

BUNKBEDS

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Introduction

Bunkbeds is an ongoing body of work that addresses the nature of remembering. By drawing upon grander ideas like culture, nostalgia and identity and how our own biases, influence the way in which things are remembered, the series attempts to depict the gap between memory and history. I've utilised painting as my main medium for the duration of the consolidative unit as well as for the large majority of my artistic practice. It's a medium I both enjoy with but provides constant challenge. From technical challenges with colour, compositions and draughtsmanship to the conceptual struggles of translating beliefs and thoughts into images without relying on metaphor. However, I've found painting to hold a strong emotive power which I attribute to our relationships with images and colour.

“Painting is an illusion, a piece of magic, so what you see is not what you see” (P Guston pg 278).

Guston's insight into the workings of paint has been a huge source of clarity and depth into my own understanding of paint and what it means to work in the figurative realm. To address the paradoxical nature of the physicality of paint but also the worlds it creates provided a jumping point to begin to understand the difference between images, painting and intention.

My report consists of three elements that made up my work as act as a sort of timeline of the progression I made alongside the works that came from the individual branches. The branches are identity and culture, image and enchantment and nostalgia and memory. All focus on the influence imagery has on them and vice versa as I aimed to centralise the image-making process and contextualise it through the theory that's influenced me.

The final oeuvre of work I've created is a compilation of all the ideas and concepts I've come to believe apply to my work. From the methods I employ to the intentions I've imprinted within the images all of them stem from my continued research and I've developed a holistic approach to painting that allows the works to channel a wide range of both medium related topics and my own ideas into one cohesive whole.

Identity and Culture

“SOCIETY ALMOST ALWAYS WINS OUT BY FORCING INNER SELVES TO CONFORM TO EXTERNAL NORMS” FUKUYAMA PG35

Bunkbeds as a project began with the research into identity and how we quantify it in a contemporary setting. It is undeniable the role social media has played in the way culture has shifted during the past 20 years and as such how our identity's have shifted in the ways we present ourselves and the way we perceive others. I had a particular focus on the concept of Thymos; the idea that we all crave social recognition, at the start of my research and wanted to explore this notion through the compositions of my paintings. This led me to begin questioning the role of the viewer and how we perceive paintings and images in general in terms of how we engage with them.



“Rain” was an early painting in the series that fell into this branch of enquiry. The figure refusing to look and the arms that enter from the bottom of the canvas placed the viewer in a POV perspective. This opened a discussion of distance within my works. Rain has a particular both openness and closeness to it that was intended to create an intimate, debatably claustrophobic feeling that could be recognised by a viewer.

