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**Dr Graham Lister**  
(MA(Hons), MFA, PhD)

**'The Art of Being There – Representational Painting and Visual Spatialisation'**

**Athens Institute for Education and Research**  
**5<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Visual and Performing Arts**  
**June 2014, Athens, Greece**

**Outline Description**

In 2014, I delivered a paper entitled 'The Art of Being There' at the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Visual and Performing Arts in Athens, Greece. This event was supported by the Athens Institute for Education and Research. The abstract for the paper is included below and it was contained in the published volume which accompanied the event.

Papanikos, G.T., (2014) *Visual and Performing Arts Abstracts: 5<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Visual and Performing Arts, Athens*.  
ISBN:978-618-5065-46-1

**Original Abstract**

**'The Art of Being There – Representational Painting and Visual Spatialisation'**

*The Art of Being There* argues that the creation of representational visual art can be utilised as a methodological tool suitable to investigate the relationship between our contemporary daily online activity and the experiential aspects of our everyday lives. Drawing upon ongoing doctoral research entitled 'The Altermodern Everyday' at the Glasgow School of Art, this paper argues that in the age of Altermodernism (Bourriaud, Hardt & Negri) and of a network built upon a 'space of flows' (Castells, Moores), the experiential 'ground level' which forms part of our everyday (Lefebvre, de Certeau) has moved; or has at least expanded to include digital territory.

Representational paintings can be described as depictions of fragments, as small parts of a much larger overarching whole. This paper extends Critchley's position of a fragment never existing in isolation, and positions this notion in the context of the contemporary online, digitised network. The act of engaging with the networked and informational realm can be expressed as moving between fragments which are only fleetingly apprehended. As such, this paper unpacks the implications of aligning the production and display of representational, fragmented, artistic images with the rapid and changing nature of accessing and comprehending visual material in the age of the networked society.

The Altermodern approach to representational painting which I have developed, and which is characterised by the network and the fragment, holds implications for our contemporary understanding of spatialisation with reference to the everyday. For Michel de Certeau (*The Practice of Everyday Life*), the everyday begins at *ground level*, with footsteps. The everyday, as that which we know and can experience in physical terms, is perfectly suited to being

represented visually. As an increasingly prevalent aspect of contemporary daily experiences, it stands to reason that engagement with the Internet, as a territory in which users flow through information and view physical locations, deserves to be considered as a *new ground level*, but one which now *begins on an electronic keyboard, with fingertips*.

The practice-based research I conduct has included creation of *Physically Travelling Route 66, Virtually* (2012) which visually describes the process of navigating the iconic American Road using a combination of digital screen captures from mapping software, personal photographs and representational paintings created *en plein air*. A series of montage-based images then serve to visualise the dialogue between real and virtual imagery which now infiltrates our daily lived experiences. This paper points toward the notion that in the altermodern everyday, rather than spatialising physical places, it may be more useful to discuss and describe an emerging process of spatialising 'flows' within the informational realm.

### **Methodological Approach**

The development of this paper was directly tied to my ongoing practice-based artistic research. This paper was created as part of the overarching investigation into the ways in which the term 'altermodern' could be articulated in an enhanced manner through the use of representational visual practices.

My doctoral study, *Altermodern Painting: Toward a new Method of Representational Painting in the Space of Flows* was completed in 2015/16 and addressed a gap in knowledge related to the ways in which painting practices could further understanding of discourses associated with the altermodern. Specifically, this body of research focused on the ways in which the network can be examined in terms of its position as part of the contemporary everyday and as a virtual space which can be directly used by individuals. This paper was considered as a testing ground for certain ideas related to the thesis.

This paper was developed through sustained academic research reflecting the international importance of the event at which it was delivered. It combined understanding of the networked society, with spatialisation activities in a physical space. It featured philosophical engagement with the existing works of theorists and writers such as Michel de Certeau, Nicolas Bourriaud and Simon Critchley. Of particular importance in this paper was articulation of the ways in which practice-based research could be positioned in such a way as to offer new ways of considering established academic materials. Practice was foregrounded as a key part of the methodological approach for this work.

### **Originality**

*The Art of Being There* focused on the use of representational painting practice as a methodological tool through which to actively interrogate visual apprehension of contemporary networked information.

The paper included examples of original visual works. These were described and analysed within the paper, to foreground how specifically designed painting processes could potentially constitute 'machines for thinking'.

### **Academic / Intellectual Rigor**

The conference in Athens was an event which was of significant academic importance, and it featured writers, leaders in various fields, theorists and practitioners from across the world. It was the case that academic level at which the majority of papers at the event were positioned was such that the materials delivered by speakers were subject to a sustained, reasoned and professional critique.

In order to have the paper accepted at the event a proposal was first required and following this, applicants were selected on the basis of a proposed abstract and were invited to provide some visual examples (where appropriate). Inclusion in the conference was based upon this.

This paper was developed under the PhD Supervision of Dr Ross Birrell, Reader in the Forum for Critical Inquiry, The Glasgow School of Art.

<http://www.gsa.ac.uk/research/foci-profiles/b/birrell-ross/>

### **Significance**

*The Art of Being There* was extremely well received with particular emphasis being placed on the intellectual rigor with which surface engagement within the activity of painting was articulated.

This paper was of significance to my overall doctoral research (January 2013 –January 2016). Ideas which were tested out at this international conference were refined and formed the backbone for my PhD. In particular, the ways in which traditional oil painting techniques can be utilised to highlight trends related to the fleetingness of contemporary networked engagement were developed. This was in part due to the overall success of this conference paper.

Parts of the paper were directly featured within the finalised PhD thesis and this too represents a successful aspect of this 2014 piece of work.

### **Documentation**

The abstract for the conference paper was published as part of an edited volume reflecting the event.

Papanikos, G.T., (2014) *Visual and Performing Arts Abstracts: 5<sup>th</sup> Annual International Conference on Visual and Performing Arts*, Athens.

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