

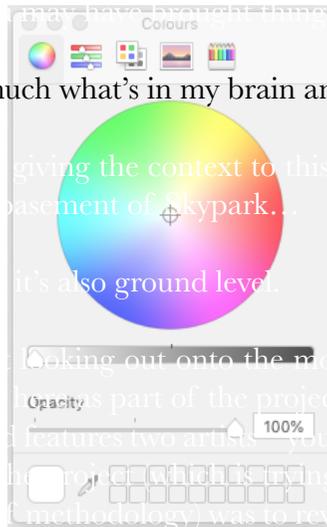
[0.44]

Okay are we good to start?

Yeah I think so.

strictly, — it's not a script, and I won't stick to it

It's pretty much what's in my brain anyway.



So this morning we've set up a pasting table and you've brought the work along.

So shall we just describe what we can see in the space first of all? Or what might be picking up on the audio as well? So we mentioned that the motorway is out ahead of us.

It's almost ten am so it's pretty busy outside. Weather is grey, dry.

Yes very white skies outside. The space we're in is only lit through the windows ahead of us and it's a unit that is currently unoccupied. It's a huge open-plan office.

It has the feeling of a skeleton, doesn't it? Because all the cladding is taken off.

The ceiling tiles have been unclashed from the grid and are stacked up around us on palettes.

They call it a construction site but it rather looks like...

... a deconstruction site!

And the plastic things look a bit like transfusion bags.

Yeah. Above the ceiling grid there are these like plastic mesh sealed bags and there are tubes hanging down from the ceiling and wires hanging down.

There is still a little bit of the office feel to everything – because of the carpet mainly I think, but all the furniture has been removed.

And there are these little impressions into the carpet tiles where you can see the desks have been situated.

The sockets for electricity is off currently so it seems like this space is a bit cut off the normal use and supplies, isn't it? Didn't someone say it had a leak?

Yes. And there's an area of the floor just ahead of us where the carpet tiles have been uplifted and we can see the structure beneath exposed. It's got these little – almost like little hooves that are clearly supporting the floor.

Cages with wires in!

Yes. Lots of cages. And there are several offices off this space, with Venetian blinds, looking in.

Oh within the floorplan? We're in the – this unit reaches the south-east corner.

The quotes yes. And the lift system. And there's a further basement level beneath this where there's the – what they call the cages, the storage units, and the treatment room for spa days and things. And security are beneath us here.

Okay.

And the space hasn't really changed since the last time we saw it which was a month ago or so -

Yes. So we've been shown around by security. They came in with a flashlight and showed us the various wallpaper murals and did take us on a little route through the space.

And we've chosen to be at the front here near the light.

sip (tea)

sip (coffee)

sip (coffee)

Yes so that we don't need any electricity or external lights.
Makes me wonder: If we did set this at night I guess the road would be a lot less busy –

lots of things are going on around us. It's kind of nice to watch things moving as well, as we are thinking.

You can hear other noises from within the building as well as the traffic outside. I remember there was a moment on our previous visit where somebody flushed a toilet or ran a tap and we could hear the water moving through. So there's the ventilation system and plumbing in this space.

And that's the site that's due for development for the next Skypark, so it will have a neighbouring building in due course. Okay. And it's cold!

Yep.

But it doesn't smell too bad.

No. neutral ?

Yep. Okay. And maybe just in brief terms shall we describe the work that's on the table?

Yeah. So actually I haven't really looked at it I think since the last time I showed it or maybe before – even since I finished making it.

sip (coffee)

sip (coffee)

sip (tea) sip (tea)
(tea) dip (tea)

Which was 2018?

Yes.

The Summer.

July last year.

And I've not seen it all the way through. I've seen it as this stacked object.

Yeah. You are also free to touch it I'm not very – I am very careful about it, but not protective, so you can handle it. So shall I just say how I made it maybe?

I think there's three ingredients that you have to know to understand how I made it. That is, firstly, the cyanotype process, which is one of the oldest photographic processes

. It is working with iron molecules and you can mix the solution quite easily

. You put the solution on a paper or some material and

as soon as you sensitise the paper it is sensible – sensitive to light!

To UV?

