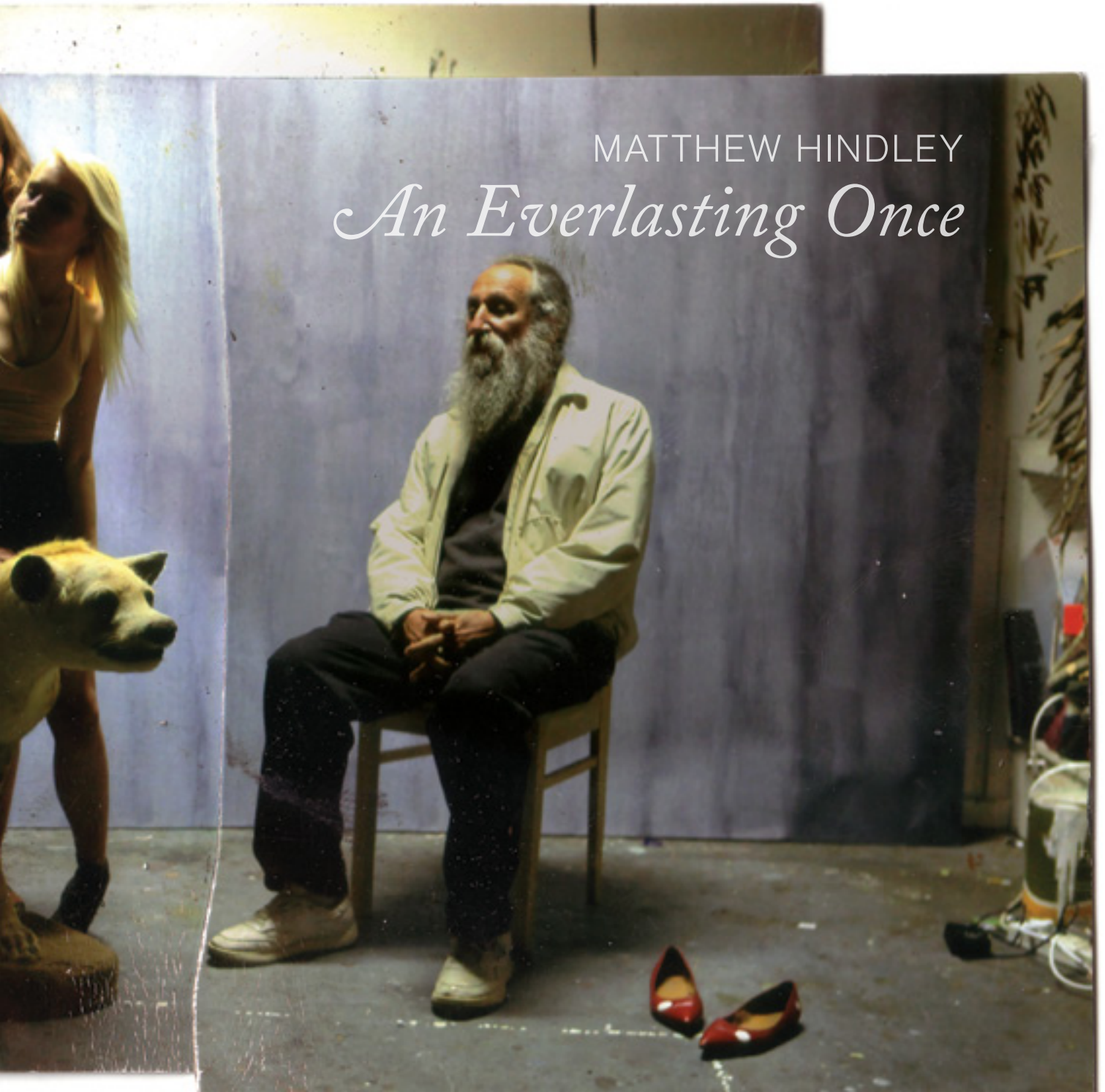

MATTHEW HINDLEY
An Everlasting Once

INSIDE COVER /
NON-PRINTING

FOR EMMA & EVA

THANKS TO JAN & CHRISTIAN FOR ROSA-LUXEMBURG-STRASSE,
THE CORRIDORS OF THE WEISSENSEE AND THE LEIPZIG ZOO

An Everlasting Once AND THE *Terrible Silence*

BY LLOYD POLLACK

THIS ESSAY IS DEDICATED TO THE ARTIST

I

My aim is to create 'a definite environment or stage on which things can happen. For me, the function of painting is to work with myths… Having set the fundamentals, the stage, I introduce the actors on the stage. Then it happens – when I set the inhabitants into a relation, I am not able to plan. In between the figures and in between the figures and me subtle relations start to be created. A microclimate comes into being.' It is thus that Neo Rauch, an artist greatly admired by Matthew Hindley, defines his goals.[1]

Hindley, who is partly of German origin, has visited Berlin on four separate occasions, often spending up to three months painting in the city. There he became aware of the expatriate Rumanian, Adrian Ghenie and painters associated with the new Leipzig School, such as Neo Rauch, Martin Eder and Jonas Burgert. 'Influence' is often merely a matter of an artist's original choice of direction being confirmed by the example of his peers. The discovery that other globally respected artists are working in a similar mode validates and endorses one's enterprise. Self-doubt dissolves: confidence is boosted, and inherent leanings blossom and thrive. Hindley's imagery always tended toward subjective fantasy, but after his exposure to Ghenie and the Germans, his art matured, achieving the greater depth, meaning and coherence that are so evident in 'An Everlasting Once'.

What Hindley shares with all these artists is not just the return to figuration, it is something far deeper and more profound, a new concept of painting as a synthesis of photography, cinema, theatre and performance deployed in discontinuous and fragmented narratives. Adrian Ghenie underlines the 'filmic quality' in his work. "In my case, the film has provided the most important ingredient of my visual background. When I paint I have the impression that I am also involved in directing a film. Looking at a film made by Lynch or Hitchcock, experiencing the tension and drama of a thriller is at once realistic and beyond the ordinary. For me, the genius of cinema resides in its capacity to project an illusion."[2] A critic's description of Jonas Burgert's work points up its affinity to 'An Everlasting Once': "Each painting seems like a carefully constructed stage of the opera or the circus, containing an artificial world set up with dramatic lighting, exotic costumes, fantastical make-up and stage props…"[3]

Hindley's painting, and that of Ghenie and the new Leipzig school, all address myth, metaphor and history and handle it as artifice and spectacle. The artist claims that 'An Everlasting Once' blurs the boundaries that divide painting from acting, theatre, cinema, and photography all of which are harnessed in his creations. 'An Everlasting Once' is a painted parallel to a photo-essay, a film or a drama. However the scenario, as in the work of the Germans and Ghenie, is cryptic, disjointed and ambiguous, and the task of determining its meaning devolves onto the spectator. In 'An Everlasting Once' Hindley submerges the narrative which continues unseen in the interstices between the paintings. Ideally the viewer fills the gaps, using his imagination to intuit the missing episodes and complete the suite. In this way, to paraphrase Roland Barthes, the spectator transcends his traditional role as a passive consumer of images and becomes a vicarious producer of images.

II

One imagines that an artist arranges his models and props in his studio, sets up his easel, and proceeds to paint what lies in front of him, however this stereotypical modus operandi does not apply to Hindley who consciously distances reality, and portrays it at several removes. Photography serves as the basis for all the paintings, so reality is mediated by photography, and then photography is mediated by painting.

Although photographs serve as reference, the painter does not slavishly reproduce them, and as the work takes shape, Hindley frequently paints over part, or the whole of what he has painted, and starts afresh. There are many false starts, revisions and amendments, and each widens the gap between reality, the photograph of that reality, and the painting on the easel which is decisively an artifact, crafted, fashioned and wrought. Reality is refracted though the mind and sensibility of the artist, and the end-product is a metaphysical tableau capable of expressing all Hindley's deepest and most enduring preoccupations.

Frequently Hindley's sitters are professional models, actors and people seen on the streets. The fact that neither party knows the other, and that this is simply a financial transaction, maintains the relationship on a professional footing. When he uses friends and acquaintances, their interaction remains remote and impersonal. Besides acting as a casting agent choosing his sitters, the artist assumes many other identities before he takes brush to canvas: he acts as scenographer, constructing sets and painting backdrops; as impresario engaged in the hire of taxidermied animals from prop houses; as lighting specialist experimenting until he obtains the ideal mood and atmosphere. He is the photographer behind the camera; the director whose intervention shapes the course of the action, or whose refusal to intervene, permits improvisation, enlisting accident and chance. Finally he is the editor.

