

## Breuer-Weil: Project 2

Ben Hanly - curator

It is not easy to find hard-edged, profoundly thought provoking contemporary paintings that clearly express a primal need on the part of the artist. Much painting today seems to lack the sense of urgency and need that is apparent in Breuer-Weil's work, that element of catharsis that is found in some of the best or at least most personal art. He has a disarmingly original take on the human condition. In terms of scale and inspiration, his creative endeavour is like a force of nature, an unstoppable flow of ideas rendered in the most direct painterly fashion. Although many of the works are monumentally conceived, they are also very intimate and tentative. They show the vulnerability of humanity, even though the paintings themselves are exhilaratingly expressive and impressively scaled. This is only one of many paradoxes inherent to this art. His work is cerebral and physical, conceptual and anti-conceptual, comic and tragic.

All of these works were painted over the last two years, in a remarkable burst of sustained activity. I curated Breuer-Weil's Project I, which was exhibited at the Undercroft of the Roundhouse in Camden Town in January-February 2001. It was there that I first saw the effect that a large installation of monumental paintings can have, each work feeding off the other, and creating an imaginative world with many iconographic relationships. Although every painting was executed independently as an individual statement, I do believe they gain a great deal seen as a single body of work. The works presented here are a continuation of Project I, and they are closely connected. But there are also differences from Project I. There are a lot of images of growth and rebirth. The Bargehouse seemed a perfect space to show this development. Like the Roundhouse it is a vast raw space, which is required for the scale and rawness of the paintings. Unlike the Roundhouse Undercroft, the Bargehouse is above ground, which matches the development in the paintings, many of which have images of human aspiration, faith and growth, 1. Furthermore, the layout of the space, which comprises several large, interconnected rooms accessed by staircases on differing levels literally enacts many of the compositions of the paintings themselves.

One of the main areas of development over the last two years has been a heightened interest in paint textures, in the most gritty and physically dynamic creation of stirring surfaces. The colours employed are elemental. The deep reds of the earth and the clear blues of the sky dominate. As Breuer-Weil has put it this series "is about the connections between thought and painting, both of which are instinctive human needs. Many of the surfaces are scratched with words, mostly illegible. These words do not suggest any particular meaning but are about the basic need to communicate, which is what art is at source".

Many of the Project paintings operate on several levels, and can be read in different ways. This fact is clearly articulated in some of the paintings, such as *MUSCLE (SLEEPERS II)*, where groups of figures are asleep within different layers of blankets one atop the other. This painting suggests one generation resting or sleeping on previous generations. It also resembles a microscopic photograph of striated muscle tissue, which explains the title, the mesmerising composition and the way in which this work creates such a massive sense of calm,

of relaxed energy. Breuer-Weil has said "Collective sleep is a tremendous theme because every night there is this massive trance shared by millions of people, something that is rarely expressed in art". This idea has affected many of his other works, where the figures often seem to be at peace even amongst seemingly calamitous surroundings.

*GENOME* depicts a man resting his hands on the heads of two smaller figures. Each of these in turn holds another two heads, and each of these another two. Very soon there are dozens of figures. This very simple concept, an arithmetic progression of connected human figures creates an image that resembles a microscopic genetic structure. On another level it looks like a family tree, a modern totem. In *PROJECT I* there were paintings that also appeared to explore genetic experiments, for example the large still-life of bottles filled with human forms titled *EXPERIMENT*. *GENOME* also resembles a large root or a tree and in this way connects with all the other paintings that portray trees in the Project.

"Trees are emblems of memory, each ring is a trace of lost but recorded time". In *CUT*, a small face appears at the centre of each cross section. The series of large paintings of trees containing different elements is very positive but also has disturbing undertones. *BIRDTREE* is filled with birds who are in fact humans, who hatch, walk along branches, stay in groups and occasionally fall to the ground. "Birds represent the human condition, the cycle of life, human vulnerability and aspiration. The idea of hatching also represents the leaving of one reality for another, another major theme in my work". For Breuer-Weil the tree represents creativity of the purest form, but it is also the most ancient symbol of knowledge, good, evil and sacrifice.

