

Babouinist Magazine – Article 1 – 1st January 2022

By the Babouinist founder – M. Harrison-Priestman

‘Poetry or Prose Painting? Anyone can get away with Mimicry !’

In today’s complicated art and exhibiting world, most exhibited Art has no definition or sense of history, self, articulation or place anymore. Whatever you place in a gallery and museum automatically is accepted as if it was placed there by the nine muses or Venus herself; and then branded with an enormous fiery hot iron with the word Art in capitals. The reality is quite the opposite, there is not one Greek or Roman God in sight; just curator’s, collector’s, art critics and dealer’s. In the age of digital immediacy, marketing and celebrity hubris, everyone is now an Artist. I would argue this is not only a falsehood, but creates a creative and spiritual vacuum in our world. Spiritual in a visionary sense and not a religious one. To explore this in more depth I would like to focus on three main areas of painting and I will divide these into three main categories; that of poetry, prose and mimicry. Using the English artist William Coldstream to represent prose painting, the Russian Expressionist artist Soutine to represent Poetry and lastly photorealism to illustrate the definition of mimicry. I will support my argument and hypothesis with my view that all art is part of a genetic heritage or family tree. And a language like any other that can either be articulate, intelligent and sincere or just plain visual gobbledegook supported by an array of hangers on that profit professionally and economically from such deceptions and illusions. There is also a tendency today to also view and value modern painting by the metre as if one is buying carpet. The bigger it is the more important and more relevant it becomes, it bludgeons you over the head with pomposity and inflated self-importance. Grand modern spaces belittle the viewer as if designed by Albert Speers, eradicating the intimate journey that needs to be embraced by that of viewer and vision. In the end just becoming just a sybaritic distraction full of emptiness and contrivance. It is by no accident that some of the biggest manipulators of the art market are part of a network of self-serving parasites that feed and survive off of each other. Whereas once upon a time the art historian or curator was a relatively unknown player, they are now at the very centre of things; they have become in a way more important than the artist and a celebrity to boot. If a curator or critic spends two hours discussing an exhibited piece or writes a 50,000 word verbose critical article, it immediately has the stamp of approval whether they be a charlatan or not. A Formica white box in an empty space suddenly becomes the meaning of life and no viewer would ever question their academic clout in fear of be labelled old fashioned or out of touch with the trendy crowd. Most of the work one comes across is in my view not part of the history of art but in fact part of the history of advertising or marketing. What does an Ad-Man do, take a product and sell it to the world whether it be good, needed or useful. Collecting is one thing, but to control the art market or definition of art is quite another. If anything and everything can be art, what’s the point in culturally valuing it or for an Artist spending time developing his unique voice and language? Can everything be science, music, literature etc and yet they are all languages. Great Art can take you on a never ending journey of self-discovery, developing your

visual awareness, creativity and imagination. But it is a language that still needs to be articulate and aesthetic for it to work and communicate its message successfully. It seems quite obvious to me that an artist's work is rarely understood or appreciated at the time of production. Inevitably the practitioner must be years ahead of the audiences understanding and appreciation of his daubs and visual endeavours. And yet the arrogance of the players in today's Art market constantly reveal that they are so certain in their opinions and definitions of what great art is. As if man has learnt from his history or mistakes of the past. I remember a barman telling me that if Van Gogh was to come into his cafe today and drew a pastel on the slate bar top, everyone would be clambering over and fighting each other in the pursuit of taking the drawing on slate away with them. I contradicted him and said no that would not be the case, he looked surprised and somewhat confused by my statement. I said if a contemporary Van Gogh came into your café today, you would think he was a maniac and throw him out of the place; you certainly would not understand or appreciate his art. I said you are thinking this with the hindsight of a hundred years of accepting and coming to terms with at the time of its inception, a revolutionary language. Another example of this although the history of art is littered with such examples is that of the great Canadian abstract expressionistic artist Philip Guston. When at the height of his fame he left his previous fascination with abstract expressionism and moved into a new direction of post-modern figurative expressionism in the form of large figurative paintings which were vilified at the time and now praised and valued. Giacometti also followed a similar course when he moved from surrealist art going back to life work using a model as his main subject and inspiration. What is the point of mentioning these two artists, well, to show that only time and the journey of visual observation can be the true judges of what art and great art is; it cannot be evaluated or redefined by curators, conceptual artists, critics, dealers or collectors. If literal definitions have no meaning, then all words have no meaning and there is no point in any sort or form of conversation or social interaction. If one inarticulate sound can be music, then anything can be music; or if one symbol can be a complete equation, then no mathematical theory or practice is important or relevant. Our words are part of the many languages we use to communicate with each other, we must use them literally and articulately otherwise we are lost and they are worthless. If a wooden chair is no longer a piece of design or carpentry because it is placed in a gallery space, but art, then all our varied languages and means of communicating with each other become superfluous. A lot to do with this re-branding is to with the ego and celebrity needs of today's society. Somehow everyone wants to be labelled an artist, using the definition to gain more self-esteem and importance in the world. As if being an artist makes you somehow more special or more valued in your community. Why is a photographer not contented with the term and wants to be re-branded as an artist? a photographer is a photographer, he is neither more or less important than the artist or painter. Or why does the stage set designer want to be re-branded as an artist because he exhibits his designs in a gallery; what's wrong with the term stage set designer? If a cobbler places his shoes in a museum space or art gallery, does that re-brand him as an artist just because he has the support of the curator, academic, critic or gallery director? What's wrong in being called or known as a craftsman? Of course, nothing. This global addiction to this type of personal re-branding in the hope of gaining more gravitas in the world is purely ego driven; the selfie rules. It is phenomenon that reveals a psychological insecurity with the sense of self and a creative vacuum in today's Homo sapiens. One would have hoped that access to an immediate information source like the internet would have improved and developed man's intelligence and

