

on thinking that I am missing the point

A man and a dog in the countryside surrounded by trees, in the distance a horizon, a picture frame surrounds the scene. This photographic slice of a landscape painting is mounted across two walls placed in the corner of a gallery. As I move closer and look into the corner, I see that the left hand side of the photograph of the painting is distended, but the right side is not. I turn around and see that behind me is a monitor. Playing on that monitor is an image that moves slowly across the gallery wall and over the corner in front of me.

'I'm Wary' (2001) offers me four (maybe more) possible viewpoints. I can either stand still in a position where I can see the painting without any distortion and where its frame lines up with the edge of the photographic image of that painting. Or I can move to stand in another position where I can see the photographic image of the painting straight on the wall, its top edge in line with the gallery floor. Or I can move again and try to find that ideal location where the perfect view of both coincides. But does such a view exist? The roving eye of the camera, in search for that very point, offers a fourth resting place for my gaze. Each four viewpoint is partial and held in tension with the others, yet somehow the suggestion is that there exists within the space of the gallery a position where all these views coincide and the perfect viewpoint is to be found.

How frustrating it is to be refused this perfect, or at least perfectly expected viewpoint, but it is exactly this expectation that artists Mary Mclean and Sally Morfill are exploring. In their collaboration, 'I'm Wary', they have pursued an interest in the views of art we are so often presented with: constructed, yet apparently natural. In so doing, with absolute precision, they have produced a viewpoint that refuses to provide certain visual gratification. 'I'm Wary' questions the prioritisation of certain modes of spatial representation in visual culture and instead suggests alternative viewpoints.

This interest in exploring uncomfortable or unresolved viewing positions, has been an ongoing theme in Sally Morfill's art practice over the past few years, examining, for example, the specific techniques of drawing and perspective that produce illusions. 'The Illusionist' (2002) consists of two photographs. Both show a person erasing a pencil drawing of an illusionist. The balance varies between the photographs, in one the majority of the drawing remains visible, in the other the majority of the drawing has been erased. Both produce an unsettled viewpoint, in the first, the illusionist appears vertical, but the presence of the hand holding a rubber on a supposedly upright surface looks strange; in the second, it is clear that the rubbing out has taken place on a horizontal surface, making you realise that what you took for a vertical plane was in fact horizontal. Similar concerns inform 'False Memories' (1999), an installation for a group show, *Estate*, at Howden House in Livingston consisting of a pencil drawing and a projection of the making of this pencil drawing at either end placed of an expanse of wall. The projected image of the drawing of an intricate wallpaper pattern appears flat, until you look at the completed pencil drawing higher up on the wall to the far right. Then you see that the pattern has been drawn as a distortion in order to appear correct from a vertical viewing position. In both these works, we are shown both the illusion and the making of the illusion, pointing to our predilection for imagining views that are vertical at 90 degrees. Morfill's work de-stabilises our visual orientations, revealing them as normalised expectations, and goes further to suggest that to achieve this orthogonal viewpoint often involves an act of distortion.

An interest in the spatial and visual manipulation of surface, whether the texture of fabric or the material qualities of drawings or photographs, has been a feature of Morfill's work for over a decade. In 'Untitled' (1993), she shifted the warp threads of a fragment of woven material to leave only the weft, bleeding the colour out of the pattern as part of a site-specific installation in a disused school for the Greenwich festival; the dissolved and

faded condition of the material placed emphasis on the deteriorated fabric of the building itself. Initially using threads of copper wire found on the floor of the electrician's workshop in which her studio was located, Morfill adapted this process in 'A Room. Another Room. Anytime' (1994) for *Pitch* at the Trinity Buoy Wharf, London, where she wound lurex tightly around a series of cast iron columns to form an iridescent screen enclosing the space between them. For 'Travelogue' (1997), at the Winchester Gallery, she again used lurex, this time wrapping it around a smooth gallery plinth revealing the rough irregularities in its apparently surface.

'Wipe' (1999) is a 17.5-hour video projection onto a textile surface, appearing as a negative image, small white stitches are slowly sewn onto a square of black fabric. At the point of completion, when white stitches have completely covered the black fabric, the image is reversed, white becomes black, and the black stitched surface, is carefully unpicked to finally reveal a plane of white fabric, now marked with flecks of black fluff. Morfill's interest in the slow actions of both sewing and drawing, positions process as the final product, a concern also explored in 'Enough' (2000) where having filmed her hand stitching, she drew a number of frames in order to produce an animation, partnered with a piece of unpicked embroidery.

'Palindromes' (2005) is also a real-time animation of the stitching of embroidery, this time words, and from two viewpoints. Slowly on a dark screen stitches start to appear, moving outwards in two directions from a central axis. One image is taken from the top of the fabric, the other from the bottom, both are placed side by side, to form, over time, a word, a palindrome, which reads in bilateral symmetry. Samplers are usually viewed as single entities, not as pairs or multiples, and seen only from the front. Embroidered words on samplers are snap-shots of time, they demonstrate a young girl's sewing skills at a certain moment in her life; indeed the sewer often stitches her own age and date into the sampler. 'Palindromes', however, explores not single letters, but reflected duplicates; not time past

but the time of the sewing itself; and shows this process from two different viewpoints. As I watch the letters slowly form, seeing the back and front develop together at once, I imagine the sewer planning her stitches to produce this evolving and intricate image.

Morfill has an interest in particular actions that unfold over time and which demand patience and precision. In describing her work to me, she expressed fascination in the (almost) impossible task of achieving her objectives, of the final pieces not quite actualising her ambition accurately enough, and observed (with strange delight) that despite her careful planning the final effects never quite matched up to her intentions. Engaging with Morfill's work demands absorption and concentration. In focusing on the minutia of her manoeuvres, fretting over whether I understand the techniques of drawing illusions, worrying about whether the work does or does not 'fail', I get the feeling I am being led away from my visual senses, somehow led off the scent. And then it strikes me: her painstaking concern to get a visual **affect** 'right' is exactly what the work is about. This sense of holding pleasure in abeyance, of creating a visual frustration, plays a key role in her art practice, producing a counter-balance to the seductive power of her images and their ability to induce a mode of meditative contemplation. Morfill's work puts forward a diligent concern over technical exactitude precisely to frustrate my visual pleasure – she wants me to focus on thinking that I am missing the point.

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