

Notes on a painting as a response to my research

This painting (see opposite page & overleaf for detail) has come to be called 'Alignment Check/Prometheus'.

My research involved making basic art materials - paper (from pulped scraps of cloth/plant/waste or used paper, paint from earth pigment (mixed with water/gum/oil/egg) - to see how these activities affected the art process amongst artists with lived experience of homelessness.

Humans have a tendency to seek approval (just look at social media 'likes' ...), therefore artists will have a tendency to make art that seeks approval. This will result in a homogenised personal aesthetic - expected outcomes - through lack of experimentation.

Art has many uses: self expression, income, comfort... However if we keep ploughing the same field, the soil loses nutrients and crops struggle to grow. To keep our art from being leached of ideas/fresh thought, we need to introduce new/different processes. The processes can be new ways of thinking, or new materials. Research in to these (and other) different methods can allow fresh and surprising outcomes.

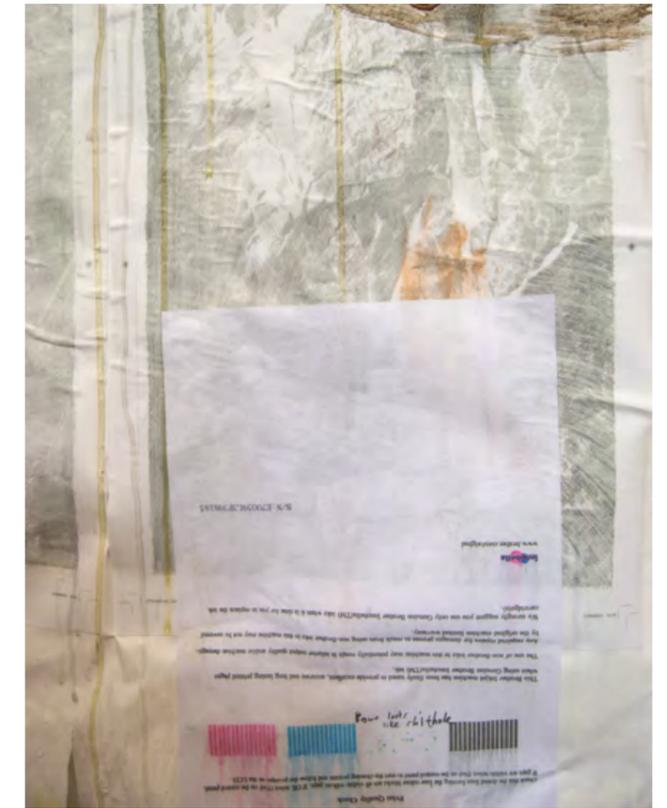
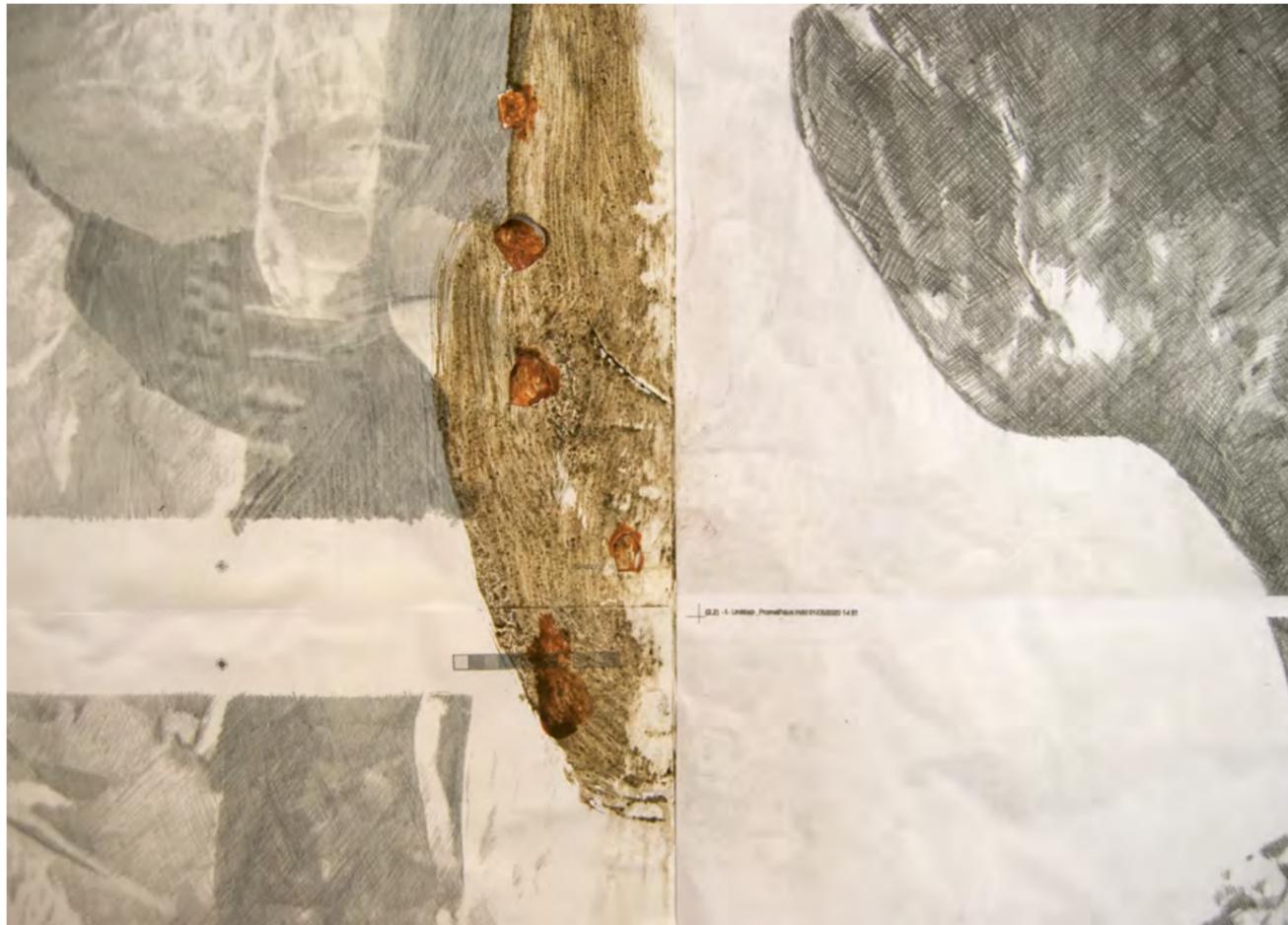
This approval seeking, this need to make an art that can be easily 'valued', is, in my (limited) experience, more pronounced in artists marginalised by society. I believe (part of) my role, as an inclusive collaborative artist, is to gently introduce other ways of working, to encourage new/different processes that can lead to experimentation and deepen the experience of creative expression.

