

Prisencolinensinainciusol
 In de col men seivuan
 Prisencolinensinainciusol ol rait
 Uis de seim cius nau op de seim
 Ol uait men in de colobos dai
 Trrr ciak is e maind beghin de col
 Bebi stei ye push yo oh
 Uis de seim cius nau op de seim
 Ol uoit men in de colobos dai
 Not s de seim laikiu de promisdin
 lu nau in trabol lovgiai ciu gen
 In do camo not cius no bai for lov so
 Op op giast cam lau ue cam lov ai
 Oping tu stei laik cius go mo men
 lu bicos tue men cold dobrei goris
 Oh sandei
 Ai ai smai sesler
 Eni els so co uil piso ai
 In de col men seivuan
 Prisencolinensinainciusol ol rait
 Ai ai smai senflecs
 Eni go for doing peso ai
 Prisencolinensinainciusol ol rait
 Uel ai sint no ai giv de sint
 Laik de cius nobodi oh gud taim lev feis go
 Uis de seim et seim cius go no ben
 Let de cius end kai for not de gai giast stei
 Ai ai smai senflecs
 Eni go for doing peso ai
 In de col mein seivuan
 Prisencolinensinainciusol ol rait
 Lu nei si not sicidor
 Ah es la bebi la dai big iour
 Ai aismai senflecs
 Eni go for doing peso ai
 In de col mein seivuan
 Prisencolinensinainciusol ol rait
 Lu nei si not sicodor
 Ah es la bebi la dai big iour

Prisencolinensinainciusol by Adriano Celentano



I am painfully aware that I am the western world. I am patriarchy, I am heteronormativity, I am white and socio-economic privilege, I am colonialism and nationalism. It's not to say that I am trying to place myself into the centre of a discussion, but rather that the place I inhabit within any discussion – as a consequence of my history and culture – is one that I can't fully reconcile with my personal beliefs and sympathies.

Yes, although the problem is always perspective. I feel tired with art that presents itself as a singularity. It needs friction in order to survive – and in that friction, the hope is that we can still retain a sense of criticality. So, I try to present contradictory viewpoints, formally, through the presentation of seemingly incongruous motifs. You know, you could argue that the Daily Mail is subversive as opposed to orthodox. It just depends where you sit. Most things we do today have political implications. Whether you choose to drink at Wetherspoons or not has a political potentiality – but a version of the truth is that you might be poor and have little choice.

When I came to your studio, I had an intuition you would be into Geri-cault. And then the Raft of Medusa came up in conversation and that's why we decided to paint the walls grey, as an austere homage that plays off our irreverence – it's been seminal for both of us. What does it mean to you?

I think it is the first artwork that I properly fell in love with, or at least the first work that shifted something in my relationship towards a sense of purpose. I saw it and thought, 'I want to do that.' It was a school trip to Paris and the teachers were doing their best to drag the class from one end of the Louvre to the other whilst keeping them entertained. And then I saw it, it's fucking massive by the way, and then just parked myself on the bench in front of it and then stayed there, left behind by the others as they progressed onwards through the rest of the 18th century and onwards. I think it is fair to say that that painting has changed me. It's rewired something in my thinking and the way that I choose to use imagery as the means to process the external. It has never left me since then. I keep images of it all over the place, it's like a visual reset. It TAREs the mind.

I was in love with the sheer horror in both the subject matter and its depiction. I loved that it was politically critical. It felt like it was wrestling a means of expression out of the hands of power. I loved the fact that it was degrading, materially I mean. He used bitumen as the binder for the paint so there's this resignation to its impermanence; that it cannot be saved. It's dying. I suppose this is a retrofitted relationship to it, but because it will inevitably fade to black. I like to think all those things have made it into the way that I make work now. I feel like when I look at your work there is this same feeling of "fuck it" to the image making process. The paintings don't feel dictatorial. Though there are clear political references, but I don't feel that I am being convinced of an argument. Which makes me wonder, when the results of a work have a political dimension, who is the process of image making for, the artist or the audience?

It's both, but I've started to look further into myself for what might be deemed as contradictory motivations. The act of painting is a profoundly psychological process – as it requires an exchange of sorts to take place



Let's Dance, collage on type written paper, 27x20cm, 2019, GF

between the inner and outer parts of ourselves. I'm fascinated by peoples' psychologies – what motivates us to behave in highly particular ways? There is a deep criticality at play with what you do. You lampoon maleness – in a similar way to the best of Paul McCarthy's work. It's a tough aesthetic, but it works as it lodges right in your throat. And the humor that we encounter with your work isn't snidey, it's actually quite tragic. I consider the work that I make to also fall along a spectrum of humor. There's a sense of comic-pathos with our figures – and with yours on a physical level, I think are they're going to fall and crush me! Your sculptures aren't engineering feats of prowess – well of course they are – but they're not pompous or falsely beautiful like Henry Moore. I don't think Moore wanted to piss all over western civilization but I think you do – and rightly so. Is that fair?

