

A conversation with Anne Harris

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Anne Harris was interviewed by Mira Gerard. December 26, 2013.



Anne Harris received her BFA from Washington University in St. Louis in 1986, and her MFA from Yale in 1988. She has participated in over a hundred solo and group exhibitions at galleries such as Alexandre (NYC), DC Moore (NYC), Corbett vs. Dempsey (Chicago), and Nielsen Gallery (Boston); and at museums such as The Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, The Portland Museum of Art, The Bowdoin College Museum of Art, The California Center for contemporary Art, the North Dakota Museum of Art, The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art and many more. Exhibitions from the past 12 months include her solo exhibition [*Phantasmagorical: Self Portraits*](#), at Alexandre Gallery, the *OBPC* exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, [*The Female Gaze: Women Artists Making Their World*](#), at the PAFA Museum, [*Sic Transit Mundi: Industry of the Ordinary*](#), at the Chicago Cultural Center and [*The Mind's I*](#), a collaborative drawing project organized by Harris at Julius Caesar Gallery, Chicago. Her work is in such public collections as The Fogg Museum at Harvard, The Yale University Art Gallery, The Portland Museum of Art and The New York Public Library and has been reviewed in such publications as the *New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Boston Globe*, *Art in America* and *Art News*. Grants and awards received include a Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, an NEA Individual Artists Fellowship and an RAIR fellowship. Harris currently teaches in the BFA and MFA programs at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is vice president of the board of the Riverside Arts Center, chair of its exhibition committee, and curator of a number of exhibitions there. Harris lives with her husband, the

photographer Paul D'Amato, and their son Max, in Riverside, IL, just outside Chicago. She is represented by [Alexandre Gallery](#), New York, NY.

What attracted you to the arts? What were your earliest experiences of making art?

I don't know what attracted me, but then I don't remember learning to read either.

There was always drawing going on in my house, and we had books on art. I remember being glued to a big coffee table book on Rembrandt when I was 5 or 6. My parents would give us (me, my brother and sister) rolls of white butcher paper, and we'd just cover the entire roll. I would tell stories out loud to myself while drawing. Sometimes my mom would join in. She drew beautifully. If I didn't have paper I'd wander around drawing in the air, prattling away (what an odd kid). My earliest character was a mouse named Herman. He had his own theme song—"deedle-deedle-dee, deedle-deedle-dy, Herman's quite a mouse"—who apparently was surrounded by many princess mice wearing those cone hats with the veils on the tip; I drew many of those.

Like most of us who wind up in the arts I had a lot of facility. As a first grader I was taking art class with the 6th graders, and around that time I started drawing faces. I became obsessed with pretty faces—pictures in magazines, cartoon stylizations of pretty faces, makeup. I'd pretend my crayons were makeup. I was very clear when I grabbed a "flesh" colored crayon that what I was using was the equivalent of foundation base, I'd blend in red-crayola "blush," "lip stick," etc. to make these waxy faced females, stylized like Betty and Veronica from *The Archie's* or like *Brenda Starr*, so I was making a face by drawing the surface mask—weirdly the same issues I'm still pondering. My evolution is... limited!

My parents took us to museums. I remember visiting the Art

Institute of Chicago with them, staring at an enormous Chuck Close self-portrait (Where is that painting anyway? I've haven't seen it shown since I moved here); and while a senior in high school I had a memorable visit to the Hermitage. I was playing clarinet in a youth orchestra and we toured Russia and Romania. This was 1979 and the Soviet Union was still operating, so our trip to the Hermitage was tightly controlled. We were only supposed to look at Russian glories—bad paintings of Russian nobility, plus lots of gold gilding and eggs—but I was walking next to one of the chaperones, someone's dad who was an art professor at Western Kentucky University, and he said to me, "Let's look in here," and pointed to an open doorway. He and I snuck away and... well you know what we saw. A shit load of the worlds' greatest paintings. Rembrandt's "Danae." I was stunned. The most memorable 40 minutes of the trip—I wish I could remember the name of that chaperone dad, I never thanked him for one of my life's highlights.

So, I actually thought then that I would major in music, but realized while on that trip that I wasn't passionate enough about it. But I never considered studying visual art—I didn't know you could learn it. I knew what great art was, knew I wasn't doing it, and thought that was that.