One must be wary of destabilising an artists' sense of self, their own hard won personal aesthetic. During my research workshop I found these practical (non-technical & non-technique learning) processes did allow a free-from-fear, gentle way of experimenting, of making an art free from value judgements.

To keep one's art fresh & personally interesting helps in the difficult (particularly now!) process of making art. The making of art is a humanising experience. In just the making process (whether a painting, a design, a



Alignment Check/Prometheus, pencil, handmade paint, & printer ink on paper. 120 x 210cm. David Pitt, 2020



weaving, a written text), we are engaging directly with politics, with the everyday, with society.



I am an artist and book/magazine designer and have always painted, drawn and written but with little knowledge of the actual materials (paint, paper, the process of book-binding, etc). I gather images and texts to create artworks that are pretty dense & opaque, similar, in many ways, to poetry. This painting explores my response to my inclusive research, how it affected my art processes: how a focus on the materials and an engagement with process can create not only a sense of complexity and difference, but new ways of working.

So, what do we have here? It's messy, dribbly, earthy. The handmade paint (from garden soil & grass) is the Blakean 'brown sauce', what Reubens calls "a filthy brown, somewhat the colour of excrement, James Elkins' (*Elkins, J. (1999). What painting is: how to think about oil painting, using the language of alchemy. New York: Routledge, p70.*) notes: *materia prima, terra foetida*, fetid earth. It's kinda unpleasant, but does relate to (see also, Freud...) Prometheus crafting humans from clay/mud/this filthy earth: creativity.

The beginning. This is where I'm going: my reaction to my research has been to go back to the beginning. The research and making of art materials takes us back to the initial processes: making pigment, mediums, surfaces to work upon. In my world this also means going back to the texts that reference beginning: creation myths, classical philosophy, ethnography, discussions of materiality, investigations into the processes of the everyday.