understanding, whether visual or literal; but looking at the world today it is hard to see the fruits of this expectation. On visiting a recent exhibition at the Courtauld Gallery in London it was impossible to view the paintings and drawings on show as I was constantly blocked on looking at the original works by tablets and mobiles. The audience were not interested in looking and absorbing the original works of art, not willing to let the work being viewed take them on a visual and imaginative journey. Instead they preferred to view the photograph they had just taken of the artwork, thus missing out on the subtleties, magic and presence of the piece in question. They could have quite easily had the same experience without paying the expensive entry fee to the gallery by buying a book on the artist and looking at the reproductions. It is like looking at a photograph of someone or something and not the real thing, one misses the life presence of the experience or observation; the magic of experiencing reality in the raw, the energy of life itself. This separation from reality only compounds and exasperates the problem of developing one's visual awareness and visual sensibilities. We can listen to a piece of music on a cd, but it is never quite the same as personally experiencing it live; the same can be said of art as well. Somehow or another great art captures not only the living presence of the artist within the weave of the canvas and the voluptuousness of paint on canvas, but the very essence of life itself; it is visual philosophy into the human condition.

Prose Painting - Sir William Coldstream -

Sir William Coldstream's work has been described on a level relative to that of paintings exhibited in a provincial amateur art competitions, but this view is only held by a few pessimists. The real art enthusiast realises that Coldstream is one of the very few serious painters of our time. It is a shame that only a select few may enjoy the great intellectual quality of his work. His professional history began at the Slade in 1926, when he was only 18. Having been interested in drawing and painting as a youngster, although once having thoughts of becoming a doctor, like his Father, he had a normal childhood of imaginative painting and drawing. His first introduction to modern art was through posters and illustrations, which was known to him as Futurism. At the Slade he was faced by immense competition, everyone was expected to draw like Leonardo da Vinci and painting was taught in the Velasquez Manet tradition, which was painting by tones. Other artist's in his circle were that of Rodrigo Moynihan, Claude Rogers, Geoffrey Tibble and many others. He lived and worked in a select circle, desperately trying to find himself. He realised his imaginative and illustrative skills were far below that of his fellow artists. This began to bother him more and more, he was searching for something. Cezanne became a major influence to his work, he became interested in real appearances and began painting from nature. This was all leading to a main objective, to paint realistically, without any form and use of trickery. He had a craving for certainty, a conventional correctness, however hard this may be to produce he believed that this was what he was after. This lust for representation became an everlasting nightmare, his dream was always seeing combinations of shapes and how they relate to one another. His truthful approach was once seen in his first ever attempt at oil painting. Having been given a box of paints he rushed away in his impulsive way and only knew what he was going to paint once he had squeezed the colours onto his palette. Adam and Eve became the subject because that is where everything began, this is typical of Coldstream's attitude. He began painting Adam brown, to represent a sunburnt man and

Eve white to show she was a woman. The tree was emerald green which incorporated the fig leaves and the sky was of pure cerulean blue, with white circular shaped clouds, the grass was also emerald green and that ended Coldstream's first attempt at oil painting. Although this very early crude and unsophisticated painting may not seem to have any significance to his career, it certainly reveals his main objective of an honest approach to painting, with his conscience not allowing him to pull the wool over anything. His approach was not selfish in any way, he tried various ideas, ways and methods but always returned to that exact realistic mechanical attempt to represent what he experienced.