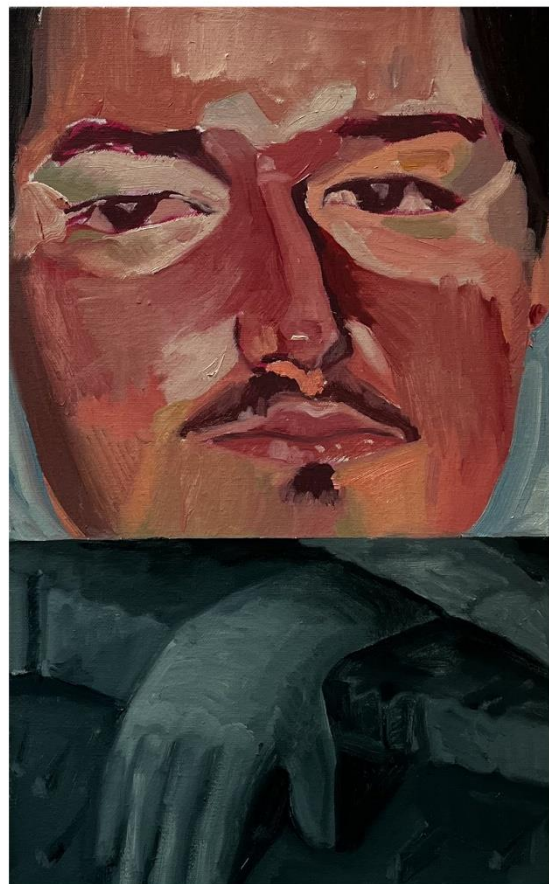
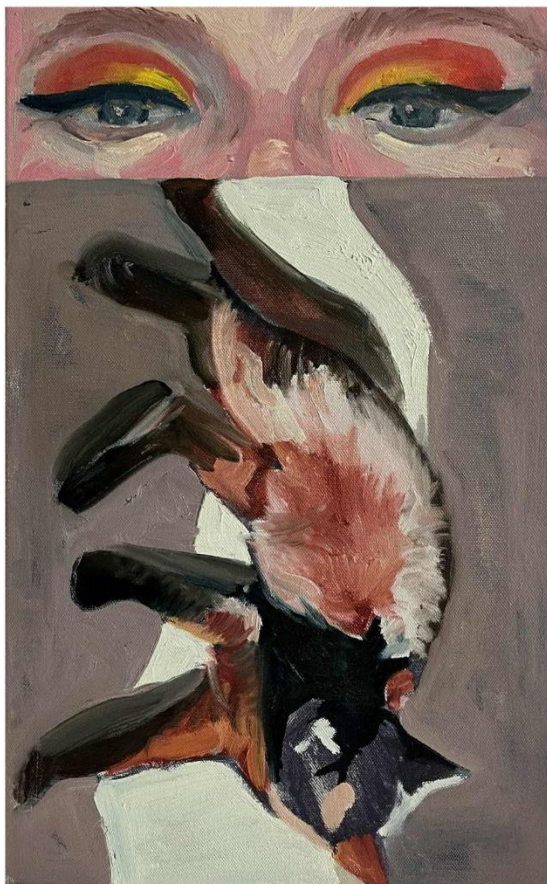
Berger talks about the concept of intimacy in painting stating “the surface verisimilitude of oil painting tends to make the viewer assume that he is close to – within touching distance of – any object in the foreground of the picture. If the object is a person such proximity implies a certain intimacy” Berger pg 97. By utilising the concept of space within my paintings I began to attempt to break down the barriers between the image and the viewer allowing them to intermingle and allowing the image to act upon the viewer. However, with all painting the intention of the piece and the reception of the piece are two different things. To attempt to express the success of the piece via the way it’s received, especially given the importance I place on the viewers role in image-making, was something that challenged me throughout this period of making work and led me to taking on a more literal approach to challenging how the viewer interacts with the image.

This exercise in challenging the role of both viewer and image was the starting point of a deep investigation of how images work today. There is an oversaturation of imagery in the post-digital age caused by the way in which the internet has become integral to our every day. To paint in an era of such oversaturation, without acknowledging the growing trends of how we interact with images, is the same as ignoring the mediums own history and place in the contemporary diaspora. This informed my own understanding of both painting as a medium/practice and of the sway culture has over identity these formed the core of my project at the start.

Social media was the source of my interest in images, having perhaps the largest volume of images available mostly with the intent of projecting a certain ideal. By that I mean that social media is portrayed as a way to share oneself and activities with friends and family yet the intention whenever one creates or photographs an image will always differ from the reality. In a sense social media, a world of make believe or half-truths that sell an ideal or more pessimistically a lie. This “make believe is what people do when they act as if something were true without being certain or enduring. Make believe delights in temporary conditions; belief does not” Morgan pg 28. This mode of understanding would once again have us question the effects of images. To truly believe in the contents of an image would be akin to projecting one’s ideals onto the image and thus having the image reflect them back. The temporary conditions mentioned prior are instead, the suspense of disbelief we all agree to when scrolling, liking and viewing through our connections on social media. For instance, we can never truly know the thought of another thereby meaning we cannot know the intentions, so when we interact on social media, we accept the ‘truth’ proposed to us. The smiling selfie means nothing more than the individual is happy, yet the same individual in their everyday life may be experiencing a very different reality. This is a defining trait of the way images work especially within cultural/social circles, that truth is what we accept it to be and as such reality is what we accept it to be.