The interaction between the models and the artist divaricates into theatre, spectacle, performance and improvisation. No hard and fast rules apply to this synergy. Sometimes Hindley has precise notions of what he wants, and acts as director, guiding his players who tirelessly choreograph and re-choreograph their actions as he nudges them ever closer towards his goal. Sometimes he only finds what he seeks in the course of the session which becomes probationary, a matter of experiment and trial and error. The artist's models become fully-fledged collaborators as Hindley surrenders control, encouraging the hirelings to improvise, while he waits for the felicitous stroke of luck or happy accident.

What determines the nature of this give and take is the imperative that the camera must capture some meaningful interaction between the models, the models and the space, the models and the props, and the models and himself. What Hindley seeks is Cartier-Bresson's 'defining moment', that crucial fraction of a second when the configuration recorded by the lens captures what the latter defined as "the significance of an event, as well as the precise organization of forms which give that event its proper expression".[4] In other words Hindley seeks to capture the essence of something, be it a human truth, an expression of life, or a philosophical proposition.

1 See http://www.artfacts.net/Neo_Rauch/Neo_Rauch_EM.html

2 Adrian Ghenie interviewed by Magda Radu, Flash Art, Number 269, November-December, 2009.

3 Claudia Stockhausen writing in http://jonasburgert. net

4 See http://www.photo-seminars.com/Fame bresson.htm

5 As certain titles are lengthy, I abbreviate them once I have first mentioned them in full.

6 With the exception of 'The Hour of Lead' and 'The Soul selects Her Own Society' to which many of these considerations do not apply.

7 'Das unheimliche' translates literally as 'unhomely', but it designates something familiar yet uncomfortably strange, something uncanny that arouses a queasy unease. Freud originally applied it to the unbelievably life-like, mechanical doll Olympia in the 'Tales of Hoffmann' and the feelings she aroused in those who saw her.

8 Padraic's hair is blonde in 'Meditations', brown in 'My Friend' and black in 'Recipe'. Noncelo wears the same outfit in all the paintings, but while it is dark gray in 'Meditations', it is fawn in 'Recipe', pale gray in the first draft of 'The Room' and lilac in the final version.

9 For ease of identification I refer to Hindley's anonymous characters by using the names of the models who sat for him.

10 Exactly the same thing happens in 'An Everlasting Once' where thin dribbles of white paint wander upwards from the sheet of white paper at right base. In 'The End of the World' streams of black paint run upwards from the second window from the right, the hyena's head, the balcony ceiling, the upper rail of the balcony's railing to right, and a flick of the brush leaves a spray of black spots over the cityscape and the sleeve of Zipho's right arm. One could provide innumerable other examples. In 'Some Last Questions' and both versions of 'The Room', trails run from the top of the skirting board over the floor, collapsing space into a single plane, just as they do in 'My Friend, My Friend' where the spray of small blobs on the rear wall also extends to Tom's knees, cancelling out the three-dimensionality. In front of his foot there is a strange chunk of black with a zigzag of gray paint upon it, and the same phenomenon occurs in the first version of 'The Room' where a solid pool of black paint, thick and viscous as tar, extends from beneath Noncelo's body to the extreme left. Here is no realist explanation for these oddities.

The final preparatory task is the selection of the photographs which become the raw material of the future painting. It is only whilst poring over the hundreds of prints, that Hindley attains a depth of understanding impossible to achieve during the split second when the shutter comes down. Often the accidental shot, or the one he was at first tempted to reject, become the final choice. Sometimes the photographs are subjected to digital manipulation; sometimes sections from one or several photographs may be collaged together to form a composite image.

III

These activities all take place in the studio, and an artist's studio is the invariable locus of 'An Everlasting Once'. In 'Recipe for an Ocean in the Absence of the Sea', the floor of bare, utilitarian screed is grimy and stained, and the large canvases casually stacked against the wall clearly identify the interior as a painter's workspace. Studios are habitually untidy, messy and spattered with paint, and in 'Recipe'[5], and many other paintings, the walls are sullied with pigment and the daubs with which an artist tests his colours. The same props recur providing further corroboration that we are in a studio.

One's natural assumption is that this is Hindley's studio, but although it coincides with the latter in many particulars, the two are not identical. The studio of the paintings is a notional studio. Its real counterpart is bright, airy and open. Two windows, one of which occupies an entire wall, open onto a balcony overlooking the city. No such sense of spatial release occurs in the paintings. There massive, unbroken expanses of blank wall drastically shrink the square footage, blocking any communication with contiguous spaces, and creating a hermetically sealed-off environment without outlook, openings or exit.

Ceilings and walls rarely close off the top and sides of this imagined location, and their absence makes the picture space but an excerpt from a continuum which runs out of frame to left, right and top.[6] The elimination of conventional framing devices - repoussoirs and the wings of the coulisse system - fail to enlarge the picture space, for Hindley crops his compositions so tightly that all the frame opens out onto is a shallow stage. No intermediate features ease our entry into it. The eye lurches into the flattened expanse with a sudden jolt, and the abridged spaces, unbroken walls, gray hues and top lighting, induce claustrophobia, imbuing the studio with penitential overtones.

Hindley's chromatic abstinence ensures that many works are almost purely tonal. Generally there are only occasional splashes of local colour in skin, hair and fabrics. 'An Everlasting Once' ushers us into a ascetic world of blacks, grays, gun-metal blues, whites and off-whites bereft of anything soft, sensuous or inviting. The wholesale subtraction of colour heightens the astringency and chill of an environment which is styptic, inimical, and steeped in a wincing Freudian unheimlichkeit.[7]

The furniture in Hindley's studio is cleared out of its fictive equivalent as are all the tools of the painter's trade. The world's multifariousness and profusion are sheared away and the depleted space morphs into a stark, abstraction, a generic essence. It is any and every room, and thus, universal.

'An Everlasting Once' pivots around the human anatomy and the bare interior becomes a figural laboratory in which the artist conducts a series of plastic experiments with stance, pose, gesture and expression.

IV

Hindley depicts constructed spectacles, and his art readily acknowledges its own facticity. The fact that many works are patently studio set-ups depicting models striking attitudes undercuts the viewer's reflex assumption that the paintings portray reality. Composition is frozen and motionless, and this static quality clearly records the photographic origins of the work in which the camera reproduces the specific pose held by the model. The reappearance of the same models, clad in the same outfits, in several paintings forbids reading the work as a slice of life. Although they remain immediately recognizable, their appearance and clothes are subject to change.[8] Such mutations proclaim that the sitters are elements in a formal composition, rather than 'real' people, thus severing the link between the image and the real world.

Sabotaging the illusion of reality, is Hindley's consistent practice, and his chief device for identifying his painting as art-making, rather than a mimetic record of the real, is his brushwork.

His practice is to thin down his paint, and brush it lightly onto the heavily textured canvas so the pigment does not form an enveloping skin or crust; it is absorbed into the fabric so that the warp and weave remain clearly apparent and contribute to the overall effect. There are no encrustations of impasto: the surface is smooth and matt with oil paint's usual gleam eliminated.

In 'The Unswept Floor', Hindley mercilessly exposes the contrivance inherent in his stylistic devices. Areas of secondary interest like the delicious monster leaf and the foliage on the right hand of the sofa remain somewhat blurred and off-focus. Hindley strives to avoid the tightness of the academic illusionism seen in the great 19th century stars of the Paris salon who rendered every single object in minute, realistic detail. He creates sketchy forms which remain unrecognizable in isolation, but instantly become intelligible when juxtaposed with the other elements in his compositions.

The degree of legibility varies. Thus we know what the pile of leaves on the right hand side of the sofa signifies, although we cannot make out individual leaves and blossoms, or botanically identify them. They are generic leaves. In the area immediately above Emma's[9] head and left hand there are blotchy green forms that slip out of register and appear misty and indistinct. In the context of the painting we read them as leaves, although in reality they are not recognizable as such. At intervals throughout the entire painting representation breaks down and forms become so nebulous as to verge on illegibility. In these passages of elision and short-cut, we peer at the painting in a vain effort to identify what is there, and in the process the illusion of reality is shattered and we are forced to acknowledge the physical reality of painting as pigment on canvas or in other words, pure facticity.

Another of Hindley's battery of anti-illusionist devices is the deployment of non-representational trails, runs, spatters and streaks of paint that underlie his illusionist surfaces. In 'The Unswept Floor' multiple rivulets of red paint stream upwards from the red throw on the sofa into the festoon drapery in defiance of the law of gravity, and such abstract mark-making reminds the viewer of his work's identity as painting, as an artificial simulacrum of reality.