After Sickert's famous lecture on painting from drawings, Coldstream produced 'The Giraffe House' but realised he enjoyed painting when he was in indirect contact with nature. The general public are blinded by illustrative quality, they fail to realise Coldstream's paintings are not only to deal with the problems of a subject but chiefly the problems of painting. The critics of Coldstream's are unfair, they believe his paintings reveal too much of his method, as if he is trying to impress the public of the hard work he has done. This is completely false, because he has never gained wide recognition, the measurement marks are only a record of the artist's activities. His painting is almost carved out of the canvas, in many ways he becomes more of a sculptor than a painter. Measurement is carved out gradually, the great tonal areas build up and up, layer upon layer. Until hopefully the jigsaw like painting becomes together. His main concern is that of the visual field, theoretically the raw material of impressionism. The method is only a reassurance, to give the artist faith in his marks, the painting on the surface does not reflect the uncertainty of the mark making. This is what Coldstream is about, to make marks on a canvas on which you can believe in. Horizontals and verticals are used to measure and see space, he then begins to scan and register. He often uses a uniformed size in a picture to refer to, in many instances he usually uses the size of the head, if he is doing figure painting. This gives him a scale to work to. The whole painting then is scaled from the head, no mistakes are made. The space in the painting is accurate and it begins to knit together to form a whole painting. The sculptor like quality is achieved by carving out spaces from each other, he is not interested in the main subject, it is the space it occupies that is the main concern of Coldstream. The model or subject becomes secondary, just a shape amongst shapes, a shape to be dealt with. The dreams of combining shapes of long ago are beginning to surface in his paintings. The web of visual marks cross and re-cross to capture anything in its path, everything in the visual field becomes one, the shapes produced are carved out of the canvas, the brush is held rigid at arms length and measurement is accurate. The thumb nail surveys the area, examining distances from one shape to another and this carries on in an endless process of repetition. If anyone believes that Coldstream's method is simple or unnecessary, just try sitting for months measuring and questioning. In the Tate is a painting called 'The Reclining Nude' by Coldstream, which was painted in 1953-54. I made a few sketches of this painting and returned to the studio and positioned a model in a similar pose. I then began to try and emulate Coldstream, erasers were abandoned, free expression went out the window and intense concentration began. Verticals and horizontals were used to calculate parts in space, the head of the model was the scale of the drawing and all the first and impressions were left in. This drawing lasted a few days and I found it difficult to sustain concentration on one drawing for

that length of time. Although it was difficult, I began to have more faith in the marks I put down onto paper and the overall drawing began to look more truthful and realistic. When a drawing in this manner, it almost becomes like a test, with exact measurement and representation you cannot make any mistakes, if you do they will be easily visible. 'Measuring', he once said, 'is like fly fishing, the alternative, the conventional pounce on material contours, is by comparison like killing fish with dynamite'.

The series on Gurkha Soldiers became very famous, the mark-making became more apparent and the measurement marks were just beginning to show through. The tonal quality was in some ways similar to Seurat. He obviously did not use the spot technique but the same particular attention to tonal differences in a painting was on par with Seurat. As dots build up into overall tone, Coldstream's thin layers of paint cover each other to give a mysterious glazed effect, which sometimes does not really represent what he actually is experiencing, but more with the problems of painting and gaining the right tones in a subject. As with Seurat, who tried to gain tonal correctness through a method, which became almost a science rather than an answer to the problem. Coldstream and Seurat are always looking for the answer and as Coldstream once stated, 'the most realistic painting can be nothing like reality'. As with Coldstream's paintings, Seurat overall appears to be correct, but this is a paradox, because we know he cannot be right. Coldstream paintings seem to be correct because of the conviction to reality, but they become the complete opposite. They lie in a state of no-man's land, they are neither correct or incorrect, as with Seurat's work.

Cezanne is obviously the major influence in Coldstream's work, in Coldstream's painting of the casualty reception station at Capua we see a dramatic relation to Cezanne's painting of some mountains in Provence. The basic structure of the paintings are the same, hills in the background with a Mediterranean town and in Cezanne's case, countryside. Although Coldstream uses Capua as the main subject, the tonal relation and the detail to the shapes made from buildings, stalls and other objects relate to Cezanne's detail relationship to the shapes and tones in his painting. Coldstream's Capua although is a very accurate representation of the subject, whilst Cezanne has a more freer approach, they still remain very similar and impressionistic. Coldstream's landscapes even have a further history than that of Cezanne. Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot has a very similar approach to Coldstream. In his painting of a Roman Campagne with a claudian aqueduct we see the same Coldstream like correctness to detail. Corot's main objective is to represent the shapes in relation to one another and also to define the many and varied shapes in the subject. Some of Claude Monet's landscape paintings have the same tonal quality of the other artists, as with Coldstream they are dealing with the tonal differences and how shapes relate to one another. The actual subject matter Coldstream landscapes have a Pissaro like quality. In many cases both Coldstream and Pissaro have created a similar structure to their landscapes. The objectives of Pissaro are not so significant to Coldstream's work but the actual positioning of the subject matter is very similar indeed. The painting of Westminster is also directly related to Cezanne. It remains an informal urban landscape with the deeply naturalistic analytical style. The only difference between Coldstream and Cezanne is that Coldstream prefers painting the urban environment, as did Seurat. Whereas Cezanne preferred more rural type landscapes. All of Coldstream's work is very good and accurate but it sometimes lacks that final touch, maybe of imaginative input. Although this

input will never occur, the subtle reticent quality of Coldstream's work makes it very personal with a rich quality that is only appreciated by the Coldstream enthusiast.