"Tortoises, snails and birds are obsessions because they emphasize human vulnerability, strength, aspiration, absurdity, creativity and mass instinct. *BIRDTREE* is a life cycle painting, like many others, but is also about the very nature of representation". Breuer-Weil interchanges one life form for another, employing tragi-comic metaphors. In one of the most disturbing paintings in Project 2, *CATCH*, a group of humans are drawn up on fishing rods, caught by unseen fishermen. He also employs metaphors for the elements, for example in the paintings where sheets symbolise water.

Many images suggest war. *INVASION 2*, a large field filled with crawling people with tortoise shells cover the canvas. Some observers have seen some kind of Kafkaesque metamorphosis here. The source is insecurity, of the human need for some kind of protective shell. In other words this invasion is an invasion of fragile creatures that need the shells to protect them. But if I compare this strange image with *INVASION 3*, interesting things emerge. *INVASION 3* presents a whole field of heads turning away from the viewer. The top of each of these is cut and exposed. Inside each head a much smaller head looks directly at the viewer. This image could also be about the difference between the apparent and the real. With this work Breuer-Weil gives expression to what he has described as "the Janus-headed reality of our time".

1, The smaller works and studies for Project 2 are exhibited at the Boundary Gallery.



INVASION 1 presents a perspective filled with clothes rails with empty clothes receding into the distance. "Empty clothes are emblems of the wearer, a way of suggesting absence and presence simultaneously. CLOTHES TREE is about absence and growth. The empty clothes are a form of arrested development whilst the tree grows. When we are young we discard clothes because we have grown out of them, they represent one period which we have left behind". In this respect an empty set of clothing is a work of art, like Joseph Beuys' suit.

FOREST is a wood where the root of each tree is a human being. This is an image of mortality, it appears distressing but is actually filled with optimism, because the growth comes from the passing of time, and from the passing of life. I believe that this work is symptomatic of the end of the Post-modern period. The images are very basic, instinctual, ancient. Breuer-Weil is starting again, a naked person in an uncultivated wood. He has shed his cultural clothing.

Time is a vital aspect of Breuer-Weil's work, particularly in the series of Egg-Timer paintings. On one level the timer is a familiar, even domestic motif. But it also has strong abstract qualities which are accentuated by the fact that the glass receptacle is barely visible and carries reflections. The two equal halves of a timer seem to represent different levels of reality, like many of the images, for example those that show people both above ground and underground at the same time – a possible reference to the coexistence of life and death at any one time. In the largest of the egg timers a massive group of intertwined figures slowly drop through the upper half of the timer to the lower half. "As they squeeze through it looks and seems like some kind of birth, from one reality to another, which is in a sense what constantly happens with time, which is an endless succession of births and deaths, of moments".

The majority of these paintings contain strong figural elements, but they also work initially (especially when seen from a distance or in small reproductions) as abstract compositions. They each have a powerful abstract framework or structure, which is essential to the symbolic meaning. Many of the paintings portray large divided spaces, for example SPACE which is a series of interconnected rooms seen from an aerial perspective. IN AND OUT shows dozens of interconnected rooms joined by doors that open and close obsessively. At each doorway stands a figure, either entering or leaving the room. Because all the rooms are connected the

permutations are endless, the painting seems to record a mesmerising scene of comings and goings – perhaps another statement on mortality. When you first see this work it looks like a puzzling geometric abstract.

SPACE is also geometric in design and presents a different but related scenario. In the very small first room are packed seven people. The next room is a little larger and contains six people. The third room, larger still, contains five. The fourth four, the fifth three, all the time the rooms increasing in size as the numbers of people there diminish. At the end there is a colossal room with only one person there. I am sure this is also in some way about mortality. Because the figures walking from one bare room to another are seen from above, each head also appears at first to be a dot within a geometric grid. A recent painting of aerially seen rooms is titled CIRCLE. People are going through doors from one room to another. In some of them there is congestion. But the journey from room to room is continuous and endless. There are no doors opening to the outside. "It is an image of a self-contained world and of the terrifying idea of immortality". SPACE and CIRCLE develop ideas first seen in Project 1 with the canvas PERSPECTIVE *fig1* (1999) which shows hands reaching out from a large perspective of divided spaces. Its pendant CRATE *fig2* (2000) employed an aerial perspective like the more recent paintings. The paradox of the aerially seen works is that although the figures seem trapped, they are observed from a position suggestive of height and consequently liberation or transcendence.