Yes, UV light. So the very first uses of this technique were obviously made with the sun. And later to make the technique faster and more efficient they made UV light machines

I've watched videos of people doing that process which seems so – it seems so

strange to me – to use the artificial UV box. When it's so tied up with histories of botanists being able to make an impression of something as fieldwork and being outdoors.

Definitely. And the idea when they invented it – or what was so exciting for artists and scientists and people to work with it – was the idea that the sun – or that nature was drawing its own image, so you don't need a transcription hand or an illustrator or someone making it from vision to something else. But you put something on it and it's kind of drawing it self. That's the exciting thing about it. And also made work of botanists a lot easier. So yeah that was the first part about it – the cyanotype process. It was used in engineering and architecture later on. But it never made it into mainstream or commercial photography because nobody wants to have a blue portrait. It's got this special blue colour.

The second thing was that I discovered the work of Anna Atkins, who worked with exactly this process in the 1840s. She was the daughter of a botanist and biologist and friend to John Herschel who was working during that time to find out more about photographic processes and chemistry. And he discovered the process, but she took it and understood how she could make use of it. She had been illustrating her father's books, so she used to draw shells for him, or plants for him, and she quickly understood how amazing it would be to use this as a kind of photocopying process. She went and collected algae from British coast lines to illustrate a book that was already existing – something like an algae encyclopaedia, but it was without illustrations and she produced I think six volumes of illustrations – photographic illustrations - in the cyanotype process to that book. And now she is getting a bit more popular, but a couple of years ago it was – it felt very much like a discovery to find her work and think how incredible that this woman worked as a scientist in the 1840s and was able to make this amazing transfer by just using this technique but actually creating the first ever photobook.

And it was an edition as well, is that right? Making multiples.

Yes. It took her decades to finish this. And she made it like a subscrip-

tion. She started it and all her botanist friends could subscribe to it and she would send to them one after the other.

So they are bound differently, each edition?

Yes, some are even loose I believe.

Yes. I went to look at it in London at the Royal Society. You can just go in, and ask for it, and they give it to you! And you could just flip through it! They look so beautiful and it was really magic. So that was the second thing of finding Anna Atkins and her work.

And then the third thing that happened was that I discovered the work of RH Quaytman, who seemed very important to me at the point because she has this systematic approach to her own works. Somehow being shortly before graduating last year in Germany it felt like I had to find some kind of system to look back on what I did the past few years. And Rebecca Quaytman is also working with photography but then transferring it to painting or other media, so I found this really interesting and was wanting to know more about her. And there is this book called *Spine* that seems really important to understand what her work is about, but you can't buy it anymore. You can if you have two thousand dollars – , you can buy it used, somewhere on the internet.

Yes – I found it, I think the cheapest was two hundred and sixty pounds or something.

Yes, so I thought okay I cannot afford this. But my tiny tiny library had one! So I just borrowed that and kept pushing my umm –

Extending the loan?

Over months and months. So I had it over the whole summer. And I just started copying it. I thought, okay I have this process, I know that it works, I'll just make my own copy. And Mainz is a very warm and sunny place in Germany so I was lucky. We had a UV index of 7 or 8 every day I think. I had my sheets that I sensitised at night. And then went into the studio in the morning, put two of the sheets under the pages in the book, glass on top, and then opened the window and put it out on the windowsill to cook. To make the magic happen.

And what kind of time is that – that you have to expose it for?

When it was really sunny and really bright
– it took about forty minutes.

Huh! For two pages.

Pretty much four pages. do you take the reference from the book or the new work?
– you have to count back page and front page.

So I am excited to look through it today because it exists as this stack of the pages that you've copied because

it also documents your process of your becoming more adept at using cyanotype – getting the exposure right, or I think is it particularly the application of the solution that seems to...

You find recipes for the solution online and you just order the chemicals, it's not difficult to get.

It took me a while to find out the right paper which now is watercolour paper to soak up the liquid bit. Yeah. And also the weather, definitely. There is some pages even in the third quarter there or something of the book if you go

through it that suddenly looks like black out – blank page, because the weather was just not doing what I was expecting.