The carving method in Coldstream's work has a direct relation to Giacometti's style. He is dealing with three dimensional space as Giacometti is. Giacometti concerns himself with depth in his paintings, he continually works on both his paintings and sculptures, working and re-working. He believes the more he subtracts from his sculptures the bigger they get, it is a continual process, once subtracted he again believes it is too large so he again subtracts, continually adjusting and questioning his judgements. The question of reality is clearly seen in Giacometti's work, the more realistic the painting appears the less like reality it actually becomes. Most of his work is to a smaller scale to the actual subject he is working from, this is because he finds it difficult to relate to life size objects, they almost become monumental. Whereas his work appears more realistic than say Greek sculpture, because he is dealing with the problems of the appearance and atmosphere of what is in front of him. When working on his sculptures he may re-model it as much as fifty times, although the fiftieth time may turn out exactly the same as the first impression, this reflects the similarity between the uncertainty both artists have. When finding the answer to the problem very quickly artists become very apprehensive. Again Giacometti is not concerned so much with the difference from one model to another, because they both have the same problems, which he has to overcome. Coldstream also is never concerned with his models, he is dealing with the problems they create, both in tonal qualities and the shapes around the subjects. A good example of Coldstream's working method was described by William Townsend when they were both at Camberwell. 'Bill screwed and stretched his eyes in agonies of penetration and balanced rulers on an extended finger in search for a statement of pure location and in the course of it put down some fifty touches of yellow ochre and black to establish a fragment of the surface of one of the sweeping panels in the front of the robe'. Now we can realise how his paintings can take many months to incomplete and that is what they are, uncompleted paintings.

Another description of Coldstream's method has been referred to as one putting a jigsaw together or a finishing a dot to dot drawing. This is a problem, because most of the work is covered in areas, this can cause unrelated areas, one area may be further ahead of another. When concentrating so much on small areas the actual aim of reality is impossible, because spending so much time on small areas means that hour by hour, day by day and so on, every part of the painting changes, so he must change yesterday's marks and it becomes a never ending process. If you are trying to represent you must try and succeed quickly, or it never will happen. One area that is worked on all day becomes unnecessary, because tomorrows view is completely different. This is a problem of Coldstream's that I have never actually grasped. But what is the alternative, if you concern yourself with accurate representation you must realise that it takes time, it is a long and laborious process. Shapes in space and tonal areas take such a long time to actually cope with accurately. So you are almost fighting a losing battle, unless you can assure yourself that the subject and area surrounding it remains constant, but this is obviously impossible so the alternative is to actually try and cope with the problems, because to finish a painting is not only impossible for him, but impossible for anyone. An artist paints what he knows best, and for Coldstream he knows accuracy and observation.

The question of unfeeling or impersonality in Coldstream's work is very deceptive. As Cezanne was only concerned with the particular arrangement of lines, volumes and colours, to gain a definite organic architecture that hopefully may conceal life for a moment, Coldstream also has this detachment in his work, his sheer method causes this separation. A portrait, still life or a landscape makes no difference to Coldstream or did it to Cezanne, he still is dealing with the problems that face him. Cezanne believed a man contained exactly the same amount of life, no more or less, as a chair or a fruit dish. Coldstream's portraits have also this atmosphere about them, the character of the person is rarely seen, but the problems of the situation are visible. The very nature of this so called detachment creates a deeper relationship between painter and subject. Coldstream's paintings have a mystic quality about them, the more you study his paintings the more they lure you into their grasp. The steady build-up of linear brush strokes, one on top of another, gradually creating several levels of light tones until the desired effect is achieved. Cezanne worked like this, very slowly and carefully, criticising every mark. Dried flowers were used because real ones withered before the picture got far enough. Cezanne had an habit of abandoning his pictures whenever he was dissatisfied with them. As with Coldstream, Cezanne's inner nightmare was beginning to pass, new surroundings and the close relationship with Pissarro helped him enormously. Pissarro persuaded Cezanne to carry on with his canvasses, never to give up and work more in the open air. His paintings gained a fresher quality, that is lost when outdoor scenes are overworked in the studio. Truth to nature became his guiding principle. Coldstream also always works from direct contact with the subject, that way no lies can be introduced. Cezanne always became very nervous when faced with a nude, and worked from photographs for a time. But with Pissarro's advice he began working more from life Cezanne was very concerned with the design in his paintings, considering everything in the visual field. Although Coldstream considers everything he is not so concerned with the position of things, he prefers a more natural approach. He very rarely positions a model, more often than not he will let the model rest in a comfortable pose, and whether there is a table or a radiogram behind her is irrelevant. But the shapes between the objects are the most important things Coldstream is concerned with. The difference between the impressionists and Coldstream or Cezanne, is the latter is concerned with capturing the underlying forms of visible objects, the impressionists were concerned with capturing fleeting surface effects, impressions, while they record the momentary effect, Coldstream and Cezanne recorded the enduring form.