Anyway, I wound up at Washington University in St. Louis, trying to figure out what I wanted to study, and I took a night drawing class, thinking it would be an easy "A." This wound up being my most challenging class. I got lucky—an amazing teacher, Amy Sudarsky. I went straight from that class into the art school.

What were your first projects/exhibitions?

I didn't start exhibiting until after grad school. Early on, I was living in Maine while teaching in Boston. I had some small "young" shows, mainly in the New England area, but my first show as a "pro" was with the Nielsen Gallery in Boston in

1994. Self-portraits (surprise!). I'll elaborate, if you want, but Nielsen—Nina Nielsen and John Baker—retired about three years ago. They were wonderful, responsible in many respects for the career I have.

Can you describe your rituals or routines in (or related to) the studio?

Lately, my rituals have been upended. A year ago or so I would have said that, on the days that I don't teach (I only teach one or two days a week) I get up, walk the dog and do other miscellaneous chores, do a little email/fb stuff over coffee, then head out to the studio, which is behind my house, around 10:00, where I drink a lot more coffee and try to figure out what I'm doing.

This year though has been a tough one. My mother died this summer after a long bout with cancer and I did a lot of back and forth traveling. I also was painting for a show at Alexandre in New York, which was a biggie, so I had bouts of desperate painting interspersed with periods where I was at my parents'. After the show (April, May) I found myself weirdly unable to paint—not even wanting to paint. Very strange for me. Some combo of post-exhibition PTSD combined with what was going on with my Mom. Instead I focused on things I'd been postponing—a couple of grant applications, plus curatorial projects, things I'd been meaning to get to and finally had no excuse to avoid. I had my first assistant this summer, Nadia Waheed, who helped me document and organize. Finally, in the last couple of months, I've been getting back in the studio, but my schedule still feels disorganized.

Anyway, my ideal studio practice—and my studio practice of late—is to I paint or draw in some form nearly every day (it's my job, yes?). When I miss a day I find it takes me a day to get back in the swing, so I try to miss as few days as possible.



Anne Harris Invisible (Blonde), oil on linen, 33.5 x 30", 2011-12

Now I am thinking of your recent exhibition "Phantasmatical: Self-Portraits" in light of what you have just told me— both the death of your mother and the aftermath of that as well as the story of how you used to draw together on butcher paper. It is hard for me to conceptualize what the loss of a parent feels like.

The fact is, grief, the loss of an immediate family member, it just feels really bad... I have no expertise here. I'm learning as I go.



Anne Harris Portrait (Someone), oil on linen, 14 x 12", 2001

I am fascinated with the sense I have of your paintings being simultaneously weightless and heavy. Can you speak about how

the figures come into being on the space? Do you always know, for example, what the composition will be? Are things fixed or changeable?

I'm really interested in the sense that substances can shift their weight—that flesh can be air, that air can be liquid, that density shifts. I love it that you say you can see this, as it isn't often discussed in relationship to my work. There's an assumption that I must intend to paint a conventional description of 3-D form and weight, but really I'm trying to do something that can't be nailed down.

I tend to think metaphorically when I paint—I'm at my best when I do. So, I might imagine that the figure is being poured into her container, that the ground surrounding her is some denser stuff, holding her in place (like a mold), or that the painting itself is a slice of air and everything in it is just slightly shifting, like condensation, or everything is skin, pushing against the membrane of the picture plane.

As to your second question: I usually have a starting point, at least a simple compositional idea (some would say I really only have one idea!), but the painting changes a lot over the course of things. I might use a drawing as a starting point for a painting. In that case I might trace the drawing and transfer a simple outline to set up placement and proportion.

In the last paintings I showed at Alexandre I began with a specific idea applied to the entire group— to paint a visibly invisible painting of an uncomfortably exposed but unseen subject. (that sounds pompous and pat, sorry). Within that body of work I had simple ideas like, “can I paint a yellow one?” However, as soon as I start painting all kinds of things happen and the painting evolves into something I don't expect. If that doesn't happen, I'm doomed. Some paintings go through a ludicrous amount of change—really paintings on top of paintings—and I wind up spending years on them. I realize there must be a better way to do this. *Portrait (Red Robe)* and

Portrait (Pink) are examples of this.