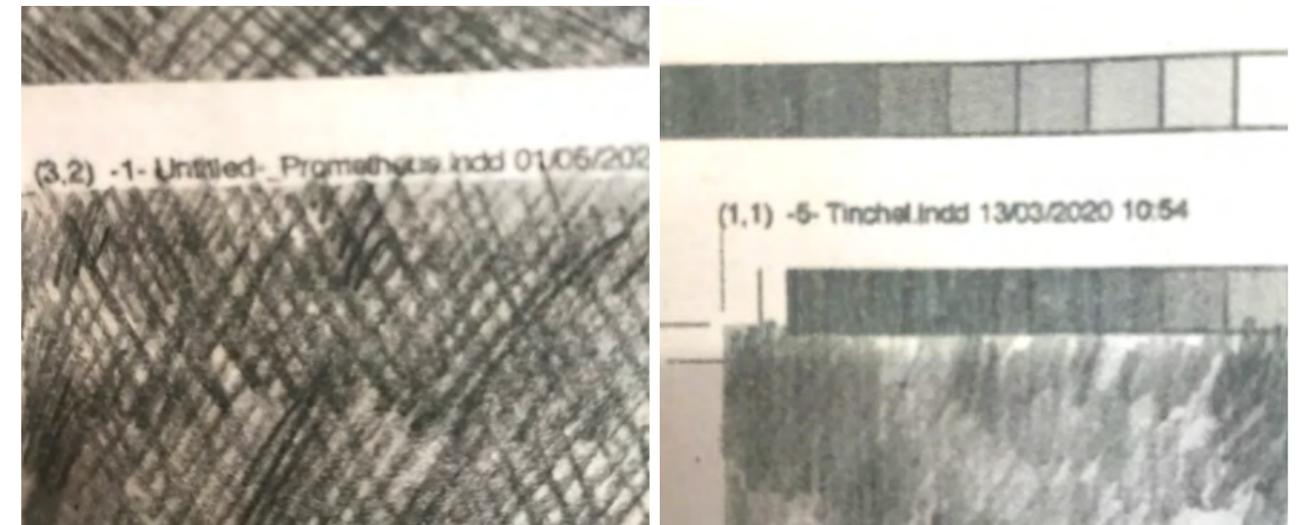
This painting began from drawings of rock. I wanted the drawing to be human-sized.



At the same time I wanted to explore the liminal aspects of designing books/magazines: the printers marks, the information hidden from the final object. I wanted to reference the process. So the rock image is drawn upon blank pages printed with all the crop/bleed/registration/colour marks.

In the back of my mind, this was the rock upon which Prometheus was

shackled. This was referenced by the file name 'Untitled_Prometheus' being printed at the top of each page. I also printed pages with the file name 'Tinchel', which is a word I have used many times before in paintings, a Scots word meaning the surrounding of a prey (eg stag/fox) by hunters. This word, for me, came to be a way to describe the honing in on an idea, the spark that ignites the creative process.



Once I had collaged the rock images (opposite, left) I felt it could either be left as is, or I could use it to explore colour... something I have always found hard to incorporate in my paintings. But the process of making paint and the confidence to experiment that came with this process, I began to sketch out an eagle (the eagle that tormented Prometheus).

Another element of process I wanted to touch upon was the 'cartoon' - a preliminary drawing - & the practice of pricking holes around the outline of this drawing. This drawing/cartoon would be placed over the canvas & faint marks would be made through the pinpricks to transfer the outline to canvas.

I made paint from soil from my garden, dried, ground & mixed with gum arabic and water. I also made a simple (unstable) paint from boiled grass & weeds. These paints are totally unprofessional (!): quick, unstable, lumpy & gritty. I really enjoyed making them. The brown paint made from the soil really looked like shit. I wasn't sure how keen I was with this. Actually, quite keen, but it was hard not to notice only this!



It got a bit Richard Hamilton, Long Kesh dirty protest.

If this painting was about showing 'process', then another way to show process is to visualise the discarding of earlier marks, to reveal the layering of ideas. That is why I drew the eagle: to mask some of the *putrefactio*, to reveal the layers, to tighten the meaning, and to complete the image.