There are many vortexes in Breuer-Weil's work. In THREAT one person is faced with a series of spear-like, hugely mutated pens. ROLL is a massive scroll, which runs over every person in its path and pulls him or her into its body. "It contains them like a womb. This is a reversal of the normal procedure where life starts with a womb. But the womb is also a scroll, and a scroll suggests both rolls of canvas and scroll of text", which has religious connotations. The striations of the roll seen from the side also connect this work to MUSCLE (SLEEPERS 2). Like GENOME the scroll at first glance resembles a biological micro-structure. In another painting titled WOMB a small figure is contained in a room. Another room surrounds this room, which is surrounded by another ad infinitum. This is an image both of entrapment and protection.

In the new paintings the animate is often replaced with the inanimate,

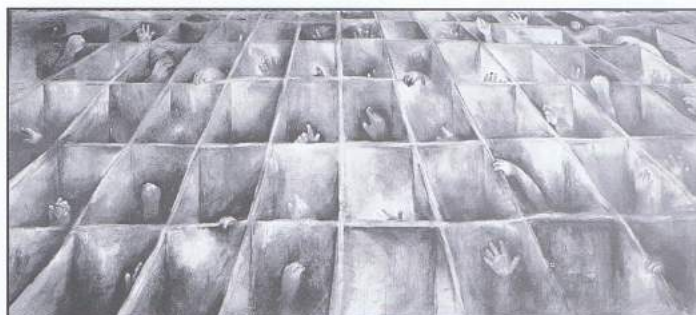


Fig1 Perspective, 1999, (Project1), Private Collection, London

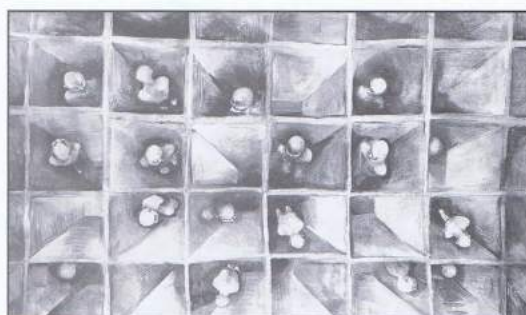


Fig2 Crate, 1999, (Project1), Private Collection, London



for example a threatening image of rows of envelopes and the mountains of stacked canvases that are also reminiscent of storerooms of looted art. "The story of looted art makes the canvas into a virtual metaphor for a victim of genocide. The canvases are seen from behind. The wooden stretchers dominate. This grained wood connects these paintings with all my images of trees, woods and planks".

"In CUT the cut trees are a revelation of hidden time, hidden levels of reality. The cut tree is a murder but also a revelation. Small faces peer upward from the centre of each sliced tree. They have been exposed. The core is alive, unexpectedly". Some people will read these paintings as warnings about environmental damage, but Breuer-Weil clearly has no precise political agenda. In WAITING people sit beside trees, but it is not clear exactly what they are waiting for with such patience. It is both a very calm and a tragic image. In TIDE time is relentless, a series of waves hammering the beach. But the waves are not made of water. Each wave is a sheet driven forward by a human being that rushes along furiously beneath it. The other waves, also human, ride on the backs of the previous ones in an endless pattern. These figures may represent generations that pass as quickly as waves.

Both parts of the Project explore the coexistence of different levels of reality, which is, in some sense, a platonic concept. This idea is enacted clearly in WATCH, a massive canvas that portrays a great crowd striding along a field. Larger faces in the sky watch each figure. These small, striding figures are watched by themselves as they charge along. This can be seen in many of the paintings in PROJECT 2, notably, COMMUTE 2, where there is a quieter, more spiritual moment of recognition. It looks like a communication between different species of humans, almost like the arrival of aliens greeting people for the first time. Each stares in amazement at the other. This mystic happening appears to take place on an empty beach. A similar moment is enacted in MOUTH, where two groups of people observe each other from different gravitational positions. When first seen this looks like a mouth.