Anne Harris Portrait (Pink), oil on linen, 44 x 30", 2008-10

It is comforting to hear you talk about the changes that some of the paintings go through, actually. I go through a similar thing in my studio and I like to think it's a requirement. I also love the way that you reference colors in many of your titles, but when I look at your paintings, it's much more than that one color— it's the way each color relates to the space around it, the light, and the bigger relationships of color and space within the entire painting. There's always this utter simplicity in your work that gives way to a complexity that is hard to name. It's in the gaze of the figures, too—the way they stare at the viewer, or just past the viewer. Is this something that you are drawn to in other people's work? What artists have influenced you?

Everything you say, yes, yes, yes. Thank you for looking so acutely. I am drawn to work that slowly unfolds, that holds me, mesmerizes me. My hope is that the elements in my painting can function this way. Color is a part of that. I like nameless colors, colors that only get their identity in relationship to other colors, they shift, or flex depending on their context. My hope is that the longer you look, the more they change, that the painting itself keeps shifting.

As for influences, I look at and am inspired by a large range of work and artists, from the Venus of Willendorf to Robert Irwin, but the key factor is that slowness of experience, something hypnotic, a sense of presence. I often talk about Bouts, Memling, Christus, Van der Weyden. I go nuts over the Ginevra di Benci, Rembrandt is probably my lifetime favorite, but I also respond very much to Ad Reinhardt's black paintings, to Vija Celmins, to early Brice Marden, to a particular Daisy Youngblood donkey. I think Lucien Freud was an incredible painter. So was Gregory Gillespie. Lately I've had a huge jones for a particular Marsden Hartley at the AIC—one of his muscle beach boys with a blue thong. And Jasper Johns's gray paintings, like "Painting Bitten by a Man." If you stroll through my fb albums you'll see a crazy range of

work and there's nothing I've posted that I don't find exciting.

I make it a point, when teaching, to discuss all art as contemporary, that it all exists now. That paintings can be widely diverse in subject matter and yet offer a similar experience, be about something fundamentally akin. So, at the AIC, I'll take my students to see the Bouts *Sorrowing Madonna*, and we'll then go see an Ad Reinhardt black painting and will talk about the commonalities.

I'll add, I like that you notice the gaze staring past the viewer. Nobody notices that. You look really hard. Thank you.



Anne Harris Portrait (Snake Eyes), oil on linen, 14 x 12", 2002

I love what you said about all art existing now. I think what you're pointing towards in this remark is the way that art exists in us as we think about it and remember it, which takes

place over a span of time and therefore places art outside of time. It reminds me of something I read recently about Jacques Lacan. When was a young man, he became fascinated with the idea of disrupting the imaginary register of perceived reality, and for a time he would shake his head violently when his picture was being taken so that his face was blurred in the photograph. In one of these images, there is what appears to be a hint of an ironic smile on his face as he gazes out. It looks as if he's looking through time at the viewer. I see a connection between that and your work, and this is only enhanced by the way you're engaging the passing of time in regards to the aging female figure who disrupts our imaginary fixations about the image of woman.

Regarding your final statement, that I'm "engaging the passing of time in regards to the aging female figure that disrupts our imaginary fixations about the image of woman," I like the last part—that a painting can disrupt fixations. But I'm not exactly methodically engaging in the passage of time as it affects aging.

This may sound odd, but when someone refers to me representing the aging female body, I'm surprised. In my first Nielsen show, in Boston in 1994, when I was 33, I was asked why I painted myself "so old." Actually, at one point a little old lady patted me on my shoulder and assured me that I was "much prettier than my paintings." So, when I was young I was painting old. However, about ten years later, Alison Ferris, wrote about a body of paintings I was making then as being of teenage girls, and that astonished me. Occasionally, I'll have a specific painting which, over the course of it, I'll realize is specifically aged, such as *Portrait (Old Neck)*, or specifically youthful, like *Invisible (Cropped)* from my last show, but generally I'm trying to paint "human." I do think of mortality, irregularity, malleability, intensity, scrutiny, and lately I've been thinking about visibility and invisibility. When am I looked at? When am I looked through?

