

ANDRÉ STITT

EVERYBODY KNOWS
THIS IS NOWHERE





Hermetic Traces of Place: An Introduction to André Stitt’s new work in Craigavon

[The hermetic] aspect of the work reminds me of the psychological conditions prevalent in the Northern Irish political landscape, where things are often not what they appear to be and where the actual conditions giving rise to social situations are often too obscure to grasp. In this way the work engenders curiosity in the viewer as to what is hidden and so is evocative of some of the darker and dysfunctional characteristics of the psychological life of Craigavon, which in itself is a microcosm of the wider Northern Irish political macrocosm”.
– Justin McKeown

There are unique hermetic traces in the place called Craigavon. There is not a single town centre—there are three. The three towns—Lurgan, Brownlow and Portadown—are all connected by a countless number of roundabouts and motorways. Some of the off-slips of those roundabouts and roads go nowhere; they just end. There are parts of the Borough that are very rural townlands, which are aligned to small, historic market towns. There are pockets of political activism from both sides of the North’s political scenario, often sitting not-always-so-comfortably next to regenerated housing estates. There is a man-made lake and a synthetic Ski Slope combined with hidden farms and a Castle. Some things are not what they appear and some are too obscure to grasp.

At the centre of the Borough lies the area known to some as Brownlow and others as Craigavon. Though the area is made up of several large estates (separated by political/religious lines) and a large shopping centre, this area has now rebranded as Craigavon Central and has been demarcated as a ‘town centre’. A strange occurrence indeed.

Yet, though unique in many ways, the Borough of Craigavon is also like many other areas of the North—one which still lives in the past, engages with the present and hopes for a better future. I have had been honoured to be a part of this community for the past seven years. As an Irish American I admit that when I first moved to the North of Ireland I thought everything was understood clearly—in black and white. From the outside everything seemed very clear, one side was right and one side was wrong. But I was wrong. There are shades of grey everywhere in Northern Ireland; there are sites where time stands still and places where it is fast-tracked; and there is a desire and resistance to investigating the contemporary issues surrounding all of us.

Some things are not what they appear and some are too obscure to grasp.

This show, 20 new paintings by noted Belfast-born artist André Stitt, is for me the most poignant and investigative body of creative work that MCAC has commissioned to date. It connects so clearly with the notion of place, yet challenges our own ideas of what we think Craigavon is or might be.

So why new work? The Centre focuses on the commissioning, facilitation and presentation of new work by artists, showcasing them in a nationally and international context, and often touring the work. We encourage all of the artists we work with—local, national and international creators—to engage specifically with notions of place (Craigavon). We do this to generate discussion and debate about the world in which we live, work and create; we do this to push ourselves and others to digest what is around us and to engage with ideas, philosophies and the physical act of seeing differently and thinking differently. At MCAC, we believe this is what art should do. In response, artists who are interested in continually redefining traditional identities, raising questions about social relationships and initiating dialogues about contemporary issues are drawn to us—and us to them.

So why André Stitt? Stitt needs no real introduction to his near 30-year career. A world-renowned performance artist, he is originally from Belfast and now lives in Wales. His socially engaged artistic practice has been a source of inspiration for many artists, curators and academics not only in Ireland but throughout the UK and internationally.

When you first meet Stitt, his intensity is palpable. He has an engaging and mesmeric personality. His capacity for intellectual vigour on a plethora of subjects—from contemporary art, creativity and academic theory to the creation of Craigavon—is astonishing. And Stitt is enticing; his work is captivating; and I wanted him to come to Craigavon to make that kind of work. For two years the entire staff at MCAC has been privileged to facilitate the creation of a new body of work by an artist who actively engages with us to connect with his ideas and creative process.

So why Craigavon? When I first met Stitt, we drove through Craigavon—from Lurgan to Brownlow to Portadown—through 8 roundabouts in total. I showed him the divided estates, the roundabouts that go nowhere, the closed shops and boarded up houses. And we talked. Stitt about his memories, like recalling dreams; me as a newly informed propagandist of post-conflict economic reconciliation. And we talked about the how some things are not what they appear and some are too obscure to grasp.

At MCAC, Stitt spoke at length with Gallery Technician Dermot Burns, who recalled stories of his youth growing up in Lurgan and then Brownlow. Burns told us about a forgotten place—an estate on a hill that had all but disappeared called Rathmore. We also discussed Newton Emerson’s documentary on Craigavon’s ‘New City’ and the utopia the place engendered initially and how it is more like a distopia now – with new signs of yuppification and regeneration.

After the discussion we went back to the estates, armed with maps, and while walking on the Rathmore estate remains Stitt recalled excitedly about his memories; his experiences; his interfacing with the place.

We see this in the work—his connectedness to the place; and others will see it too—both his links and their own. And while the process of the artist’s making the work was a very personal process, meandering between real and imagined memories, I believe there will be a strong bond, with overwhelming relevance, for the audiences. I see the works as a type performance—an extension of Stitt’s practice—and as unique hermetic traces of Craigavon that are represented visually for us to respond to. There is an immediacy in the experience in looking at these paintings for the viewer—as they would experience while watching performance art—as Stitt has captured this energy and extends it out of the painting towards the viewer to grasp.

As part of that connectivity MCAC has commissioned an artist/writer/critic Justin McKeown to discuss the many evocative elements in this body of work. McKeown has eloquently and intelligently written about them in his insightful essay. Recently MCAC has been interested in unpacking and revealing more about the exhibiting artist’s process and approach to their contemporary art practice. In response, Stitt has added a revealing essay on his approach to the project, his conceptual process, the socio-political and economic context, his return to painting and the investigation of the medium. This text also includes his poignant observations about urban planning, social aspirations, and the ‘place’ of Craigavon/Brownlow.

