

**An Artist's Diary** by Sarah Iremonger

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*You have not got the countenance  
To hold the angle of pretense,  
That angry bitter look for one  
Who knows that art's a kind of fun;  
Out of grief-born intensity.  
Dullness alone can get you beat  
And so can humor's counterfeit.  
You have not got a chance with fraud  
And might as well be true to God.  
(Patrick Kavanagh, *Prelude*)*

**June 1992** - Line describes the existence of the plane. The line is the edge and divider of planes. However, the concept of a continuous, never-ending plane denies the existence of line. The tension created by this paradox is central to these paintings: there is a need to discover and disclose the true sense of the canvas, through the use of line, tone and colour.

**July 1992** – Every picture is a battle, a corrida. One line is enough to conquer the picture plane but there are a multitude of other concerns. Feelings of frustration and inadequacy are the artist's constant companions.

The picture plane reasserts its primacy over the efforts of the artist, who struggles to achieve an openness, and an honesty. This is a daunting task.

**August 1992** – Every move must be a revelation, a discovery, a step forward into the future, an action upon the world. The smallest of sketches is as important as the largest masterpiece. It is the act, which is important.

From the simplicity of line through the mayhem of colour and tone, the depths and variations possible are innumerable. The sense of motion that keeps you going. Every new painting takes me back to the beginning again to start all over again.

The line suggests a final decision, it is unequivocal. Colour has a million possibilities, and changes as soon as you make a move. It is like an orchestra, which has to be in tune with itself. Decisions are Consolidated through colour.

The horizontal line is both horizon and the bottom or top of a wall. The vertical line marks the edge of a wall or the edge of an opening, with endless possibilities and ambiguities.

**October 1992** – With these large striped paintings, I am trying to give the surface of the canvas a greater sense of strength and potency, to bring its strength forward. The viewer's awareness of the plane is heightened, it is not hidden by any visual obstacles or barriers. You have to retain the integrity of the elements, both separately and together. This means to simplify, to appear at the end of a particular line of thought, while actually to be only touching the surface, realising the endless possibilities.

I am always ahead of myself, not realising or understanding what or when or where I am being taken. I can feel the excitement and expectancy of new discoveries. The future is always staring me in the face. I am living it at the very moment I work. Painting gives me the acute, potent sense of consciousness. To let yourself go, to be honest with what you are creating, to go for it!

**December 1992** – Describing what and why I am painting is in itself an art-form alien to me, and it seems at times quite impossible. There is no particular standard formula which I have to follow, for they do not exist.

**January 1993** – The Vertical line suggests a solid object, a wall, which in turn suggests an opening or a space hidden or seen as a physical presence. The space or the wall is very near to us, very up front. It is almost the surface of the painting. It describes the actual pictorial space. It blocks our view, suggesting a space or place left to our imagination. The vertical line denies us entry into the pictorial space but also creates it.

The vertical line suggests an actual presence, a being, whereas the Horizontal line describes a place for that being to exist. The vertical line represents my sense of existence, and therefore my sense of separation from the world. Passion is existence.

Painting represents the transient moving force of life. Through painting, I gain a knowledge and understanding of life, of existence. A painting should be emotionally, psychologically and intellectually correct, and this is impossible without a compassion and understanding of what life means. Life should flow through the painting, and in return heighten our awareness of life.

As in writing, painting has its own language. It is more direct, more immediate. It is real in a sensual way. You can become anything through the act of painting; it is an expression of yourself and of your relationship with the world.

The other is knowledge of something different, of a difference, of something other than yourself. It is an idea. The world and the other imposes many faces and ideas upon this notion of the self. There is no absolute truth. Cliché, tradition, narrow-mindedness, society, junk, are beside the point, everything has to come from something, history, past, family, etc. but everyone is authentic, original, different, a self. This is a potency and strength which can be diluted very easily.

My work is driven by a sense of consciousness, knowledge and emotion. I am wary of sentiment and assumption, the idea that knowing yourself will open the world up to you, but you can only know yourself through your knowledge of that world. You are only a reflection of people's perception of what you are. To find a place of your own creation for you alone to exist, but this in itself is only an illusion. Consciousness is a reaction to the outer world you know you exist only through your perception of the outer world, the material world, through the senses and as ideas through the mind. This is egocentric and vain, deriving from a vanity, which is struggling for recognition of existence. Religion, morality, unwritten law, to make a judgment of something, good or bad, is egocentric and undermines the whole concept of selflessness which is the basis of Western religious teaching. In other words, we are taught to be giving and selfless in a selfish world, a contradiction in terms. Everyone is a self; the basis of human existence is centered on our consciousness of self.

**February 1993** – George Berkeley believed that the world only existed in our minds in the form of ideas. Berkeley wrote: 'The idea of an object, abstracted from its elements, e.g. colour, movement, size, etc. which describe its finite existence, is known as the extension; the object separate from these elements, cannot exist in their own right, without the extension. The idea of movement cannot exist without a moving object colour cannot exist without an object to reflect it. But the fact that I can perceive these notions of movement and colour, etc. as abstract senses means they can exist as a separate reality. If the world is perceived only as ideas through our senses, surely then our senses are enough to create a reality, but reality is not confined to the awareness of material, solid objects abstracted through our senses.' (George Berkeley, *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, Fontana 1989).

