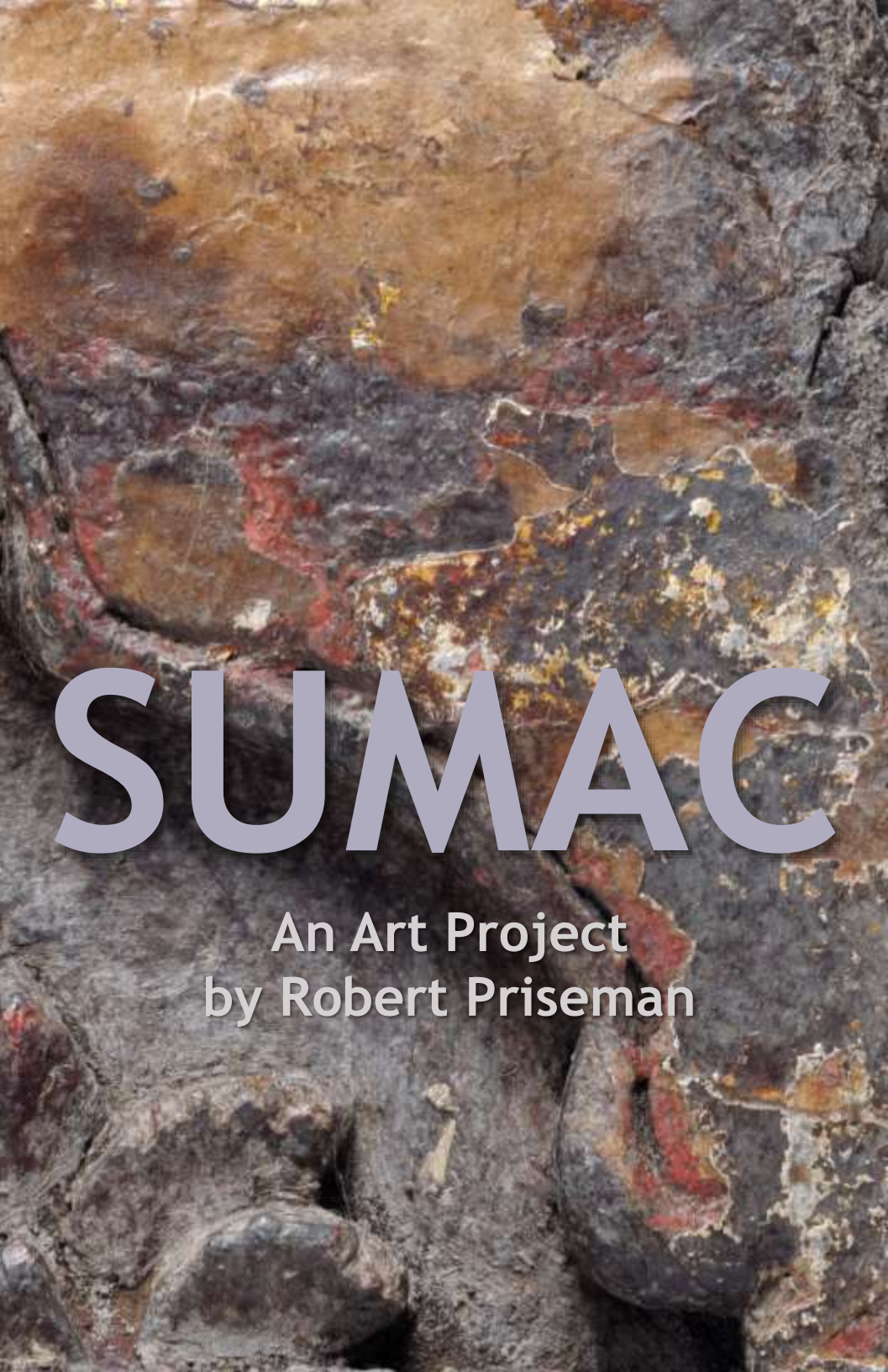
SUMAC
An Art Project
by Robert Priseman

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With essays by Dr Matthew Bowman and Robert Priseman
and an interview with John-Paul Pryor

SEABROOK PRESS

Introduction

SUMAC

As a child, I used to go to sleep at night with a copy of John Constable's painting 'The Cornfield' hanging over my bed. 'The Cornfield' which is on display at the National Gallery in London was painted in 1826. Like many great paintings it can be interpreted in a number of different ways. Constable himself referred to it as 'The Drinking Boy' and in the bottom left-hand side of the picture we see a small brook. By the brook lies a boy on his stomach, he is wearing a red waistcoat, blue scarf and white shirt, his face immersed in the water he drinks. Behind him stand a dog and sheep being herded up a lane, ready to pass through a gate to a cornfield which gives the painting its title. Beyond the gate walks a man wearing a black hat, red scarf and white shirt, with two further men working a distant field in the background, on the horizon to the rear of them stands a church. The boy, the gate, the man in the field and the church are drawn along a straight axis which gives us a cause to read this painting as a narrative of life which moves from childhood, to adulthood and then ultimately to death and the final resting place of the graveyard. The sheep remind us of the Christian flock and the brook of the cleansing act of baptism, whilst the gate appears to act as the threshold between the innocence of youth on the one hand and the experience of the adult world on the other. The gate itself hangs off its hinges, indicating that we loose something as we gain experience.

