

Katie Sollohub

Reverie in my painting and teaching

Amanda Ravetz (AR): Katie is an artist and teacher and she lives and works in Shoreham by Sea, she studied anthropology for her first degree and then fine art.

Katie Sollohub (KS): Okay, so I don't need my clock.

I chose this slide to demonstrate one part of my practice, which is lying down a lot. It's come from a phrase that popped out one day in talking and actually, it's made me realise how important it is. It's not until I've done some work recently with Amanda, that the word "reverie" has even cropped up (to describe this activity of lying down).

This presentation has made me look at my practice in terms of recognising that that's what I have been doing, I have been creating a space for reverie in order to create.

Primarily I am a painter, but I have used performance, writing, poetry and other forms in my practice and I suppose by now, this (photo) is a kind of mini-performance for me, it's just a private event that happened, whilst painting a larger painting and it makes me laugh, which is not a bad place to be.

I've chosen these two paintings to start off looking at my actual work, "Dreaming with Open Eyes" is a title of a book by Norbert Linton. I don't know the etiquette of using titles of books as titles of paintings but I have used it with fingers crossed, as I love the title.

AR: It's fine.

KS: Is it fine? It's fine! It's art isn't it? So my work is always primarily about place, it's usually interior spaces and I have found myself looking out of windows a lot, so again that fits with a kind of reverie. This is Turner's house in Twickenham, looking out of the window and imagining that this view hasn't changed apart from the planes going by for Heathrow.

The one on the left was done in situ, it's a life sized (9ft by 4.5ft) version of the window itself. The one on the right was done in situ. The one on the right, was done in my studio. I found myself working from memory and using writing and meditation to get myself back into the same place; so physically the place is the same, the image is the same but mentally, I mean physically, I was in different spaces, I had to mentally get myself back into that space to be there.

In these drawings, which were the precursor to the paintings, it was a moment of reverie, it was an epiphany moment when I realised that having done standard sized work, that I had a roll of paper exactly, it was serendipity, the roll of paper was exactly the same width as the window, so I unrolled it to the length of the window and in these drawings, I therefore am immersed in the drawing and I don my boiler suit, a bit like Rachel and kind of swim in it. You can't see the whole, you're in it and that's become very important as well, this idea of being physically engaged in a process to stop my brain interfering, so anything that does that.

Artists that have inspired me and continue to inspire me - I chose these images particularly for the window and I started to think about my reasons for being in the interior space. I haven't analysed this, I haven't studied it but I feel like it's my safe space, it's my room, I don't want to be out there in the landscape, I don't want to deal with people, with the world, I'm fine in my life but in my art work, this is private.

But there's a looking out, so this is my safe space and here are some artists who have used their studio, their home, their domestic space to look out from: Bonnard, Matisse, Gary Wragg.

I've chosen two other very contrasting images, by two different artists, to talk about

the things that I use in my practice, to achieve a creative state. Agnes Martin on the left, whose work is about the meditative process of, the physical process of paint, the physicality of it, the touch of the brush. This is her quote, "My paintings are not about what is seen, they are about what is known forever in the mind."

In contrast, Cecily Brown, where again the physicality of the paint is much more evident. In the slide, you can't see Agnes Martin's brush strokes, but with Cecily Brown, she is constantly sort of pulling apart the image and letting this paint, the language of paint do something. So she doesn't have an idea, she finds the idea through doing the paintings and she "wants the experience of looking at one of my paintings to be similar to the process of making the painting, you go from the big picture to something very intense and detailed and then back again".

I feel that that's very appropriate also for this sort meditative state of expanded attention and absolute focus, that you can be in that zone where you have everything, so you are aware of what's going on, you're not an empty mind but you are focused on the breath, or whatever it is.

My paintings, two examples of my paintings, again examples perhaps of the overall, the interior space and the attention to detail, the pattern, the Dennis The Menace on a shelf, Man United poster, I think it is? And things like that.

This is an example of another drawing that I really felt when I was doing it, I was completely in the zone, a six hour drawing, I think, or four hours, in two sittings. I'd been invited to various heritage places around Twickenham, which is why I get access to these spaces. For me it's the importance of the space that affects me and my reaction to it. I've chosen two more paintings which give examples of moments where I know it has worked, whatever "it" is, however it worked. The first one is an exterior image of Turner's house and I remember: there's another thing I do - I physically move myself so I get involved with the process. I play with the paint and I physically move myself so I cannot fix the image. I have to move so it becomes... the important thing is the process of looking, the process of immediate response, being present. I remember feeling and writing about how the paint was just falling off the brush and landing in the right place, as I did it, it was magic, it was really one of those. So it's quite a sparse painting, it's on linen.

In contrast, in Tuscany last year, the second painting was much more laboured, it was in that place where you hate it, where you don't know what you're doing, you remember that you don't know how to paint and everything goes awful and then suddenly, the painting does itself.

Some examples of my working practice: walking, drawing, in tiny hand held sketch books, the way I would begin any project, lists – endless lists and rules, observations and ideas corresponding. So I might have a stream of consciousness of observations, things I see, and corresponding ideas, in order to just be in this new project/property. This is West Horsley down in Surrey.

The importance of daily practice and the mundane - by recording my everyday life, my breakfast, my lunch, it gives me an opportunity to practice as well and to lose myself in it. Daily practice will also come out in my "dream drawings". I know that these only come when I really have time to dream and then my daily practice starts to go all sorts of different places, including when I was in Italy - the serious artist had to go home, she wasn't welcome.

Again in Italy, I'm starting to play with the dream space, drawing with my eyes shut, drawing from memory on a large scale. The large window images at the beginning were in situ, this is by memory.

This is the image given in the paper, having started a painting, continuing it at a much later date and bringing the outside in somehow, bringing the dream space in, using imagination. This is a new phase in my work.

As a teacher, how do I create, help create this space, this potential for reverie? I ask students to shut their eyes, I give them huge pieces of paper where possible for

certain events, so that they have to physically be engaged, I'll lead a meditation This is them, the one on the right, she's actually just drawing before the drawing, physically feeling the space.

Work I did with Amanda down on the beach in Sussex, again physically being in the space or being outdoors in the space. Recently, I've been very interested in relating this stepping over, the artist stepping into the unknown. My window paintings are examples of this. A lot of things are about that boundary from the inside out and bringing things back in. On a fairly regular basis I will go into the sea and I just think it's this magical opportunity that you have to go, to step off this world and be in another space.

AR: We're out of time.

KS: Okay. I'll just flick to the last slide, which is knowing when to stop. It's cut off the little quote but sometimes I just have to sit and just make one mark is my instruction to myself, and sometimes I stop when there are no more just one marks to make.

S: Thank you, Katie.

S: Thank you.