The issue with this acceptance starts from the participator role or the active role. If we consider the one accepting the truth as the viewer, then the role of the creator/poster is now the active participator, their will is within the image. By understanding that the way one portrays themselves is how they are perceived, the control of perception is now in the hands of the creator. Historically this role was in the hands of governments or religions, later artists and authors had a hand in portraying *their* truth. Currently we all have access to an audience and as such have access to the power of portrayal.

This isn't to say that being able to portray oneself through a lens is a negative thing it is just the way that imagery has evolved alongside technology and culture. The importance, as a painter, is in understanding the ever-evolving nature and substance of imagery. This point of view is what fuelled a small series of painting that focused on the interplay and contemporary settings of images. The general idea was to take 2 unrelated images and force them into the same surface. Similarly to the way we experience overlapping images on social media and the lack of context they provide to each other these images work in a similar way. Yet, by forcing them to inhabit the same surface a forced context is created addressing the core of how images are processed and how they can or more commonly don't provide context to one another or the viewer.



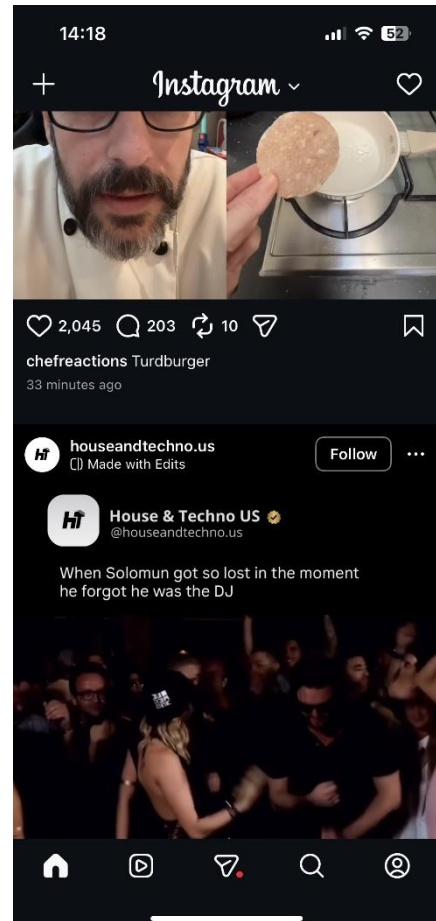


The above piece was of a similar strain to the 2 smaller pieces but focused more on a painterly/emotive approach to images. Working from memory as opposed to reference opened the potential to attempt for a more honest “intention”. The idea of “Wanting, in connection with the creation of artworks, does seem necessarily to entail some reference to a prior image, because it is this image which serves as the object of the want, i.e., it is the image which renders the want intelligible” (Hagberg pg 64) thus leading us to the idea that the nature of painting vs image making is more intuitive but also inherently insular within the context of viewing the work. The image cannot escape the viewers interpretation as the artist cannot escape the inevitability of the piece being “complete”. So, in my endeavour to pursue an honest intention the pre-intention of creating an image is still ever-present, an underlying will that guides the purpose of the action. This duality of action vs intention is unavoidable when creating anything, to try to remove one from the other is oxymoronic and leads only to a misunderstanding by the artist of their own process. With this revelation in mind my ideas of addressing intent or trying to influence it were moved to the side of my practice and instead I leant into the inevitability of my intent seeping into the pieces. Combining both an awareness for the viewers experiences when looking and my own internal bias that would reveal itself regardless of intent.

