally defined by their uniforms.

16. Courbet’s L’Origine du Monde, long a site/sight of contemplation and controversy, before being available for public scrutiny in the Musée d’Orsay, was owned by the French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan, who bought it in 1955 on auction.

17. Maldoror was the main character in the prose poem Les Chants de Maldoror (The Songs of Maldoror) (1869) written by Comte de Lautréamont (aka Isidore Lucien Ducasse), which became a standard inspiration for the Surrealists. Maldoror epitomised evil and was opposed to morality, humanity and God.

18. Probably the only name in the list not so instantly identifiable, Szilárd was a Jewish Hungarian physicist who conceived of nuclear reaction in 1933 and was instrumental in developing the atomic bomb – hence a god-figure of sorts.

References


2010 mm x 1650 mm
Poe. 2009. Acrylic on canvas. 1800 mm x 1600 mm
3250 mm x 2450 mm
Pogonology

2000 mm x 1600 mm
Caravaggio. 2008. Acrylic on canvas. 3000 mm x 2000 mm
Sirius & Achnar, 2009. Acrylic on canvas. 2000 mm x 1600 mm
Melchior, Caspar & Balthasar. 2009. Acrylic on canvas. 2000 mm x 1600 mm
Thursday 31st May 1984. Acrylic, canvas, wool felt. SASOL Collection. 2000 mm. x 1600 mm.
1800 mm x 1600 mm
de Sade. 2009. Acrylic on canvas. 1800 mm x 1600 mm
Pogonology

Ed. 2010. Acrylic on canvas.
1660 mm x 1240 mm
1660 mm x 1240 mm
1000 mm x 800 mm
L’Origine du monde IV. 2009. Acrylic on canvas.
1000 mm x 800 mm
Pogonology

L’Origine du monde. 2009. Acrylic on canvas. 1000 mm x 800 mm
L’Origine du monde II. 2009. Acrylic on canvas. 1000 mm x 800 mm
Wilgerfortis. 2009. Acrylic on canvas. 2000 mm x 1600 mm
The librarian, his left ankle wrapped in a brace, hobbles to where the researcher is seated, places a dog-eared tan file at a discreet distance from the bent figure, swivels on his crutch, and slowly creaks back to a doorway marked PRIVATE on the lintel. The room swallows the librarian and his crutch whole. ‘Thank you,’ the researcher says, removing her earphones. The room is empty. She closes her eyes. Barely audible over the low hissing of the air-conditioner, the thrum of daily life: taxi hooters, an indecipherable tongue, other’s things. Opening her eyes the researcher tries to see the space anew, as if she had just discovered it. Rectangular, eggshell coloured, sunken, but not quite a basement, its high windows are little more than slits, the quality of light they allow into the museum’s research library not so much religious as, well, crepuscular. The researcher looks at the new file.

As with the others she has requested, its bare exterior features only a hand-written name in the upper right-hand corner: PAYNE, MALCOLM. He is new to her. PAYNE, MALCOLM did not accompany the researcher on her painful flight to Johannesburg from Minneapolis, did not form part of the list of names to investigate on her field trip. The thesis. Her doctoral advisor had frowned at the work-in-progress title: Fiction and Ritual in Post Avant-Garde Art. ‘Too easy,’ he stated. ‘Try to think past Greenberg and Krauss. Come up with something that is your own.’ Abandonment, Banality and Circumstance – it had felt a bit like this wading through the research library’s incomplete holdings and poorly archived files.
She picks up the file marked PAYNE, MALCOLM. What is she to deduce from its weight? It is lighter than some, that soporific expressionist painter the creaking librarian had foisted on her earlier; also the file she is presently excavating, BATTISS, WALTER. She indifferently parses the new file’s contents. It is just like the others: press clippings, invitation cards, commercial leaflets, an interview transcript, notes, all the unruly ephemera of a professional career. The researcher sighs, her outburst absorbed by the atavistic study space. She closes the file marked PAYNE, MALCOLM, returns it to where the hobbled librarian deposited it earlier. She plugs in her earphones.

The frisson of discovery comes later. A piece of paper drifts from the file marked PAYNE, MALCOLM when she picks it up again, when ordering her desk before lunch. The paper, she sees, contains a handwritten list. The angular cursive script is precise, a reminder of an almost prehistoric physicality.

