



Book of Jam *portfolio* "whistlejacket"

VOLUME I NUMBER 4 AND A HALF May 2008

'A continuous process altered daily'

ROBERT MORRIS

Portfolio

This portfolio is the first in an occasional series that will punctuate, but still be part of, the monthly stream of *A Book of Jam*.

Each *Portfolio* will present a specific sequence of images as a series, a *riverrun* of images or text.

Preface

Our photographs, writings, sounds and conversations act as our *collective memory*. This memory becomes active and functional when we start our work and remains as shaping force during this process; the *riverrun* of making things.

Within this ebb & flow lies the force of attraction, where things come together and take on a *life* of their own. This series of images is one such instance.

The starting point for this series is my physical isolation, half the world away, from Rick & Karl. Our photographic library is not only a document of where we have been and what we have seen but it also serves as a touchstone *to* each other (a device for relinking us together) and as an *catalyst* for further work. In this case I decided to take two images, one from the archive of Rick's photographs and another from Karl's. Although not entirely random the choice was made by a chance selection from images within a specific folder within each archive. The challenge was then to respond to this serendipitous selection and see what could be made. As is often the case something unforeseen 'happens', the discovery or uncovering of a particular lay-line of connection. Given the length of time that we have known each other this may not be that surprising but it is unpredictable because it is shaped by whoever is creating the work, at that particular time. We each respond differently to the same material and each of us respond differently from day to day – as we contextualise what we are doing within the *process* of reference *of* the moment.

Resonance

I wanted to choose one image from both Rick & Karl that was both simple in form but deep in association. From Rick's archive a landscape of Wales and from Karl one of his 'found' objects. This 'found' object happened to be a large reproduction of the (over) famous George Stubbs' equine painting *Whistlejacket* complete with cheap gold frame, hung on an exterior brick wall somewhere in the streets of East London. The resonance & reference between these two images was instantaneous.

As a boy I used to spend my summer holidays with my grandparents in Rottingdean, near Brighton, on the south coast of England. It is an area steeped in history and folklore and one of our favourite excursions was to visit either the villages of Alfriston or Wilmington. Both these picturesque villages had one particular thing in common, an ancient chalk carving on one of the nearby hills – *the Long Man* in Wilmington and a horse in Alfriston. Its debatable how old these figures actually are but to a young boy they seemed magical, a direct, and literally drawn, connection between the distant past and the present. It is a similar sense of resonance that Rick has for the Welsh landscape, a personal, *wordless* association that connects you to the deep time of a particular place.

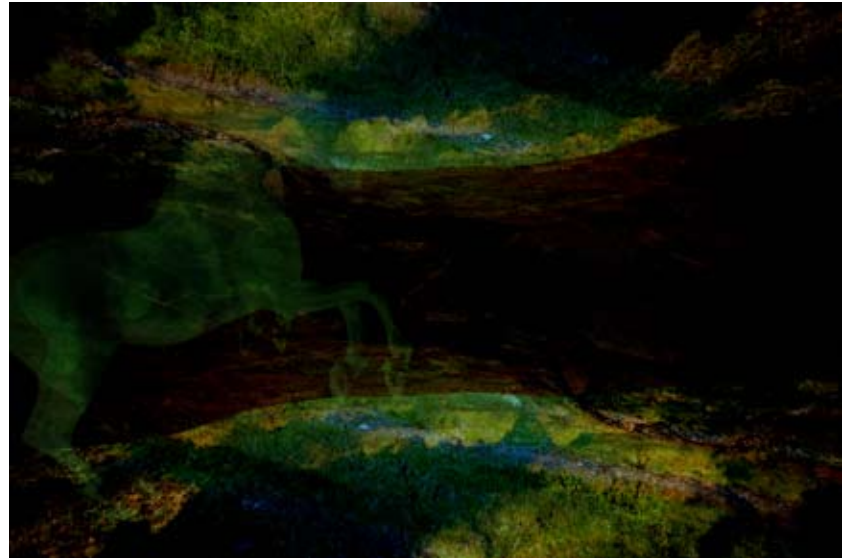
The next resonant is my art teacher at school, Barry Viney. Mr Viney (the formality was always retained) was a gifted watercolourist and in a time of experimentation in the arts (the early 70's) was deeply 'traditional', believing in the virtues of observational drawing over what was happening in contemporary art at that time. The only contemporary artist that he would talk about was, surprisingly, Brigit Riley, who had been a classmate of his at Goldsmith's Art School. Only later would I realise that her art was directly based on observation and then translated into its geometric, *optical*, form.

Mr. Viney's art history classes concentrated purely on British art before 1960. Unlike the art of many other countries this meant itinerant individuals rather than 'schools' or 'movements' and many of these artists, with the exception of William Hogarth, had an obvious romantic connection with either place or the landscape – William Blake, Samuel Palmer, John Cotman, JMW Turner and Eric Ravillious. Art, like memory, once absorbed, acts as a permanent filter or particular lense and influences our perception and interpretation of the world and our character within it. It also effects the tone, syntax and grammar of our being and our 'self'-expression. This is far from being a mechanical process, rather it is organic and osmotic, ever there but never-quite-forming until we make these interior thoughts present in the physical world. And even then the process of translation alters its form, tone and rhythm, it alters its *nature*. And, as I described earlier in this short essay, in the process of making other resonances and references come into play as the work takes on a life of its own – in this case; Anselm Kieffer, Sigmar Polke and Robert Rauschenburg.

The work and overall strategy of Rauschenburg embodies much of what we do and make as he created a vast, personalised, *wunderkammer* of the world as he found it and reconstructed it in his own language mixing the mediated contemporary with found materials in a complex, highly individual, matrix of resonance. Beyond the work itself it is the restless energy of his inquiry that appeals and continues to inspire.

For all the intentions and theory it doesn't mean that a work will progress further than the first iteration. Either *something* is present and needs to be amplified or it is *there* but must be extracted or is absent. The other strategy is to add, layer and subtract further elements (from our archives) to create (and implying) a never-ending flux of potential meaning.

John. Melbourne, Australia. 26th May 2008.



Images