Images and Enchantment

“In the last few decades, a variety of kinds of scholars – anthropologists, art historians, archaeologists – have come to regard images as agents or actors. Doing so departs from the prevailing view that an image is a sign, a coded symbol of meaning delivered in the form of a visual message. According to that approach, an image is a communication of information. An image is another version of language or text. This model of images fails to account for the deeply affective relationships that people develop with images as objects, whether relics icons, fine art or family photographs.” D Morgan

The contemporary condition of images has undeniably shifted from the historical idea that they are simply symbols and signs. The cultural shift that occurred with the rise of social media and the following prevalence of an abundance of images always present to us has forced a sort of hierarchy on the value of an image. To explain the idea below is a selection of 3 images, one a screenshot taken from social media app Instagram, one a painting by Doig and the final the British flag.





The screenshot is an example of what I've been referring to as the visual noise. A type of imagery that is so abundant within our current era of post digital consumption, yet the least acknowledged 'space' within that sphere. The lack of any sort of context, aesthetic, or reason makes the image devoid of any sort of value which we can gain from as consumer/viewers.

The second image is arguably Doig's most famous painting "Blotter". Awarded the John Moores painting prize and since reproduced as prints, published in books and shared prolifically online. The painting provides us, unlike the previous image, information. The depiction of the boy in the frozen lake, painted dramatically and delicately in purples and whites, we can infer meaning from the artists intention. Providing us beauty, we can also gain from the joy such an image brings. Finally, as with most works of art, the piece allows us to contemplate, it offers us an image, but we are able to dwell upon the 'meaning' and come to our own conclusions of what the image means.

Lastly the image of the British flag. Flags in general act as icons of nationalism often evoking deep feelings of belonging/attachment or conversely, and becoming seemingly more apparent, a feeling of non-belonging. The British flag is a divisive image/object, tied to a history of colonialism and empire, that has a power of its own. Morgan talks on liza Bakewell's idea of "image-acts", which proposes that images go beyond simply communicating and symbolising; instead suggesting that images can act and that thought itself operates in a visual medium not a linguistic form. He states that "in this way of thinking, the image is not framed principally as the tool of the viewer or the sign of the viewers meaning-making; rather it operates as an active source, as the speaker, directly affecting the viewers thoughts, feeling and behaviour" (D morgan pg 50) The flag

is a good example of the effect that we can feel when looking and how the object/image in question operates and affects viewers. The switch from a symbol of nationalism to an object capable of affecting a viewer's thoughts and feelings mirrors the cultural switch that "modern man is not loyal to a monarch or a land or faith, whatever he may say, but to a culture" (E Gellner pg 35)

The progression of culture and the way in which we understand how images can work can retroactively affect the way in which we view art both old and new. The focus on the intention of the image itself was a large part of what drove my paintings and the way in which they were composed. The lack of intention I mentioned in regard to the screenshot was something particularly valuable to my understanding of how imagery works or in this case doesn't work in a contemporary setting. Leading to a overabundance of visual noise pervading our everyday consumption of imagery from adverts to social media to art. The most prevalent of which being social media, the term doom scrolling refers to the act of absent mindedly scrolling through the sea of images we are provided with on said social media. It raises an awareness of the power of the image being able to draw attention, to garner interest, to act upon an onlooker.

One of the biggest influences of my practice for the past few years is Danica Lundy whose work features figures and limbs in often surreal spaces. The spaces themselves are compositionally really interesting, both magnifying, flattening and twisting perspectives to present familiar spaces in chaotic perspectives. The chaos produced by Lundy's approach to compositions was of real interest to me, if we consider the image below, of an interior of a car in a drive through. The cultural implications of the space;



convenience, fast paced, cyclical, are all brought into the fray amongst the compositional implications of floating limbs, a forced perspective, as if we're viewing the scene as fly from underneath, all come together to create a sort of theatre set that presents the viewer with a multitude of entry points.

I wanted to apply my thoughts of how images work with her work and came to the conclusion that Lundy employs these skewed perspectives in a way that deliberately brings the viewers attention to it. To provide the viewer with the visual cue that they're looking at this scene from above or below or from within, is more jarring than the typical centralised onlooker view that is more akin to being behind a camera looking into a scene. Which I've come to believe is key to tackling spaces within my own paintings, with either missing context or only half a figure to suggest closeness and thus challenge both the viewers perception of their position and the world within the canvas and figures within them.