But I've never thought that I was somehow documenting the aging female. That is, I don't think painting can document anything really—except, maybe itself, in that a painting gives evidence of its own development. It's a fictitious form. Or, maybe it can (?), but mine can't.

I guess, I don't want to be thought of as having some grand project to represent the female life cycle. At times the work is interpreted that way and it makes me squirm—my fear is that it's being seen as literal and predictable. I say this, and yet I know Alison Ferris, writing again about my work for the last catalog (*Phantasmatical: Self Portraits*), discussed menopause. I let that stand because I believe that I have to accept that a viewer's good-faith interpretation—Alison has looked hard and thought hard—is a kind of truth, even if it makes me squirm. I would rather she'd discussed the way they were painted, how that related to the meaning of the paintings, but she discussed them in connection to an autobiographical arc in my work.

Regarding *time*: I love the notion of time in a painting, because it's so hard to nail down. We can watch a film and say, "that film was two hours long," but how long is a painting? I was just discussing this with my grad students during a crit yesterday (Yes! We had a crit on Saturday, 'cause I'm so dedicated!). Time can be illustrated or represented—painting the aging of the body could be an example of this. There can be the illusion of time—a painting that has the look of age, or the look of being "worked" over time. And then there can be the experience of time—the speed of a painting, particularly when it unfolds slowly, when it's seen slowly, when we crawl across it, or when it mesmerizes, hypnotizes, expands on the wall. I'm so interested in all of this.

I completely understand this frustration about not wanting the work to be understood in terms of being reduced to a sound bite. The presence of a female figure in a painting that

doesn't mesh with mainstream propaganda is automatically a challenge to the status quo. My question came in part from an article by John Seed which quoted you discussing invisibility in relation to your work and in relation to your own experiences inhabiting a female body. I read it as a significant part of the work, but in truth hesitated to ask it because I didn't want to reduce the conversation to being this one thing. But then I thought— do I want to avoid it? It deepens the reading of your work for me, the way the subjects assert their gaze outward, and the way that they are complex and not easily understood. The idea of you painting something that is in effect invisible by making it an image of something about invisibility is profound.

I keep in mind that, even if I want the work to be understood in a certain way, even though I may intend the work to function in a certain way—I may not be right. That is, my intentions may not line up with what's actually there. If so, this is either a problem in the work (a failing?) or a strength that I haven't recognized. I don't know... these are things I struggle with.

Anyway, you're right, it is certainly part of the work. It's not the discussion that's the problem, it's when the discussion is reductive—when it's the only thing discussed. Another issue I wonder about, if I were a man painting myself as I do, I'm pretty sure mortality would be discussed, but would it be specifically *male* mortality? And then there's the beauty and youth thing—if a man paints himself as not beautiful and not young it's simply considered direct, factual, honest. When a woman does it, it's interpreted as the point of the painting. She's not simply describing herself—she's pressing her non-youthful, non-beautiful self at us. Female beauty (which usually involves youth) is an expectation; a painting of a woman that isn't plainly beautiful is therefore about unattractiveness. Even the beauty

of the painting itself may be questioned—the painting is considered ugly if the subject is ugly.



Anne Harris Portrait (Pearls), oil on canvas, 36 x 30",

1999-2001

Perhaps there is no resolution to this. It makes me think of what Slavoj Zizek writes in "The Parallax view" regarding the notion of parallax as "a constantly shifting perspective between two points between which no synthesis or mediation is possible." This relates to your work and broadly to assumptions about images, and the difficulty of understanding anything in painting, whether that be from the shifting point of view of the viewer, the artist, or even the painting, for that matter.

I'm now pondering the parallax—a word I didn't know! I've thought a lot about paradox—that two contradictory truths can exist together to form another truth—but I hadn't thought of perspectives that can't meet in the middle, where the contradiction is unresolvable. Do you think that happens in my work? If so, tell me how so. It's good for me when someone points out something I don't know. I learn something, and it's also satisfying to know that the work can go somewhere that's beyond me. Does that make sense? I mean, if the work only sits inside my intentions, only does what I know it does, then it's only going to go so far. Cripes... does that make sense?

