

ON EXISTENCE
Why I do what I do



On Existence : Why I do what I do

My work explores a deep, but universal, impulse: the search for knowledge and understanding. For me that has always been manifest in understanding what has been; in history.

As I age, this impulse, to look back, apparent since my youth, has deepened. A counterbalance to a sense of dislocation with the world we have constructed. The world in which I must live.

Perhaps that is inevitable; a consequence of ageing, but technology, social media, hashtag movements, bio-engineering : they all serve to make me feel isolated and redundant, not joined or connected. I try to understand them, use them, even embrace them, but they leave me cold.

Books and words, images and music, and most of all landscape - the rough geology of it, dynamic geography, its botany, the sounds and smell of being outside - all these comfort me.

So I find myself an archaeologist of sorts, digging in the present for the past and trying to find some 'truth'. Someone called this condition the 'original shape of man', *and though I recognise this is an unsatisfactory shorthand for our species* it is profound in many ways. A condition and orientation towards and defined in relationship to a sense of something greater.

Where does divinity lie and what is it?

For me divinity is most apparent in things that lie external to us, those things that are greater and more complex than we can fathom, and which lie beyond our control:

Time - on scales we can only model through mathematical equation.

Geological time is the closest I can get. I can hold a rock in my hand. It can be millions of years old, its very substance altered many times, indeed it was once just gas and may well be again. As must I.

Permanent Impermanence - the true order of things.

Natural processes of creation and destruction - the opposing, balanced forces of gravity and expansion, erosion, deposition, cooling, heating; the seasons.

Scale - both limitless and boundless and at the same time infinitely complex, minute and 'perfect'

I see wonder in all these things.

And it surely lies within us too - in the atomic make up that makes us feel and be aware.

What is the 'original form of man'? It is not about Eden and sin but:

The inescapable feeling of 'soul'

Insignificance: of the individual

In light of the immense scale of the world and its processes, our vulnerability and the unfathomable/incomprehensible vastness of space and time.

Even in the face of an empty or majestic landscape, what is the point of me?

There is none.

Imagination and knowledge : Though there is no point to me I am a carrier, curator and creator in my own right. As are we all. Receptacles of accumulated layers of history and experience - part of a continuity of human experience and inheritance that is both ubiquitous and unique.

What am I doing to safeguard and share that?

The sensory animal feeling of existence - air, light, temperature, humidity, smell, sound, feeling, touch. Movement, perceptible change. Emotion. Particularity.

For millennia driven by the real - by geography and the land....even by mortality, by loss and passing. Now what?

How do we define existence in the future?

It seems this will be through digital interface and virtual reality; through biogenetics and intergalactic travel? Of these four, three are entirely self-referencing.

And here lies my disquiet. Here we lose touch with the 'original shape of man'. We lose our connectedness to Earth and our true experience and become something different entirely.

And my disquiet is doubled by my own knowledge of history. For I recognise fear in my voice. Not excitement. It was the same fear as those who fought the coming of the railways, who disliked the intrusion of the telephone, who thought computers a monstrosity....

So I cannot stop progress, but must live through it. No matter if I feel left behind.

I was born during the Space Race. I was four when mankind stepped upon the moon.

Our knowledge of the universe and its systems has expanded exponentially since then, as has our knowledge of our own planet, of life even. But I have reached maturity at a time when I may be part of the last few generations to define their existence in terms of a relationship with these natural systems.

Every preceding generation, in all cultures, has understood itself, in reference to its environment. Now culture - human existence has reached a tipping point - where it is only self-referential and self-perpetuating. A digital, virtual, media driven mass existence that is the basis of ubiquitous experience.

When I look back on a tumulus from the Neolithic, I know it was significant but I can only vaguely sense what that might be, even experts have been unable to say precisely what it was for.

So will future generations looking back on us, perhaps from another planet, wonder why we did what we did? Why we made our paintings and wrote down words and tended our gardens? And wonder what purpose did they all serve?