Further non-illusionist marks occur. A patch of black and gray amorphous blobs is found in the upper register, to left of the drapery, where further runs of paint pour downwards. Driblets of pigment slither down the shadowy folds of the red drape to right of the sofa, and leak downwards from the ropes on the floor.[10] When paint is thus liberated from any descriptive function and simply courses over the canvas, its materiality registers forcibly upon us and we are reminded that pigment is pigment, and that what we look at is paint on canvas, and not a scene extrapolated from the 'real' world.

11 In ‘After Great Pain’ and ‘In a Dark Time’ the skirting board divides the canvas horizontally into a larger and a smaller rectangle. In ‘Recipe’ the square canvas breaks down into no less than five rectangles.

Hindley’s players exist within a self-contained world, and although they occasionally glance out directly at the viewer in acknowledgement of his presence, they never solicit his involvement nor disclose their state of mind. Psychologically viewer and viewed remain detached from each other, and we neither identify with them, nor empathize. The barriers between the spectacle and the spectator, like the abstract marks and loss of crisp focus, are distancing strategies which approximate to the alienation effect Bertolt Brecht deploys in his epic dramas. The playwright jettisons the stock devices that sustain the illusion of reality. Set shifts and costume changes take place in full view of the audience; a chorus comments on the action; the actors direct asides to the audience and break into song and dance routines. These prevent us from being swept up by the narrative, fostering a dispassionate attitude and equipping us to evaluate the drama in an objective spirit.

Hindley similarly identifies his paintings as fabrications and enactments, products of directorial intervention, manipulation and contrivance that bear a weight of agency and comment on, rather than merely reproduce reality.

V

The strict classical structure of Hindley’s compositions recalls the supreme masters of pictorial architecture, Piero della Francesca, Poussin, Ingres and Seurat all of whom aim for the utmost clarity of statement. In the Hindleyesque universe, action, movement and overt emotion cede to introspection, silence and still. Stasis is the artist’s goal, and to achieve it, he avoids dynamic and unstable diagonals and curves which would introduce movement and disrupt his frozen compositions.

Instead he cultivates the balance and repose implicit in stable, static vertical and horizontals. In ‘The Unswept Floor’ for example, the sofa forms a horizontally accented rectangle, a purely rectilinear geometrical form, and this rectangle clicks into place within the larger rectangle of the framed canvas. The festoon drapes descending from the summit of the painting echo these rectangular shapes, which firmly lock the figure into a schema of inset oblongs. Insistent parallelism between the frame and its contents unites every element in indissoluble harmony. The use of rectangles as steadying structural devices that break the composition down into a fixed and immoveable grid is seen again and again.[11]

Hindley favors the most radically stripped down set-ups devoid of background and middle ground. ‘Meditations’ consists of a mere four elements – the narrow strip of floor, the rear wall, the two figures and the rope. Tightly compressed frontal, centralized and symmetrical configurations in which the sitters are presented in big close-up, isolated within an extremely shallow space defined by the bare floor and wall, are the artist’s signature compositions. Pose is always either frontal, or profile, or three-quarter, lending optimum salience to the figures and ensuring they register with force and immediacy.

Similar schemas obtain in many other paintings where the figures are disposed in primary geometric configurations which cement them into the composition with absolute finality. In the first draft of ‘The Room’ the seated Noncelo forms a triangle within the square canvas. In ‘Meditations’, Padraic and Noncelo, standing back to back, form a three dimensional column at the central axis of the composition. In ‘My Friend, my Friend’, the figures again form a three-dimensional High Renaissance triangle juxtaposed with the columnar form of the animal. In ‘An Everlasting Once’ they form a diaper, and in ‘A Sort of Song’ the grouping of Noncelo and the animals forms an irregular triangle.

‘The Unswept Floor’ and ‘The End of the World’ depart from the norm by introducing depth and the conventional tripartite division into foreground, middle ground and background. In both, space is articulated with a classical rigor. In ‘The Unswept Floor’, the composition is built up out of receding planes kept flush with the picture plane and the rear wall, to create a sense of measurable receding space as we move, step by step, from the base of the frame to the front of the sofa’s base, to its back, to the drapery, to the wall.

In ‘The End of the World’ Matthew turns the outdoor balcony into an isometric box housing a frieze-like arrangement of figures and a hyena kept equidistant from the picture plane. The orthogonals race into distance, and converge on a single vanishing paint so that the image is constructed in the scientific, one-point Renaissance method.

Hindleyesque composition favors formal contrasts. In ‘Meditations’ Padraic and Noncelo are antithetical and embody polarities. Padraic is blond, fair-haired and decisively white. Noncelo is decisively black. The barefoot Padraic is informally dressed in black shorts that leave him nigh nude; Noncelo is formally dressed and fully covered-up in boots, skirt and jacket. Padraic is sexualized whereas Noncelo is not. Similarly in ‘The End of the World’: one woman is black, the other is white; one stands, one crouches; one is long-haired and one short haired; one wears a patterned dress; the other is dressed in plain white.

Classical composition bestows a bludgeoning force upon Hindley’s canvases. The tightly cropped, ruthlessly simplified compositions, and absence of any kind of barrier between the figures and the viewer, pitch the latter into the shallow picture space with disconcerting celerity. The figures are projected onto a scale three times life size, and presented in such close proximity to the viewer, that they assume an overwhelming physical presence. However proximity goes hand in hand with psychological distance. Hindley’s scenarios are cryptic and their meaning elusive.

VI

‘In a Dark Time’ portrays Kristi imbricated within an exiguous space of floor and wall, and such cramped compositions express entrapment, lack of agency and curtailed freedom. Space contracts around the figures, eroding their lebensraum, and depriving them of room within which to maneuver.

In many paintings, notably in ‘In a Dark Time’, the walls assume the gritty quality of inner city streets, and the scrawls inscribed upon them testify to intense interaction between them and the beings they enclose. Immediately to left of Kristi’s right shoulder, a rough linear grid has been scrawled onto the wall, and this echoes the shape of the frame, creating a series of rectangular spaces that mirror the ground-plan of the studio. The macrocosm rhymes with the microcosm foregrounding the theme of immurement.
Hindley’s abstract marks play an emotive and expressive role, exacerbating tensions, and raising the temperature of the paintings. The gravitational runs of pigment trailing down the wall provide subliminal reminders of blood issuing from a wound, reinforcing the mood of duress, while the slashes and broken lines of paint, like the slits and gashes in Lucio Fontana’s canvases, invoke injury and rents, gaps and tears in the fabric of being.

Like Bernini’s drapery, Hindley’s mark-making becomes a means of externalizing the characters’ inner turmoil. The wall ceases to be a blank and neutral surface; the slashes and spatters of pigment give it an added density and weight so that it exerts an outward pressure, shunting forward toward the picture plane, and nibbling at the space of the shallow stage. The wall becomes a charged expression of pent-up energies and expletive aggressions denied release through normal

12 Ravens fed Elijah, St. Benedict, St. Anthony Abbot and St Paul the Hermit in the desert, and through association with these saintly anchorites, the bird became emblematic of solitude.

13 The title of one of Hindley's paintings, 'An Everlasting Once' elucidates the nature time takes in his work. The word 'everlasting' implies perpetuity. 'Once' designates a single finite event in the past with a beginning, a middle and an end. Fairy tales, folk tales and children's stories commence with the locution 'Once upon a time'. When the two words are yoked tighter, the 'once' is eternalized, and the past becomes the present and stretches to infinity. This suggests that the subject of the paintings is not an occurrence, but an atemporal condition, state or mode of being. In this respect one can compare Noncelo to allegorical figures like the blind Justice with her scales, or the Grim Reaper with his scythe and hourglass, who exist in the empyrean beyond time.

14 Bernard Dukore, 'The Zero Soul: Godot's Waiting Selves in Dante's Waiting Rooms' in Transverse No 2, November 2004, p 70.

channels. Like graffiti, the gestures of the brush, the zigzags, commas and streaks, convey alienation, frustration, anger and protest. They form a vain assault upon the wall, an attempt to sully and besmirch it, a revolt against its enclosing function and an urge to escape its confines.

VII

In Hindley's first version of 'The Room', Noncelo's internment and isolation are underscored by her uncomfortable pose seated against a wall. A book, a hunk of bread, a taxidermied animal and a portfolio and book lie to the right. A loop of rope rests in front of her. It is as if she were serving a sentence, and she gazes heavenwards in helpless resignation.

Matthew empties the studio so it becomes a metaphysical realm that conflates the catholic concepts of limbo and purgatory. As metaphysical concepts, limbo and purgatory exist in a shadowy beyond which is everywhere and nowhere. Time is dismantled and the past, present and future become one.