So much of this kind of work cannot be accomplished without collaborators, partners and supporters. A great thanks goes to Justin McKeown for his essay for this exhibition catalogue, which accompanies the stunning photography by Tim Freeman and Dermot Burns. We are pleased that this exhibition will tour to Cardiff School of Art & Design, in Wales in 2010, as well as other venues. The exhibition and catalogue are supported with principle funding by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland with Lottery monies for Project Funding with partnership funding by the Craigavon Borough Council. MCAC and the artist are indebted to the ACNI and CBC support, both of whom continue to support the commissioning of new work and supporting high-quality art by Northern artists. The project was also supported by the Arts Council of Wales Creative Wales Award. Research for the project has been supported by the Centre for Fine Art Research [CFAR] at Cardiff School of Art & Design, UWIC.

Most importantly we thank the artist. These are poignant and stunning paintings. For me, they combine what I love most about contemporary art—the visual interrogation of place and time and the creative energy artists possess and present for us to engage with. We feel, therefore, the work and Stitt individually, connect perfectly with MCAC’s artistic vision.

Megan Johnston, MCAC Arts Director





JUSTIN McKEOWN NOWHERE BETWEEN THEN AND NOW

André Stitt is best known for his work in the medium of Performance art. His prolific output over thirty years of activity with countless international performance exhibitions earmarks him as the most successful native Northern Irish artist of his generation working in this medium. Though Stitt left Northern Ireland in 1980 his work has never lost the marks of his formative experiences growing up in the province. His performance works are characterised by their biographical nature and albeit coded references to his formative experiences growing up in Belfast during the modern Troubles. His performance works have frequently been described as intense, aggressive, traumatic, shamanic and transcendent. The question is why, when faced with the opportunity to present his first major solo exhibition in Northern Ireland for the first time since 1993, does he choose to work in the medium of painting and not performance? Further, why choose the 'lost city' of Craigavon as the subject matter for the work instead of his native Belfast?

In looking to the exhibited artworks for some clues that might aid one in answering these questions, one is met with an eclectic mix of abstract forms. Some are pleasant, optimistic, abstract landscapes such as *The Road In*. This canvas is reminiscent of the view one might encounter from a spacecraft entering the earth's atmosphere. One can make out vague grey lines suggesting roads or pathways. One is not sure whether they are simply disappearing off into the distance or stopping dead in the middle of nowhere. This calls to mind some of the half finished roads that exist in Craigavon, though frames such a comparison within a hopeful green Irish landscape. One cannot help but wonder if there is not a very subtle element of humour at play in this work. In contrast to such lightness, other canvases are dark and disconcerting like *Underpass* [Pinebank], which resembles a close up of the wall of a subway underpass. In looking at it one senses the tensions that are commonly associated with passing through such portals and the gangs of bored teenagers that often assemble at these junctures.

In contrast again to these unified surfaces are several works in which objects have been treated in isolation, creating sensations of absence and disjuncture. For example the works *PSNI* and *Drumgor Heights* seem based on police and/or military installations. Yet the flattening of these objects formed into two-dimensional abstract shapes creates the feeling of an absence or hole in the painting. Similarly, *Vigilante* seems somehow foreboding; as the disembodied form of a garden shed hangs ominously in the air surrounded by cryptic text and amorphous dark green globules.

In considering the great variance in the work, one could speculate that the exhibition does not so much resemble a single body of work but rather a collection of specifically chosen pieces taken from several bodies of work. There is some aspect of truth to this, as the works on display have been selected from a prolific body of work that Stitt has generated in response to five different visits to Craigavon over a period of several months. In considering this one may also conclude that the works constituting *Everybody Knows* this is *Nowhere* chronicles the artists formal engagement with the medium of painting as much as they chronicle the artists engagement with Craigavon. However, such observations do not detract from the lines of continuity that unite this collection of paintings. Indeed, it is the issue of continuity that we must focus on if we are to find some answers to the previously raised questions. Some may look to the repeated use of colours such as green, grey, and the dark staining of bitumen as an aesthetic thread through which to find unity among these works. However, what is perhaps much more significant and indeed helpful in grasping the artists motivations is the line of continuity supplied to us through the subtitles of these works. These are frequently poetic drawing on a wide range of sources, from the work of musicians like David Bowie to graffiti Stitt encountered etched on the walls of Craigavon housing estates. The mixture of these things has a strange affect. It summons a sensation of white working class life. One senses naivety and yet a great spirit of optimism.

Also the period the musical references are taken from transports one back to the late 1960's and early 1970's, a time when there was a utopian current in the air and Craigavon was a city of the future still under construction.

In discussing this matter with André Stitt on a journey around Craigavon he told me stories of his many frequent visits to Craigavon to see to a girlfriend in the early 1970's. He mentioned his love of bands like T-Rex and the 13th Floor Elevators, and the sounds of music by Mott The Hoople, Slade and Bowie blasting from newly built council houses; he talked of how bright and optimistic the whole place had felt; he took me to look at things that were no longer there or have changed so much that they are no longer recognisable. We visited old signposts, long-since overgrown tennis courts, the site of the old Goodyear factory, roads that go nowhere, car parks in the middle of wasteland with no conceivable way of entering by vehicle; and all around us as we journeyed and talked the lines of the cycle paths weaved here and there, tying the otherwise disjointed landscape together.

This experience provides some insight into why Stitt chose Craigavon as the focus for this work, as opposed to his native Belfast. It is evident that Stitt has a very personal relationship with Craigavon, one that is in some sense unresolved. Prior to the commissioning of *Everybody Knows this is Nowhere*, Stitt made a private visit to Craigavon in 2006 to revisit some of the places he frequented during his teenage years and to document them through photography. Following the logic that any exercise in history is also an exercise in self-identity, one may speculate that for Stitt the history of Craigavon is somehow allegorical. It is as if the utopian beginnings of Craigavon and its conflicted and still unresolved form is somehow analogous with Stitt's personal experience of himself. In weighing this up, it is worth remembering that just as Craigavon is both a product and embodiment of Northern Irish culture, so too is André Stitt.