Above is a painting of mine titled “waiting for enlightenment”, stolen from a line from the film ‘Good Morning Vietnam’. The piece employs a few of the ideas I have been looking into, one of them being the perspective I employ. The piece places the figure centrally in the canvas but only shows only half of the figure, the reason being to give that sense of closeness to the viewer. To force a perspective within the stillness of the image. The piece came from a moment I recalled of being stood by the sink waiting for the tap to get hot and I liked the idea of trying to capture that mindlessness and stillness in contrast to the chaos of everyday life. However, I wanted to try and draw the viewer into that feeling and feel the intimacy of a solitary moment. Overall, the influence of Lundy has been felt in multiple way from the consideration I give to my compositions to the colour palettes I use to create the atmospheres within my paintings. The main take away though, for me, has been her ability to take these sorts of cultural spaces and apply that painterly method of image making to them without compromising the intelligibility of the scene. Which has in turn influenced the style in which I render my paintings trying to stay in the realm of figuration but allowing paint to act as it does, both in terms of colour and mark making.

Overall my understanding of images has come down to the manipulation of the viewer and how I can interfere with the way in which the viewer is positioned within the scene and how that affects the interpretation. The use of colour and composition also play into it, with Lundy’s influence playing a big part on the liberties I take with my colour palette, leaning into the bias of the memories I recall. For example, “waiting for enlightenment” I recall there being a red sky as the sun was setting and leant heavily into the pink soft lighting. Elements like these are what I attribute to Doig’s style with his use of colour being driven heavily by memory also and creating dreamlike landscapes that come from an intent as opposed to a reference.

Nostalgia and Memory

**“Longing might be what we share as human beings, but that doesn’t prevent us from telling very different stories of belonging and nonbelonging. In my view, two kinds of nostalgia characterise one’s relationship to the past, to the imagined community, to home, to one’s own self-perception: restorative and reflective”
Boym pg 41**

The final destination of my research for the duration of this project was nostalgia and as such memory. I had already been working from memory at this point prompting me to look into how memory works and how nostalgia affects memory. Boym’s insights into nostalgia were perhaps the most informative for me providing a jumping point for me to investigate visually. Her concepts of reflective and restorative nostalgia gave me the clarity to properly get to grips with understanding what nostalgia is and how it can look.

“Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home.” (Boym pg 41). Here Boym explains that the first type of nostalgia seeks to rebuild the past literally and wants to rebuild it in the present. The idea that the past is recoverable perhaps proposes a futile, painful nostalgia. The idea that memory is more desirable than reality. I found that Morgan’s idea of enchantment informs the power of the memory-image explaining that “What I explore about the power of images in this study is the ways in which they operate as the tokens of enchantment by deftly integrating the individual into larger communities or networks of human and non-human actants, which is where the extended work of enchantment takes place” (Morgan pg 18). The idea of enchantment, stemming from folklore, proposes that image act upon us in such a way that we would feel compelled to do their bidding. To apply this to restorative nostalgia would be to position oneself as both the enchanter and the enchanted. A very narcissus-esc take on the power of nostalgia and the power our own memories have over us and the effect of longing within humans.

