

## **Presence and Production in Creativity in Fine Art: ends, transitions, beginnings.**

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**Abstract.** The Paper: ‘Presence & Production in Creativity in Fine Art: ends, transitions, beginnings’. will discuss the production of three groups of prints based on the topics of Cyclops, Exodus, and The Void, which together relate to the theme of time, and will be shown in the Open Portfolio session. There will be a particular focus on Group One (Cyclops): a large digitally hand-drawn print of the blinded Polyphemus attempting to kill the escaping Odysseus in his ship with spears of lava from Mt Etna, seven individual small variants, a combined print and a digital variant. The production of the three groups of prints will be discussed in relation to Presence in mind and body, and Production with materials, technology and ideas, in relation to creativity in fine art. This will be done in the context of Merleau-Ponty’s Embodiment Theory of Art, which will be briefly outlined. The Theory views art as ‘enriched being’, in its own right, as distinct from an analogue for an external truth or essence, as traditional aesthetic theory claims. It proposes that this enriched being is not produced primarily by intentional acts, the traditional view, but by the reciprocal influence of consciousness, the body, techniques and materials. [www.creativity-embodiedmind.com](http://www.creativity-embodiedmind.com). A power point presentation including the prints will eventually be available at this website at Developments: Projects.

**Introduction.** The Cyclops/Polyphemus prints were conceived during a visit to Sicily in 2015. We stayed below the volcanic Mount Etna, which was billowing white and orange smoke. We visited the impressive outdoor theatre in Taormina, from where we could also see Mount Etna. Our day trip to the snow lined top of Mount Etna enabled us to walk round the volcanic craters, experiencing the starkness, edges and contrasts, in mind and body. We had discussed the story by Homer of the Journeys of Odysseus and his capture with his crew by the Cyclops: Polyphemus, kept in a cave on the mountain, and the escape of Odysseus after blinding Polyphemus who threw spears of lava (Solgi) at him as he sailed away in his little wooden ship. We later visited and photographed the Solgi on the sea-shore. In ‘The Odyssey’ Homer recounts the encounter of Polyphemus in his cave with the captured Odysseus and his crew. After eating some of his crew, the Cyclops drank several bowls of wine proffered by Odysseus from his store, who gave his name as Nobody. The Cyclops answered from his cruel heart ‘Of all his company I will eat Nobody last and the rest before him. That shall be your gift.’ The Odyssey. Homer. Penguin

Classics. E.V. Rieu and D.C.H. Rieu. (2003) p 119. The Cyclops fell down drunk. Odysseus seized an Olive pole he had made sharp and drove it into the Cyclops eye, twisting it home. The Cyclops gave a dreadful shriek. The other Cyclops living in nearby caves hearing his screams gathered outside his cave and asked him is somebody by treachery or violence trying to kill you. ““Out of the cave came mighty Polyphemus’ voice in reply: “O my friends, it’s Nobody’s treachery, not violence, that is doing me to death”. “Well then,” came the immediate reply, “if you are alone and nobody is assaulting you, you must be sick and sickness comes from the almighty Zeus and cannot be helped. All you can do is pray to your father, the Lord Poseidon.”” And off they went. p120. Odysseus and his remaining crew escaped at dawn to their ship, when the Cyclops had rolled back the boulder at the entrance to the cave. They taunted the Cyclops who tore off a great pinnacle of rock and hurled it at them falling just ahead of their bows. A further bigger boulder plunged astern of the ship and the wave carried them towards the further shore.

Odysseus’s journeys from war at Troy back to Ithaca involved a stay in Corfu. I had a 22feet sailing yacht there for over 30 years making journeys in the northern and southern Ionian, including Ithaca, thus having an embodied affinity for seafaring encounters.

### **Cyclops and Solgi**



In creating prints, the size of the work, or scale, is an important consideration in the encounter with technology. In my studio I have a Design Jet 500 printer which can print an image up to a maximum 58cm wide on a roll of paper 61 cm wide. I have utilized this in making six foot long banner type prints hung from a pole. I also have a separate digital printer for smaller works. Larger digital works I have had printed elsewhere. Scale is also influenced by the commissioning of the work, as noted in the Exodus prints discussed later. The Cyclops print illustrated is on paper 61cm wide and 100 cm long and in a ready-made wooden frame 74 cm wide and height 104 cm. This print was hand drawn on a high-resolution monitor in a PC using Adobe Photoshop software utilizing my experience of Mount Etna and the shore line with the spears of Lava. Seven individual smaller variants of this print were made using the Photoshop tools in an exploratory manner. Exploring scale, these were combined, incorporating a further image, making eight in total, and a digital variant of the whole image produce, printed on paper 20.5 cm wide by 15 .5 cm height and placed on a white paper background in a wooden frame 33cm square. It is as though a view of campaign medals had emerged in the interactive process, which is characterized by both freedom and constraint (Haworth, 2009)