It is therefore not surprising that when in 2008 MCAC Arts Director Megan Johnston began talks with André Stitt regarding the possibility of commissioning a new body of work, Stitt showed an interest in Craigavon. On a site visit in July 2008 to what remains of Rathmore housing estate, the proverbial penny dropped. It is very interesting to consider that Craigavon is an embodiment of many of the positive and negative aspects of Northern Irish society. As such, it serves as a microcosm through which one may consider the wider social macrocosm. On a personal level, one may speculate that this is exactly what Stitt required to facilitate his on going analysis of the relationship between himself and Northern Ireland. It would have been impossible for him to attempt to

encapsulate the whole of his biographical relationship with Northern Ireland, in particular his native Belfast, within one body of work; but to take Craigavon as a biographical back story has enabled a filtered and succinct examination of one thread of this narrative.

In thinking about all of this, I am struck by the fact that the artist is caught somewhere between his embodied memories of the past and his sensation of occupying these places in the present. In looking again at the paintings one can see that while on the surface they may seem quite aesthetically different, they actually chart the space between Stitt's memories of Craigavon in the early 1970's and his experience of the place in the present. As such, the contrasting nature evident in the aesthetic of the work - far from being disjointed - is actually very coherent. Yet the nature of this coherency is deeply personal and, like much of Stitt's performance work, anchored in his biography.

The layering of memories of the past and sensations of the present is not simply psychological on Stitt's part; if one looks at Craigavon this layering is echoed in its landscape. Similarly, the paintings produced by Stitt embody this condition of both psychological and physical layering in their construction. In making many of the works Stitt has begun by painting the canvas a utilitarian grey. The choice of colour is interesting. It is the colour of industrial floor paint and also the colour used to cover graffiti in council estates. It is reminiscent of working class areas and working class culture. On top of this Stitt would then carry out a mapping process, usually in black felt tip pen and/or red paint markers. This mapping process would involve drawings, phrases encountered while walking round Craigavon's housing estates and notes from personal memories anchored in specific locations. In looking at images of these maps there is some similarity between them and the drawing and mapping processes Stitt uses to compose scores for his performance works. The next stage of the processes seems to vary depending on whether the works were made early or later in Stitt's process of navigating the psychological and physical terrain of Craigavon.

In earlier works Stitt has opted to cover over the mapping processes with oil paint and in many cases bitumen, using these materials to create the surface of what the viewer encounters here as the finished painting. In some cases slight traces of these underlying maps are visible.





Such is the case with the work *Underpass* [Drumgor West], where streaks of orange can be seen through the paintings bitumen surface, giving hint that perhaps there is something lurking underneath. Yet any guess at what actually lies beneath would be based on pure conjecture, as its form is lost beneath the dynamics of the surface work. There is something deeply hermetic – in both senses of the word – about this tendency in these works. In one sense Stitt is creating a canvas that contains a sealed world. The traditional compositional dynamics of the painterly landscape are inverted; the horizon occupies the foreground and the foreground is obscured behind the horizon. This condition gives rise to the second sense of the word hermetic, as the painting acts as a vessel for hidden, biographically obscure, and therefore esoteric information.

This aspect of the work reminds me of the psychological conditions prevalent in the Northern Irish political landscape, where things are often not what they appear to be and where the actual conditions giving rise to social situations are often too obscure to grasp. In this way the work engenders curiosity in the viewer as to what is hidden and so is evocative of some of the darker and dysfunctional characteristics of the psychological life of Craigavon, which in itself is a microcosm of the wider Northern Irish political macrocosm. It is therefore interesting that in the later works such as *Haunted* and *The Knowhere Guide* these mapping processes are refined and left visible. Yet there is still a tension in these works, where the objects of their composition occupy an uneasy proximity; they are together but lack unity.

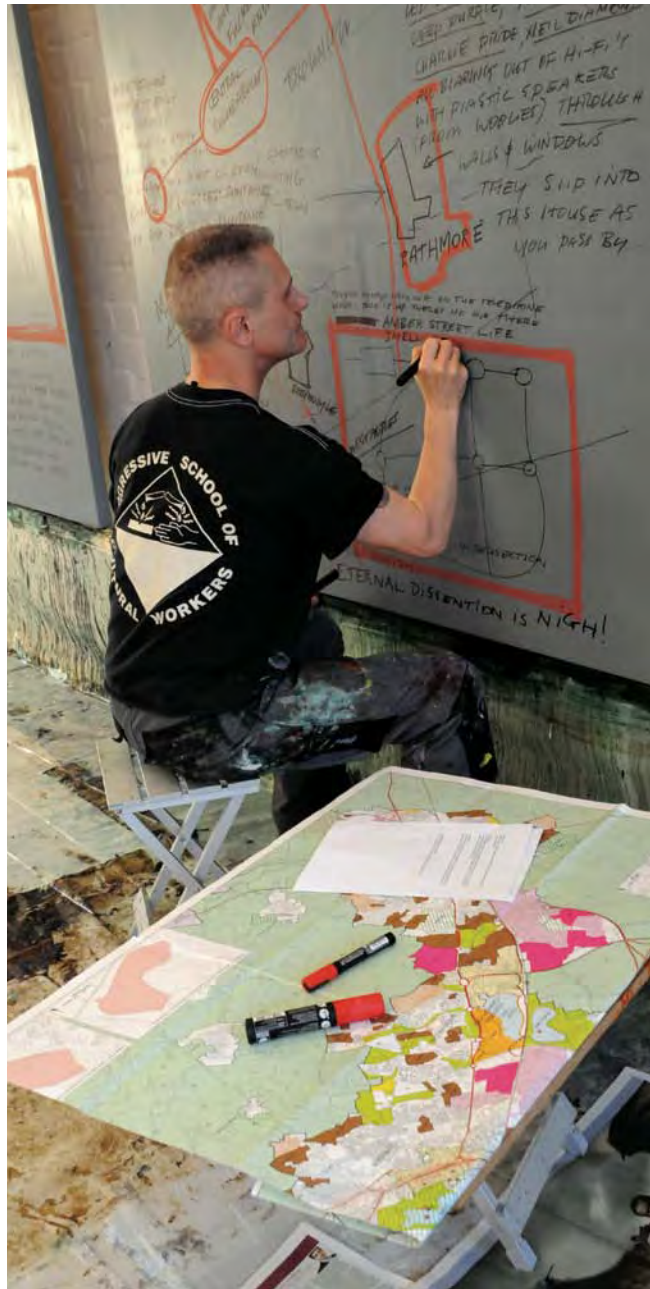
In one sense what is most interesting about all these paintings is the way the process of making them has allowed the artist a means of thinking about his relationship with Craigavon in all its layers of past, present, personal and public. Through the process of their creation these paintings have come to embody the dynamics of this relationship and are therefore not so much representations of Craigavon but rather crystallised moments of the artists thought processes as he seeks to situate himself in relation to his past memories and present experiences of the place.

