

## **David Rayson Professorial Lecture *The Everyday Fantastic* Lecture Theatre 1, The Royal College of Art (2009)**

(The tradition at the RCA is that when a Professor is appointed they give a Professorial Lecture. Herewith is are the notes that document David Rayson's commentary on a visual presentation of over 150 images.)

This is a talk that goes some way to document the past four years where I have held a somewhat schizophrenic position, there is this world I am about to share with you, and then the world where I put a clean shirt on and come into work at the college.

There are two very different worlds here that are about to collide and that's why I've turned the lights down a little bit.

This piece of work is called *Stella Morning*, and the cycle of drawings I've just finished called the *Everyday Fantastic* is circular. It starts with wonderful mornings where everything's possible and then slowly unravels, and there's a danger in that, and there's all sorts of outcomes and life gets complex, and then there's always a new morning.

All the work is ink on paper, they're all the same size and the act of drawing itself has become an event. I'm never sure where they're going to go and there's an erasure and cutting and collage and lots of different things come into the work, music and things I see on the street. So what I'm doing now has become very responsive. I'm very easily distracted and all of those distractions are recorded.

To get into the headset: If you imagine someone living in suburbia, building their life around what time the off-licence opens, getting back in time for Quincy or Bargain Hunt, and then maybe finishing off with a few pints in the pub. Just imagine that as a kind of metaphor (or a reality that makes for great research) hold on to that idea as a metaphor or mind-set, and then you will be able to enter the work.

So this is the place where all of these things are taking place, whether fictitiously or as fact.

And the pub offers a kind of outlet where the lights are turned down, and often very cosy and different things can happen.

This is Sheila who works at our local, and Debbie her mate. We'll see more of

Debbie later she's got her own cookery programme now.

So the drawings start off being very much, sort of connected to terra firma and suburbia and as the day goes on the fantastic is allowed to unroll. and again, the off license as a metaphor plays a key part in that.

Also television! Television is great because as an artist if you do television drawings, you can draw whatever you like, because it's coming into your room... and so, that notion of election or selection goes out the window. Getting back in time for the afternoon black and white war film, for me, is the kind of height of a good day.

But here too, I can act out narratives and freeze-frame and enjoy moments of escapism into bits of the film I'd have liked to have lasted longer.

This is my mate Max, his new car....great gear stick, that.

So fantasy TV also rubs against reality TV... which can get quite grimy, especially shows like Trisha where people come on these shows and do all their dirty washing in public. This poor girl feels disenfranchised from her real mum, and went to care at an early age. we'll find out more about her later...The audience was not impressed.

And then there's escapism then there's commercials. you can escape all this by going off on a cruise for five hundred forty-nine pounds (£549). And off you go. If you haven't got the money, then the adverts allow you to get really close to fruit. Isn't that great? You could run around those for days.

So all of this stuff's coming in. you could go and boil with the carrots...

And then there's the reality of circumnavigating the estate to go shopping. you have to go to the off license. and there too, there's strange things happening in the undergrowth which I can seize upon as an artist.

I'm going to show you some of the earlier work, which kind of laid out some of the territory of where these things are taking place. This drawing was made about ten years ago. and I got hooked up with drawing the estate I grew up on, but rather than using photographs, I had this system of reconstructing. I found out how to render brick, and fence and grass and I reconstructed the estate that grew up on in Wolverhampton.

I was especially attracted to these hinterlands where cars are often sometimes dumped or small fires can take place, away from the houses.

And this is a new drawing, which still occupies these same hinterlands but it's become much more of a kind of spectacle, much more internal for me. For this

drawing I cut up lots of lady's underwear and made a landscape out of it....(I have got friends....)

And this is an earlier drawing again, where the beer can or the fast food packet becomes the characterization in these drawings.

But with these paintings and drawings I always felt that it was as if the narratives were on a slow burn. They took a long time to make and they weren't very responsive. And also there's a kind of critical distance from the subject, I felt as if I was looking at suburbia from across the street. and so quite early on I began to be more attracted to these drawings I made for each of the paintings. because in their own right they were doing what they wanted to do, in their own narrative.

This is a drawing for Star Trek, a drawing that then became a painting....

