

Art Practice Statement - Shannon Dowdall

From working on the given projects throughout the past trimester I have gained a lot of insights through different aspects of making based off of given briefs. I feel that each project has aided me in some form, developing my thought processes, approach and material use associated with each piece I make.

During the first project beginning in January titled 'Techno Fossils and Tectonic Forces', we explored the theme of 'The Anthropocene' a new concept to me exploring the influence of human behaviour on the Earth's atmosphere in recent centuries - reflecting on remnants of the past in comparison to the techno fossils of the future. This project was very thought provoking to me because of how broad of a theme it was. I began reflecting and researching the meaning behind The Anthropocene, discovering current ongoing permanent changes that have happened or are currently happening to the Earth's surface left in place as a memory of the people that came before us. I began reflecting on civilization past and present and how we as people create for pleasure or function. Ancient land structures became a prominent focal point to me personally because of the 'mystery' and unanswered questions associated with some of them. This, in contrast to today's focus on mainly functionality of land structures, interested me. I planned a visit to Newgrange monument and created some on site drawings and rubbings of the monument. I used mainly willow and pencil charcoal and then later worked into some of them with water. I loved this effect and I think the charcoal captured a lovely atmosphere and movement within the drawings. I decided to move forward developing these drawings in the studio through the use of collage. This to me represents a sustainable aspect of the project and preservation of the Earth's natural materials embodied alongside the admiration for the structure and history of Newgrange. This shows through within my final piece represented through recycled newspaper shreds.

I enjoyed this project but found it hard to narrow myself down to one specific aspect and struggled deciding which pathway to go at times. This struggle itself was like a learning curve and a shift forward representing a change from previous projects to

the newer ones. I personally thought it challenged security within myself to trust my instincts within the making and process choices.

The next project, Social Fabric - The Knitted Now, focused on the relationships and connections we make with each other making us all a part of the common thread of society as a whole. This project positioned textiles and its history at the centre of interest. This project was very thought provoking because it made me think about the content and context in which textiles play a part of our lives as a society through representation and functionality. At first it was hard for me to not think so literally about the concept of The Knitted Now in terms of textile pieces. Originally flags, jerseys and political symbols associated with fabric and textiles came to mind, looking especially at symbolism and the potential to create a large flag with repeating patterns.

Upon further exploration, I strayed away from this approach to expand a more historically rooted theme. Also as a small continuation of aspects from the previous project 'The Anthropocene', Irish history and mythology was at the forefront of my mind. I found myself researching and becoming interested in ancient Irish clothing, especially the Kinsale Cloak, a sixteenth century cloak called a 'brata' that along with its purpose was used as a symbol for social class among citizens. This interested me and I decided to begin making my own 'brata' from second hand clothing in a more current day style incorporating different textures, fabrics and colours to represent the progression of trade of products into our country. I wanted to create movement and body within the cloak by adding exaggerated folds and layers. I really enjoyed this process and working in a more physical way, I felt more connected to the piece.

I wanted to make small studies and sketches on canvas of the cloak capturing the folds, wrinkles and patterns of the fabric. I thought the monochromatic approach looked really interesting when replicated through paint and from looking at artists such as Georgia O'Keeffe I was inspired to paint in a different style than I usually would. Overall, I enjoyed this project because it inspired me to reach for a broader spectrum of materials other than what I would usually feel comfortable with and through this it led to a series of experiments that continued into the next project.

The most recent project, A State of Affairs' aim was to develop research based processes into creative processes of production. I chose to continue my last Knitted In the Now project into this brief. I wanted to lead this idea further, moving my subject matter over to almost exclusively natural materials. I wanted to convey the importance of textiles and social fabric within my work by incorporating woven installations made of wood from a fallen tree, unprimed canvas printed with flowers, leaves, grasses, leftover orange peel and strawberry tops pressed into the surface.

My thought process behind this piece was to reflect society in a raw and natural way relating back to the process involved in ancient cloak making and the natural materials available in comparison to nowadays glorification of plastic and non recyclable materials being incorporated into fast fashion clothing. I was questioning the idea of what makes and constitutes a fabric, trying to replicate a woven fabric exclusively from natural twine, branches, leaves, flowers etc pushing the boundaries of what materials can form a fabric. This also translates into the larger piece creating a wooden 'fabric' overlaying a raw canvas piece. The main canvas piece to me spoke of the fast fashion industry and that in contrast to machine made fabrics, creating a handmade piece felt really personal. I loved the process of pressing the flowers into the fabrics and thought it made a gorgeous quality to the piece with some of the dried pieces of the flowers and leaves stuck onto the canvas. I really enjoyed this process and fell in love with making pieces in such a raw and physical way.

Overall, throughout this trimester I have learned a lot about experimentation, alternate materials and the importance of thoroughly researching and making art that I want to make most importantly. I have also branched out with my painting materials using oils for the first time and experimenting with different mixing mediums. I have enjoyed experimenting more with techniques and feeling more independent within my work. This trimester has also taught me that being stuck for ideas, although an uncomfortable feeling, can transform into something completely different with help of a fresh perspective by talking out and discussing ideas to classmates and tutors.