

Graham Lister
MA(Hons), MFA, PhD

Documentation of Research - My Altermodern Everyday: Glasgow
Solo Exhibition – The New Glasgow Society – October 2014



Graham Lister: Installation View, My Altermodern Everyday: Glasgow, 2014.

Outline

My Altermodern Everyday: Glasgow was a major solo exhibition of visual work in Glasgow, Scotland. The work was created over a period of 8 months and was publically exhibited in the New Glasgow Society in October 2014.

The solo exhibition of paintings, text works and photographs was displayed for a period of two weeks. It represented a display of ongoing practice-based research. The underlying research question related to 'how the use of *en plein air* painting techniques can be help to investigate engagement with the physical and virtual spaces of the city of Glasgow?'

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The New Glasgow Society is a civic society promoting, protecting and raising interest in the City of Glasgow, through campaigning, discussion, projects, talks and exhibitions. Established in 1965, it has an excellent profile and track record nationally with regard to developing and showcasing visual materials and facilitating social activities. Alongside debates, discussion and workshops it has recently

been host to works by Association of Illustrators award winner Mitch Miller, Johnny Rodger (Reader in Urbanism at the Glasgow School of Art) and acclaimed artist Luca George.

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The exhibition was awarded after submission of a proposal to the committee of the NGS, in response to an Open Call. Following this process of peer review within the NGS, I was awarded an exhibition and the project was focused on for a period of 8 months. *My Altermodern Everyday* featured a large scale installation of 100 oil paintings, 200 text works and a series of documentary photographs. This exhibition was attended by a large number of visitors during the period in which it was open.

It was supported financially by the GSA, and in kind by the New Glasgow Society. It was facilitated using an award of a £4000 (The Mackendrick Award), obtained as a painting prize from the GSA in 2013.



Graham Lister: Installation View, *My Altermodern Everyday*: Glasgow, 2014.

Process

This project was created over a period of 8 months. The process of generating the materials, creating the work and developing the installation was key to this as a coherent body of practice-based research.

Primary research was conducted through the use of questionnaires. These were distributed as hard copy documents to various art and social groups with which I was in contact. Responses were anonymous and fulfilled the ethics guidelines at the GSA. The simple questionnaires were structured such that they provided respondents that change to reflect on the idea of 'What is, or has been, your everyday experience of moving through or within the city of Glasgow?'

This open question elicited a range responses and the anonymous offerings highlighted everything from daily commutes to bus stop locations, to buildings which attracted personal attention or were

personally significant to people. All responses were collated and using these, I spent considerable time navigating the city through the use of other individuals' everyday experience of moving in the urban spaces. I selected materials to paint based on the ways in which which I personally connected with and was able to re-spatialise the spaces highlighted by others.

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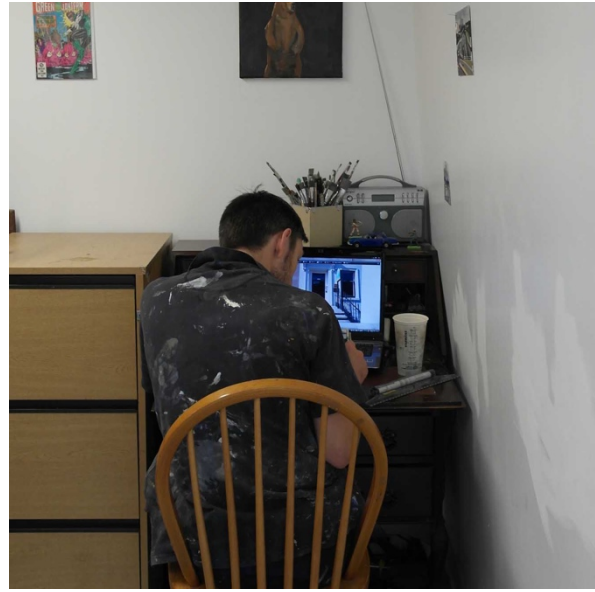
For my painting process, I retraced lines of movement, paused outside childhood homes and stopped at specific traffic lights in the city; my movement always governed by the material collected at the outset of the process. Over a period of 6 months, I created 50 oil paintings *en plein air* across Glasgow. These were each created strictly within one hour, which I personally judged as a suitable time to feel that I could visually spatialize (through conceptual projection) the source space or place. Paintings were made exclusively in situ and the works were not edited in the studio. This maintained the integrity of the process of making the works.