So something happened between the drawing and all the invention, all the inward giggles...then would come this very long process of rendering this thing real. all of these drawings...

And also the way I painted was very literal. like, something like this, the walls would go in and then the window frame, then the glazing would go in, then the reflection. It's a very literal way of painting. It's like the B and Q school of painting.

And I did envy people who could really paint, at this stage. Those people who could take a pallet knife and go: black, white, black, white, black, white, silver birch. I really envy that but, I needed to build these things up in a kind of virtual way rather than a suggestive way.

So at this point, the studio wall is covered with these drawings.  
(that's a detail from a painting)

And at the time, I was looking at a lot of American realism. This is Tom Blackwell. And it's a juvenile kind of hangover from the kid who can draw the coke can best at school. And I still pour over these but they've lost their currency now.

And also looking at the new objectivity school that came out of Germany. This is a great name for an artist: Gustav Wunderwald, and he, with others like Otto Dix and Georg Grosz painted paintings of a social context, sort of mirroring what was taking place in Germany.

This is Franz Raziwill who mixed sort of brooding skies with wonderful brickwork and crystalline highlights on water, again, built up in a very kind of neurotic way.

Now this is the painting that actually made me want to be a painter and I still pour over this painting as well. This is by Pieter de Hooch and it's called A Milkmaid Crossing a Courtyard. And reason I love this painting so much is just the sense of

heat that's created: on the roof, in the courtyard. And if we look, the milkmaid is having to squint because the suns in her eyes, but it's just a painting. And that level of alchemy where the dead stuff that comes out of a tube or out of a pen takes on a kind of magic, if you like, and you can feel the heat and you can empathize what it feels like to move across a hot courtyard.

So it's that kind of realism, if you like, where you're convinced you can never gain space that came into the early paintings. To the point where I had to build models of the things that I couldn't make up such as the rubbish in this painting, which is there. so they really were constructed...

But going back to the alchemy thing... With all these drawings on my studio wall and this discontent with the paintings, I began to look at a lot of people that worked in a more responsive graphic way.

This is Philip Guston and it's kind of an ironic drawing because it's called A Painter's Table but it's all made of ink and what I love about it, again, is that level of alchemy where: you have a brush and the space inside the line is the brush and the space outside the line is the table. But it's just paper, and it's that balance between language and space and volume, I also think has an element of alchemy.

And with that he built up a whole rattle-bag of vocabulary where he could construct the whole universe, and make sense of it out of these range of objects he invented.

And this, again towards the end of his live he drew this. Life is coming to an end, all the detritus has gone down the hill with him, he's looking back reflectively. And even though it refers to cartoon and low culture as a kind of seminal piece of work reflecting the human condition towards the end of an artist's life. great...great piece of work.

This is a map by Henry Darger ,who was seen as being an outsider artist. but the drawings and the stories, for him were very real. Again, constructed out of collage, into these fantastic serial scenes telling stories in a very explicit way. But rather than being for consumption or as illustration they were real in a filmic way.

Polke, how he can take a seat and move it around and make it jump and animate.

And this is Georg Groz who found a way of drawing where he could see through buildings and see through people and be very sharp and focused about what was happening socially in Germany between the wars.

This is Peter and Jane in suburbia: The way we'd all like it to be really, especially

if you've got children... and then there's the grim reality: two bored teenagers with a bike. now that scares me, two bored teenagers, with a bike and everyone's at work....marvelous.

And this couple: And I've had this couple on my slide list for a long time now and I know It's juvenile but I can't bear them. They're smug, they've got their new flat and they're really happy. and if you notice the table there...in the text it says: If you buy two of those, and put them together, it emphasizes the wave effect. you know?

So, also what was changing was my relationship to suburbia and a sense of cosiness and kind of brought the dark side out a bit.... and also the whole transformational thing, about doing up your home or having a makeover also began to get under my skin.

This is the before....there's the after. There's the kitchen, that they didn't want to live in, so the builders come in and they take it all out ...but unfortunately I had to go and get a cup of tea so by the time I got back I can't show you the end of the transformation. So we'll just leave that hanging there... And they also did the back of the house as well. They turned this small conservatory into something much more substantial.