These sites of confinement and castigation are stations between death and last judgment, twilight zones which exist solely to activate examination of conscience, the acknowledgement of transgressions and the expiation of sins.
Like all Hindley's characters, Noncelo exists in a state of surrender as she awaits illumination, absolution or inculpation. Although there is no drama in the sense of action and clash, there is tension and suspense. The paintings bring us to the brink of resolution, the threshold of finality. All is attent and nothing stirs, and the absolute silence and still whip up a powerful sense of imminence and expectation, of being on the verge.

Hindley drastically revised 'The Room', opening up the composition, dissolving the walls, and replacing them with a summary Friedrichian cliff surmounting a vast stretch of water that creates a sense of infinite distance, invoking the boundlessness of the romantic Sublime.

In this landscape, like those of Caspar David Friedrich, the characters play purely contemplative roles as they immerse themselves in nature. Noncelo gazing upwards at the swirling clouds, like Friedrich's figures gazing at the sky or the endless plain, also gaze at something beyond nature, 'the mystery of where they come from, and where they are going' as the first critic to pen a monograph on Friedrich wrote. Thus the final version of 'The Room' raises exactly the same questions as the painting it replaced.

The same self-scrutiny takes place in ''Some Last Questions' where the kneeling Kristi asserts a hieratic presence, like that of a priestess or acolyte. Her fixity of attitude and face – shadowed into a dark impassive mask – assume a ritual solemnity. A pale yellow light pours across the frontal planes of her cheek and brow which glow as if hallowed. A black bird, a symbol of solitude[12], perches on her leg and her left hand appears to caress it as she gladly espouses her seclusion. Kristi communes with the bird and the two coexist as harmoniously as a Saint and his attribute.

Kristi's pose is alert; her expression, grave and reverent; her eyes, lowered; and her attitude one of intense concentration. Black is the traditional colour of the penitent, and the bird is an immemorial symbol of the soul of man flying away at his death inherited from ancient Egypt and pagan antiquity. It retains this meaning as a Christian symbol, and often features in paintings of the Madonna and child where it is held in the hand of the infant Jesus or is tied to a string. It is also a standard ingredient in altarpieces and 17th century Dutch and Spanish still-lives where it also carries this meaning.

The title 'Some Last Things' immediately recalls the four last things that loom so large in the doctrines of the catholic church which adjures the faithful to remain mindful of 'the four last things' – death, judgment, heaven and hell. By contemplating them, one internalizes the truth that the goal of life is to earn salvation and escape damnation. Seen in this perspective, Kristi assesses the state of her soul.
The artist was raised as a highly observant catholic, but no longer subscribes to the religion. Once the creed has been assimilated by the unconscious mind, it continues to shape one's inner frame of reference, and although reason may dismiss faith, it cannot demolish the substratum it has left in the depths of the mind. 'An Everlasting Once' is obviously concerned with unease, compunction, introspection, incipient awareness and glimmering insight, and even though such states of mind may be secular and existential, they are still underpinned by an ethical scrupulosity and moral urgency that seem catholic in origin. The transactions portrayed in 'The Hour of Lead' are all lay reenactments of The Last Judgment, salvation and damnation.

VIII

Matthew's models are only portrayed as active and purposeful when they pose for the artist. However when they cease to project these fictive identities, their sense of self deflates, leaving them depleted, idle and without occupation as they lounge around the studio, vainly attempting to kill time. 'The Having to Love' and 'Recipe' both depict models relaxing, rather than posing. A mood of attrition prevails, and the figures appear bored, restless and frustrated. It is obvious that they wait and that time weighs heavily on their hands.

Waiting is an intensely frustrating condition as it strips us of agency, making us dependent on the actions of others. The condition of waiting is the subject of Samuel Beckett's dramatic masterpiece, 'Waiting for Godot', and the play casts light on Hindley's scenarios.

Two characters, Vladimir and Estragon wait endlessly for the arrival of an unknown man named Godot. The second act is merely a variation on the first, and once again Godot fails to arrive. Boredom, impotence and futility are the keynotes of the play: Vladimir and Estragon long for Godot's appearance, but appear he does not. 'Nothing to be done' remarks Estragon, and nothing is precisely what the pair spend two acts doing, for, as generations of critics have remarked, this is a play in which nothing happens, just as nothing happens in Matthew's paintings.

Vladimir and Estragon attempt to hold 'the terrible silence' at bay, eating, chatting, quarrelling, making up, singing and playing games, but these disconsolate attempts to amuse themselves rapidly wear thin. Although there is duration, there is no linear advance. Both the play and Hindley's paintings deal with the prelude to the action, but not the action itself. That action is left hanging in the air, and time distends into a monotonous, repetitive cycle in which the same preliminaries are endlessly reiterated.[13]

Beckett's play sustains multiple interpretations, but the most germane to 'An Everlasting Once' is Bernard Dukore's view of it as a metaphor for the meaninglessness and absurdity of human existence when man awaits salvation from an external source, and refuses to engage with humanity's perennial dilemmas and assess what the meaning of life may be.[14] This supports the consensus that Godot is God, and that the

characters await the revelation of his existence and the transfusion of meaning which should accompany it. It also reflects the existentialist belief that, in the absence of a transcendental framework of meaning, man is responsible for his fate, and must choose and live out his own values.

In the first version of 'The Room', the wall behind Noncelo is painted in a deliberately vaporous manner and the strong atmospheric suggestions of light breaking through mist dematerialize it so thoroughly that Noncelo can be envisaged as sitting on the edge of an abyss. What encroaches upon her is the void, the intuition that the universe is without God or any moral absolutes, and that death is emptiness and oblivion. Although the final painting nods toward Caspar David Friedrich, anything indicative of the presence of a benign deity, such as the German master's radiant sunbursts, rainbows, steeples, Gothic cathedrals and roadside shrines disappear. The atheistic overtones and presence of the abyss, loads both paintings with a nigh identical symbolic weight.

In existential literature, such encounters with the void are accompanied by dread, for to attain authenticity, we must assume an awesome burden, and make the choices that define our being and our moral code. Sartre's proposition that existence precedes essence is the exegetical nub of 'The Ache of Marriage', and, it applies to all of Hindley's characters who look for a self and find nothing there. There is no 'ghost' in the 'machine' to use Koestler's term. Existentialism insists that man is not born with an 'essence' or innate character, personality or identity. Our acts define our character and determine our attributes. The understanding that life condemns us to be free, and the fear of accepting that freedom, is the source of Hindley's characters distemper and malaise.

X

In 'Meditations', Noncelo and Padraic look exactly like what they are, two models striking a pose. They stand to attention, rising to their full height, and remaining straight-backed and stock-still, muscles braced and breath withheld. Hindley's work must be understood on two levels. The paintings record studio set-ups, but at the same time there is intentionality in the arrangement, and the latter must be viewed as a calculated and deliberate construction intended to convey some broader meaning true of the human condition.

In 'Meditations', the length of rope tied around Padraic and Noncelo's necks, straps them together like Siamese twins. Rope is a prominent recurring leitmotif and its inferences are significant. On the most obvious level, snarls of rope, like a tangled skein, represents life's knotty perplexities and complications, but ropes, chains and figures bound in them, have a long history in Western iconography. Although the list of associations is long, certain stand out in the context of 'An Everlasting Once'.[15] Rope, by association with Prometheus, signifies the 'divine spark' that elevates man above the rest of creation. Prometheus dispelled mankind's original ignorance, and thus he came to stand for the artist who receives the fire of creative inspiration from heaven.

Rope is also an established symbol of abjection, pain, punishment and martyrdom, a freight of meaning deriving from traditional Christian iconography where rope is one of the instruments of Christ's passion. It features prominently in the Mocking of Christ where his hands are bound, the Ecce Homo where there is often a rope round his neck, the Flagellation where he is tied to a column, the Betrayal where he leader of the soldiers who arrest him, casts a rope around his neck, and the road to Calvary where he is often depicted being dragged along by a rope.[16]

The symbology of rope expanded further when Hindley discovered the work of Araki[17], a contemporary Japanese photographer inspired by Kinbaku. Kinbaku is a ritualized form of bondage in which the naked or clothed female body is bound up by rope deployed in elaborate decorative patterns using intricate knots and twine of varying thickness. In Japan kinbaku, which is consensual and involves mild discomfort, rather than cruelty, is not associated with either sad-masochism or exploitation, nor is it considered pornographic. It is esteemed as a highly traditional art form, governed by complex artistic and ethical rules and aiming at the creation of visual spectacle and seduction. The female form is always idealized and handled with a pronounced degree of stylization and formality. The rope-work itself is aesthetically pleasing, and it's roughness acts as a foil, accentuating the beauty of the female anatomy and its flesh tones, and highlighting the curvature of breasts, buttocks, hips and thighs, the delicacy of the skin and the silkiness of hair. In Araki's words 'Putting a rope round a woman is like putting an arm around her'[18], and it expresses tenderness rather than lust, for the rope becomes an extension of the kinbaku master's admiring hands. Araki's influence can be seen in the aesthetic grace with which the rope binds the anatomies in 'Meditations', 'My Friend, My Friend' and 'The White Shadow', and his photography coincides with Hindley's imagery inasmuch as the woman fettered and bound epitomizes the condition of waiting, and provides a metaphor for the photographic entrapment of the human being in that frozen moment that sluices life away.