Going into further detail on Coldstream's popularity, although he did try in many paintings to reach a wider public, the reason why he did not succeed stems from the fact that he lacks the illustrative quality needed for a wider appeal. His early paintings of Bolton were not political in any way, but he was trying to reveal his work to a wider audience. He wanted to attract people who did not know too much about painting and hopefully make his paintings interesting to them. Once retiring from the Slade, he more or less became a full time painter. Continuously working on several paintings at the same time and never ever feeling the temptation to paint out of his head. For an artist not to have any challenge of starting something new, may seem wrong but when you find a style that works for you and you have faith in it, you are usually quite contented with that. Whenever he has worked from a drawing

he only feels he is reproducing the drawing, and not creating a new drawing from past references. Many of the greatest paintings in the world have been done from reference drawings or from the imagination, so you cannot say that it is wrong but Coldstream it doesn't work. When he tried other methods, like objective abstraction with his friends Rodrigo Moynihan and Geoffrey Tibble, he only found his attempts were very inept and uninteresting. The difference between Coldstream and other painters is that he has no goal, he works and carries on working, he never ends up with a solution, just a few answers to the problems. His painting progresses gradually. To appreciate his aims and language we need to investigate and explore the differences between illustration and painting.

When working from the model he feels that you almost become a machine, it has an impersonal quality about it. He prefers to have less to do with the painting as possible, this is why his method is very strict; it doesn't allow any room to breathe and relax. Whereas a more imaginative approach requires much more personal input; that is not to say Coldstream does not. Anyone who studies objects as much as he does must put in a hell of a lot of effort. Many people think if Coldstream prefers this impersonal approach, why doesn't he paint from photographs like Sickert or Bacon did. But when looking at a photograph you have all the problems answered for you. The subject is composed and it is flat, whereas in real life you have many complex problems to overcome. Coldstream enjoys solving problems, he does not want the answers given to him on a plate by the use of trickery, he wants to solve the problems facing him by hard work and intense concentration. The main problem is translating space into something which is flat. Coldstream's tonal approach gives a sense of depth, different colours placed together creates the three dimensional quality he needs. If you do reference drawings from life and return to the studio and paint you are not dealing with the real problems of the subject, but with the problems of remembering the feelings one got from the first drawing. Coldstream is prepared to forego all of this to keep this involvement when translating what is spatial into something flat. When starting a Coldstream painting there is no turning back, the problems are there to be conquered. Although Coldstream may be criticised for having a mechanical jigsaw approach to painting. An unfeeling, unimaginative painter who paints in a dot to dot method and who spends months on a painting and never really finishes it. We must realise what Coldstream is all about before we can understand him and his art. Alright, sometimes his method may seem a bit mechanical and you can argue for an artist this is wrong. But when you are dealing with correct and truthful representation, measurement and patience are vital if you want to come close to you aim. The thin use of paints are also questioned, but this again only reflects the situation. He concerns himself with the great variation in tone and achieves a reasonable answer in over-painting thin transparent washes to represent the differences in tone, which he succeeds very well. The famous red measurement marks that are associated with his paintings are not left in out of sheer egotism of the artists method, but true dedication to it. When you want to paint truthfully all marks need to be left in and Coldstream's whole method of painting is to do with correctness to the situation. I believe he is one of the best English artists, he deals with true impressionism, that of representation. But gains it not through impulsive painting; but thorough investigation of the subject. It is true that his method does not represent, but total representation is impossible. So although the philosophy behind his approach is true representation, he does not achieve this but comes as close as you possibly can in painting. He is dealing with the challenge of what is there, he wants to achieve this

without taking any short cuts and the rules are very difficult. 'The rules are very complicated, but one has these rules, everyone has rules all the time they live, really. Of course, as you were saying every action one performs is partly explicable through utilitarian motives and things; but also there's usually a big undertone of unconscious appendages to the way you cross the road or how you mount the stairs or anything, isn't there? And there's a double meaning to all the things we do: there's practical one and there are the imponderable undertones. An action may contain symbolism to a person in all sorts of ways, don't you think? And of course, the double meaning has become very important in these games which are called Art.'

End of the Coldstream Chapter.