COMMUTE 1, the largest work in Project 2, is a triptych measuring nine metres in total length. It presents a perspective of figures marching to and from an unknown destination. This profoundly unsettling work is paradoxical. The figures look like victims in some sense, yet they are drawn along by a tremendous sense of dynamism, as if pulled along by some instinct. Like many of the other pieces in this show, it can be read on many levels. Is it an exploration of the futility of the life of a commuter? Or is it about the difficulty of communication (like COMMUTE 2). Are the walls solid or as flexible as the pages of a book?

Images of books and other tools of information are prevalent in PROJECT 2 as they were in PROJECT 1. The large canvas ENCAMPMENT represents people sheltered by books. The books are like tents. They protect those sheltering under them as much as the shells protect the tortoise-men in INVASION 2. Information is protection but also a form of imprisonment.

In GRAPH two sets of figures walk into a suspended sheet from opposite directions. The advance of each figure prevents the advance of the one approaching from the opposite direction. From the aerial perspective this creates a zigzag form graph which, in some sense, represents competition and the ups and down of humanity. The advance of one frustrates the progress of another. When first seen this work looks like a stock-market graph. GRAPH 2 is similar but presents a more intimate moment of opposition with three figures.

Staircases and ladders continue to obsess the artist. Many of the works are titled either ASCENT or DESCENT. "The DESCENT paintings enact my search for hidden truths. The ASCENT paintings are about aspiration, about our desire to transcend our material nature".

Many of the new paintings have images of the act of writing, presented as an instinctive, not predetermined act, a human necessity. The writing comes out of the pen in one continuous stream, the words are only partially legible and make little sense. The text itself is of unclear language. In fact it is written in English but it could also be Latin, Greek, Arabic or Hebrew. Breuer-Weil presents language as a universal outpouring of the need to record experience not as a specific meaning in any particular language. In other words, writing is presented as a form of expression that exists before it has a specific meaning. WRITER 2 is an image of a small figure writing on the ground, leaving behind him a trail of words that appears like a magical, artistic, composition. In one sense this is a continuation of his earlier images of snails, carrying the idea of leaving a glistening, barely visible trace behind. In RACE a group of naked figures write on the ground. Their writing stretches into the background and looks like a plowed field. "Writing is a form of plowing, the planting of a seed. Our society has inherited an addiction to information, something that is both positive and negative. In RACE the writing is as instinctive and vital as the primal agricultural act of plowing". This work has a wide range of meanings and its name, RACE, is deliberately ambiguous.

For Breuer-Weil, pens and brushes are simple extensions of human hands, tools that enable us to communicate with our environment, both enhancing and polluting it with our desire to express ourselves. Art is, on one level, a form of pollution, as is writing. Both activities are the start of our domination of nature. They are also, with speech, the main actions that distinguish us from animals – proof of our need to communicate and to leave behind some sort of mark.

It is hard to deny that Breuer-Weil is one of the most powerful new painters working today. Once you have seen one of his large cycles of paintings, you cannot look at humanity in the same way again. He has engaged with some of the most pressing themes of our time in an entirely original way, uninfluenced by any scene.



## Extremes in the art of Breuer-Weil

John Russell Taylor, art critic, The Times

David Breuer-Weil has been known up to now primarily as a symbolist, reflecting (though not without humour) an agonised world of the imagination. His Project 1 series of paintings clearly concerned the existential plight of mankind, caught in a number of irresolvable dilemmas, in which the individual could struggle forever to get out of the box assigned him, or swim endlessly against the stream in which he was caught, while aware that the best result of all his effort was to stay in the same place. All of this came, fairly unmistakably, from his Jewish heritage: his father was a Viennese Jew, and many of his father's family perished in the Holocaust. No wonder Breuer-Weil himself could hardly fail to be affected by the greatest of twentieth-century traumas. And when the references seem to be more remote, classical myths appear (the myth of Sisyphus, who had to roll an enormous stone endlessly uphill without ever getting any nearer the top, seems to haunt Breuer-Weil as it famously haunted Camus before him).

Project 1 has now been succeeded by Project 2. In a sense it is more of the same, but in fact there is a clear progression from phase to phase. Perhaps above all a technical progression: this time round the colours are more vivid and varied, and the whole approach is more "painterly" in the use of paint for its own sake - for the sheer joy of it, one might say this time - rather than primarily to apply colour to what seems to be essentially a draughtsman's statement. The people still seem to be confined to little compartments, or running as fast as they can in order to stay put. But the possibility of liberation seems to be nearer, if only because they can start to escape the tyranny of the tightly drawn line and burst into the freedom of paint.