And this is a great book, A Year Round Garden by Adrian Bloom...what are the chances of that? And he shows you how to plant out. And there's something so pathetic and optimistic about that photo. wonderful.

But a few years later, you see, and with a few seasons it begins to take and becomes a very attractive front garden.

Now, I've got two children and these are the things they often used to leave as I'd go out to work, these constructions which I'd come across in the morning. And they've played a major part in terms of me being able to play again with the work.

Baby and the farm...marvelous.

There's a duck with a hat on and a spade... and that's the whole cast... infinite possibilities.

I was also looking at a lot of illustration, this is great, this is about Harriet who discovers some matches, which she does to awful consequences: WOOOSH! And even the cats are in horror!

There's something about illustrations that hit the retina, and they tell a story which is also a massive attraction for me.

and artist's books...

Oh, this is a tea I did for the kids...Oh the horror...

Another great artist, Richard Artswagger he did a show at the Serpentine Gallery a few years ago. He did this wonderful project with a hundred drawings where he took a table, a rug two windows and a door and a basket on top and he kept reconfiguring them in a sculptural way. So, the table would be turned on it's back, the windows would be smashed over the legs he completely sort of sculpturally moved around the space but just using line. It's a great series of work, it's called A Hundred Drawings by Richard Archwager(?). And that was a big influence too, what you could do virtually and sculpturally in space just with line.

The paintings stopped being paintings and started being drawings, and I made that heady mistake of thinking I could just transfer what I was doing in painting to line. So I made a series of these large drawings but they still didn't give me the freedom I was looking for.

And this is a shot from my studio, where drawings would often go wrong, but I'd cut out the fragments and keep them. and they'd find their way back into drawings.

I found this one night on my drawing table, my kids must have done it. but, great...I can use that.

I've also got into reading these women's magazines, which I say I find on the train to sort of get me off the hook a bit, but they really are amazing. The best bit about these magazines is that inside they often reconstruct traumas that have happened to people. So they phone people up, at the magazine and say "this awful thing's happened to us, can you send a photographer around so we can re-stage it, and go through it again and I can get my two-hundred fifty quid?" You should read them, they're really addictive. And they're something about that in the cold light of day they're reconstructing the trauma they went through so they can get a story out of it.

And there's wonderful things like this in there as well...

And makeovers too, which is all about transformation, and watching other people go through transformation either in themselves or their homes.

then the drawings emptied out, devoid of color, and became very simple. But the subject stayed the same.

And then out of this, I was lucky enough to work with the printmaker Kip Gresham in Cambridge who helped me put all the color back in...

There's a duck with a brown hat on this time! Same duck different hat!

...who helped me put all the color back in. So working with Kip, there he is... There's all the colors, in pots. Any artist who gets to work with a printmaker or someone who has technical know-how, it's fantastic because you get to learn the language that you never learned when you were coming through your art training to do with how you mix color and what colour can do.

an so we can put all the colour in... And these are screen prints...so out of this I got reintroduced back into color.

Toulouse Lautrec... This is a lovely drawing because the closer you get to it the contours of what the shape is falls away and you just begin to discover different lands and different spaces.

And this is a bit like that as well. When I first found this photo, I couldn't believe it, their video player is the one that we've got. I'm going to let that hang there for a moment. So you can go on a little journey.

And the drawing continued. Again, the drawings get very confused between fact, fiction, representing a space, flower arranging, pornography and having visions. It all becomes a bit of an event.

This is a great drawing. I love the way she's kept her sport socks on... and also the TV control is just there so when he's finished taking a photograph for Reader's Wives - he can carry on watching his programme.

Bad breakfasts become drawings.

Our local Tesco's is somewhere I can't seem to avoid. I seem to spend most days at some point in the morning or the evening having to go there. But there's a great photo, it's a bit unkind really because it's a lovely looking family, but the teenagers are spitting tissues at them through bios and then occasionally they wipe them off and then they reappear again. It's completely unwarranted.

So this is where people shop...

Oh there's Sophie again, did I call her Sophie last time or? What did I call her? Debbie. There's Debbie and she's shopping. She's got her own cookery programme, which is coming up in a minute. Checking out... off she goes with her shopping... we'll see her later.