Karl Marx – like cumulonimbus clouds, harbingers of thunder
Grigori Rasputin – his beard and general facial appearance resembles Goya’s mural of Saturn Devouring His Son
Charles Dickens/ Colonel Sanders / Ho Chi Minh – variations on the moustache and goatee theme
Vladimir Lenin – kinda similar to JM Coetzee
Fidel Castro – wispy fuzz, a pretend beard really
Rick Rubin – Karl Marx remixed with a Haredi Jew
Genghis Khan – “tall, long-bearded, red-haired, and green-eyed”
Ayatollah Khomein!!!!!!!!

Men with beards, obviously, but to what end? She finds another list written on the reverse. The script is smaller but still by the same hand.

No beards:
Kandinsky
Ad Reinhardt
Yves Klein
M.P.

M.P., as in Member of Parliament, melting point or, quite possibly, PAYNE, MALCOLM. Who is this man? Is this his handwriting? The librarian is unsure, but says he might be able to verify if it is.

‘Before he emigrated to Cape Town’ – the librarian guffaws – ‘he donated some of his books to our library. If I remember correctly, he used to sign them with his name.’ The researcher follows the creaking librarian. She watches as his finger gently glides over the spines of the books, the slow touch of a lover, teasing but only nominally erotic. ‘There you are.’ It is a copy of Linda Nochlin’s 1976 study, Gustave Courbet: A Study of Style and Society. The researcher opens the book. The flyleaf bears the inscription M.P. ‘Does it look the same?’ he asks.

She returns to her seat with the Courbet book. The researcher always had a soft spot for his self-
portraits (in a lay, unprofessional sort of way, if it was possible for a person to abstract themselves from what they do professionally, to achieve weightlessness). Courbet’s Desperate Man looks like Johnny Depp. A dish. But she never understood the fuss around his inversely bearded muff, The Origin of the World. Once, in a past life, she had been made to look at it for an agonizingly long time; it was at The Met, with an editor from Art in America, the exaggerated pause his way of delivering the coup de grace to their relationship. Old paintings, old lovers, both loathsome things.

The researcher leafs disinterestedly past the illustrations, searching in the gutters of Nochlin’s book for annotations, bits of marginalia that will animate her quarry, PAYNE, MALCOLM, or as he prefers it, M.P. Nothing. The researcher opens the artist’s file again. Moments earlier she had treated it like a disinterested Baghdadi looter; now she will be more careful, diligent in her excavation. She rereads the beard list, mentally drawing up her own list of bearded men (Afrika Bambaataa, Mr. T) and women (Annie Jones, the Weird Sisters in Macbeth). She reads the photocopied transcript of the interview published in Art South Africa magazine. March 2010, five years ago, the Obama era.

‘These paintings,’ the artist is quoted, ‘read as conflations of bum-holes, vaginal entries, men’s beards and all kinds of other persuasions that repulse or draw you in. I see them as vibrating points of entry and exit, primordially oral and anal.’ Courbet, she thinks, retrieving her research diary from a leather satchel slung over her chair back. She scribbles a note, continues reading, pauses, makes another note. Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s, Queens Museum of Art, 1999.

There is an altercation of feet in the far corner window. The researcher looks up. The feet disappear. She remembers the summer of 1999: New Haven, Yale, Hélio Oiticica’s colour theories. ‘Colour can be an incendiary device,’ she remembers a professor saying. The file contains only one photograph of the artist, a self-portrait published with the interview. Much like the illustrated beard paintings, the portrait has not weathered the transition from print reproduction to photocopy. She squints at the warped image. The artist looks Indian. The researcher imagines meeting a Sikh gentleman in Queens.

PAYNE. A British surname, but of French origin. His biography states that he was born into a white family in Pretoria, in 1946. BATTISS, WALTER (prankster, nudist, colourist and educator) is a recurring protagonist. The artist moves from Pretoria to Johannesburg, later Mafikeng, finally Cape Town. Like his mentor, he becomes a teacher, also plays pranks. With this basic plotline established, she sets about chronologically re-ordering the file’s contents. It is prosaic work, but allows her to establish connections between his prints, his sculptures, his paintings and other works that evade easy taxonomies. One bit of ephemera confuses. She re-reads the single block of text printed on a light-blue sheet of A4 paper.
A Short History of Evasion.
By Ivan P.