All this can be accounted for - to the extent that any vibrant artistic creation can be accounted for - in relation to Breuer-Weil's paternal heritage. But we tend to forget, or just do not know, that his mother's heritage is different. She was born Danish, and while no Scandinavian is likely to be associated unequivocally with light and joy, there is a lot of Danish painting which reflects the long summer days rather than the long winter nights. And that must surely be where the other side of Breuer-Weil's art comes from: the side which has long been present but never before exhibited in depth. In one of the present shows ("Extremes" at the Boundary Gallery), for the first time, the artist allows some of the more searing works of Project 2 to be shown alongside his tranquil, mysterious landscapes. Or rather, perhaps one should say, seascapes, since many of them seem to be looking outward at an almost abstract expanse of misty water and watery sky.

It cannot be too fanciful to see in these pieces a close connection with the painters of Skagen, especially Kroyer, who seemed to have their being imaginatively on the long, sandy strands, in the opalescent dusks of a north Jutland summer. Is there some apparent contradiction between these two sides of Breuer-Weil's art? No more, surely, than any of us feel impaled upon the great dilemma of life. Presumably he would be happy to say, with Walt Whitman: "Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself."



## Thinking in Images: A Brief Memoir and Appreciation Simon Blomfield

One day when I went round to David's room in Clare College Cambridge, where we were fellow English students in the late-1980s, the floor was strewn with dozens of playing card-sized scraps of paper, on each of which was a drawing. They were of bald, naked human figures, their outlines quickly drawn in rough lines. They crouched, or curled foetally, or held arms above them as if to shield themselves from a blow. Figure after figure was an image of vulnerability. And there was David, squatting among them and grinning broadly.

He and I spent a lot of time together as students, and there were many evenings in his room, which was also his studio, where canvases were stacked in deep piles against every available bit of wall space. We talked about the books we were studying (me a good deal more assiduously than him) which included philosophy and psychology as well as the greats of English literature. And as we talked, he painted.

In the many hours I spent watching David paint what amazed me was his ability to find images, and the technical facility that enabled him to turn his ideas into paintings at an unbelievable speed. Before those naked figures appeared he had been producing elongated women in red ball-gowns who eerily mixed glamour and malevolence. In the weeks that followed came a stream of paintings in which the same forms were enlarged in whites, blues and purples. I don't know if this was the first time such figures had appeared in David's work, but after an absence of several years, they are there again, twelve years later, in 'The Project'. And the women who disappeared from his work with their arrival are again absent.

Even the most casual observer of David's paintings can hardly fail to be impressed by the strength and variety of his imagery. The human figures in 'The Project' are not always so wracked by anguish as were those in the Cambridge sketches. I was always perplexed by the contrast between David's cheerfulness and vigour and the anguish that is often represented in his work. But David has no qualms and no inhibitions in this respect. He sketches continually, and he doesn't censor what appears. He refuses to predetermine what images he would like to produce and he doesn't conceptualise the result. He seizes on the elements in his drawings that have strength and energy, and he follows that strength where it leads him. He is always alert to images in the world around, but still more to those in his thoughts. He exemplifies Emerson's advice that: 'a man should learn to detect and watch the glimmer of light that flashes across his mind from within.'

There is a characteristically eccentric secret behind David's images. As a child he invented a kingdom called 'the Empire of Nerac,' and he imagines that each pen he buys is the tool of a court artist of the Empire. When the pen stops working the artist has died, and another will take his place. The artists have varying styles, and their work develops through their careers, making this a phenomenal prompt to creativity. David has been producing Neracian drawings for twenty years, and perhaps even he does not know how many albums have been filled with such work (it must be hundreds).

I didn't realize it at the time, but the drawings I saw spread across David's floor were Neracian images. Eventually he brought some of his old albums up to Cambridge and I discovered Nerac for myself. Many of the drawings depicted inhabitants of the empire. There were angular depictions of Archdukes and Grand Viziers holding themselves stiffly before ornate interiors adorned with occult symbols and Kabbalistic hieroglyphs. There was a veritable dynasty of crown

princes and pretentious nobility with covetous, disdainful expressions in drawings that resembled baroque lithographs embossed onto postage stamp scraps. Through this fiction David combines his engagement with raw imagery with a childlike playfulness (these aren't his drawings, they are the artist's) and this combination of vigour and frivolity accounts for the imaginative freedom of his work, and perhaps the element of whimsy in some of it.