Also within this time, I created 50 oil works *en virtual plein air*. By using online mapping technology, I navigated the city as described by individuals. This navigation was conducted in the studio environment in Glasgow and I painted, again for a period of no more than one hour, but this time focused on visually engaging with virtual spaces displayed as part of Google Streeview.

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In addition to the painted works, 200 text works were developed based on phrasing obtained from the questionnaire responses. All 300 works, shared a consistent scale of 15 x 15 cm and they were positioned as an overall manifestation of using personal visual practice, and the process of retracing lines of movement at (physical and virtual) ground level, as a machine for thinking.





Graham Lister, Painting en plein air, photographic views, 2014 – exhibited within My Altermodern Everyday: Glasgow, 2014.

As an artist, the making of these works was an important process in that it was built upon an engagement with surface level connections, the action of re-presenting physical and virtual views of spaces and places and with a tracing of lines of movement. The process of painting en plein air was an extension of previous painting activities over the last 5 years, and which resulted in various national exhibitions (Virtual Fragments, Charing Cross (2013), The Briggait Project Space, Glasgow, Travelling through TIME (2012), Montgomery's, Glasgow)

All 300 works were displayed on the main wall of the gallery space. To comment on the idea of vicarious travel and also with regard to the physicality of painting practices in an outside environment, the body of works was positioned as a single piece. An installation of a traditional armchair pointed explicitly to the idea of an armchair traveller, and this was further emphasised using wording from Oliver Wendell Holmes on a gallery text and through the inclusion of photographs which documented the painting process.





Graham Lister, representative painted fragments, oil on board, 15x15cm, 2014 – exhibited within My Altermodern Everyday: Glasgow, 2014.

Methodological Approach and Originality

The practical outputs generated for this exhibition were useful within the context of ongoing practice-based research. Specifically using the textual work focused on practice as research by Macleod, and Holdridge, *Thinking Through Art: Reflections on Art as Research* (2005), Graeme Sullivan's, 'Artefacts as evidence within changing contexts' (2006) and relating to the seminal sociological work of Michel de Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988), this collection of artistic practice investigated the ways in which personal narratives could be engaged with, transposed and re-negotiated.

As a contribution to original knowledge, this exhibition foregrounded practice-based research through painting practice. The implications of 'thinking through doing' were carefully considered throughout the making of the work, parallel to Mlicka's 2002 text 'Potential and Pitfalls of Painting Architecture as Practice-Based Research Methodology' and Nelson's 2013 work *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*.

Paintings made in a personal representational style pointed toward engagements with space and place and these of course were shown in a public exhibition forum. Painting practice was investigated here as a 'tool for thinking'. It is through the activity of painting in a simplified representational fashion, that an improved visual, spatial comprehension of the selected subject matter was gained.

The process of creating this body of work involved refining the act of painting outdoors with oil paint and medium. Photographic works were commissioned and exhibited as part of the overall exhibition. These photographs showed the practice of painting *en plein air*, both physically and virtually, since for half of the images this activity took place whilst being 'present' in the virtual space of the network.



Private View Images, October 2014.

Impact

The footfall for the exhibition indicates that it was a successful endeavour in terms of allowing the practice to be seen by a significant audience.

Contemporary painters such as Simon Ling continue to engage in *en plein air* painting, and use this activity as a personal way of visually engaging with the world around them. The notion of painting outside, of seeing the world and making reflection on it whilst in situ is something that I too identify as being of importance to my practice. However, from this endeavour, I have developed an emerging understanding of painting as a methodological tool through which one can investigate spatialisation processes as part of both the physical and virtual everyday.

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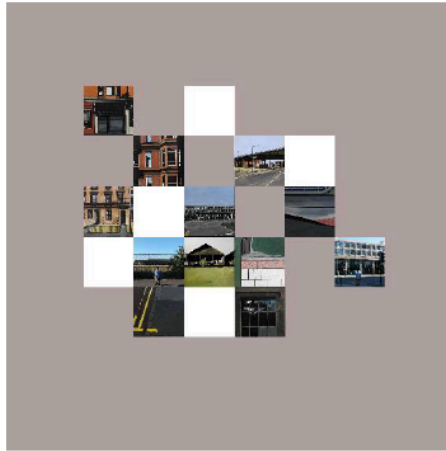
Given the modest scale of the individual works, and also the ways in which they were positioned in sequence – recombined and orientated in relation to one another – key aspects of the contemporary everyday were uncovered. Contemporary individuals are more used to fragmented narratives, disparate collections of information and fleeting imagery than ever before. This body of work presented a process of thinking through painted and textual fragments in a new way. It pointed toward the possibility of navigating, linking and moving vicariously through fragmented information and it equally demonstrated the interest that can be generated through an individual lingering on, and visually considering the fragments generated by other people.