Illustration

To fully appreciate the different approaches in painting whether it be between poetry, prose or mimicry in painting approach we have to go to great length to discuss and differentiate between painting and illustration, it is a minefield of conflicting opinions and prejudices. The subtleties' between these two visual areas sometimes blend from one approach or area into another, with a fine line separating them; but there always a line whether we like it not. It is like having two accomplished pianists playing the same piece of music on stage and then judging which one performed with more expression, sensuality, articulation and truthfulness. Either one reveals a presence of reality or a robotic interpretation; manufactured to fool and seduce through its decoration and slickness. Great Art has the same mystical and talisman like qualities of man's primitive art, in fact it is the same animal, just executed at different periods of man's visual understanding and development. Whether they be objects created to represent deities or in praise of fertility or other such magical symbols, they all have one thing in common; a living presence retained in inanimate materials. Some of the most powerful sculptures ever created by man must be that of the great Pharaohs Egyptian area around 1500 B.C. The great monolithic sculptures were created by artisans and not by the current hubristic term of Fine Artist. And yet pieces are sublime examples of man's skill, artistry and creativity. A small granite of a Baboon (circa 1400 BC) in the British Museum in London comes to mind. It is not very big, but the imaginative, inventive interpretation of that particular species of the primate kingdom is pure genius, it could easily be mistaken for a Picasso sculpted some 3200 years or so later.

Economy of marks, whether they be carve or painted depends on the language and vocabulary of the practitioner. A Rembrandt might be made up of 10,000 individual brush marks, while a de Kooning only 150, but we must remember that it is not the amount of individual elements that counts that makes a piece of work great, but the exact amount no more or less that is required for that particular language, subject or creation; great artists add no extra fat or embellishment to their works. In Chinese calligraphic painting, the image is spontaneous and of usually few colours. But the art is about creating a pure, immediate, unblemished or manipulated brushstroke capturing the intense reality and spirit of the moment; in other words man's sense of mortality.

Another artist whose working practice and language on the surface may not seem to be linked to Coldstream is that of Frank Auerbach. Where Auerbach is part of an expressionistic lineage, full of impasto and emotional responses to the subject and Coldstream is not. The similarity lies in their intense scrutiny and search for the truth when working directly from life. I often hear that Art is purely subjective, I would contradict that assumption and view most emphatically. And go on to say that the preferred genre is subjective, but like any other subject, evaluating Art is firmly based on objectivity. Painting is part of an unbroken chain from the very first cave drawings to the most up to date pictures of today. Whenever human beings express themselves visually they forge another link in the chain. The question is whether the link is a strong one or a weak one, this is where a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of the history of art comes into its own if one is to critique anything. There is nothing new in one sense, new languages and work do not arrive via a flying saucer piloted by a totally alien species and language. As Picasso once stated, good artist's copy, great Artist's steal'. All painters are part of this on-going genetic visual history, we are a product of the past.

Of course every person and therefore artist is unique as no one will ever have the same history, experiences or personality as anyone else. The son of the Father maybe his own man, but he is still a product of the same genetic code as his ancestors; the same can be said of Art. When an Artist finds his own voice, it is on the ancestral foundation stones of everything else that has visually been explored before him. Two different talented musicians may play a piece by Bach, but how do we evaluate which one is the better practitioner, which one reveals hidden depths of emotion, expression and articulated excellence. Like any other language, we must take small steps and have a long exploratory journey of study before we can bring something of worth out of the depths of the inner self. We are constantly absorbing visual experiences from the day we are born and more so than ever with the birth of the digital age; where we are bombarded by visual stimuli on the move 24/7. Every image or form has been drawn one way or another from all things that have been visually invented before their current incarnation. Modern advertising and a lot of conceptualism is derived from surrealism, Russian revolutionary art, Hollywood or theatre design. Once upon a time a set designer would create a set design specifically for a play and that would be that. Today if that same stage set is placed in a gallery or museum, the stage set designer is no longer considered a stage set designer, but a fine artist; apparently ego enhanced. Which begs the question? does art today only become art when placed in a gallery or institution by a curator. Making the curator the instrument and sole arbiter, he is the judge, jury and executioner on how we define and view art; in essence he decides what Art is or not. The viewing public are mere uninformed lambs to the slaughter, following fashion rather than substance. An Art gallery is like going into a church and being made to feel religious for the sake of it, even though you don't believe and are afraid to express this due to the intimidating priest and atmosphere of the space. The conclusion is there are works on show so it must be important art. Valuing art not through its visual power or exploratory investigation into the human condition; but by the curator or collectors marketing prowess or economic clout. The difference between the two analogies is at least the priest hopefully has spent at least 5 years

studying his subject in a seminary before he is ordained. Whereas anyone can lease a shop without any prior knowledge of the history of art, paint the walls white and get a sign-writer to paint a sign above the door saying, Art Gallery and immediately it becomes a place of reverence and influence. Instead of letting the art take you on a visual journey using the strength of its visual language and expressive communication, so you can gradually build up a wide and varied visual vocabulary on which to appreciate the many beneficial and inherent philosophical aspects of great art. They bludgeon you with a 50,000 word dissertation or lengthy verbose dialogues, plus the grand space or academic institution to intimidate you into submission. The audience are like lambs to the slaughter, they follow the herd because the shepherd is in charge of the dog and the crook; an apt word coincidentally. There is a hunger today for celebrity and self-importance, in my view an artist is no better or worse than any other profession, in my view you are born an artist. For example, if one was to venture into the last remaining tribe somewhere in the depths of the Amazon untouched or corrupted by the outside world. One would find a natural leader, the doctor, teacher, carpenter, preacher, philosopher and of course the artist. In other words, our communities only continue and survive if our tribe have all these attributes and elements in place.