I'm looking at my own work and wondering whether it's possible to objectify the female form (my female form), to do it unironically, and yet have it become an internal experience, an emotional experience. Can I play with a form which is at heart sexist (woman as object), find that form wonderful (for example, I love Rubens), and still make that work feminist? So, am I even understanding this new word?

I think you are understanding it deeply, because the point of it is that there is no fixed understanding. Isn't that what a great painting is—something that expands meaning but also never delivers a finite or universal answer? And in answer to your question, I do think that it is feminist work, because you encrypt complexity into the objectification of the figure,

putting it in service of something much deeper. As you point out, there are layers of paradox here- that the “unbeautiful” should not be depicted and therefore essentially should be hidden or invisible, yet your work is about invisibility, and finally that the solidity of the work is palpable. I feel like I enter into them and move in slow motion immediately, like a force field. This is true about color in your work as well. If I were to attempt to describe it, it is muted, soft, and subtle- but that is not the effect that it has, so what is it, exactly? I fantasize that you work those light-yet-dense transitions for days and weeks, modulating and shifting them around.

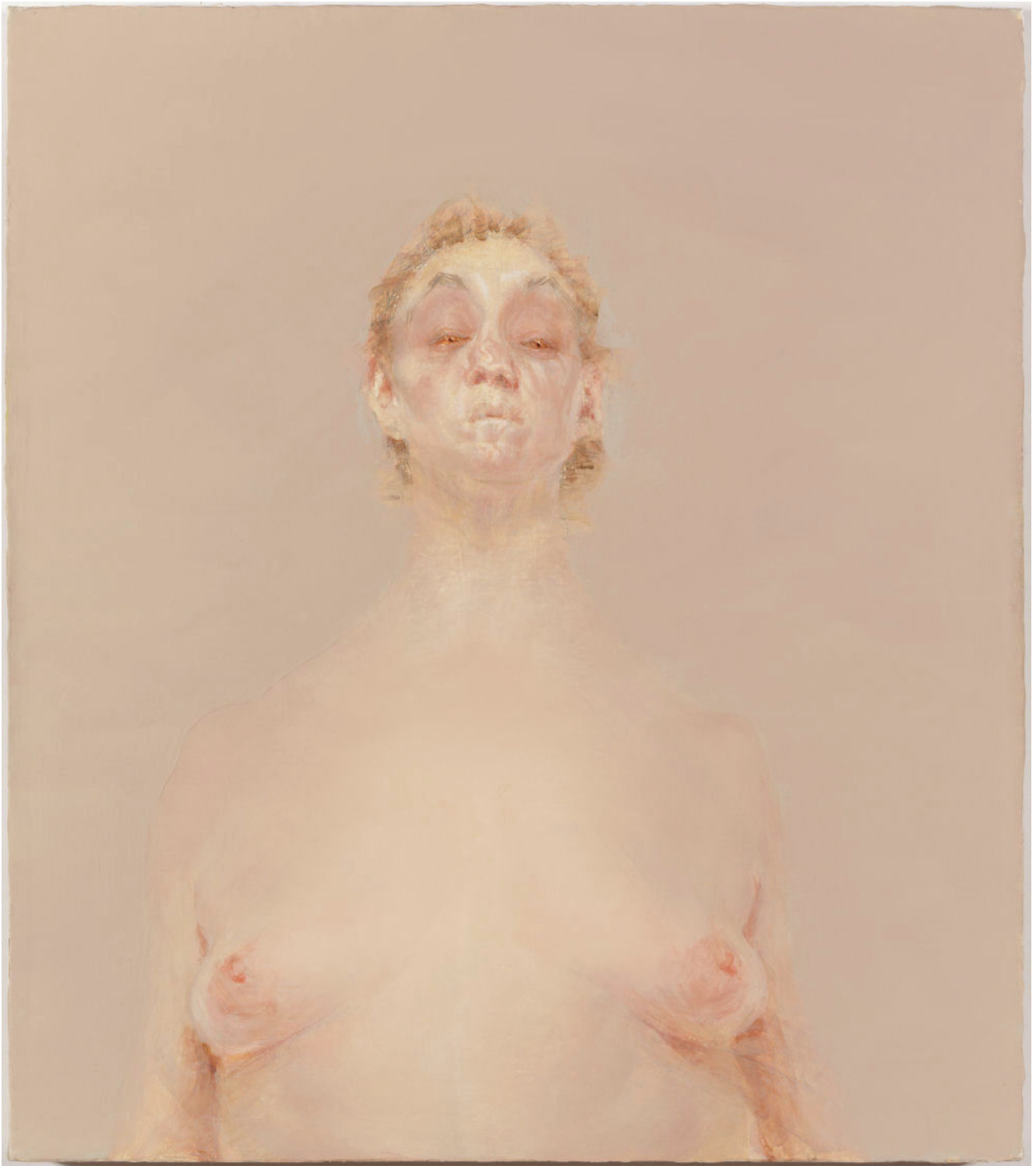
Yes, paradox. I’m very interested in contradiction—the more the better. I’m particularly interested in the relationship between subtlety and intensity, that those apparently contradictory elements compound each other. And your description of the unbeautiful being hidden is good. And your “what is it, exactly” question, regarding color (and other things too, yes?), that’s the question I hope will be asked. I hope the work produces questions, instead of just answers. We actually had a student in Advanced Painting Studio here who asked, in his final crit, if his paintings were answers or questions—a brilliant way to begin a critique. My hope is that mine function as questions—that they leave you wondering.