Okay. So even in trying to impose a sort of systematic approach, you are still at the mercy of the environment?

Definitely! And then I ran out of chemistry at some point and had to mix it new. And somehow even if I just did what I did before it wasn't the same. I don't know if the humidity changed, or the water maybe as well. I have no idea. Yeah so this is the first page and you see the stamp from my old art school.

Oh yeah nice.

– you say 'Qu-ayt -man'? I always want to say 'Quay -tman' in my head. Like a quay. Like a boat, – but I've not heard anyone else pronounce it that -

Like a ship quay? Ahh.

But I think you're right. Somebody else said it the other day aloud as 'Quaytman'.

Yeah, but I have never met her.

No. And – she presents herself using gender-neutral pronouns in exhibition texts as well.

But publicly in her exhibition it's quite important.

She tries to avoid personal pronouns.

So the first chapter is the Sun, as well, which of course is fitting to the work. Thanks for outlining these like three sort of ingredients to the work there.

I'm not even sure how important all of these things is because of course you can make it more complex all the time because so many things go into something when you start doing something

– I think, it ties itself up quite neatly once you know more about the book itself that you've made the copy of, but I think for me it's quite – there's a kind of passion to the work – there's this book that you can only access while you're on the course and there's this idea sort of reflective process in coming, approaching graduation and wanting a copy of the book! And then the commitment to making that copy as a very like studio-based practice

– yeah, for me what resonates is something also about this removing – having this temporary withdrawal of the book from the library and then producing this sort of imperfect copy.

I also have to say it would have been very easy to steal the book from the library because there's no tag on it and I really thought about it, but then I thought no, that's – you don't steal from a library. Even if no one else ever borrows it – it has to be there from now. And then I thought about stealing it and replacing it with mine, but –

They might notice?

They might notice and also I don't really know – it's also a book you know. A book is not an artwork, that is original, in that sense. Also, this isn't functional as a version of the book.

It's in reverse, and as you say – it varies from one page to another as to...

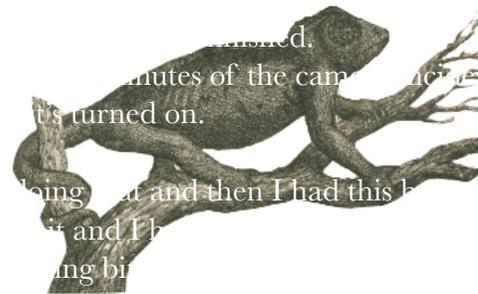
No, it's not a very useful object.

I was thinking about why we are here in the basement of Skypark looking through this work –

– the process of giving the time and space to looking at the work – is a kind of footnoting to it. And maybe this sort of architecturally sits nicely within the building to be in the basement during this kind of – the undercurrents of it or something.

Because obviously we're – we're sort of calling upon the work within this project Strange Weather but it's not being made publicly visible at this moment.

Yeah – it's sort of the first testing of how it reacts here. It won't chemically change but there is definitely a way if you're aware of the surrounding.





And sort of ship it into this harbour here, and see what kind of information might be in it that become more visible in this space than in an art school surrounding.

When did you start the process of production on this ?

It might be around now. Back one year. Maybe a bit earlier.

April. Somewhere within this exists April 2018.

Yes.

Okay, so there's a kind of – there's a calendar sort of format to Qua Quay Quay-

tman's work? Within this book which, for context, maybe we can describe is – it covers about a decade of her practice?

Yeah, in 2001 she started making the chapter structure for her work, and then 2011 she published the book, as a way for a reader to understand the narrative of this as well, which is a very abstract narrative –

Yeah. She said something nice about this and I've forgotten.

She says, she talks about the use of the chapter – so the use of the chapter conceit, attributing it to a defence mechanism, a fighting back against the fear of failure, wanting to make it less shameful to not sell and to end up therefore collecting a lot of her old work. And also she talks about her desire to push back against the egotism of the single painting as well.

Yeah, she says very interesting things about this. She's very aware of the afterlife of art works as well. Her father was a painter and she describes it as very painful to watch his paintings just go away into storage and collect dust and dirt. And she was looking for a way – I think on the one hand to give her single works some kind of over-arching relevance into a bigger context – which is pretty much what I am doing as well by saying – taking this book and copying it and then it's my work and at the same time making it belong to each other. Even if you purchase one of them, or if one exhibition is in New York, and the next one is in China, they will have some kind of connection.