The lane is thought to lead from East Bergholt in Suffolk towards Dedham, with the church in the background being an artistic invention. Many of Constables most famous paintings are based in and around this small rural area which lies just south of Ipswich, the same small area of English countryside where in 2006 the serial killer Steve Wright deposited the bodies of five women he had murdered, all of whom had worked as prostitutes. Earlier this year I decided to produce a set of five small paintings depicting these deposition sites. The five pictures form the series 'SUMAC', the name given to the

police operation undertaken to catch Wright. Each of the paintings is titled after a letter from the operation's codename and they are displayed in the chronological order in which the bodies were discovered. 'S' portrays Belstead Brook and 'U' the stream by Copdock Mill where the remains of Wright's first two victims were concealed, 'M', 'A' and 'C' the roads near Levington and Nacton where the bodies of three more women were later found. The five paintings work to create a visual narrative along the lines of Constable's 'The Cornfield' and begin by viewing the earliest two scenes close-up and in day-light, while the second two take a broader view and move towards sunset. The fifth painting draws back completely to reveal the night lit woods at Nacton. This creation of a narrative arc over a set of images is similar in approach to one I took when I painted the larger six foot by nine foot 'Gas Chambers' series on the Holocaust. The scale of these paintings allowed the paint to be applied in an increasingly impasto manner while the size seemed appropriate for the subject.

The 'SUMAC' series demanded a different approach and I made the decision to create them as a set of miniatures with each painting being framed by a roughly treated antique Indian shrine. I was drawn to the idea that these paintings would need to be seen intimately, experienced by the viewer on a one to one basis. I have aimed to paint these pictures as beautifully as I can, setting a contrast to the treatment of the locations as areas of waste ground for bodies which were treated as waste. The history we now attach to these places creates a shift in our perception from one of the previously ordinary and non-descript to one which is scarred by some kind of residual energy attached to violence. This is the same landscape Constable painted of rural life, re-framed by a tragedy which makes us aware that we view what we see through the lens of personal knowledge and experience.

As a child of eight I was abducted and taken to an area of waste ground by a paedophile and often wonder at the fact that I'm still alive after the event. I was too ashamed at the time to reveal all he did, but he was caught and sentenced to prison. This is a small incident compared to an event like the Ipswich murders, or the many other worse fates people face

every day and it is this event which led me to consider the Ipswich murders as a subject suitable for painting. My approach to the 'SUMAC' series is underpinned by a belief that all creative acts are driven by emotions which we rationalized at a later stage, a process which appears to reflect how many of our actions in society are driven by irrational feelings which we slowly make sense of further down the line. Art is one way we may attempt to comprehend the incomprehensible, with paint working as a metaphor for the potentially overwhelming nature of human emotions, while the physical constraints of the canvas act to hold them in place. Painting is deeply personal, yet what is most personal is also most universal.

Robert Priseman, 2011

The Paintings

Gemma Adams aged 25, went missing on November 15. Her body was found in Belstead Brook on December 2.

S
7.7 x 5.7 cm, Oil on Board
Set in an antique Indian shrine
2011

Tania Nichol aged 19, went missing on October 30, her body was found in a stream by Copdock Mill on December 8.

U
7.1 x 6.3 cm, Oil on Board
Set in an antique Indian shrine
2011

Anneli Alderton aged 24, was pregnant and went missing on December 3. Her body was found laying in a cruciform pose, opposite the entrance to Amberfield School.

M
6.3 x 4.5 cm, Oil on Board
Set in an antique Indian shrine
2011

Annette Nicholls aged 29, went missing on December 4, her body was found in woodland near Levington, in a cruciform pose, on December 12.

A
7.0 x 5.8 cm, Oil on Board
Set in an antique Indian shrine
2011

Paula Clennel aged 24, went missing on December 9, her body was found on December 12, close to that of Annette Nichols.