Although the artist strongly disagrees with the writer, and insists that he deliberately avoids any contemporary political allusions or reference to race in his quest for timelessness and universality, I strongly feel that both 'Meditations in an Emergency' and 'My Friend, my Friend' both assert a political dimension and will inevitably be read as such.[19] In South Africa's highly politicized and race-conscious environment, it is impossible not to see the title 'Meditations in an Emergency' and its imagery of black and white, as alluding, however elliptically, to the state of emergency that was declared on several occasions under Nationalist rule, during the period of

15 The first and most meaningful example is the Greek mythological figure, Prometheus, who taught men all the civilizing arts, writing medicine, mathematics, astronomy, metallurgy, architecture and agriculture. Despite his munificence to humanity, Zeus punished Prometheus for giving fire to mankind by chaining him to a rock. There an eagle fed on his liver until Zeus finally struck him with a thunderbolt, plunging him into an abyss.

In 'Halls Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art' (John Murray, London, 1974), its author, James Hall states that Prometheus' stolen fire was seen 'as the spark of divine wisdom that distinguished man from lesser creatures, his source of the knowledge of the arts and science.

The 'Prometheus Bound' (1618) by Peter Paul Rubens and Frans Snyders in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the 'Prometheus having his Liver Eaten out by an Eagle' (1640) by Jacob Jordaens in the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, and the 'Prometheus being Chained by Vulcan' (1623) by Dirck van Baburen in the Rijksmuseum, are all major baroque works in which the travails of the mythological titan become an analogue of the spiritual sufferings the heroic artist endures in order to create redemptive work that will uplift humanity, and their and the myth's relevance to 'An Everlasting Once' is obvious.

The ancient Romans often created relief's depicting Roman Triumphal ceremonies which included shackled 'barbarian' prisoners. The 'barbarian' was a stock type, bearded, long-haired and coarse of feature. Michelangelo's Medici tombs include a dozen bound prisoners which obviously derive from Roman prototypes. The significance of Michelangelo's slaves as symbols of spiritual conflict and eventual triumph (of the soul over mortality, of virtue over vice, and of the spirit over matter and the flesh in which it is imprisoned) surely provided some impetus for Hindley's Padraig/Noncelo and Kristi paintings.

16 The biblical associations with rope are manifold but all imply coercion, chastening, humiliation and debasement. According to a medieval tradition, Judas Iscariot died by hanging himself. As hanging became the traditional method of capital punishment, the rope and noose are closely associated with execution, death and retribution and function as symbols of disempowerment and forced submission. A rope around the neck is the emblem of penitents like Charles Borromeo. Before his martyrdom the evangelist and martyr, St Mark was paraded through the streets with a rope around his neck and the injuries he sustained accelerated his death. A rope was the attribute of the apostle Andrew who was bound, not nailed, to the cross. Rope also has secular and mythological meanings. In Renaissance allegory, a bound figure symbolized man enslaved by base, earthly desires. A hanging woman was a medieval personification of despair. Nemesis, the scourge of hubris, wields a rope with which she binds man's pride.

17 Araki's work is often dismissed as pornography by the uninformed in Britain, and, more particularly, America, due to a clash of cultures. It is important to understand that the artist works in a specific historical tradition of extreme visual refinement. His images are inspired by the shunga woodblock prints produced during the Edo period (1600–1868) which blend high art with elegant pornography. Shunga means erotic art in Japanese, and the Shunga prints explored the sexual practices of the day in a sexually explicit, but visually exquisite manner unique to Japan. Shunga was practiced by even the greatest of Japanese graphic artists, such as Hokusai and Utamaro, and in Japan, as opposed to the West, it was accepted as a perfectly legitimate form of expression. The closest European equivalent is perhaps the work of Egon Schiele and Aubrey Beardsley.

18 Araki interviewed by Jerome Sans in a recent collection of his photography published by Taschen with no mention of an editor, a place of publication or date.

19 Once an artist has completed a work, it enters the public domain, and the artist can no longer mandate the meanings that others assign to it. The work becomes subject to interpretations the author may well repudiate, but which may well be valid despite such authorial disapproval. I feel I must emphasize that Hindley dissociates himself completely from the political interpretation of 'Meditations' and 'My Friend' contained in the next few pages. Conflicting views are par for the course, and although Hindley rejects my views, I still believe they possess validity.

the Sharpeville Uprising, and then later, during the total onslaught. Meditation is a process of profound reflection and analysis that culminates a conclusion, and both the title and the mise-en-scene suggest that the subject of the meditation is the current South African situation.

Thus I read 'Meditations' as an emblem of racial interdependence in contemporary post-apartheid South Africa, emphasizing the necessity of black and white making common cause, burying their past and present differences, and committing themselves to forging a positive future for their shared country. This, the moral imperative that will ensure peace, progress and prosperity, is presented in the form of an incisive visual symbol, and the clarity of the communication makes the image iconic, and bestow an archetypal power and upon it.

The related painting, 'My Friend, my Friend' too phrases a similar statement about how white and black are bound together in a symbiotic relationship where they are jointly responsible for themselves, each other and the country. The prognosis may be pessimistic for the back to back pose could imply that the two groups wish to move in opposite directions, but cannot as they are roped together, and thus neither can advance in a forward direction. They are stuck in an impasse.

XII

The sextet of paintings revolving around Padraic and Noncelo charts this incapacity for change, and the moral collapse that it provokes. In 'Reflections' the pair stand tall, carrying themselves with a pride and dignity that have worn away in 'An Everlasting Once'.

In 'Recipe', two canvases occupy the background and one is blank. Pictures within a picture are an age-old artistic device used to comment on the action, and the empty canvas speaks of the artist's vocation of filling the vacant space, acting as a reminder of things left undone, of duties unfulfilled, responsibilities neglected and sins of omission. The undefiled white sheet of paper in 'An Everlasting Once' and 'The Room' fulfills a similar function, emphasizing the need for an account, a statement, a moral balance sheet. The bare surfaces of canvas and paper are both an incarnation of nothingness, and a token of the reckoning the cast must undertake in order to validate themselves. This Noncelo has failed to do, and the presence of a jackal and goat, may indicate that she and Padraic are atavistically regressing into primitive patterns of living in which they share their space with animals.

In 'A Sort of Song', Noncelo kneels in the company of a baboon. Noncelo hugs the animal with both arms as her cheek brushes intimately against its fur. Her embrace may imply a sense kinship with animals and a descent to their level. Although the goat with its hind and fore legs cruelly bound together immediately invokes thoughts of ritual sacrifice, the two fingered sign the baboon makes with the index and little finger of his right paw introduces a comic note into the painting. This undermines any overly earnest attempt at interpretation, as this is a surfer's sign language for 'Cool Waves' conveying the animal's enjoyment of Noncelo's attention with an off-the-wall kind of humor. This steeps the painting in the deliberate ambiguity and contradiction that makes Hindley's imagery so slippery and resistant to elucidation.

'An Everlasting Once', an allegory of abjection and moral failure, reveals Padraic and Noncelo together with a redoubtable hound. All three are covered up to the neck in a cloth which conceals their anatomies, and the painting hinges on the unseen doings taking place behind the fabric. Both the kneeling Noncelo and Padraic, crouching on his haunches, are immobilized in cowering poses, as they huddle together, seeking comfort from their closeness. They appear to have been stripped of their possessions and of whatever grit and resilience they may once have commanded. The two are obviously in extremis. They appear alert and on their guard, but the dangers that threaten remain undisclosed.

The dog's brilliantly lit profile rivals the heraldic majesty of the wolf's head in the Romulus and Remus bronze in the Capitoline Museum in Rome. The mythological wolf acted as the mother and guardian of the orphaned boys and Hindley's dog too assumes a custodial function and asserts a poise and centrality which his fearful human companions have lost. Noncelo and Padraic rely for their safety upon this beast which appears resolute, unafraid and ready to spring to their defense. Take away the yellow cushion and indoor setting, replace the sheet with a blanket, and these could be two homeless vagrants on the street.