And there's lots of stuff in drawing to do with traveling around the estate by bus. Things I might see or not see. Also, in the studio I've started constructing these little distractions which are generally play and I should be working really, but

these have become more inventive and start to find their way into the drawings.

And with the everyday fantastic there's the kind of hangover mornings. I've started to represent a hangover with this strange fog to see through. where the suns too bright and things bristle on the retina.

Again, chance happenings which find their way into drawings.

Holidays on t.v.

This is good: this is a new advert, and I couldn't work out what it was for at first because it felt so cosmic and spatial. And all of this is coming into the living room in my everyday fantastic. And I watch this and try to work out what it was and what kind of space this was whether it was of the mind or another universe...and it transpires it's for yoghurt. which is great.

and the days roll on, and fact and fiction again, blend and blur. from kitchen duties to what's on t.v...celebrities on ice, which eventually become distorted drawings.

..This audience still aren't looking very entertained are they.

O this is good, I keep saying this is good...this is good for me! sometimes I watch TV while I'm drawing. This is a film about an airplane: That's the pilot, don't worry about him he gets killed on impact, forget about him for a minute... and she's the love interest and he's the love interest they're stewards... and the plane takes off and all's fine and then the dials start going weird which they do in these air-crash films and then they go below the radar so, ground control have lost them and they get nearer and nearer to the sea to a critical point where: TSSSHHW! They crash in the sea, and then they sink to the bottom of the ocean. Panic ensues, there's no natural leader, the pilots dead but a natural leader emerges-the love interest- and they sort it out and a submarine eventually saves them....I speeded up the end of that film, sorry about that, but great film. which then finds it's way in various ways into the new drawings.

so very often I try and qualify play or watching daytime TV as work, as long as it finds it's way into a drawing.

Oh this is Sheila now...Debbie! She's got her shopping and she's going to talk us through a soup...I took this photo from the TV and another scene was coming in but it looks like a really sophisticated photomontage. It's just two scenes coming in. ...And she whisks the soup, there's the soup: that's the starter. and at the main course we've got pie, she talked us through and showed us how to make.



and while you're enjoying the very idea of that pie.....

\*\*\*MUSIC PLAYS\*\*\*while a series of images slideshow (music is King Biscuit Time – Eye of a Dog).

The days continue. Like I said, there's the down days as well. Things don't always go to plan, a heady mix of fantasy and reality don't always get on, so there're dark mornings too. I've been drawing a lot of crows lately, which seem to be ganging up a little bit. and there's regret and accountability, I guess, which creeps into this.

So I've tried to take “him” fishing, just to get “him” out of the house. So here he is fishing, doing quite well. And even that, as a past time when the hook isn't...when the bait isn't taking, when the fish aren't biting then the visions return and things begin to unravel again.

But then there's good days too...really good days. Look at all those! 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9! Nine fish there...

But when the fish aren't biting the visions return and down with the tools and strange apparitions appear in the lake. and life becomes complex again.

But with each new morning there's a sort of catalyst or thing to see to sort of spark the work off again.

....I don't know what they're up to....three heavy metal people with a policeman?

This is me trying to get home....

I've also started sticking things on the TV, if the TV's really rubbish I turn the channel right down and stick my own things on, the programs I would like to watch which then become drawings.

Oh, If you was wondering how she was getting on what they do they work out a plan in terms of access for the mother so she can visit her daughter whenever she likes and her new mother's quite happy with that.

And in with that kind of sadness, this is the scream by Munch where the whole landscape itself is screaming. And that kind of, that level of fear is nothing compared to Mr. Jelly. No seriously, feel for Mr. Jelly. He's frightened of everything. the slightest rustle... but it's completely unwarranted where he lives is really nice: there's trees a nice little extension at the back he's just had done...really lovely. but he's frightened of everything. Sometimes he won't even get out of bed. things can get quite grim....even breakfast is an ordeal. But then

one day you reach a kind of impasse where he just faints, he's so frightened and a tramp meets him and he gives him some great advice: When you see or hear something that's frightening you just count to ten slowly. Mr. Jelly starts to do that and low and behold it works to the point where he's actually feeling quite relaxed now. And if things do begin to slide and the fear returns, there's always those Stella mornings.

(Transcribed by Lea Provenzano 8/6/09 from film recording)