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The theoretical positioning of the work produced for this exhibition allowed for a conference submission to be generated for 'Material Culture in Action: Practices of making, collecting and re-enacting art and design' at the The Glasgow School of Art in September 2015. The poster paper presentation was accepted from this open call for submissions.

My Altermodern Everyday: Glasgow was successful in that it was a legible, coherent manifestation of practice being used to test out philosophical positions. Specifically the ways in which fragments and networked arrangements could be visualised, as well as the nature of vicarious documentation and spatialisation activities can now take place were usefully investigated. The legacy of this endeavour has been to cement research interests and offer evidence for the continuation of practice-based activities to the ways in which contemporary *en plein air* painting can usefully reflect on a multitude of engagements and interconnections with present day ground level. It also highlighted a process which, although in this instance was focused on Glasgow, could be utilised in any other physical / virtual location.

My Altermodern Everyday: Glasgow



Created over the period of 8 months, *My Altermodern Everyday: Glasgow* is a collection of visual and textual fragments. These fragments are a mixture of personal ideas and the thoughts of various contributors; stemming from the question 'what is, or has been, your everyday Glasgow?'

Using brief thoughts, locations, stories and records of journeys in the city, spaces have been re-visited, views have been painted and new experiences of the everyday have been generated. The thoughts of others, from the past and the present have been appropriated, mixed and re-considered to form this body of work.

Through painting in situ, physically on Glaswegian streets or virtually viewing spaces via Google Maps, a new personal interpretation of the city has been created. Installed as an unordered amalgamation, the exhibition points toward the idea that the individual user is at the heart of the contemporary everyday. This everyday, what is referred to here in tandem with the concept of altermodernism, reflects the way that individuals can choose to blend physical and virtual information, experiences and views, stemming from personal or external sources, in a way that has become second nature.

Checking locations via real-time maps on smartphones, experiencing the city through the social media updates of others, recalling past experiences as we walk on ground level in the city and tracing lines as we move on the streets and within the network. *My Altermodern Everyday: Glasgow*, is a personal, artistic take on the now ubiquitous blending of physical and virtual information reflecting spaces and places.

I stroll through Rhenish vineyards, I sit under Roman arches, I walk the streets of once buried cities, I look into the chasms of Alpine glaciers, and on the rush of wasteful cataracts. I pass, in a moment, from the banks of the Charles to the ford of Jordan, and leave my outward frame in the arm-chair at my table, while in spirit I am looking down upon Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives.

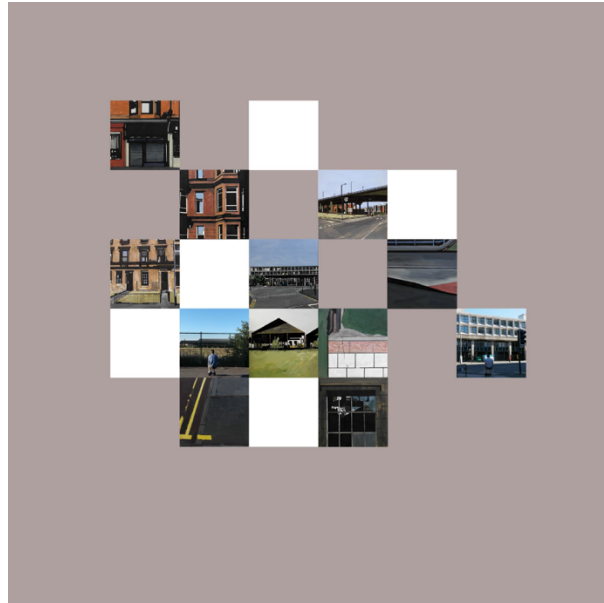
Oliver Wendell Holmes, 'The Stereoscope and the Stereograph' in: *The Atlantic Monthly*, 3 (June 1859), p. 738-748.
Reprinted in: Vicki Goldberg (ed.), *Photography in Print*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico), 2003, p. 109-110.

Graham Lister

The New Glasgow Society

October 2014

Gallery Text – exhibited and available within the exhibition *My Altermodern Everyday: Glasgow*, 2014.



You are invited to a Private View of
My Altermodern Archive: Glasgow
A collection of new work by Graham Lister

Friday 17th October 2014, 7 - 9pm
The New Glasgow Society
1307 Argyle St, Glasgow G3 8TL

Show open 18th - 24th October by appointment

Private View Invitation – exhibited within *My Altermodern Everyday: Glasgow, 2014*