It is natural to ask who or what the figures in these paintings signify. At the time I saw those images scattered across his room my immediate association was with the shaven and shrunken figures that stare out from photographs of concentration camps. A few years ago I took part in a contemplative retreat in the grounds of Birkenau and, in seeking to reflect on what had happened there, I found that David's figures came to my mind. His 1990 Sotheby's show, 'Large Figurations', contained huge canvasses of melding, interlocking figures in softened reds and blues. At the time he produced these I thought David had moved on from his preoccupation with suffering, but at Birkenau those images, too, came to my mind as eerily sublimated recapitulations of torsos piled on the floor of gas chambers.

In the most personal and characteristic parts of David's work even overtly tranquil images seem shaded by something darker. One of the most powerful of the Project 1 canvases is 'Crate' in which figures stand in a honeycomb of cubicles and we peer down on their shaven heads and stifled bodies. Like 'Perspective', the similar painting of hands reaching up from cells, this is a powerful figuration of the pervasive isolation of our enucleated lives. But it evoked for me a more visceral association: the tiny standing cells at Auschwitz in which prisoners were kept in a closely confined space for days and weeks on end, without room to sit.

But it would be a mistake to identify these images solely with the Holocaust. Such literalism ties them to a concept, and David's whole endeavour is to evade such narrowness. His undergraduate dissertation was on Holocaust literature, and he shared George Steiner's concern that Holocaust art would always be inferior to the awfulness of the simple historical truth, and that fictionalising or mythologising the victims' experience risked violating it. That was one of the subjects we tossed backwards and forwards as I lay on the couch in his room, book in hand, and he painted. Perhaps behind that discussion lay the tensions in Jewish tradition (and David is a devout Jew) around the place of visual art in the light of the Second Commandment injunction against graven images. Does this express, alongside rejection of the literal idolatry that reduces the divine to a statue, a sense that any human depiction does an injustice to the inalienable truth, the mysterious 'suchness' of the world as it has been created - imaged - by God? I suspect that David's imagination is endlessly haunted by the Holocaust, but his paintings evade the problem of violation by distilling some essence of that experience and deeply internalising it. David's paintings are uninhibited expressions of the images that appear in his inner landscape, and he values them for their power as images, whatever historical, artistic or psychological forces may have produced them.

But concepts and images are closely tied. Aquinas says that we cannot think without images, and Freud (whom we both studied at Cambridge) tells us that resonant images are a kind of thought. And at their best David's paintings resonate, signify and communicate in ways that prompt interpretation. I don't have much to say about his more overtly metaphorical works, except that I think he is much more of an expressionist than a satirist, surrealist or allegoriser. His works



undoubtedly comment on modern society, and on contemporary art, but their fundamental concern is more with the soul than with the intellect.

The best guide to David's paintings that I can think of is Kafka. Like the figures in David's paintings Kafka's characters are not preoccupied with life in general, and still less with historical events, but with the peculiar circumstances of the world they inhabit, which follow different rules from those we are used to. Kafka's world is one where you may be tried and convicted but never told your crime, or you can wake up and find you have turned into a giant insect. The tortoise-man in the Project image "Invasion 2" could be a brother to Kafka's insect, and many of Breuer-Weil's characters look lost, as if they have undergone a similar metamorphosis. Their expressions are strained, and they seem perplexed – and perhaps oppressed – by the strangeness of their circumstances.

David's characteristic colours also contribute to the sense that the paintings create a dislocated world. In our second year at Cambridge we both lived across the road from Kettles Yard, the house-turned-gallery that is a shrine to the elegant subtlety of the European-influenced British art of the mid-Twentieth century. David commented on this work, 'They use so much white!' He meant that colours were typically softened by being mixed with white, and the Kettle's Yard aesthetic is a harmonious combination of fabrics, muted colours, and rounded forms. Nothing could be further from David's vision, which is 'uncanny' in Freud's sense of 'unheimlich', literally meaning 'unhomely'. He uses cold blues, strong reds and a great deal of purple as well as yellows and blacks. You cannot feel at home with these colours, and the figures in the world they create are also, in a powerful sense, not at home.