I'm not sure I want to piss over it, but I definitely want to kick the legs out from underneath. For a long time, I was concerned with the rhetoric of a figure rather than the experience of a body. And I guess it could be argued that that in itself was a form of privilege – the fact that it had never occurred to me to address what the experience of my relationship between body and figure was? As it seemed to me when looking out, relatively universal.

I think over the last two years, my work has shifted more towards looking at my relationship towards these different forms of symbolic cultural power. I guess this has manifested itself into using elements of film and animatronics which has enabled me to bring narrative in the work. You seem to have a clearer understanding of the distinction between yourself and your work. And yet I have always felt that your work is a manifestation of your relationship to the world around you. There are characters in your work that are recurrent throughout the cycles of your paintings, some explicitly recognizable and others more canonical. Do you see these figures as symbolic – perhaps as some kind of universal spitting image puppet? Or I guess, rather, how much of yourself do you see, or even put, into them?

I never really thought of my biography in relation to my work – and I think that's a generational thing. I remember a tutor at the RCA asking me informally in the pub what my "backstory" was and I told him curtly that it was private. As we continue to embrace the complete atomization of the self from the structures that it once would have identified with, such as civic, national, even familial ties – today's self feels evermore, like a fortress-privatized island in a sea of many-other-privatized-selves. I'm from a single parent, primarily working-class background. My mother came to England as a child from Trinidad in the 1950s with her barely adult mother. My mother and uncle were educated at a Catholic Convent Boarding School in Birmingham in the early 60s. Is this why I've started painting pig-vicars? No – it's not helpful for me to think like that. However, it's possible that on an epigenetic level this is where my disdain for cruelty and power originates?

It's clear though that biographical knowledge has the potential to change how something can be seen. My concern is that if it's used as the primary lens into unpicking an artwork then I can't help but sense it's reductive – similar to how I felt when I would watch the talent shows on a Saturday night — where often, a tragic biographical fact was used to enhance some insipid and meaningless song.

It feels that we're at a point where the self – and how our external self is perceived, has begun to take priority over the formal concerns or nuances of an artwork. I suspect it begun with the crossover in the mid twentieth century of art and entertainment – and I would further hypothesize that it's another symptom of the total contempt Capitalist Realism exerts over us.

So, the long way round to answer your question is that I am not looking to present any resemblance of myself in the work, but it's there inevitably, I am sure. It's strange though when one deals with images, as they are in a sense pre-linguistic. They have the potential to offer contradictory points of contact in the same moment. If we think of William Burroughs and how he thought of auditory language



Victorian Morality (The Dog Symbolises Fidelity), collage on inkjet print, 27x20cm, 2020, GF

– as a viral transmission that has forced the host (us!) to mutate irrevocably over millennia – it makes me still retain a sense of hope for the potential power of pre-linguistic communication.

As you deal in power structures – do you feel that? That the word never gets the heart of the matter? You recently made an animation that seemed to have a strong focus on narrative, and I wonder if that has some bearing on this?

Have you read Larkin's poem 'I Have Started to Say'? There is something so essential, or rather fundamental, in those words about the sense of time passing. Without wanting to sound over dramatic or hyperbolic in the way that people can do in these types of conversations...

Nothing wrong with hyperbole, apart from it being difficult to pronounce...

Whenever I read that poem, I get short of breath and sweaty palms. I feel the same fundamental sense of communication as I can with a visual artwork.

There are more words in the works now, having incorporated narrative into the video works and animatronic sculptures but the word here, is not getting to the heart of any matter – if anything it is being used to purposely obfuscate.

Initially, the use of sound was an emulation of language. By having the sculptures burst into noise, the sounds shifted the work from sculptural grandiosity to something more mundane and ignoble. Coherence wasn't the objective. I was aiming at some sort of pseudo-profundity. I read a book on practical rhetoric that had all these very mechanical techniques to achieve something that veered towards the emotional. Like watching a robotic arm programmed to recreate the Raft of the Medusa in perfect verisimilitude. It was a weird book, clearly for the sort of people that get stiff reading Churchill speeches and want to emulate that intensity when hosting an annual awards ceremony in the function room of a Travelodge.

I wanted to use the same techniques, build these passages of speech, that were devoid of content but delivered with a similar intensity. I think I would like to aim towards a complete eradication of content from my narrative pieces. To reduce language to nothing but the power structure of language rather than the content of the words. Have you ever heard the song *Prisencolinensinainciusol* by Adriano Celentano? It's written in English by someone who doesn't speak the language. A bit like when you were a kid and pretended to speak another language you had absolutely no concept of.