In 'In a Dark Time' Kristi cocks her head and courage and defiance accrete to her expression. Instead of attempting to blot out the approach of the 'terrible silence', as she does in 'The Having to Love', she boldly confronts it. 'After Great Pain' portrays Kristi crouching above the rope in a mood of relaxed exaltation after she has wrestled with her demons. She straddles the rope and tramples it underfoot like some personification of Victory. Although she is entirely static, she resonates Michelangelesque contained energy, and confronts us as triumphantly.

XII

'The Unswept Floor' is the only work in 'An Everlasting Once' with biographic content. It portrays the artist's partner, reclining on a sofa during the uncomfortable final stages of pregnancy. Emma lies outstretched lengthwise across the sofa with her head and shoulders supported by a scrolled armrest. Her gaze is directed out of frame at someone who, given the context, can only be Hindley. Although the painting is far from romantic, the mass of flowers and Emma's cast-off shoes and gaze create an amatory context, and suggest the artist's attempt to prove his adoration by smothering Emma in flowers.

The subject of the nude or partly-clad female lying outstretched on a sofa and gazing directly at the viewer is a topos inherited from Graeco-Roman antiquity, and Emma is a lineal descendant of the abandoned Ariadne in the Vatican, Pauline Borghese, Madame Recamier and the Orientalist odalisques of Gericault, Delacroix, Jerome, Ingres and Matisse. Such imagery awakes expectations of sensuality and eroticism in the viewer, however Hindley holds these firmly in check.

Normally the female is presented at her most inviting, and she offers herself to the male viewer and suckles his erotic fantasies. However Hindley foils any such attempt at sexual appropriation, and deprives the painting of the customary idyllic overtones by presenting a woman whose pregnancy strips her of sexual allure. Furthermore he removes her from a never-never land by garbing her in contemporary clothing, and placing her on a standard modern three-seater couch. Emma sports a glamorous evening gown but the garment's seductiveness is offset by the white vest-like white undergarment which compromises the revealing effect of the scooped away cut beneath the arm and the deep décolleté.

Traditional paintings of recumbent women are lusciously indulgent visual poetry, whereas Hindley subverts the genre. The artist strips the setting of luxury and ease, and envelops the model in a problematic atmosphere of tension and mystery.

The palette adds to the grating dissonance. The predominant gun metal gray is bleak and repressive and the festoon drapes, upholstery and throw on the sofa are harsh and jarring in colour. The mausolear background and absent windows make the setting as comfortless as a bomb shelter. Shadow outlines the ridges and creases in the lilies, giving them a gross fleshiness that suggests imminent decay, introducing a memento Mori, and warning the sitter, the artist and the viewer that love may be transitory.

20 Barthes, R., 'Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography' Jonathan Cape, London, 1980.

21 Banz, S., 'The Photograph as Misunderstanding', in C. Doswald (ed.), 'The Image of Man in Contemporary Photography', Zurich and New York, 1999.

22 John Berger, 'Ways of Seeing', BBC, London, 1972.

23 The body in the trunk occurs in all the following recently published works of detection – Stieg Larsson's 'The Girl who Kicked the Hornet's Nest, James Hayman's 'Child of Night', R.N. Morris's' The Gentle Axe', Victor Gishler's 'Gun Monkeys' and Michael Connelly's 'Trunk Music'.

24 'The Body in the Trunk' an American silent film shot by John O'Brien in 1914 is probably the first cinematic treatment of this theme which recurs in Quentin Tarantino's 'Good Fellas' where Billy Batts is placed in a trunk after his murderers believe they have killed him, and Hitchock's 'Rope' where a body is concealed in an antique chest. The most notable example however is Hitchcock's 'Rear Window'. In which a photographer recuperating from a broken leg idly spies on his neighbors through a window with binoculars. A man living in the flat across the courtyard arouses his suspicions, leading to the discovery that the latter has killed his wife, sawn up her body, and is in the process of disposing of it bit by bit, by packaging it in suitcases which he then dumps.

XIII

In 'The End of the World' we move out of the confines of the studio to the balcony with its view of the city bowl and the rump of Lion's Head. In this nocturne, Hindley constructs a perspectival box to accommodate the two women and hyena. The orthogonals converge on a single vanishing paint so that the spatial construction is congruent with the Renaissance one-point, perspectival method.

At first sight, the cast do not appear to pose, and the polystyrene cup beside Zipho suggests the two models have gone onto the balcony to take a breather before returning to the studio. The presence of the stuffed hyena is an oddity for, in the normal course of events, this would remain in the studio. However the hyena is integral to the painting's meaning. Its symbolical gist is unambiguous. It is a carrion-consuming carnivore that does not kill its pray, but feeds on the dead, and thus it represents the cast's craven failure to get to grips with the existential consequences of the human condition.

Jessica freezes as though posing for a photograph, and Zipho's momentary pose and turn of head suggest she has just seen us. Thus both girls react to our presence by gazing directly at us, and their sightlines meet outside the picture space directly where the viewer would stand. The spectator thus becomes part of the painting. The spatial construction places us on the balcony in front of the girls, just as its counterpart in Velazquez's 'Las Meninas' positions us within the royal palace standing before the artist and the Infanta's retinue.

Colour is sparing and the monochrome grays create affinities between the painting and a black and white photographic. Zipho and Jessica can be construed as posing for the artist who is taking the photograph that will serve as reference for the future composition. In this way the painting records its own genesis, and the artist and the viewer are collapsed into a single entity.

The photographic representation of any individual is a kind of death, for the camera, reifies its subject. In 'Camera Lucida', Roland Barthes' treatise on photography, the savant concludes that death is implicit in every photograph.[20] Not only does the photograph outlive its subject; it also records his appearance at a particular moment in time, after which it precludes any change, growth or development. Instantaneity is the defining attribute of the photography, and as Stefan Banz writes "A photograph is always an extraction, of 1/25th of a second for instance from life. It is a Now, and there is no Before and After…. Life, reality, takes place in time and space. But a photograph is neither time nor space. It is simply this Now or this Then."[21]

The camera freezes and embalms its subject in a present that rapidly becomes the past. It severs the umbilical cord between photograph and subject, and the latter is alienated from himself and transformed into an entity devoid of awareness, and thus 'death in person'. "The photograph is the advent of myself as other: a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity", writes Barthes.

John Berger[22] states that one-point perspective "centers everything on the eye of the beholder." It "makes the single eye the centre of the visible world. Everything converges on to the eye as to the vanishing point of infinity. The visible world is arranged for the spectator as the universe was once thought to be arranged for God. According to the convention of perspective there is no visual reciprocity. There is no need for God to situate himself in relation to others: he is himself the situation." It is in this very specialized Barthesian sense that Hindley plays God in 'The Hour of Lead' and brings about the 'death' of those he depicts.

His image of them is his 'judgment'. Although he neither endorses nor condemns his sitters, his vision of them is perpetuated in paint, so it becomes as immutable as a divine sentence. This is the only instance in which this master of ambiguity is forced to renounce it. Even if the sitter finds the portrait hostile, he is powerless to change it. There can be no repeal in Hindley's limbos and purgatories. His 'sentence' is irrevocable, a judgment in stone.

XIV

During the final weeks of bringing 'An Everlasting Once' to completion, so Hindley's work became increasingly ambiguous and elusive. His final cluster of paintings, 'Three Quarters Animal, Three Years from Juliet', 'The Soul selects her Own Society', 'The White Shadow' and 'The Hour of Lead', are bafflingly opaque works, true puzzle paintings with a calculatedly unfathomable quality. They are haunting, mysterious and disturbing. There is no gainsaying their riveting impact, but they are susceptible to only partial and tentative interpretation.

There can be no definitive interpretation of 'Three Quarters Animal' as Hindley provides insufficient evidence to enable the viewer to decide whether the girl in the suitcase, Kristi and her companion, Jessica, are simply engaging in play-play, whether Kristi has been murdered or whether Jessica is reliving a traumatic memory. Physiognomic expression, one's principal key to the understanding of any figural painting, is effectively neutralized. Hindley casts Jessica's face into deep shadow which occludes whatever emotion she experiences, and Kristi's face is glimpsed from an odd angle which hampers reading her expression.

The foreground of this unnervingly blank, blunt painting is bleached-out. The contrasts between black and white are souped-up and detail dissolves into white. Diagonals create an impromptu 'snapshot' composition that simulates an over-exposed press photograph, and its appearance and subject appear inspired by the press's obsession with murder and the body in the suitcase. The theme has always enjoyed huge popularity in detective fiction[23] and the cinematic thriller.[24]

Given its mimicry of the documentary appearance of a press photograph, one strongly suspects that the painting records some paedophiliac violation, and what makes it so shocking is the elevated viewpoint whereby we tower above the two girls, looking down upon them. In this way, the viewer is implicated and placed in the role of the transgressor, forcing him to interrogate himself as to whether he harbours paedophiliac tendencies and what his attitude towards this aberration may be.

