

**TUE 26 FEB 08**

## TUTORIAL &amp; STUDIO VISIT FROM CHRIS DORSETT

I showed CD the different spaces in which I work; the office in the milking parlour, the workshop in the stable, and the studio space in the barn. We followed that with a brief overview of paintings that I'd made before the start of the course. I was surprised that CD was interested in these, and we spent much longer viewing them than I anticipated. He related aspects that I feel are important in reading the work; what works and what doesn't, such as the relationships of colours and texture, how paint is applied to what ground, and respect for the subject. He explained how the work would be viewed in a contemporary art-school context, which made me realise why it seems to send out a confusing message, particularly so because of my efforts to eschew some aspects of post-modernism. This served to reinforce the comments made by DD during my studio crit.

We moved on to the work in the barn. I started to explain about how I assemble an 'installation' for every season of the year, so as to have something tangible on which to reflect and draw upon in order to move my work forward, but he seemed much more interested in the individual pieces. He wanted to know about the 'triodes', and I explained that I used Indian ink and China white directly on the wooden bases of fruit boxes. He seemed to be particularly drawn to the constructions, and was interested to see what materials were used and how they had been treated. As I was explaining what I was hoping to achieve, both with the paintings and the constructions, I sensed that the rawness and the elemental qualities of subjects and materials are fundamental to my work. It seems that I'm trying to create a body of work that signifies the natural environment (geological and climatic forces, cycles of growth, decay and regeneration) and how it has been overlaid by cultural environments. This accorded with earlier remarks by CD about the influence of Hodgkins' book 'The Making of the English Landscape', and about my work following similar concerns as Constable and other British landscape painters (although I stick to my assertion that I am not primarily concerned with landscape).

CD explained how the constructions needed their own space, and he seemed unconvinced by the way I had grouped some of them as an 'altar', suggesting that in a white cube setting they could have sufficient presence to convey their meaning individually. He highlighted the challenge of trying to resolve how meaning can be conveyed through treatment of a two-dimensional surface (by painting, staining or scorching) on a three-dimensional form, without it appearing to be mere decoration. He commented favourably on my confident use of materials and processes. We had an engaging conversation about my fixation with fruit boxes, and he considered it quite significant that there was one box which I could not bring myself to spoil by pulling it apart. We explored the idea of exhibiting it on its own plinth, and part of a body of artwork. I became so engrossed in exploring ways of presenting the work that I overlooked the principle aim that I have, which is to develop what I call a Wonderbase, never once mentioning the term, and neither did we look at the work outside which incorporates plants, mosses and lichens.

We talked about how I could use the artwork to facilitate and develop ideas. I still regard the course as a space in which to play and explore, but I am becoming increasingly aware that contextual practice is concerned more with the context of the *visual arts* than of *life in general*, and each session at Northumbria confirms this. For the sake of my course of study, this means that I will need to process-out and conceal the wide range of approaches and treatments that I use to make work, and select, edit and align it more closely to the conventions of contemporary art practice. I felt I was unsuccessful in persuading CD of the importance that I attach to the setting of making work in the North Pennines, in a space that had been previously used by generations of miners and small-holders. However, I drew great reassurance and confidence from his tutorial that my work did have a contemporary context, and could have something to contribute to it.

Following the tutorial, I have resolved to:

- Find opportunities and venues to exhibit selections of work
- Continue searching for clarity
- Develop the Wonderbase through facilitated sessions with participants.