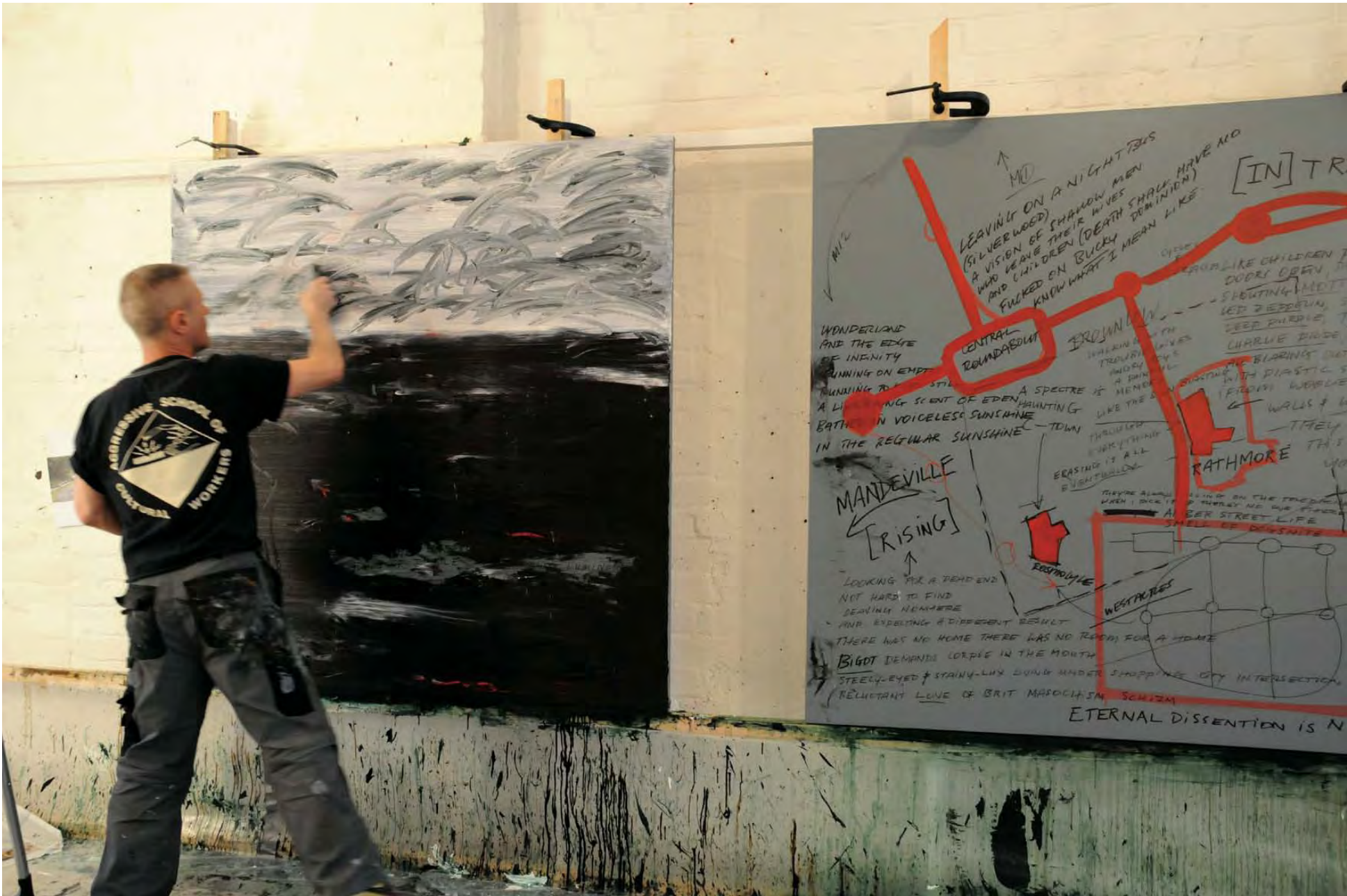
What is equally remarkable is how the processes of thinking through painting has allowed the artist some distance between himself, his biography and his memories. Through encapsulating this distance in the form of painting he has created a space that can be occupied by the viewer

on their own terms for however long or short they wish. Similarly the artist may also occupy this space himself, creating room for his own contemplation of these matters. In considering this one wonders if such an opportunity could have been afforded to both artist and viewer had Stitt approached Craigavon and this subject matter through the medium of performance?