It also sort of dismantles the idea of a practice as having a recognisable aesthetic or something. It enables there to be more disparity between works if you conceive of them within this framework, – I think it is relevant to your copying or referencing of her work somehow that she herself draws on these generational references to other painters – that she sort of uses their work.

Yes.

So I feel like there's a kind permission in you taking from hers.

That's what I felt as well. But I have to admit that for... like since I made it, I have this unfinished email in my mailbox, to her, telling her about it. So I don't know.

Mm-hmm?

There is also this magic to work very closely with something or someone maybe – like a secret collaboration, which a book definitely enables you to do because it's so handy you can take it anywhere. And it's kind of made for travelling as well – travelling time and space. It felt appropriate to do somehow.

Yes. I had a thought about this – talking about the ego of the single painting and trying to avoid this, she then admits in one of the interviews – I don't know if she uses these terms – but by imposing this framework on her whole practice then everything is going to sit beneath that.

I wondered if somehow, where her book 'Spine' ties up everything within this system, but somehow your copying of it – she's controlling everything so closely that this short-circuits that system somehow by, you know, removing it from the library and then making this extra copy sort of unconsensually like 'Oh, this collaboration...',

Yeah. I think the way I am thinking about this – if that's what you mean – is that you take something that is quite stationary maybe, or compact, or finished, or – tied up and take it back into a process.

I feel like it releases it and I don't think that it undermines it necessarily, but I think – it kind of neatly acknowledges the thing in its entirety. 'Here's its twin'.

It sort of unravels it. And she also talks about the system of the chapters as a way ... to take charge of time, and so I think this is like something that is thrown into this process of you working through it in the studio.

It's a bit
like a monk, accepting to work in different timeframes, but then there's
also definitely some freedom to choose your own restrictions –

Maybe picking up on the title of the work – I don't know if we've even called it by its name. I'm just thinking about you speaking about working on it day and night and I'd asked where the title 'As a lover or a chameleon' comes from – I don't know if you want to...?

Yeah but I might need your pronunciation help! Because I think you call him Percy...

Shelley.

Bysshe? Ah okay, he's got this...

I know this middle name which again I'm not sure if I've ever said aloud.

Bysshe.

I would – I would just hear him referred to as 'Shelley'. Well-known enough that he goes by 'Shelley'.

Okay, good. Yeah, he's more of a side reference for me. I don't even remember why I stumbled across him –

I wondered even if it – umm, if in a kind of back route you'd come to it through thinking around the changing of the paper as the chameleon?

Yes, maybe.

And somehow there's something about relying on the good weather to make the cyanotype – the blue skies and then the paper taking on this hue that yes, you end up with something almost camouflaged.

Yes. That's also what's so beautiful about Anna Atkins' work by the way – that she's taking algae that usually live in water, and then putting them onto this blue frame.

Uh-hm. So this phrase 'as a lover or a chameleon' is from Prometheus Unbound 1820. So similar actually, interestingly, tied up with the kind of timeframe of the Cyanotypes.

the 1840s or 30s or 20s – this first half seems to be like a magic moment where lots of things have their roots somehow. Yeah, he was a romantic radical poet, ?

Uh-hm.

I have to say honestly, I don't know very much about him. I just read, or I'm aware, that he had some very radical thoughts on love and creative work, or the work of a writer. And that he died in the sea somewhere. He went out for a sailing trip and never came back.

Oh!

Yeah, and he is sometimes using the chameleon throughout his work.

It's like, yeah, more than a passing interest!

And it must have been a
really exotic animal back then!

Yeah. I mean, it almost seems – you know, I can remember as a child being –
learning about a chameleon...

And not believing it?

The impossibility of it, yes! It's like the unicorn – 'What's this? An invisible animal?' And somehow... I'm just thinking like what's going on in the early 19th century in this kind of science-nature relationship and

it seems so high-tech, a chameleon, you know?