The protagonists of 'The Project' paintings most resemble Kafka's heroes in being victims: caught in webs or crushed under a boot, or pouring over a weir in a vast river with the rest of humanity. Kafka's creed was patience, and David's similarly endure their peculiar circumstances. Sometimes they seem like ghosts, waiting inside suits or beds, like the memory of the owners or the previous occupants. Or perhaps they are our own ghosts, waiting to emerge from our skull while we are still living, or mysterious Kabbalistic spirits that suffer for us the consequences of our own spiritual malaise. But whether they are images of ourselves as victims or they are victims of ourselves, they gaze out with a stoical dignity that is not the result of heroic resistance, but simply of being themselves. Because of their sufferings – not in spite of them – these figures endure, and possess a strength such as that superbly expressed by Kafka in *The Blue Octavo Notebooks*: 'Believing means liberating the indestructible element in oneself, or more accurately, being indestructible, or more accurately, being.'

Perhaps something of this indestructibility lies behind the massive calm and solidity of the most successful pieces in 'The Project' – the

superb large canvases such as 'Descent', 'Web' Fig 3, 'Fall' Fig 4, 'Perspective', 'Graph', 'Roll', 'Genome' and 'In and Out'. Their compositional ambition makes them so complete and so intensely focused that the individual figures become part of a vision of the human condition. Their calm comes from the wholeness of that vision. Having known David's work over the years, these paintings seem to me a peak of his achievement to date, uniting many elements that have been long germinating.

So powerful are the images that David produces that it is possible to ignore another dimension of his work, which for me is just as characteristic and just as expressive: texture. I spent hours watching as he built up the textures from which the images are constructed, with astonishing skill and rapidity. Look closely at a detail of many of his paintings and you will see a fascinating abstract that combines his distinctive colouration with large, bold contrasts. For several years in the 1990s these textures were absent from his work, but they re-emerged in 'The Project', and for me this is essential Breuer-Weil. These textures are like a signature, the expression of a temperament and sensibility that is constantly present, whatever image may be in the foreground. Looking at his paintings you can focus in on the texture and let the image dissolve into it. Or you can step back, and allow the image to distil itself from the layers of paint. I can imagine the subject matter of David's paintings going through many phases in coming years, but it is hard to imagine these textures disappearing.

They are there, too, in his lumpy, rough-worked sculpture, and in both media his work has a visceral quality that abets the immediacy of the imagery. He is capable of great subtlety in colouration, but I also watched as he slapped the paint on and then gouged great channels through it. And this isn't just backgrounds: this is how he did faces. The physicality of the painting is an important reason why, for all the ideas that course across the canvasses, his work is anything but intellectual.

David's work is expressionist not only in its echoes of other artists, but also in the root sense of being expressive. We observe a mind expressing in images what cannot be said in words, and for that reason the very strongest work earns the right to be contemplated for itself, not for the ideas that are drawn into its gravitational field. Although they excavate an inner landscape his paintings are not introverted or narcissistic. At their best they give us the world bodied forth as image, and they suggest the sense in which the world is to be discovered through the images that appear to an attuned and reflective consciousness. Kafka, once again, says it best:

'There is no need for you to leave the house. Stay at your table and listen. Don't even listen, just wait. Don't even wait, be completely quiet and alone. The world will offer itself to you to be unmasked; it can't do otherwise; in raptures it will writhe before you.'

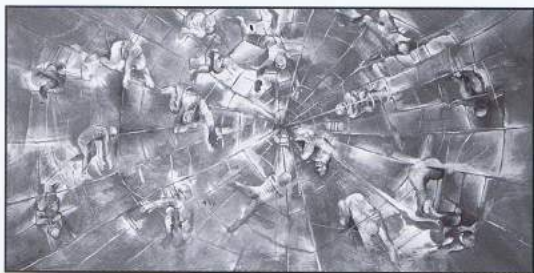


Fig3 Web, 2000, (Project 1), Collection of the Artist



Fig4 Fall, 2000, (Project 1), European Private Collection