Within the larger framework of theoretical and art historical discourses, what is most interesting about these works is not the artist's negotiation of the problems of the medium of painting but rather the ingenuity with which he has navigated the problems of the discipline of art, and through this used art to mediate his experience of life. Contemplating this further, it is evident that these works are indexical of a very particular way of thinking about art that is essentially European in origin. If one considers the first European pioneers of performance art as a fine art medium, it is interesting to note that many of these artists were painters. For example, one of the earliest recorded performance works was made by French artist Yves Klien, who made his first foray into performance in 1957 in an attempt to overcome the problems of the confines of the canvas, which he likened to 'the window of a prison'¹. In his work *The Anthropometries of the Blue Period* (1958) Klien, instead of painting models, used the bodies of models as brushes to paint a canvas. Through doing this he believed he was 'tearing down the veil of the studio so as to reveal the processes by which art was made'². Yet if we look at Klien's works, in particular his *Anthropometries*, it is evident that he never stopped painting. Rather, his understanding of painterly composition expanded to consider the aesthetic composition of actions and events in the real world within the mental pictorial frame.

If we look at the performance works of André Stitt, such as *the Drive By* (Paris, 1988), *Covert Activities* (USA, 1989) *State Of The Nation* (Rotterdam, 1986) and others, we see the use of paintings as horizons framing his performance actions in the foreground. Remarking on the nature of Stitt's treatment of materials in his performance work Dr. Heike Roms remarks 'The manner in which Stitt treats the many substances he uses in his akshuns indeed betrays a deeply painterly approach'³.





Thus, just as one can say that Klien never stopped being a painter, might the same also be said of André Stitt? Further, if this is the case then Everybody Knows this is Nowhere, far from marking a departure from a particular way of working, actually marks a return to its essence.

¹ Yves Klein cited by RoseLee Goldberg in Performance Art, from Futurism to the Present, Thames and Hudson, 1999, p144

² Yves Klein cited by RoseLee Goldberg in Performance Art, from Futurism to the Present, Thames and Hudson, 1999, p147

³ Heike Roms, 'What Substance is Substance', published in Substance, Spacex Gallery, Exeter, England, 2008, p16



No matter how incompetent, irresponsible, and politically expedient the outcome, I still feel a real thrill when I cycle or walk around those sixty miles of secret pathways that interconnect Craigavon's hub and its satellites.

However, that optimism is tempered with the knowledge that in Craigavon and in contested places throughout Northern Ireland there are shadows and spectres inhabiting Emerson's 'holes in our knowledge' or perhaps more accurately, our memory.

One is never really getting the full picture in Northern Ireland. Indeed Craigavon is like that for me; a place of partial views and, like Northern Ireland, totally embedded in my psyche as a place that requires hyper-awareness and watchfulness. A place of almost revealing and simultaneously almost vanishing.

It's here that my own experience of Craigavon has taken me. Here where the autumn sunshine comes steaming through the underpasses like portals into another world. Here, and in all the spaces between. All those strangely intimate spaces of woods and lakelands, of debris and residues, of demolished housing estates; vacant community centres and shopping precincts, burnt and charred earth, overgrown and partially revealed former streets and carports, roundabouts with dead end slip roads, the outlines of foundations and knee high brick walls, concrete steps enveloped by gorse and brambles, shorn and rusted lampposts in the middle of dense and lumpy fields, where people once lived and children once played; and finally, those accidental spaces, those dead spaces, those being in the wrong place at the wrong time spaces; at mobile shops, at corners, on footpaths, and in the middle of roads where people have laid down dead and dying.

It is in these spaces that I have most assiduously felt the spectres that haunt Craigavon and now, in some small way, sincerely attempt to almost reveal before they almost vanish.

ALMOST ART

A site-specific exploration of the 'new city' of Craigavon in Northern Ireland Investigating memory through the interrogation of space as a primary vehicle for tracing it's repression and recovery and how through memory and recall this may be translated or mediated through painting.

Through painting recalled formative experiences are evoked and applied to Craigavon. The artists psychogeographic experience of Craigavon through a series of site visits and explorations via the new city's cycle and pedestrian network is extended to the wider context of trauma, and conflict transformation in Northern Ireland.

The project is both an investigation of the failure of institutional planning; exemplified by dead-ends, planned but uncompleted city sectors and vacant land, and a celebration of utopian aspirations through the integration of housing, civic amenities, dedicated paths, the separation of traffic and green space.

ALMOST PAINTING

The most predominate theme in my artistic output is that of communities and their dissolution. This often relates back to the city of Belfast and the 'Troubles' it was going through during my upbringing. Through my recent painting, memory and recall concerning contemporary experiences of civil conflict are evoked and applied to the wider contexts and interpretations of trauma, and conflict transformation.

In this recent painting I consider myself in the role of unofficial 'conflict-zone artist' and extend this to that of a responder to, and documenter of civil conflict.

I have previously explored my own experiences of growing up in Northern Ireland in the 1970's through the medium of performance art. In this live work my presence imbued otherwise codified symbols and significances with an autobiographical anchor, and my use of language – whether spoken or text – was pivotal in making clear the issues the work was dealing with.

In recent years I have been exploring ways in which painting might be used as a means towards contemplating conflict without reverting to the didactic. However this in itself has lead to questions concerning painting as representational and the position of the painter as commentator.

Central to this is the question: if I want to communicate political/ social ideas why choose the most lyrical and obscure method going? (i.e. abstract painting); and if the artistic dissemination of conflict iconography and imagery is officially sanctioned what might this also meanrelative to artistic autonomy and ideological expedience.

It is through engagement with specific sites such as Craigavon that I have considered painting as a documentation and an interpretative experience. For me this work aspires to a condition of association and evocation rather than direct representattion. I also consider how we experience an engagement with specific conflict environments and how through memory and recall this may be translated and/or mediated through painting.

In exploring the means by which painting is executed (style, application, material, gesture, abstraction, textual signifiers etc.) my work has as much to do with what painting achieves, as it has to do with what it does not achieve. For me this has as much to do with the possibilities of conflict transformation as it does with the nature of the conflict itself.