In South Africa the rape, abduction and murder of underage children has reached proportions unknown in the rest of the civilized world. The country has also become a happy hunting ground for local and foreign paedophiliacs, and the painting alludes to these deplorable realities. Executed shortly after the birth of Hindley's daughter, Eva, the painting seems to express his deep parental trepidation about what may await her in the land of her birth.

My interpretation is that the painting presents two overlapping themes, the first that of murder and the body in the trunk, and the second the legend of Pandora's box.

Pandora was the Greek mythological equivalent of Eve, the first divinely created woman. At Zeus's command Hephaestus molded her from clay to punish mankind for Prometheus' theft of the secret of fire. According to the myth, Pandora opened a jar ('pithos' mistranslated as 'Pandora's box'), releasing all the evils of mankind. Both Eve, the architect of original sin, and Pandora, disobeyed God's command, and visited a great calamity on mankind. In children's books, Pandora opens a giant chest, not unlike a suitcase in appearance, and there is a famous illustration by Arthur Rackham which answers to this description.

The myth of Pandora is an attempt at theodicy, at 'justifying the ways of God to Man', and it addresses the question of why evil exists. The mouse is an obvious symbol of the girls' helplessness, however because of the hairiness of the genitals, Freud saw the mouse as a

25 http://www.suite101.com/content/the-arnolfini-portrait-symbology-and-meaning-a288994#ixzz1CRBx6bfy

26 The mirror possesses further symbolical associations that shore up my interpretation. To cast a reflection, a mirror needs light which has always been associated with illumination, enlightenment and wisdom. The mirror is an attribute of Prudence, one of the four cardinal virtues, who represents wise conduct. Her other attribute is a snake which derives from Matthew (10:16) 'be ye wise as serpents' The snake denotes self-knowledge, while the mirror signifies that the wise man possesses the ability to see himself as he really is.

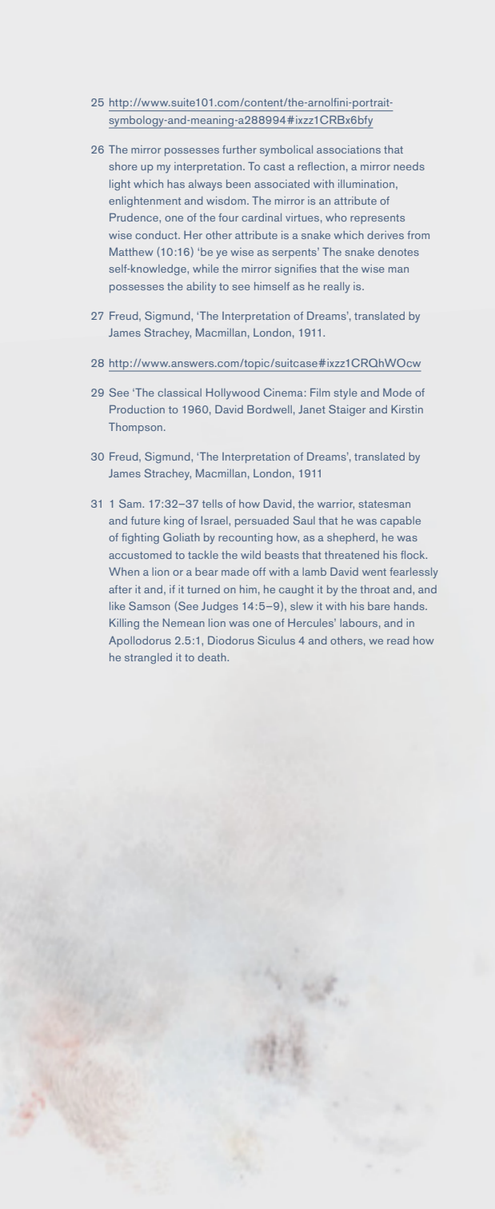
27 Freud, Sigmund, 'The Interpretation of Dreams', translated by James Strachey, Macmillan, London, 1911.

28 http://www.answers.com/topic/suitcase#ixzz1CRQhWOcw

29 See 'The classical Hollywood Cinema: Film style and Mode of Production to 1960, David Bordwell, Janet Staiger and Kirstin Thompson.

30 Freud, Sigmund, 'The Interpretation of Dreams', translated by James Strachey, Macmillan, London, 1911

31 1 Sam. 17:32–37 tells of how David, the warrior, statesman and future king of Israel, persuaded Saul that he was capable of fighting Goliath by recounting how, as a shepherd, he was accustomed to tackle the wild beasts that threatened his flock. When a lion or a bear made off with a lamb David went fearlessly after it and, if it turned on him, he caught it by the throat and, and like Samson (See Judges 14:5–9), slew it with his bare hands. Killing the Nemean lion was one of Hercules' labours, and in Apollodorus 2.5:1, Diodorus Siculus 4 and others, we read how he strangled it to death.



phallic symbol. It thus represents the misdirected powers of Eros assuming socially disastrous directions. The contents of Pandora's Box become a murdered, and possibly violated, girl. Even if the girls are merely playing, the sinister nature of the game indicates that dark fears of murder and defilement play on their minds, and the painting expresses both their fear of, and fascination with, their hitherto unexplored sexuality.

'The Ache of Marriage' is set within a room of markedly abstract and diagrammatic quality. Here an old man sits in a pose redolent of profound thought. His beard, bald pate and grey hair give him a venerable appearance, suggesting he is a repository of wisdom corresponding to the Jungian archetype of the wise man or sage. The title 'The Ache of Marriage' intimates that marriage is what he mulls over, and his ponderation and absolute still are entirely consistent with brooding remembrance. Strong light pours over him, establishing him as a solid, volumetric presence, and endowing him with a far greater degree of reality than the girls and hyena bathed in a faint, anemic light that leaves their faces and large parts of their anatomy in dense shadow. The hyena is far too small to carry two adult figures, and the girls are impossibly tall and cast on a different scale to the old man. These inconsistencies locate the group in the old man's mind's eye. They correspond to the memories, imaginings and fantasies his wife, ex-wife or deceased wife inspires in him.

This is supposition, and given the inscrutability of 'The Ache of Marriage', the only secure method of unlocking its meaning is to decode its symbolism which has shifting, but clearly codified, meanings. What of the pair of ladies' shoes to the right of the old man?

Probably the most famous shoes in art history occur in Jan Van Eyck's 'Arnolfini Marriage' which depicts a wedding ceremony as it takes place. The shoes belong to the Christian symbology of the painting, and allude to the hallowing of the ground of the room in which the marriage takes place. Shoes were traditionally removed in the presence of God who joins bride and groom together. To unloose ones shoes and give them to another was a biblical means of confirming a contract, and the husband frequently presented his bride with new shoes which symbolised the covenant between man and wife. We may safely assume that the shoes are a metonym for the old man's marriage. Freud would concur: shoes are orthodox vaginal symbols, and the shoes discreetly allude to the old man's unseen spouse.[25]

On the left are a suitcase and mirror. The mirror is firstly a symbol of naked truth (a mirror does not lie), and secondly, an age-old symbol of spiritual reflection representing honest self-assessment, man's desire to come to terms with himself and his past and his quest to achieve self-knowledge and wisdom.[26]

The suitcase indicates some disruption of the norm, an imminent departure or a recent arrival. A suitcase appears in 'The Ache of Marriage', 'The Hour of Lead' and 'Three Quarters Animal'. In his 'Interpretation of Dreams', Freud states that luggage is the burden of sin by which one is oppressed[27], and in general it symbolizes the baggage we carry around with ourselves, our unresolved conflicts, traumas, complexes, fears, inhibitions and persistent regrets. A suitcase is where we store things, and thus it represents all those feelings and drives the censor relegates to the unconscious. It represents the psychological obstacles one must overcome to attain mental health and maturity, and this must be what the old man is endeavouring to do as he mulls his marriage.