Painting demands unconditional involvement, from the maker, from the viewer. Pay attention! Be a part of the event, or, rather, become a part of the ongoing series of events that mark the life of a painting. Don’t abstract yourself from it; be a participant not a spectator, a writer not a reader, a thief of meaning not a custodian of fact. Reject theology; become deeply spiritual agnostic. And above all, IMAGINE. Think past the encyclopaedia. Because, and this is paramount, painting excommunicates fact. In less religious terms – because we shy away from the wholly spiritual when looking at objects, favouring a closeted materialism – painting rejects fact. At least this is its irrational drive: to exist before language and the semantic confinement of the caption (artist, title, date, medium, dimensions, price, owner), to be pure experience, an autonomous thing in charge of its being. Anarchism and absurdity are key aspects of its ontological make-up. However, painting, as pure experience, does not yield discreet insights such as this easily. It is for this reason that painting exists as a tautology. Painting = not fact = Painting. Which is not to say that paintings do not have a history, be it personal, social, political, art historical, literary, whatever. These circumstantial ephemera satellite around every painting, like a weightless metal technology that pulses a distant light from a dark sky. Conceptually, painting is a fugitive practice; it is continually evading things, mostly itself; but also the history of what it is or was, the proof of which is increasingly unreliable, speculative and corrupt. Images in print are not paintings; they are a simulacrum, a rumour, a tenuous photocopy of an unverifiable past. The immediacy of the thing itself, that’s the thing. Dare yourself to look at Malcolm Payne’s anarchistic experiments in form and colour. Try to recognise them for what they are: portraits without faces, props without scenarios, paintings without subjects, artefacts from the McGuffin School of painting. McGuffin: an expression coined by Hitchcock to refer to a plot trigger. A gun. A beard. Hitchcock would have loved this stuff.

Something about this quarrelsome tract – it may have been a speech, she thinks, although there is no corroborating evidence – intrigues her. Not its rambunctious, idealistic, high modernist faith in the artefact, which is easy to critique; but, or rather, the feral nature of the document itself. Who is Ivan P? The abbreviation suspiciously recalls M.P. What was it with white South African men and their love of hiding behind contractions? ‘I have no idea,’ the librarian responds when she shows him the sheet of paper. ‘Those old files are full of stray things. We had a researcher here a few months ago who called them anonymous footnotes.’ More like disembodied voices, the researcher thinks as she photocopies the mysterious text.

An hour later, the researcher will stop her slow quarrying of the past. She will neatly assemble the files and return them to the librarian. ‘Any luck?’ he will cheerily ask. ‘Some,’ she will reply, adding that she is due to fly to Luanda the next day. The librarian will round his lips in mock amazement, then creak off, files tucked under an arm. A week later the researcher will return to Minneapolis where she will write a journal paper. PAYNE, MALCOLM will feature prominently. In 2038 she will return to Cape Town, the researcher now a distinguished professor, partly to look for a group of paintings she has never seen. It being the future, it is unclear if she will find them.
2100 mm x 1650 mm
650 mm x 340 mm
Einstein & Jesus from Word Beards Panel 2. 2009. Acrylic on canvas. 1250 mm × 1000 mm each.
Select Curriculum Vitae

Solo Exhibitions

1983. *Five Roses Young Artist Award Exhibition*. (now Standard Bank Young Artist Award), 1820 Settlers Monument. Grahamstown.

Select Group Exhibitions

2003. *Kwere Kwere: Journies into Strangeness*. Arti et Amicitiae, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.


2001. **New ideas — old tricks**. hARTware projekte Dortmund, Germany.


2000. **13 Videobrasil. Festival Internacional de Arte Electronica**. Sao Paolo, Brazil.


1995. **Panoramas of Passage: Changing Landscapes of South Africa**. Meridian Cafritz Galleries, Washington DC, USA.


1994. **States of Contrast — Contemporary Printmaking from South Africa**. Florida State University Museum, USA. Chicago Printmakers Collaborative, USA.


1994. **Art Kites**. Sydney, Australia.


1994. **Images of Metal**. Curated by Liz Rankin, University of Witwatersrand Galleries, Johannesburg.


1993. **Momentoes**. Newtown Galleries, Johannesburg.


Pogonology


**Works in Public Collections**


**Prizes and Awards**

1971. Ernest Oppenheimer Memorial Trust Award.

**Select References**

**Monographs & Articles**

Halfway House: Southern.


Catalogues


1998. 16th World Wide Video Festival.