ALMOST HISTORY

In his 'Belfast Regional and Survey Plan', which was published in February 1963, Professor Sir Robert Matthew identified the three principal functions of the 'New City' as the creation of a new base for industry which would increase the attractiveness of the area to foreign investors; the creation of a new residential area which would to relieve housing and traffic pressures on the Belfast Urban area; and the creation of a new service area which would contribute to the regeneration of the south and west of N Ireland. Craigavon was designated in 1965 when the Craigavon Development Commission was created to develop the 'New City' of Craigavon. Craigavon District Council came into being in June 1973 following the reorganisation of local government and achieved Borough status with effect from 1st October 1973 under the Charter of the former Borough of Lurgan.

Originally, Craigavon was planned as a 'new city' along the lines of new towns that were being built in England in the 1960s such as Milton Keynes, Telford, and Cumbernauld in Scotland. The plan was to build a large city between neighbouring towns of Lurgan and Portadown and thus create a large urban/suburban conurbation. It was hoped that this would encourage people to move out of the crowded streets of Belfast. Craigavon was intended to ensure a more even distribution of development across Northern Ireland. Residents in Belfast were offered cash incentives to move to Craigavon. Critics argue that Derry in the northwest would have been a more appropriate choice, but was excluded by the Stormont-based government. Some believe this was to ensure that the new town was predominantly Protestant. For example, the terms of reference given to the author of the Matthews Report in 1963 stated that any development plan for Northern Ireland must concentrate development east of the River Bann (where there was a Protestant majority) so as "not to upset denominational ratios."

Some of the most striking features of the development include the separation of motor vehicles from pedestrians and cyclists who have their own dedicated path network, use of roundabouts instead of traffic lights at junctions, situation of self-contained shopping centres in each housing area on an evenly-distributed and planned basis, and the total separation of industrial land-use from all other uses. All estates were built with security concerns in mind, with one entry/exit point.

Craigavon was designed as a very child-friendly environment, with numerous children's parks dotted throughout, a lot of green space in the housing estates, and safe paths to cycle on. The new town was also provided with many local amenities, with a leisure centre, shopping centre, civic centre, artificial lakes, playing fields, and even a petting zoo and gardens at Tannaghmore.



Problems began to come to light when it emerged that some large-scale housing areas had been built with materials and techniques that had not been fully tested, with the result that insulation, sound-proofing and durability were not adequate. The area's main employer, Goodyear, had a large fan-belt factory in the Silverwood industrial estate, and at the time it was Europe's largest factory. The plant failed to make money on a consistent basis, and had to close. It also emerged that the population projections for Northern Ireland upon which the project was based were wildly inaccurate, with the result that the planned development was redundant. This was compounded by the outbreak of the 'Troubles' in the late 1960s, with the result that investment into Northern Ireland dried up and emigration increased.

Consequently around 50% of what was planned was never built, and of what was built, nearly half of that had to be demolished after years of lying empty and derelict. It was not uncommon to drive through Craigavon in the early 1980s and see entire housing estates and acres of housing abandoned. The area designated as Craigavon 'city centre', roughly mid-point between Lurgan and Portadown, for much of this time contained the municipal authority, the court buildings, a shopping mall, and little else. Sectarian tension during this time also resulted in many estates becoming almost wholly Catholic or wholly Protestant.

Today with the development of the peace process and a time of conflict transformation many of the estates in Craigavon are religiously mixed with Catholics and Protestants comfortably living side by side without fear. Yet the Craigavon urban area was also one of the most violent places in The Troubles. Civil conflict resulting in public disorder, riots, violence and murder has also contributed to a perception of the area as a dangerous and problematic place. With the recent killing in March 2009 of Constable Stephen Carroll, 48, [the first murder of a police officer in NI since 1998] who was shot dead by the Continuity IRA, this perception was re-enforced. However in the present climate of conflict transformation public condemnation was immediate resulting in peace vigils in Craigavon and throughout Northern Ireland coming from all sides of the political divide. This in itself was a major change in public recognition that the process of transformation could not be revoked.

Sources:
Self, Peter, New Towns, The British Experience, Charles Knight/Town & Country Planning Association, UK 1972
Downie, Jr., Leonard, The Disappointing New Towns of Great Britain, Alicia Patterson Foundation & The Washington Post, USA 1972
Matthew, Prof. Sir Robert, Belfast Regional and Survey Plan, 1960, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
New City, Northern Ireland, First Report, Oct. 1964, Public Record Office of Northern Ireland
Emerson, Newton, The Lost City of Craigavon, BBC, Northern Ireland 2007
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)
Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS)
CAIN: (Conflict Archive on the Internet) Sutton Index of Deaths. Cain.ulst.ac.uk
CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet) Chronology of the Conflict www.craigavon.gov.uk
McKittrick David, Kelters Seamus, Feeney Brian and Thornton Chris (1999). Lost Lives: The stories of the men, women and children who died as a result of the Northern Ireland troubles, Mainstream Publishing Company, UK 1999 (2001 edition)







The Road in [Ghost Junction M12]:

it is not known where they lived, but the old ones say they never met again.
2009 / oil, marker, and enamel on canvas / 150 x150cm





Brownlow [Passing]:

like children playing, doors open, Dads in chairs shouting; Mott, Bowie, Led Zeppelin, Charlie Pride, Neil Diamond all blaring out of Hi-Fi's with plastic speakers through walls and windows they slip outside this house as you pass by.

2008 / oil, marker, and enamel on canvas / 150 x150cm

Mandeville [Rising]:

there's a Starman waiting in the skies, he'd like to come and meet us but he thinks
he'd blow our minds. Wonderland and the end of infinity, running to keep still,
a lingering scent of Eden bathed in voiceless sunlight in the regular shape of forever.