The color—which reproduces terribly—functions this way, I hope. It’s mainly relative color, color that’s pushed around by its neighbors. So, for instance, “blues” aren’t actually blue, they just appear blue in context, through the layering of paint or the side-by-side interaction of colors. I think about skin all the time. My skin, which is pale and transparent: that its color is a product of transparency and reflection, that blue veins are an optical phenomenon caused by light passing through translucent layers of skin and hitting dark red/purple.

Thinking about teaching again—recently, I fell and broke my

nose and had cliché black eyes, purple-red crescents under my eyes. When I pulled “concealer” over them (my actress friend Jennifer had to actually give me concealer lessons) they went blue—exactly what happens in painting. So, I used my black eyes to explain to my beginning painting students how scumbling and optical grays work.

Your guess that I work color transitions for days and weeks actually underestimates—it’s more like months. Although much of the work isn’t actually painting, but *looking* (part of painting, I suppose). Sometimes, I’ll stare at something all day, and then make one move, which might be great or ruinous, or neither, but I usually can’t see it until the next day. And if, on that next day, I’m unsure still, I’ll wipe it away regardless. So, I usually have a number of paintings going at once, because working on only one would be not just incredibly slow, but would pull me into a painting black hole that I’d never come out of.



Anne Harris Invisible (Cropped), oil on linen, 27 x 24", 2012

Can you describe what you are working on now?

Right now, I am, coincidentally, thinking hard and heavy about figure/ground as not just a formal tool, but as the point of the work. Truly, when you asked me to talk with you for

Figure/Ground, I thought "how perfect!" Lately it's come to me that everything I've ever done is about that: the first fundamental of visual art, and the ultimate metaphor. Asking how figure shapes ground and ground shapes figure leads to the existential questions: How do we shape our world? How does our world shape us?

Behind this is my Mom's death. The period during which I couldn't work—the work seemed not to matter. When you see a difficult death, there's a period where you wonder, "What's the point?" (or... maybe it's just me who wondered that, I probably shouldn't extrapolate to the rest of you). To get myself back in gear I gave myself a simple exercise. Building off the last group of paintings I made (the *Invisible* paintings for Alexandre), I started, in September, making drawings on heavy water color paper, just looking frontally at myself, trying to push a figure/ground reversal—the figure being the literal ground of the drawing—while also pushing the simplification. To take the pressure off myself, I've been using acrylic paint. I'm such an oil-painting girl, that in my mind, acrylic isn't *real* because it's plastic, so, I can jump right in without expectation or presumption. I prepared the paper with a variety of acrylic grounds—seductive fun surfaces, some even metallic, like "stainless steel"—and then went in with a painted line, drawing the ground surrounding the figure first. I've wound up using a combination of oil paint and acrylic, some with collage, and right now I have about 35 drawings (I suppose some would call them paintings, but thinking of them as drawings, again takes the pressure off). They're very open. I'm experimenting. I have no idea whether they're good, or superficial. Currently, I have a grid of 24, maybe 10 feet high and 18 feet across, that take up my studio working-wall. I have no idea whether all these drawings will become one piece, or whether they should be individual, or again... whether they're even any good. But I'm excited to do them. They surprise me.