Here is the chameleon. Yeah, anyway, so somehow you had this – yeah, you had
picked up on this closet drama –

I think it's called a closet drama, yeah.

So that typically would be written to be read rather...

than performed

...in a theatrical setting. What led me on to this was you talking about working at

day and night, and this phrase coming from a conversation between the sun and the moon.

Yes!

And so – the Shelley link to the work and to the title is not direct. It's a third voice in this work.

Uh-hm. It was a lucky find.

it is the perfect title though for this devotional act of the copying.

Yes. Yeah I felt it was so fitting somehow because at that point it was bordering on being a bit mad, about finishing this. And so obsessive as well!

Yeah.

A bit strange, err, and people were asking me like, 'Are you serious? You want to graduate and you're not doing anything else but copying this book?' And it's always good to find some references, no matter what time, that feel a bit like friends. Or that make you feel like, 'I'm not the only one who is doing something like this.'

He is – definitely seemed also to be a really interesting character in history – to go through life with very big curiosity about things. And liking chameleons. It also just made me wonder, back then, he must have seen one I guess live, because there was no colour reproduction of anything.

And now he's obsessed about seeing one!
Because he seems to use it as a motif or something rather than...

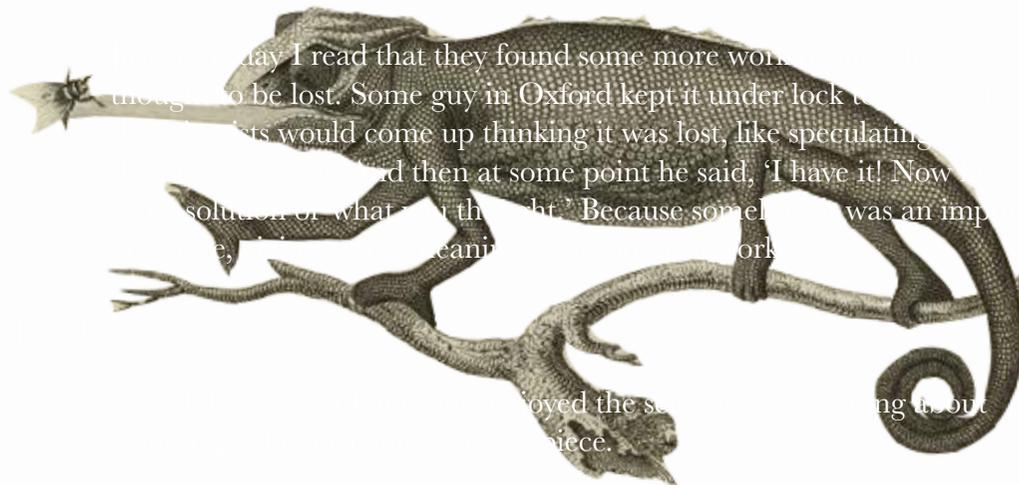
Almost like making sure for himself that it exists by repeating that it

exists.

But it's a metaphorical use.

when you work on something – that you adjust to it somehow.

Yes.



I thought also – ah! We have an image! I also wondered about like, just in terms of our decision to be revisiting the work there's something about the title that for me takes on another meaning in relation to not showing this work publicly in an exhibition context! And the semi-visibility of the chameleon,

But this almost seeing through it. I think – yeah. I felt like maybe inhabiting the basement was somehow doing the same thing and maybe making this um, conversation a sort of public form...

...outlining it.

Just see the eyes!

Also, the size of the book means you get this...

Yeah. Uh-hm. For ages I thought I cut it off, but I kind of like it as a friend that just records the process as well as a backside. Some are really extremely messy – yeah, and this one of the pages that is just –

Bad weather?

Or the water was wrong, or I dunno, my patience wasn't there. And then some of the back pages almost get more interesting than the front page.

There's a kind of economy to it as well, that like it's an A4 page.

Yeah.

And if you're going to commit to this process it is not about – it would seem kind of violent to guillotine it down to size, I think!

Photography is always about industrial formats as well. Umm, there is not much space for making your own custom-made...

Bespoke?

... yeah. It's also a text becoming an image, because you can't real-

ly..

[52.28]