Reflective nostalgia on the other hand dwells on the melancholic nature of remembering and “thrives on algia, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming” (boym pg 49) which I think is the more common association made when thinking of nostalgia. So, to apply morgans ideas here the image/past acts as enchanter having a physical and emotional effect on the individual. This is the realm of nostalgia I believe my work exists in. The recreation of memory as painting serves as an interesting mixing pot of all the ideas listed from enchantment in images, reflective nostalgia, identity and culture all being revealed through a lens based on personal memories. The bias is unavoidable such is the nature of painting especially from memory the bias of nostalgia will inevitably seep in. But therein lies the truth of image making, the artist/painter will

always impart some of themselves into the piece. This understanding is what got me to the piece entitled “BLUE EVENING”. The piece revolves around the melancholic nature of remembrance, with only a few key elements that signify my past growing up in the



suburbs of Manchester. The telephone pole became an interesting visual, that the more I dwelled on it, the more I found it inseparable from my childhood. They act as the bridge between the urbanism of Manchester and the sub-urbanism. I remember looking up at blue skies and seeing the thin black wires connecting all the houses on the street in a way that gives me a sense of missing community. This personal iconography was another way of understanding the ways in which we interact with images. While the telephone pole for me holds nostalgic power the same can't be said for everyone and I was confronted with the idea of how one would address nostalgia in a broader sense.

Two of the painters whose work I've looked at during the past year, Doig and Anderson, both tackle painting from a perspective of understanding place. Both being British born Doig spent his youth growing up across the globe while Anderson's family came from Jamaica "as a result, Anderson's work reflects on his experiences of belonging and

diaspora.” I found both their work added to my understanding of memory and place as the two tend to go hand in hand. Doig’s work, mainly his landscapes, offer a rich interpretation of his understanding of the world. My main take away when viewing his work is the overlapping of realism and interpretation, the pieces make sense to the viewer and offer an entrance point but within the image the paint is allowed to act as itself providing a richness and vibrancy to the works that can and have enchanted audiences worldwide. Interestingly his works are often described as dreamscapes alluding to a quality within Doig’s paintings that depict recognisable, familiar spaces but with a sense of uncanniness almost.

Anderson on the other hand attempts to depict the world simply. With a focus on flattened surfaces and textures/patterns. The simplicity with which he depicts his



surroundings was a big drawing point for me. The scale which he works at when employing his style was also an interesting touch point for me, to consider the complexity of Doig and Lundy's compositions to the relatively clean compositions on Anderson served to demonstrate the ability paint has in communicating these internal worlds and instil that power of enchantment within the images.

His use of these textures and patterns often cover the surfaces of his paintings acting almost as barriers, blocking and obscuring the viewers entry. This can be attributed to many factors one cited often is the gates and barriers he experienced diving the rich and the poor in Jamaica. Another explores the idea of the personal struggles he faced growing up in Britain facing racism and other barriers due to his heritage. The pictorial manifestation of his experiences are my main takeaways from Anderson's practice. Boldly displaying the power of images through a sensibility that also explores a personal interpretation of memory/nostalgia.