I hadn't heard that Calentano song until now. Fascinating – and very catchy. Something mildly dangerous about people singing along to songs where the content is nonsense. A bit like the whole tradition of national anthems possibly?

Absolutely, I got hooked for a bit, on national anthems and flags. Again, going back to that idea of rhetoric, or formalised artistic decision making, as in this

musical key or mode or time signature has been universally designated as more authoritative.

Yeh, I've been making music with people who can actually play and understand it – and breaking that understanding does definitely disrupt things...

So true. I found this UN document that was the official colour keys of each nation's flag. I.e, this 'red' or this 'blue' is THE official red or blue of that country's flag. So, the minutely specific hue conveys the ritualistic legitimacy of nationalistic power. What is strange is that this convergence of so many of the colours are repeated across so many of the nations and this results in a cultural hive-mind of endorsed power.

If we are talking about visual language, I was absolutely fascinated the other day when you came round with those ring binders stacked with collected images. As a visual resource alone, they were amazing – but I was fascinated by the way you had marked many of the pages and there were visible signs of use or functionality about them. Would it be too romantic to view these things as some sort of subjective visual 'dictionary'? I wonder if you could tell me a little bit more about them?

I've been collecting found images for about twenty years now. Initially they were newspaper cuttings as back then, that is what I had closest proximity to regarding imagery. Obviously, the internet has changed our relationship to the found image so now, they're mainly from the internet. They become prompts and exit points for the paintings – and occasionally they work themselves directly onto the painted surface. I catalogue them by date, not by subject. That would be too fastidious – as there's a chance element to how I use them. I flick through the ring binders and make connections between the subsequent images, in a similar way to how we might flick through a newspaper and see incongruous messages throughout.

I've been making paintings in series, in triptych form. Each part of the triptych is painted as a singularity and then when I'm ready I place the paintings together and they form new connections. I don't think this would have been possible without having the ring-binders as I associate each painting with the idea that it could be a page or a chapter from a book, that is rearranged or cut up to form a third meaning – or a Third Eye to quote Burroughs and Gysin.

In this way, it feels as if the work has evolved from a methodology of collage into a more holistic approach to the method. Where the subject is allowed to have an open fluidity by what appears to be the random association of sources from the ring binders. Of course, it's not truly random as there are distinct themes that run throughout the imagery – such as religion, power, socio-economic disparity, dominance and submission. These ideas form a sediment of sorts in the ring binders, and I try to channel them into the paintings.

DAEEN
flick -
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GEE LIM FREIC II, Inkjet Print and Oil Bar, 297 x 420 mm, 2021, JF

What's your relationship to your sources? Do you collate them or is it more nuanced?

It definitely doesn't run as deep as it seems to with you. I do have printer copies of things up and around the studio, along with post-it notes scrawled with short lines that have come to me to be woven into titles or performance works. I suppose the practice is loaded with historical, art-history and cultural references, so most of the images are pretty straight-forward aide-memoirs in relation to whatever it is I'm working on. In fact, come to think of it, I do very little preparatory work before starting to work on a new sculpture. I will have a vague idea in my mind of how it will look but the works evolve quite organically. I will throw and cluster lumps of clay or polystyrene and let them evolve into the form or pull bits from previous works and amalgamate them into new compositions or just allow for things to collapse and fall during the making process. I guess ultimately, the overall work is more concerned with that explosive evocation of destruction and creation in each figure than it is with aiming towards a final image. It's more like the final sculpture is a frozen moment from a period of chaos. I find if I start the process with too clear an idea of how the work will finally look then I get a bit too precious with them and don't allow for a more naturally haptic surface. I'll often panic when I realise there is a particularly neat passage or I'm leaving something because it has some recognisable detail and I'll just take a hammer to the thing or tear my fingers through it. It's like this compulsion to constantly resist any comfort towards things I find beautiful. But surely you have something similar in your image making. Like, those caulked images overlaid over the 'main' painting?

Well, I'm always looking towards finding the third part to the image if you like. You see, there's the intention and then you have the execution of that intention, but unless there's the opportunity to go beyond that intention, through either invention or error, then I tend to get bored of my painting.

The caulked method serves two purposes for me. On the one hand it offers a cataclysm as the caulk is permanent and can't be easily erased -- but then if it pays off, it's as if the image as a whole has been offered a third layer of meaning. It's also very direct -- like drawing, and I've spent time thinking about how drawing intersects with painting. When I'm putting the caulk over the painting, it feels like I'm icing a cake. There's something incredibly fun and natural about it -- it activates my saliva glands and I feel very present.



Dirty, Wax, 2015 to present, JF