kim pieters.dunedin.new.zealand.may2019.

dear x,
i have a plan!!! i think we should go back to the beginning. back to a sort of foundation that will at least provide an anchor with regard to your questions. i have only recently become aware that i, myself have had a blind spot with regard to discussion about the underlying premises that inform my work. i am happy to answer enquiries but i have noted with puzzlement that there is often a lack of basic grounding in 'questions' and therefore my answers inevitably only give part of any meaning and then float off into voids. i knew i was missing something whenever i discussed the work. it seems i have remained silent on what is most close to me and oddly that thing is presence.

letter to X.

i am going to attempt to discuss this ground. . i am not sure what this will do and it could be a complete failure. anyway i will try and i am going to write a series of small paragraphs. (well i hope) that start at a beginning and send them to you. part one. part two etc. any one of them may or may not be useful to you. hopefully things will become much clearer and my answers/examples will make more sense to you.

i will write them quickly and send to you. i have part one. will send now

xxx k

part 1: the method

…my process has always been emergent and non-representational, (from about the age of 22 actually, way before i could name it. before a naming 'language' therefore….. it is an experience that i have absolutely believed in for nearly forty years.)) (why is another discussion) it does not matter if i am making music, making films, taking photographs, painting or drawing, graphics and heaven forbid writing. (hence my difficulty with linear thought)

what i mean by emergent is that an action is decided on and delivered in that moment, without predetirmination and in response to the field at hand. the field itself being in constant flux. a play therefore of a particular presence inside time and space. by non-representational i mean i have no intention of re-presenting anything. (not a tree, an expression etc etc) i am creating something of itself in the time i make it. this across genres but let us concentrate on painting. these words…..chance, necessity, contingency, choice.

>>>>diversion to improvisational music for a moment …..in the improvised music that i was involved in, you would of course have an instrument that you played. (the instrument could be a tin can, a toy, a computer, a bass guitar or any manner and combination of things) you got to know the sounds of your chosen instruments. no doxa. no orthodox chords. one just concentrated on the sounds it made. one could be simple or complicated when playing the thing. and then——when playing with others——the point for me was to listen intently to what sounds were being produced and to answer or to fold into those sounds a 'choice' from the sounds that i could play with my instrument. it was a choice made in that moment. in response to that moment. no preconceived notion or result in mind.

the result however was often highly original. sometimes it 'worked' other times not. what makes it work or not is another discussion. we must get on.

in the same way when i make a painting i have various criteria at my fingertips. i have the knowledge of the gestures i have made with colour and line over many years. these gestures are the 'sounds' i can draw on at any one moment. again no doxa. just the experience of looking and acting with colour and line. i draw on these gestures repeating them and as i do they manifest themselves differently each time. there is always a losing and finding and repeating of gestures.

one of the Most interesting things for me when i begin a work is that i have no idea what the end result is going to be. i cannot predetermine what decisions i might make at any one time in the process. the whole thing is very sensitive to initial and ongoing conditions. simplifying here, i will say…….i begin. i make a mark, this mark needs a response. i make another mark in response to the first. this gives me a completely new arrangement in which i then have to decide what is necessary for the whole field and the next marking. i draw on my knowledge of my gestures. i continue until the composition is finished to my satisfaction. therefore the work is finished when there is no more to add nor subtract from the field according to me at that moment. i might decide something different on a different day or at any one moment in the proceedings.

the image that this process gives me at the end is always shocking! it is something new. something has emerged that i have never seen before. an enigma. it is a thing to itself and therefore open to the world and to me, its first viewer and then to others. the other viewers.

these words….emergent, adaptive, evolutionary.

to create a new combination of gestures each time is a complete pleasure and strangeness and this method that i have developed over many years allows me this experience. it is challenging and at times extremely fraught. i become totally immersed in the creative process that produces this entity and then entranced.

full of wonder at this thing, the finished painting which i consider quite separate from me. i forget that i have made it. i look to see what it offers me. it has qualities, potencies, differences, sensibilities that i can respond to. it keeps its reserve.

the work is predominantly concerned with questions of 'being' in the world (human beings included): that is, my interest is mainly ontological and arches over any political, historical, subjective or psychological concerns. what IS this thing? why is it there? why this colour? why is that bit so ugly? what simmers? what strikes? what travels? why these relationships? what is telling on me? what stories are evoked here? what of the silences?

these questions do not have satisfactory answers. the work remains open. free and rich with continuous possible meanings that can be actualised and revoked at any moment in time. I like it that the work gives me this freedom. I am grateful.

it gives me qualities that flash like signs in the distance. it reconciles me *with* life. and then i make another painting.

part 2: materiality…

…i align myself with the material world. its mysteries. its pragmatics; these forces are my primary concern when i am making the image. i have always had enormous respect for this unlanguaged part of living. the various pressures…density, shape, colour, falling, folding, moving across, temperature, speed, light, weight…intensities. the 'sense' of these not the 'names' of them. most of these non human things are involved in dynamic systems. dynamic systems activate most of the world. large and small. what we know and what we do not know. only the human species removes itself with language. due to a weakness in language says plato, it cannot help but distance us from the experience of breathing.