### **Embodiment Theory of Art**

The writings of the philosopher and psychologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty contain an Embodiment Theory of Art, in which art is viewed as ‘enriched being’, in its own right, as distinct from an analogue for an external truth or essence, as traditional aesthetic theory claims. It proposes that this enriched being is not produced primarily by intentional acts, the traditional view, but by the reciprocal influence of consciousness, the body, techniques and materials. It “gives visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a ‘Eye and Mind’ p166). Merleau-Ponty (1964b ‘Indirect language and the voices of silence’p77) considered that works of art have matrices of ideas that have their origins in embodiment. Merleau-Ponty also claimed “that modes of thought correspond to technical methods, and that to use Goethe’s phrase ‘what is inside is also outside’” (‘Sense and Nonsense’ 1964 c, p 59).

From his analysis of modern art, Merleau-Ponty indicates that we do not see the world, but see with the world. In artistic terms different media with which we interact have different voices which play a part in the creation of enriched being, perception and consciousness. The Embodiment Theory of Art gives us a route to follow rather than a finished theory (e.g. Haworth 2009, 2015, 2018). My practice-led research undertaken at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, on ‘Creativity and Embodied

Mind in digital fine art', and my work done in conjunction with Neo Studios at Bolton UK, supports the Embodiment Theory of Art. It shows that traditional and digital prints emerge in the creative process rooted in the body. Artistic vision is constantly reshaping itself in interaction with the world, including technology, geographical place, culture and events. In making my prints the log I keep of the creative process indicates that it is also about what one is willing to accept, and where the print takes one. In one sense it is art as analogy. In the terms of Merleau-Ponty (1962) "the process of expression brings meaning into being or makes it effective, and does not merely translate it" p 183

### **Three Groups of Prints**

The three groups of prints and the embodied mind philosophy of creativity are conjoined. The prints are a product of the encounter with place, time, ideas, materials and technology. They incorporate, but go beyond, reason. The production of a print emerges from lived experience. The prints are also influenced by **Ends**: of certainty, old ways, old existence; **Transitions**: exodus, war, famine, poverty; **Beginnings**: encountering the void, new beginnings.

In 2015 when we visited Sicily, migration to the southern shores was a significant concern, with exodus from Africa. Today 'The Guardian' Newspaper 8 February 2018 in its Editorial says that 'Continental politics is plagued by xenophobic nationalism, which is intimately connected to the absence of consensus on how to deal with mass migration from beyond Europe'. War, famine and poverty in Syria continues to fuel the exodus. In Neo Studios, Bolton UK in 2015 I made a small horizontal etching 5cm wide by 16 cm long titled Exodus, done in relation to a 20 cm x 20 cm print exhibition organised by Hot Bed Press in Manchester, with print studios from across the UK contributing, the exhibition consisting of hundreds of prints touring widely. The cut etching plate with processed abstract image was wiped in four colours: black, deep red, moving into dark blue with yellow over at the end, and printed on fine art paper. After the printing the glowing attractive coloured plate was photographed and later scanned into my PC and digitally modified to have 'migration crises' printed on one side with small holes like a film strip, and a grey strip on the other side. Digital copies of this on fine art paper were made for the 20x20 exhibition. This print was followed by a larger digital Exodus print experimenting in Photoshop with several variations, a vertical version being exhibited in a black ready-made wooden frame 74 cm wide and height 104 cm. The vertical abstract print combined vivid blood red stripes bounding a brown-red

oblong over black marks moving from a grey/brown base through a dark blue area to a narrow yellow horizontal oblong, the whole set against a grey/ white background. The digital prints, 'Encountering the Void' and 'Flight from the Void', mounted in ready-made wooden frames 74 cm wide and height 104 cm are influenced by a concern with new beginnings. Hyman (2016) 'The World New Made' discusses in the introduction the creation of a picture as entering the void. The first print began by exploring the letters of the word entering. An accident with this framed print scratching the surface of the print led to the creation of 'Flight from the Void'.

**In conclusion** the discussion of the production of the prints, in the context of The Embodiment Theory of Art, shows the importance of Presence in mind and body, and Production with materials, technology and ideas, in relation to creativity in fine art.

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