2008 / oil, marker, and enamel on canvas / 150 x150cm





I'm A Drug Dealing Scumbag
2008 / oil and bitumin on canvas / 50x40cm



Vigilante [Shed Envy]
2008 / acrylic and bitumin on canvas / 50x40cm

Vigilante: lay down before your mind like rocks placed solid by hands.

2008 / oil, pencil, and bitumin on linen / 50 x150cm





Westacres:

in deserted bus shelters, in wooded drizzles,
in rookied front rooms, wee dolls and fegs dancing to Slade;
the dense Loyalist Ideological prop, hell bent in Mundies mystic
fury Its true hardmen don't have much up top: this is my country,
these are my people, this is my story, and these are the things
I understand.

2008 / oil, marker, and enamel on canvas / 150 x150cm

Leaving On a Night Bus [Rosmoyle]:

waking half-drunk on a sofa in a strange room; a housing estate
in Brownlow, Craigavon; nineteen seventy six

Mundies wine cold water sharp sleet winter light.

Standing at a deserted bus stop. Desolate open land, half tilled, dug over,
and pock-marked. New dead-end cycle paths and walkways.
Feeling spooked, cold, hungover, unbearably alone.
Seeing my girlfriend with her family passing by in a car.
Seeing them look away.

Getting on an Ulsterbus to Belfast, to 101a Fitzroy Avenue, to another strange room.
Stranger still, strange land, painting strange paintings, making strange art.

And down thru all these years and their moments, the resilience of recall echoes thru the dust in your hair;
banging bricks, breaking backs, and the smell of her skin.

A time when I knew where I was going.

2008 / oil, marker, and enamel on canvas / 150 x150cm





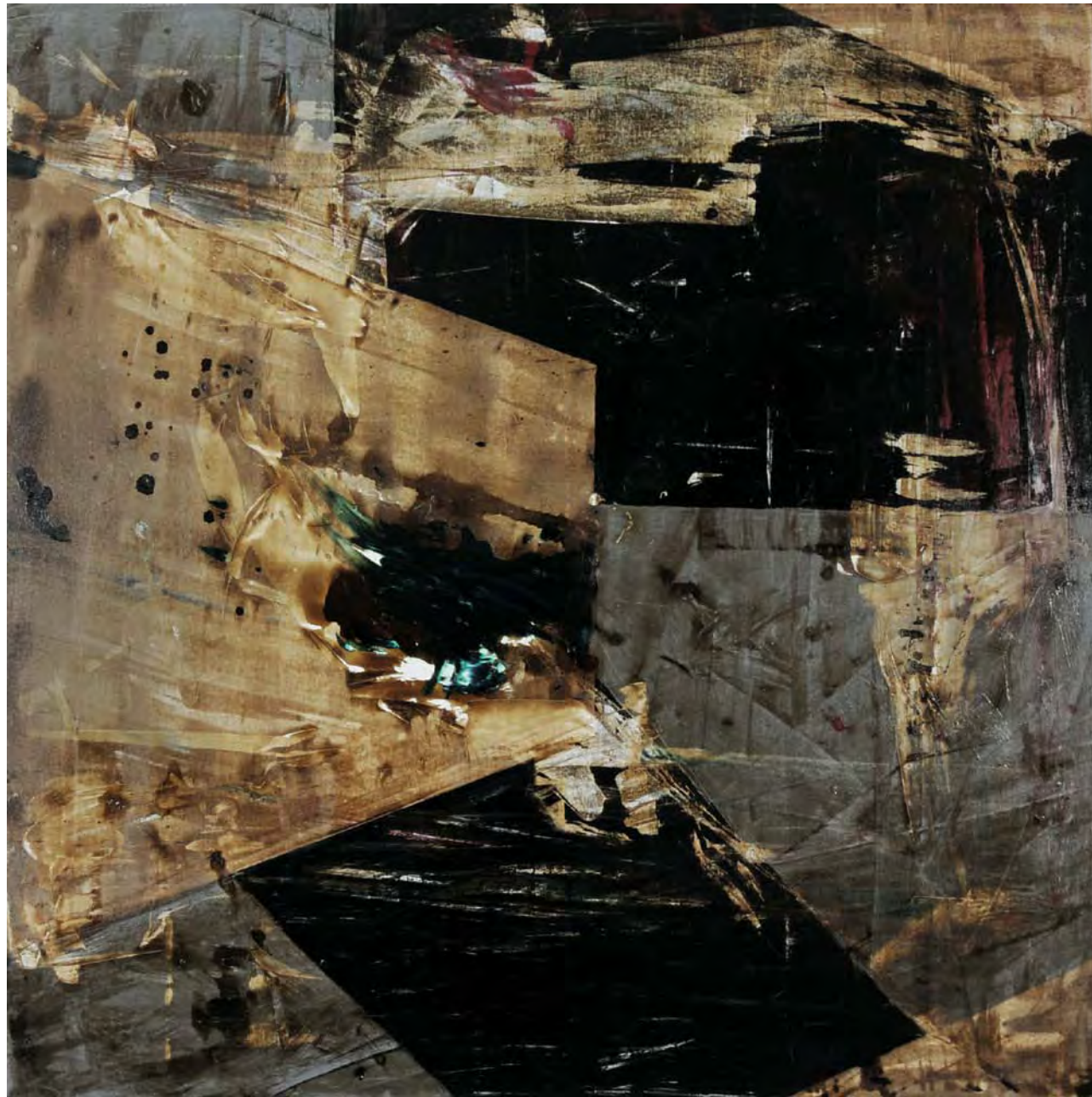
Shadowlands: tortured by demons and filth hungry ghosts, earthbound in shadowlands; the bright lights in the eyes of the ones we love.

2008 / bitumin and acrylic on linen / 150 x150cm

Lakelands: winter brittle, watching luminous green moss creep along cycle paths and into your mouth.