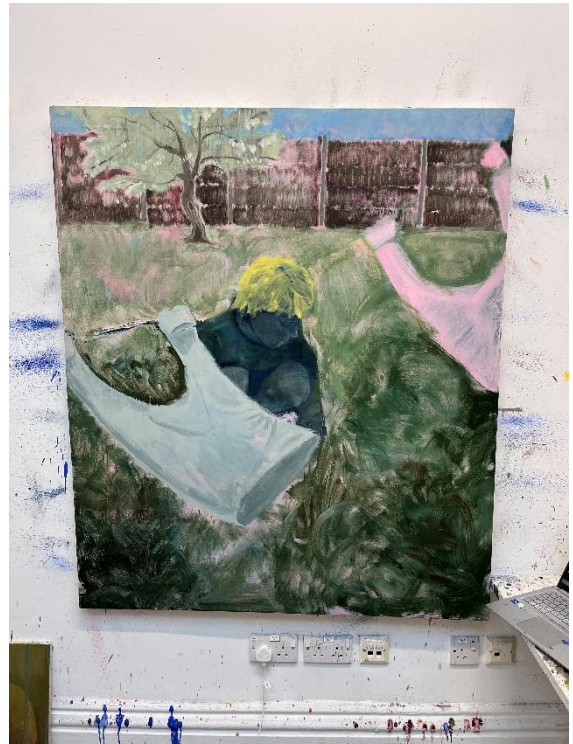
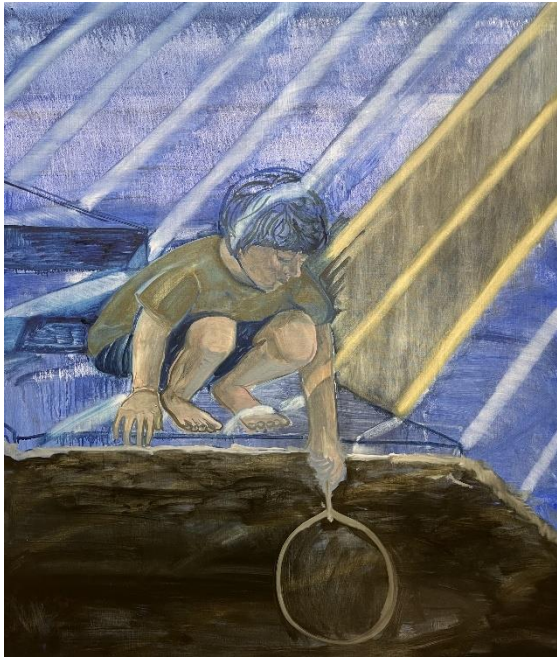
The final images of my own I wanted to talk about are a diptych titled "BUNKBED 1" and "BUNKBED 2" and a large-scale piece titled "UNDER THE APPLE TREE". The diptych was a later appearance in my practice and were more of an accidental discovery while working on a larger piece. They work as a really relatable (for myself) visual topic that

allows me to explore all the ideas I've been interested in. I think they made me realise that the actual content of the image plays a large part in the success of a piece. I shared a room for 18 years before I moved out to Swansea and during that time me and my brother always had bunkbeds. It seemed a simple idea at the time but the both the conceptual strength of the image; the inherent relation between youth and bunkbeds and the visual interest; the divided yet connected space and my own personal attachment to the memories provided me the clarity to play with the image and find a resolution that incorporated my ideas of what paintings should do.



The final piece "UNDERNEATH THE APPLE TREE" was a combination of two memories, my grandmothers garden and my mother hanging washing on the line. This piece was more forced, I was actively searching for a composition to paint, and I lost the intuitiveness that came with the Bunkbed pieces. I think the painting turned out fine, but I can't help but feel less involved with the image, as if were more of a forced relationship. It's proven to me that a more explorative relationship with imagery and composition are needed in order to find the same success. Perhaps reference is needed going forward so I have a ground to work from and towards something. This occurred to me when looking at both Anderson and Doig's process, both have an extensive body of photography, collected imagery and sketches to pick and choose from. My own process has severely lacked in the preparatory department with many of my pieces being spontaneous and end with me retroactively sketching out figures and compositions to

fix the issues. Below are the process pictures of the piece and you can see how drastically the ideas change, which isn't inherently a bad thing, but the lack of informed decisions I made I believe held me back.





The Bunkbeds project overall I think I can say has been successful. I've gained a clarity and direction for the process/research driven portion of my practice to take forward. The work I've created have given the stepping stones to work towards a larger body of work focusing on the connection of memory, nostalgia and identity. Is the work as a whole particularly strong I would argue not, as I explained the lack of a real creative process in the buildup to the larger paintings hindered me, but this is something I want to address and improve upon given what I've learnt. As a collective series I think the lack of a central underlying force to drive the pieces has let me down, instead of broadly approaching the subjects I was interested in I would, knowing what I know now, home in on a singular aspect. Overall, the project wouldn't be substantial enough to support a showing outside of the walls of the university. This is now my main priority in my practice to clarify my pre-painting process and build a base to create a series of works off.

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IMAGES

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[Blotter | National Museums Liverpool](#)

[danica lundy / painting](#)

[For love or money; the ascent of Peter Doig](#)

[Hurvin Anderson at Tate Britain: Questioning My History and My Place](#)