it is a curious thing and has always fascinated me. we sit the breathing and the 'naming' of the breathing beside each other. for me the naming is a subset of the experience that is breathing.

it is the experience of sense that i want to let be in the painting. without the naming. i am letting the material be. i am human, i am creating something with these non-human things of matter. i am letting them be, i arrange them into compositions. i make with them a non-representational construction. by building with these traces, i, the human, work in collaboration with the material, the non-human.

the first look at this work is about the experience of sense, not the experience of recognition. you look at a work and to yourself you say woooo….what is that? and something unfolds into being. you really look. you really feel something. later you may language it. words are created from it. the relationships between speech and the unlanguagable form the 'meaning' of this composition which manifests as pliable and continuous. the whole thing belongs to the convolutions of time.

part three: language…

i make paintings in series using a particular colour palette. i make many works. i select usually around seven paintings from the series. the extra paintings become outliers to the set. i give the set a NAME. each painting in the set is also NAMED. each painting and the set it belongs to is distinct and will never happen again. each work is quite singular.

each grouping has its own qualities. some series are muted and sweet. others are graphic and intense. one could talk about their effects. each painting is an event that generates effects and how those effects are received and processed depends on each viewer and the weaving of their particular sense of things.

at the beginning of this process of making i go through a thing i call 'the finding'. most importantly i have to find the colours and the hand that belong to this time. but also the texts that i will use. quite a delicate process. something that involves listening closely to the time. to its shape. to its chance events. the texts (very human) are a supplement to the image.

philosophy and poetry tend to be my main reading materials. and it is usually from these i will find the language that resonates for me. they will be sentences, sometimes one word, taken from their original context and relocated to become titles to the work. i wait for the poignancies that relate to the time. once i find them, it is very clear.

the languages never illustrate the image but instead sit beside it, often evocative in themselves. they have their own indicators and histories. the space that is created between the image and the text allows for extensive lines of flight. here a layered and complicated constellation, full of associations, relationships and divergences, can be put into play. and it IS a matter of play. things and names engage in a state of unceasing reciprocity…

'…A language that speaks through enigma, the enigmatic Difference, but without complacency and without appeasing it: on the contrary, making it speak and, even before it be word, already declaring it as *logos,* that highly singular name in which is reserved the nonspeaking origin of that which summons to speech and at its highest level, there where everything is silence, *"neither speaks nor conceals, but gives a sign" …'* [1]

part four: the encounter

….of course i am the first viewer. & as i have said previously this emergent process that i use gives me a new, singular work each time and this new thing produces a type of shock in me, where i have to ask myself ‘what is that?’ and perhaps have to LOOK for the first time. there is a sort of shimmer in the brain. no doubt any other viewer will be puzzled also. it depends on ones temperament as to how much ‘looking’ will be given the work considering its initial silence.

however attention pays handsomely. (why i prefer to keep works for at least six months to a year after they are complete) (why the works are satisfying to live with) (why i live with them).

at first there is very little, then something grows as thought and feelings start responding to what the work gives out. each work has its own constellations. there are temperatures and speeds; insinuations and exhalations; any manner of forces. clustering intensities, a going across, quiet pools. a friend recently said these words in response to a drawing…'that is magical kim, somehow warm and funny and full and traveling' [2]

something like that. just like that. perhaps that is all that needs to happen

each image presents multiple differences. completely other. at once a resistance to suffocation and a line of flight. there are breaths, communicating intensities: worlds of simulacra and ‘mysteries’. one could land at colour for instance “ is the sky blue?” what opens out in that question? what is actually possible in our many worlds. different for each person. this is good for our hearts no?. to avoid the irrational. something possible for us.

a curious aspect of the work is that it offers an ongoing experience. for each time i pay attention to its play, it will give me a different field of relations to consider. each time a glittering in my life, a thought can be actualised & with this another sense of what is possible manifests itself. this in turn can change. turn back, go forward, double up, slow down… the story becomes richer with each interaction and the work becomes a continuous life giving thing. a changling that can also—of course—because of speed, remain static for long periods of time.

well there it is, a basic basic outline. a field from which to leap. artists work in so many different ways. sometimes very difficult to decipher. it is hard to trace back. again i am not sure if i have been successful in providing a ground with this letter. i hope so. i would like people to at least be alert to the life affirming qualities that are latent in the work and from there they can do what they like with them. it will be their experience. however rich or poor. for me, they are something like endless gifts actualized *AND*absent inside our uncertain and unrolling world.

soon soon kim

[1] Maurice Blanchot in the essay 'Heraclitus' from 'The Infinite Conversation' published by the University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1993, pg 92.
[2] Fi Johnstone commenting on facebook.