Poetry - Soutine

Another Artist that comes to mind when dealing with observation, although from an expressive lineage unlike Coldstream, is that of Chaim Soutine. If Coldstream is painting in prose, then Soutine's must surely be poetry. An artist who works from life must focus and patiently securitize his world intensely to get to the real heart and truth of his intended subject. Like Rembrandt and Van Gogh, Soutine was not only in my view a descendant and of the same genetic strain and make-up of these two greats. He also chose the subjects he painted with the same uncompromising eye and obsessive devotion, painting the same subjects again and again. Once inspired, he would do anything to reach his artistic goals, even resorting to bribery or violence if a chosen model would not sit for him. Another Jewish artist come to mind who again is part of the same lineage, but the next generation in this particular family tree; that of Frank Auerbach. Who like Soutine is not only fastidious in his journey in the pursuit of honestly capturing the presence of his subjects, but some may say to the point of a kind of religious or devotional obsession.

My hypothesis is that a community can only survive and flourish if the tribe includes all of the necessary cultural, religious, artistic and intellectual elements born into its structure and framework. If we are to accept this argument, then we are born to play certain roles in our tribal communities. Life in a colony of bees, there is a Queen, workers, soldiers etc with each one complementing and assisting the other to make the whole a continuing health and success. Cultural influences and emotional scars can be seen in Soutine's reoccurring series of slaughtered carcasses of an Oxe, chickens, rabbits, ducks etc. Which can be seen to relate to the Jewish holiday of Yon Kippur, where in ancient times the scapegoat was beaten and originally sent out

into the desert carrying away the sins of the community. This in latter days transformed itself through time into a feast, where a instead of being sent out into the desert, a bird was eaten and consumed on the said feast day. The bird in question is whirled around the head while reciting a prayer before it is eaten; 'the whirling of the fowl'. It may be said that Soutine is the main scapegoat in his paintings, regardless of the subject matter. Those early traumas and prejudices against his chosen blasphemous vocation, resonate throughout all of his paintings; a sense of personal sacrifice and inner anxiety. The scapegoat is exploited and plays a lowly role in the Jewish community, a very hierarchal society.

To illustrate my point more simply using a different vehicle or language, let's take a look at our earliest experiences in developing our literal and verbal communication skills, are we writing prose at 2 years old or verse by 4? Our performance and understanding of using language as a communication tool is very basic and limited at this stage of our human development. We start we sounds, then single words, followed by short sentences until after many years of study, practice and exposure to the language we begin to enlarge our vocabulary and means of making ourselves understood. Is a grunt as articulate or as enlightening as John Donne poem exploring what love is all about, of course not. Should this same grunt be on the same bookshelf as Tolstoy novel or Homers 'Iliad'? In the same token, should a bunch of twigs entitled 'Forest Deforestation' that is neither intelligent, aesthetically or compositionally pleasing be exhibited next to a Velasquez or a Soutine? Just because of fashionable marketing and a galleries clout ?

It is surely obvious to anyone if we have 50,000 words at our disposal we can communicate much more successfully, although this alone won't turn you into Shakespeare. As well as this reservoir of words, artistry then comes into play, even if one has a large vocabulary to draw from other factors like performance, creativity, the imagination and life experiences affects the success of our communication endeavours and artistic ambitions. Enabling us to explore the many complicated subtleties of our emotional, psychological and intellectual inner world. In essence, understanding reality and the human condition in greater depth and with more clarity, so as to create an image that attacks, confronts and smashes the viewer in the face with an explosive experience that takes him on a never ending journey of visual pleasure and uncomfortable enlightenment. After all I want to taste and experience the sensual pleasures of eating a fabulous meal, not just verbally told about it. The same can be said of most of today's vacuous daubs that we see in art fairs, museums and galleries. Are we visually nourished, educated and fulfilled or do we come away still hungry; I don't know about you, but I am still famished. The only satisfied customers are the self-congratulators and sybarites who are in the business of enlarging their colleagues bank balances and their own hubris through the art of advertising, marketing and self-delusional mockery. The tragedy in all this is that many contemporary so called artists support and encourage this practice of illustrational deception. The days of visionaries such as Cezanne, Coldstream, Giacometti, Picasso, Bacon, Soutine and many more great masters are sadly not seen, supported or championed in the current market.