What's next?

Well, I'm not exactly sure. I'm in the middle of this work, so it's still "next" in my mind. I'm also waiting to see where a couple of other projects will go. I have some curatorial stuff going on. I've been doing some work with the Riverside Arts Center's exhibition committee, which is a lovely tiny not for profit in my neighborhood, and it's lead me to some other things. If I get a green light I'll let you know!

I've also been working on a collaborative drawing project, called *The Mind's I*, which debuted at Julius Caesar Gallery last winter (an alternative space in Chicago, a wonderful place started by a terrific group of young artists—I want to stump for JC and the RAC, they're both worth knowing about). I want *The Mind's I* to travel and expand and land some place great. I just finished submitting a proposal to the "great landing place," and again, if I get a green light, I'll let you know.

Any advice for future or emerging artists?

Work hard at your work. And... enough with the referential irony. Push forward. Go all in. Mean it. It's so much braver.



Anne Harris studio west wall, april 2013

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< <http://figureground.org/interview-with-peter-adamson/> >

Questions? Contact Laureano Ralón at ralonlaureano@gmail.com

Interview with Martin Crowley

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Dr. Crowley was interviewed by Andrew Iliadis. December 20th, 2012.

Dr. Martin Crowley is Reader in Modern French Thought and Culture in the Department of French at Cambridge. His current research examines responses to crisis and catastrophe in the work of modern French thinkers. He is the author of: *L'Homme sans: Politiques de la finitude* (Lignes, 2009); with an afterword by Jean-Luc Nancy); *The New Pornographies: Explicit Sex in Recent French Fiction and Film* (co-authored with Victoria Best; Manchester University Press, 2007); *Robert Antelme: L'humanité irréductible* (Lignes/Éditions Léo Scheer, 2004); *Robert Antelme: Humanity, Community, Testimony* (Legenda, 2003), and *Duras, Writing, and the Ethical: Making the Broken Whole* (OUP, 2000); and the editor of *Contact! The Art of Touch/L'Art du toucher* (L'Esprit Créateur, Fall 2007), and *Dying Words: The Last Moments of Writers and Philosophers* (Rodopi, 2000).

How did you decide to become a university professor? Was it a conscious choice?

It was mostly a matter of keeping going with what I enjoyed, to be honest: free, critical thinking, and engaging teaching. I made a conscious choice to come back into academia to do a PhD; after that, I just kept on down the track.

Who were some of your mentors in university and what were some of the most important lessons you learned from them?

As an undergraduate, I was tutored by Prof. Nicholas Mann, who taught me the intellectual value of a combination of imagination and rigour; I was also taught by Prof. Ann Jefferson, who later became my PhD supervisor, and from whom I learned both how to mix theoretical understanding with

detailed literary analysis, and how to work with clarity. During my PhD, I had the good fortune to work with Prof. Malcolm Bowie, whose joy in creative thinking, and ability to make room for this within academic institutions, were inspiring to me and to many others. My PhD examiners (Prof. Colin Davis and Prof. Leslie Hill) have been major influences throughout my career so far, teaching me in particular the patience of detailed thought.

In your experience, how did the role of university professor evolve since you were an undergraduate student?

More external scrutiny; plus, decisively, an ever-expanding administrative load.

What makes a good teacher today? How do you manage to command attention in an “age of interruption” characterized by attention deficit and information overload?

The core components are pretty much the same as ever, I should think: commitment to the development of students as independent, critical thinkers; interest in students as already insightful thinkers; love of subject and ability to open up what’s fascinating in it to new minds. If anything, this kind of contact is less common in a faster-moving and information-saturated context; bringing students into relation with dynamic thinking through teaching which respects and engages them can already attract attention by its rarity value alone.

What advice would you give to young graduate students and aspiring university professors and what are some of the texts that young scholars should be reading in this day and age?