Travel is an obvious further association. Women often remove their shoes whilst performing tiresome chores, and the conjunction of the suitcase and the women's shoes suggest that the old man's wife is either packing in order to leave him, or that he is reflecting on her act of desertion after the event. Seen in this perspective the suitcase becomes a symbol of female independence. To pack is, after all, a matter of choosing outfits and costumes, or, in other words, exploring alternative identities and reinventing oneself.[28]

In both the fairy tale Cinderella and the Hollywood movie of that name the crystal slippers signify transformation, the elevation of Cinderella from a lowly servant girl to a Princess. In 'The Wizard of Oz' Dorothy's red slippers possess magical, transformative powers. Not only do they protect her from the Wicked Witch of the West, they also enable Dorothy to return home to Kansas by simply clicking her heels three times and repeating "There's no place like home." In 'River of No Return', a movie directed by Otto Preminger, the last shot is a close-up of the discarded shoes of the heroine Kay and the shot signals her abandonment of her old life in favour of a new existence.[29]

'The Hour of Lead' portrays the same man seated in a cavernous studio. 'The Hour of Lead' and 'The Ache of Marriage', are both extremely moody, brooding pieces, and the one could well be the pendant to the other. In the Ache of Marriage, the greybeard surveys the past. He looks back at the course of his life, especially his marriage, in an effort to sum up his personal history and achieve catharsis. In 'The Hour of Lead' by contrast, he turns his attention to the present.

Whereas the room in 'The Ache of Marriage' was just a room, 'The Hour of Lead' returns to the studio, and I suspect the greybeard becomes an analogue of the artist wrestling with his bogeys. The mirror is an obvious metaphor for painting. It accurately reproduces the world, and answers to the Renaissance conception of the canvas as a window on the world. However Hindley's mirror defies logic as it reflects nothing in front of it. What appears in the mirror looks like a segment of a circus ring, identifying the painting as a magical construction in which reality becomes equivocal.

Exactly the same thing happens in 'The White Shadow'. Zipho and Jessica, enveloped in thick ropes, stand before a mirror. In the reflection they gaze into the frame, but the real figures, gaze out at the artist/spectator as in 'The White Shadow', and the painting proclaims itself to be a chimera. Zipho's gaze is challenging, Jessica's look is one of poignant appeal. They gaze into the mirror in an act of self-confrontation that fails to achieve the transcendence they seek. It does not deliver them from the rope, and Jessica's crest-fallen expression conveys her deep disappointment while Zipho reacts with anger.

The purpose of a studio is to enable the artist to escape distraction and suspend all responsibilities and commitments other than that of producing art. The studio is a place of self-discovery where the normal pressures of life are relieved. There are no interruptions, and the artist can plumb the depths of his psyche. It is akin to the privileged space and time of psychiatric analysis, the fifty minute hour where the unconscious also heaves into view.

The old man is surrounded by taxidermied animals. In his right hand, he holds a leash of rope attached to a doe who gazes timidly at him, and the rope here seems to denote a link uniting him to his animal instincts and origins. Could the work portray some primal confrontation with the id where all the old man's unavowable obsessions, urges, dreams and fantasies erupt in the guise of wild animals?

Although repression prevents awareness of our obscene sexual and aggressive instincts from registering in the conscious mind, these dangerous urges erupt in distorted form in dream, trance and waking fantasies. Freud posits an equation between wild beasts, particularly the lion, and the unruly impulses that proceed from the libido which the dreamer fears precisely because they are so ungovernable.[30] Dreams are governed by the principle of displacement whereby the emotions inspired by one thing, become attached to another, and this explains why our sexual and other primal drives manifest as animals.
The strong heroes of antiquity Samson, David and Hercules all triumphantly accomplished the trials they were forced to undergo in order to prove their bravery. All three wrestled with lions.[31] The medieval church equated David's fight with the lion with the struggle of Christ against the devil. Representations of Hercules strangling the Nemean lion derive from the ancient image of the Persian god

Mithras slaying a bull, and represent the triumph of right over wrong. However the accomplishments of all these heroes can be interpreted in Freudian terms as the triumph of the conscious mind over intractable unconscious instincts, or the former reaching attaining some kind of accommodation with the latter.

The lion is possessed of a dense nexus of positive symbolical connotations[32], all of which rub off onto the old man who metaphorically wrestles with, and overcomes the ferocious bounding lioness. Lions, as stated before, are dream symbols that intimate the need to get in touch with our emotions, and to subdue them if they assume too explosive a form. However because the lion is a nocturnal creature (Night is an ancient symbol of the subconscious and dream states), it is a symbol of command over the subconscious.

Like all sharp-toothed, carnivorous animals, the hyena is a dream manifestation of the anarchic and anti-social id, and its associations are almost entirely malign.[33] Deer represent instinctual energy, and, like the lion, symbolize powers that are not easily subdued.[34] The Celts believed deer were supernatural beasts. The doe was sent by the gods to summon us to the Faery realm, urging us to go deep into the forest of magic (yet another symbol of the unconscious), before guiding us into the divine realm. The doe is the animal physically closest to the old man. She stands still and gazes at him, while the hyena and lion ignore him, and look and move in other directions. Finally they are linked by a rope, and just as Virgil guided Dante through the seven circles of Hell in 'The Inferno', the doe serves as the old man's guide as he successfully negotiates the underworld of the instincts.

32 The lion, the king of beasts, signifies strength, authority, nobility, pride and courage. It is a symbol of Christ, the Lion of Judah, and it is connected to God inasmuch as both the beast and the deity supposedly sleep with their eyes open so that they can watch over their children. This makes the lion emblematic of alertness. Newborn lions were once believed to be born dead, and to only acquire the life force when the father passed its breath upon the pup, and hence they are emblematic of conversion and resurrection.

33 The fact that the hyena's diet is carrion, and that, reputedly, it is a scavenger, rather than a killer, made it a symbol of filth, cowardice, greed, cruelty and treachery. The hyena was credited with powers of divination and fascination, and this, and its constant laughter, associated it with profane wisdom verging on black magic. It supposedly knew the secrets of the dead, and various hidden and demonic forces, and witches and ghosts were thought to ride it. It was thought to imitate human voices and call its victims by name. This attribute made it a symbol of the Devil.

34 For the symbolism of animals see Biedermann, Hans, Dictionary of Symbolism: Cultural Icons and the Meanings Behind Them, New York, Facts On File, 1992; Chevalier, Jean and Gheerbrant, Alain, A Dictionary of Symbols, (Transl. by John Buchanan-Brown), New York, Penguin Books, 1996; Jung, C.G., Mysterium Conjunctions, (Transl. by R. F. C. Hull), The Collected Works of Jung, Vol. 14. Princeton, NJ. Princeton University Press. 1970; Andrews, Ted, Animal-Speak, Llewellyn Publications, 2002; Carr-Gomm, Philip and Stephanie, The Druid Animal Oracle, A Fireside Book, 1994.

MATTHEW HINDLEY

An Everlasting Once

The Ache of Marriage
2010, oil on linen, 300 x 200cm

The End of the World
2010, oil on linen, 300 x 200cm

Three quarters animal, Three years to Juliet
2010, oil on linen, 300 x 200cm

In a Dark Time
2010, oil on canvas, 175 x 240cm

Some Last Questions
2010, oil on canvas, 95 x 95cm

The Having to Love Something Else
2010, oil on canvas, 95 x 95cm

The Unswept Floor
2010, oil on linen, 300 x 200cm

The Room
2010, oil on canvas, 95 x 95cm

An Everlasting Once
2010, oil on linen, 300 x 200cm

Meditations in an Emergency
2010, oil on canvas, 175 x 240cm

My Friend, My Friend
2010, oil on canvas, 95 x 95cm

The Soul Selects her own Society
2010, oil on linen, 300 x 200cm

Who is it seeks my pillow nights
2010, oil on linen, 300 x 200cm

While I was fearing it, it came
2010, oil on canvas, 95 x 95cm

Recipe for an Ocean in the Absence of the Sea
2010, oil on canvas, 95 x 95cm

Matthew Hindley was born in Cape Town in 1974. He is a graduate of the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town in 2002. Winner of the Michaelis Prize in 2002 and the Public Sculpture Commission for the National Gallery in 2005. Recent solo shows include, ***Like, like, like, like a circus*** at iArt Gallery Wembley: A Project Room for Contemporary Art and ***Blackout*** at iArt Gallery, Loop Street. A recent collaboration between Hindley and Zwelethu Mthethwa has been selected for a show at the Prado Museum in Madrid.

Acknowledgments

Elana Brundyn, Anne Gonsalves and the iArt Gallery team.
The models Noncelo, Paddy, Sini, Zipho, Jess, Alan and especially Kristi.
My Friend Ned and Props to the stars.

This catalogue was published to accompany the show, *An Everlasting Once*, in March 2011.

iart
gallery

iArt Gallery
71 Loop Street, Cape Town, South Africa
+27 (0) 21 424 5150 / info@iart.co.za / www.iart.co.za
Editor: Jacqueline Nurse
Text: Lloyd Pollack
Design: Erika Koutny
Image Repro: Jurie Senekal
Printing: Hansa Print, Cape Town

INSIDE COVER /
NON-PRINTING