And yet the human condition remains as complicated and misunderstood as ever. Art through the centuries has tried to unravel the intricacies of man's on-going dilemma; that of why are we here and what is our purpose? Bacon once said that he was 'not interested in fantasy, but reality'. I would argue every serious artist whatever language he develops or explores deals with this very subject, to quote Bacon again, 'the brutality of fact'.

Mimicry - Illustration

So what do mean when say illustration as opposed to painting, I would say that an illustrator knows the destination before he starts the journey; whereas a painter starts his visual journey with no destination in sight. An illustrator has a recognised style and language which is contrived and reliable. A product that produces the same result time and time again, walking along a line that is drawn on the ground. The painter is the tightrope walker crossing the wire without any safety net or means of support. The challenge of the hunt, the thrill of the chase, the adrenalin rush of pursuing something dangerous and unpredictable; pushing ourselves to the limits of our understanding and abilities. Beginning a Painting is like opening the door into unknown dark labyrinth, we touch and explore every wall of our imagination until we find a light switch. When the first switch is found we turn on the light and find the exit door, only to discover we have not found the exit or the answer to our problems, but another dark room. In which the whole process starts again and again.....and again.....until we have exhausted all possibilities. Whether it be Coldstream or Bacon, the search for reality or truth remains the same. Coldstream's approach may be one of scrutinized layer upon layer, like placing one fine filter over another time and time again. And Bacon's one of capturing the brutality of the moment drawn from photographic sources like Sickert. Whatever vehicle or approach is used, the common dominator that links artists like Coldstream, Bacon, Giacometti, Soutine, Rembrandt, Van Gogh etc together, is their unflinching search for a living presence or sense of reality in their work without ornament or unnecessary seduction or elaborate pyrotechnics. Quite often today we see paintings produced and sold by the metre, as if the larger the painting is, the more power, intensity and reality it possesses. Art is not like carpet, a reoccurring design that can be bought by the metre; and yet more often than not you see painters, curators, critics and institutions supporting and buying into this idea. Art should not be painted or purchased by the metre, but by the strength of it's visionary, exploratory journey into the human condition. A large DeKooning thrusts us into a world of expressive colour, amrk-making and emotion, whereas the intimacy of a Klee draws us into a dreamworld of symbolic, visionary surrealism. One of my favourite paintings of all time is that of Rembrandt's 'Woman Bathing in a Stream' in the National Gallery in London. A painting no bigger than 61.8 x 47cm in size and yet one of the greatest paintings of all time. Sometimes described as a sketch for a larger work, although Rembrandt never did oil sketches before starting a painting, it remains a sublime combination of mood, composition, symbolism, expressionism and the most sensual, articulate mark-making ever achieved in the history of Western oil painting. I have found throughout my life that I have returned to view this picture again and again and it never ceases to amaze and excite me. And yet it is very modest in size compared with most of the contemporary paintings we are served up again and again at art fairs and galleries today. For example, we are supposed to accept and value a large mural sized photo realist painting just

because it took the practitioner 6 months to paint using a small sable brush. No matter if this is the sum of its artistic merit, whether we like it or not; we are told this is Art and has gravitas. Charlatans can only get away with selling this concept of art by the metre if we accept that everyone is an artist and everything that is exhibited in a gallery is Art. Whereas the Rembrandt shows a language that is completed in all departments, these contemporary monstrosities' often reveal quite clearly their weakness through flaccid brushwork and unresolved journeys. As if like they are trying to pull the rabbit out of the top hat without ever studying the art of magic; their illusion is incomplete and shows immaturity. Sadly, if these artists and works had a little bit of modesty and were prepared to work on a much more smaller scale. They would not only probably find the work is more visually successful, but more importantly their artistic journey and visual language would end up much stronger in the end. Some languages obviously work better on a bigger scale while others are more successful if smaller. An artist finds his own preferred scale through experience and time with his work, as he does with his preferred colour palette or subject method. You cannot rush this or cut corners, Rothko when asked why one of his paintings cost so much to buy and yet took so little time to produce; his reply was, it took 50 years of painting to produce these images. Or a finished Auerbach that may have only taken 30 minutes to execute, but 6 months of previous attempts before accepting the final solution. The paintings that hold onto their magic are the ones that have a living presence within them. As if the life force of the artist has somehow or another been transferred from his body and absorbed onto and into the weave of the canvas; like a battery that has been fully charged.

Footnote :

Babouinism is against groups so you cannot join it, as it remains an ethereal and solitary creature, exploring a creative never ending journey into the unknown. You have two choices, either to Bark or Yak, What is it going to be ?
Fellow Babouinist's either Bark loudly in anger and or Yak with great passionate pleasure at the following list.