**March 1993** – Painting is an absolute inspiration in itself; it needs no other visual, verbal or literal justification; it transcends its own physical being. It brings to the sensual world, the physical expression of the human condition; it is a physical reality and therefore has all the fragility of that reality. This can only be perceived through the senses and react upon them in an abstract

way, therefore we can only know what we know as a third party, through the medium of the senses. It is not the place of art to titillate the senses, to create a theatrical performance, play their game and remain locked in the visual world. Art should be an expression of this very state, an awareness of our dependence upon our senses, but at the same time transcending that very state; a direct appeal to our understanding of what and how we perceive the world around us. To judge how and what is perceived is not enough. It must get through to the core; it must dig deep into our unconsciousness, address the emotions and intellect directly.

**May 1993** – To find yourself through your work. It helps you to open up and look inside yourself. Painting is no great mystery. You paint for paint's sake; let it be what it is, nothing more. You deal with what you have, that physical reality of paint and canvas, being as true to this reality as possible.

My paintings are abstracted from my earlier work, which had a direct inspiration from a particular source, namely the architectural abstraction of the early Italian and Renaissance painting. Now they are abstracted from themselves, leading a dialogue with themselves. The abstraction is not a symbol of anything. The planes of colour and their juxtaposition to each other do not signify anything. The proportion of tone, hue and line are determined by an overall harmony and balance within the painting itself. My work deals with painting itself; as Matisse in his *Red Studio* illustrated, and Mark Rothko continued, the problems are with 'painting itself.' I am not interested in symbolic or ironic symbolism.

**June 1993** – I believe the void is the self and through the self the awareness of the other, the world. My work is a step into that void outside myself and into the unknown space, which exists between the mind and the action upon the outer world. It is part of me and created by me and also exists without me.

A point of emotional intensity, when all the forces of yourself come together at a particular time, when you are completely yourself, creating an intensity of being and a heightened sense of imagination.

To let the painting be an object in its own right, colour, like sound, is formless, colour as light.

**October 1994** – Colour as reflected light which exists in its own time frame. Painting with colour as abstracted light, which is trapped in our material world. Giving it a sense of freedom, opening our perception of what colour is. Through the work of James Turrell, you are taken into the world of intense colour as light, making the light become solid.

The notion for freedom is widely discussed and can take many forms. My sense of freedom stems directly from my culture, the time and sense of place. Society places huge constraints upon us which are sometimes hard to take, and the best way to deal with this is to create your own identity or space within and parallel to that society.

The notion that colour can exist outside of our perceptions as light with no external or practical features, and at the same time exist as a tangible solid substance, is wildly exciting to me. It is such a paradox, with great emotional and psychological possibilities.

To let colour have a true freedom, I have to eradicate myself from the picture, so to speak, become egoless, cease to exist. Not existing is a kind of freedom. I have emptied the canvas of everything to deny my own existence, to let colour exist in its own right.

**March 1995** – Proportion, and the pressure it places on our perception of the structure of the painting. Our attention is focused on the centre of the painting when the lines are close together; the area between them becomes solid like a wall. The same will happen if a line is closer to one side of the painting or the other – your attention is drawn to this area. That is why I have chosen to divide the paintings into two or three equal or almost equal areas, so that your attention is not pulled to any particular part of the painting. Also by doing this, I have given the paintings a sense of depth and lightness. The expansiveness of the blank canvas is enormous. The line humanizes the space, placing it in tangible perceived space.

**September 1995** – My paintings are the definition of theories about painting. Theories made solid; about light, space and the interactive motion between the physical act of painting and the aspiration to create time and mental space.

**November 1995** – My work is directly inspired by the light, space and shape of the place in which I live and work; of the blue and green evening light which falls in this part of the world. The painting is working when you can feel them breathe the evening light.

**January 1996** – The Abstract Expressionists believed that painting existed in its own right, representational of itself; that the act of painting was more important than the finished painting; separating the act of creating from the fixed point of what is perceived as the finish or end of a particular set of actions or thoughts. I think that the act of creation can be used and felt in a

painting continuously, as a form of strength and life which can be felt, depending on the time, place, light etc. in which a painting is placed or seen. A painting seen in different places, with different lighting, continues to be painted. My work can be worked and painted long after they have reached the point of emotional fusion, which is seen as the point of finish.

Working on a flat surface, conscious of its flatness to the point of obsession, and painting obsessively in three dimensions, layer upon layer creating a depth, which is imagined and tangible at the same time. These paintings are painted so that no element can exist in its own right only as a cohesive interacting force and, at the same time, letting each element have absolute authority over its own existence. For example, the line puts the picture plane into focus for us, but divides the picture plane at the same time, shattering the very illusion it is creating. The colour is painted flatly on a flat surface, but in multiple layers and transparency, so you get a glimpse of all the layers at once, giving the paintings an iridescent depth.

They are dark and still paintings, painted as though for meditation and quietness, but they are painted with an energy and ferocity, which is not passive. There is a huge element of chance and evolution, which is very important to me. They are about battling with light and the paradoxes they create in themselves.