To be honest, any advice I might have is rather negative, or at least to do with self-protection: the pressures involved in getting and then doing an academic job are such that I wouldn’t recommend anyone to go into this line if they aren’t aware of these pressures and reasonably prepared to face them.

I'd certainly advise anyone thinking of an academic career to have a good look at their motives before committing themselves.

Do you think the university as an institution is in crisis or at least under threat in this age of information?

In the UK, the public university is certainly under threat as an independent institution free to pursue learning for its own sake, with the removal of state funding for arts and humanities courses and the consequent attempt to impose market-style competition between universities, the weighing-down of students with large and ill-calculated (by the government) amounts of debt, and the socially-divisive effects of widely-differing fee levels between institutions, not to mention government attempts to align research funding priorities with partisan slogans. I don't see the age of information as a particular threat, to be honest; certainly not compared to this. (Much of which I imagine may perhaps look pretty run-of-the-mill from a North American perspective.)

Francis Fukuyama argues that the tenure system has turned the academy into one of the most conservative and costly institutions in the country, making younger untenured professors fearful of taking intellectual risks and causing them to write in jargon aimed only at those in their narrow subdiscipline. He believes the freedom guaranteed by tenure is precious, but thinks it's time to abolish this institution before it becomes too costly, both financially and intellectually. What do you make of Fukuyama's assertion?

I'm not convinced by Fukuyama's argument (not for the first time). It hardly seems likely that a reduction in job security throughout the sector will produce greater innovation and risk-taking, or indeed a greater desire or ability to communicate beyond the academy. Abolishing tenure will tend to make academics even more dependent on seeking external favour

and finance, reducing freedom and hardly encouraging daring work.

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Questions? Contact Laureano Ralón at ralonlaureano@gmail.com

[Subject Areas by Gender](#)

Here is an [interesting diagram](#) analyzing gender breakdown of the student population in different subject areas, drawn from a recent report issued by the UK Department for Education. There is still a high proportion of women in the para-medical and educational fields, and a high number of men in computational sciences and engineering, with the most balanced fields being communication and historical/philosophical studies.

Posted by Nuné Nikoghosyan

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Abstract submission due: 14 January 2014

For more information please visit the conference web site:

<http://bcom.au.dk/research/conferencesandlectures/encompassing-the-multimodality-of-knowledge/>

On behalf of the organizing committee and the Research Group for Knowledge Communication,

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Posted by Judie Cross

International Conference on “Causality and Complexity in the Sciences”

International Conference on “Causality and Complexity in the Sciences”

September 8-11, 2014

University of Cologne

Albertus-Magnus-Platz, seminar building (Seminargebäude), S 21, S 24, and S 25

The aim of this conference is to investigate epistemological, metaphysical and conceptual aspects of causality in the sciences dealing with complex systems. The special focus will lie on the interplay between causality and complexity. Among the questions we want to address are: What is causal complexity, and how does it differ from other notions of complexity? Does the explanation of complex phenomena require non-causal or non-mechanistic explanations in particular? Is the macro-behavior of complex systems emergent? How do scientists in different fields deal with the (causal) complexity of their objects of study? Is it possible to identify general and transdisciplinary (explanatory) strategies of dealing with complexity?

This conference is an event in the conference series ["Causality in the Sciences"](#)

Confirmed plenary speakers

[Laura Franklin-Hall](#) (New York University)

[Mara Harrell](#) (Carnegie Mellon University)

[Paul Humphreys](#) (University of Virginia)

[Meinard Kuhlmann](#) (University of Bielefeld)

[Álvaro Moreno](#) (University of the Basque Country)

[Gry Oftedal](#) (University of Oslo)

[Cosma Shalizi](#) (Carnegie Mellon University)

[William Wimsatt](#) (University of Chicago)

In case you have any further question please contact the local organizers:

Marie I. Kaiser (kaiser.m@uni-koeln.de)

Alexander Reutlinger (Alexander.Reutlinger@lrz.uni-muenchen.de)

[Call for papers](#) (Deadline for submission: January 31, 2014)

[Travel grants](#)

[Tentative Program](#)

[Practical Information](#)

http://www.clde.uni-koeln.de/?page_id=1439