2008 / bitumin and acrylic on linen / 50 x150cm





Underpass [Drumgor West] from the daytime [to the] centre of the city at night where are the young men with weights on their shoulders.

2008 / bitumin and acrylic on canvas / 150 x150cm

Underpass [Pinebank]:

hometime underpass, shadows of people rising up vaguely staring back at childhood and everything all together.

2008 / bitumin and acrylic on canvas / 150 x150cm





Underpass [Legahory]

they're always calling on my telephone, when I pick it up there's no one there; cars pass,
amber street light, smell of dogshite, reflect a star; there's a feeling I get when I look to the west.

2009 bitumin and acrylic on canvas 150 x150cm

Underpass [Drumbeg South]:

across the field people lay in bed listening to thousands of people listening

2009 / bitumin and acrylic on canvas / 150 x150cm





Rathmore:

don't believe your neighbours fiction; your Dad should make himself invisible or he will be made to vanish. Snipers and booby traps; a spectre is haunting C-town. Walking with trouble gives angry boys a painful memory; like the sun blasting thru us and the sun going out, erasing it all, eventually.

2009 / bitumin and acrylic on linen / 150 x150cm

Fucked on Bucky [Aldervale]:

a version of shallow men who leave their wives and children; [death shall have no dominion]
fucked on Bucky, know what I mean like.

2009 / bitumin and acrylic on linen / 150 x150cm







Haunted [Moyraverty Centre]:

there was no home, there was no room for a home, steely-eyed and stainylux living under shopping city intersection, reluctant love of Brit masochism schizm, bigot demands corpse in the mouth; butcher boy, eternal dissention is nigh.

2009 / acrylic, marker, pencil, and bitumin on canvas / Triptych 450 x150cm





The Knowhere Guide

The road in and havin ta go Eastside to get gear.
 The road in and the Lakes, dead dogs in there.
 The road in and not getting a BJ from a Meadowbank slapper.
 The road in and drugged up on E's as lost their virginity there
 before 10 by their Da.
 The road in and lying drunk beyond belief with some dirty Moe or Caveman poking
 at their arse with a stick
 The road in and Hoods and anyone who knows them
 The road in and greasy haired women [I think?] running around in baggy tracksuits,
 old trainers and pushing 2 prams with 3 kids behind them.
 The road in and all the Provy luvin scumbags.
 The road in and all da fuckin peelers especially Burger Boy and da old man who wears make-up.
 The road in and getting the shit kicked out of ye at Westacres dvd and just about everything and
 the name that sounds just the way it is, shit.

2009 acrylic, marker, pencil, bitumin, and enamel on canvas 120 x 180cm

Dead Taigs [Meadowbrook]:

shapin fer burgers, shapin fer burgers, empty tins of Tenants, empty tins of Tenants, hanging from a lampost,
hangin from a lampost, got his face kicked in, got his face kicked in, to the back of his head, to the back of his head.

2009 / oil and bitumin on canvas / 150 x150cm





Silverwood: the good years
2009 / acrylic on canvas / 150 x150cm



PSNI

2009 / acrylic and enamel on canvas / 50x40cm

Drumgor Heights

2009 / acrylic and enamel on canvas / 50x50cm

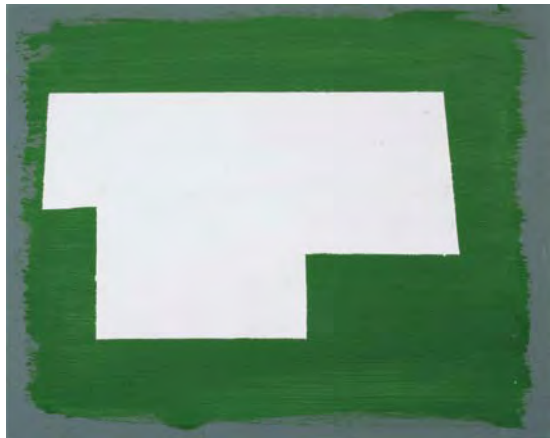
Tales From Topographic Pastures [Prod Remix]

2009 / acrylic and oil on canvas / 150x150cm

Tales From Topographic Pastures [Monbrief Road Original Underpainting]

2009 / acrylic on canvas / 150x150cm





Lismore Manor:
 bear in mind these dead,
 I can think of no plainer words.
 2009 / acrylic on canvas / 40x50cm & 120x180cm





Childer
 Do not look away, do not forget
 please remember us in the places
 we no longer frequent

André Stitt would especially like to thank Megan Johnston, Dermot Burns and all the staff at MCAC for their support in facilitating this artist-in-residence commission.

André Stitt is represented by curcioprojects, New York

This catalogue, ‘Everybody Knows This is Nowhere: New Work by Andre Stitt’, has been published as part of an exhibition of the same name. The exhibition and catalogue were commissioned by the Millennium Court Arts and presented in December 2009– January 2010.

The exhibition and book are supported with principle funding by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland with Lottery monies for Project Funding, and partnership funding by the Craigavon Borough Council. The project was also supported by the Arts Council of Wales Creative Wales Award. Research for the project has been supported by the Centre for Fine Art Research [CFAR] at Cardiff School of Art & Design, UWIC.

Millennium Court Arts Centre
William Street
Portadown
Northern Ireland
BT62 3NX
Telephone
0044-2838-39-4415
Facsimile
0044-2838-39-4483

The Millennium Court Arts Centre wishes to thank the Board of Directors of Portadown 2000 for their continued support.

Curated by Megan Johnston, MCAC Director

Designed by Seed

Photography
André Stitt & Tim Freeman
Craigavon 1970’s photos courtesy Dermot Burns
Studio Assistant: Tim Freeman

Printing by Nicholson & Bass

© 2009 Millennium Court Arts Centre
This book has been published by MCAC.
ISBN: 978-0-9558649-4-0



Cyngor Celfyddydau Cymru
Arts Council of Wales