C
9.2 x 7.0 cm, Oil on Board
Set in an antique Indian shrine
2011

An Essay by
Dr Matthew Bowman

Witnessing and Trauma in Robert Priseman's SUMAC

Five paintings in all: each small painting, completed by the artist Robert Priseman in oils and ornamentally framed, depicts a landscape. Perhaps, to utter the generic term "landscape" here is almost too much in this context, calling to mind, for instance, the haunting expansive works of Caspar David Friedrich or the more socialized paintings of John Constable. Instead, two of the paintings present us with small streams—one of these, designated S, appears to be a wooded area, while U offers a view of the banks but provides no further visual information; the two paintings entitled M and A are road scenes set amid trees, thus suggesting that the environs to be that of the countryside rather than the town; finally, somewhat separate from the rest is C, which shows two trees shorn of their leafs—indicating a wintery time of year—silhouetted against an orange sky. All five paintings, then, are, at first glance, indefinite regarding their location. Their smallness and concentration upon small details, moreover, seemingly restricts their narrative dimension, as does the absence of people. If anything, they resemble details—or indeed, fragments—of a larger, more encompassing landscape painting or series of landscape paintings, rather than landscape paintings in themselves.

If the paintings are coy about revealing their specific locale (or if they even have one), the single letters that comprise their titles is more forthcoming. Read in the correct order, the letters spell out SUMAC, which serves as the collective noun of this series, and references a police investigation—Operation Sumac—carried out over half a decade ago. In late 2006, a series of murders were perpetrated in the county of Suffolk. The five victims were young women, all of whom were working

as prostitutes in the area, a fact which, for some, served as sufficient justification for drawing their deaths as a "natural corollary" (albeit tragic) of their dangerous, illegal occupations. The ensuring police investigation uncovered a local taxi driver and former merchant navel sailor, Steve Wright, as the murderer. The victims died as the result of asphyxiation and their bodies were left naked (there was no evidence of sexual molestation, however), leading to Wright becoming dubbed "The Suffolk Strangler) in the rural locations now depicted in Priseman's paintings.

Insofar as these miniatures depicting landscapes relate to the brutal murders perpetrated by Steve Wright, then we are compelled to ask whether such an aesthetic strategy is adequate to the trauma it represents through a specific act of pictorial displacement. Staging the critical question, however, in terms of adequacy is surely insufficient—doing so risks making the decisive issue merely a technical or formal matter. Rather, there are further questions that demand to be brought to the fore: questions of the particular responsibilities that should be borne by the artist in the face of the wanton murder of others and of the representability of trauma tout court. Thus, then, not only or simply a question of "is this the most appropriate way to document a tragic series of events?" but also "should the artist engage in these kinds of issues?" and "is it possible to represent trauma at all?" (responding that artists have often freely sought to engage such weighty subjects is not evidence that they should or, more pertinently, that they can).

The artistic strategy under discussion here is less common within painting. Rather, the field of photography has been much more commonly associated with traumatic representation—whether we are speaking of collective or personal trauma—than painting has. On this score we can't sidestep the massive influence of Walter Benjamin's "Little History of Photography" and Roland Barthes Camera Lucida upon theories of trauma within photographic discourse. These texts have been repeatedly and extensively analysed, but it bears mentioning in this context Benjamin's famous commentary upon the Dauthendey portrait photograph in which he writes: "No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed the subject, the beholder feels an

irresistible urge to search a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality has (so to speak) seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it." Similarly projecting future death as something implicit but determinative within the photograph, Barthes argued that these frozen images contained a temporality marked my mortality. As he famously wrote, the photograph of the manacled Lewis Payne—awaiting execution for his attempted murder of W. H. Seward, the US Secretary of State in 1865—evinces a peculiar conjunction with time and mortality: "He is dead and he is going to die" Rather than seeing this conjunction as distinct to this image alone, Barthes comments that it is shared by all photographs: "In front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder, like Winnicott's psychotic patient, over a catastrophe which has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe."

Photography's peculiar historicity, its indexical connection to a particular time and place, combined with the sheer contingency and transitoriness of that time and place, allows it to become a medium that is indelibly traumatic. In his book Spectral Evidence, Ulrich Baer examines two photographs taken by two different photographers. Both Sobibór (1995) by Dirk Reinartz from his photo-book Deathly Still: Pictures of Former Concentration Camps and an untitled image from Mikael Levin's War Story (1997) which depict markedly similar scenes: overgrown clearings, completely unpopulated with no extant architecture, plain overcast skies rendered starkly in black and white. That these two photographs show former concentration camp locations isn't immediately obvious. Instead, their usage of landscape pictorial traditions and the lack of visual clues displace their documentary evidence. Although knowing here might rely upon contextual historicist awareness—that is to say, an extra-visual knowledge—Baer's interest stems from perceiving the power of these works as emanating from an altogether source. For Baer, their evidentiary power coincides not with contextual reconstruction but from the very absence of visual historical markers. At stake here isn't the "banality of evil" as metaphorically replicated by the quotidian ordinariness

of the landscape in the photographs; rather, it is the emptiness of the landscape, its refusal to represent, that testifies to the sheer unrepresentability of the Holocaust. Thus, that which evades representation and the negation of representation becomes paradoxically the most adequate representation of historical trauma.

While the correspondences between these photographs and Priseman's SUMAC paintings are plain, various factors disclose that we shouldn't erase their specific differences without further analysis. Firstly, there is a question of medium. For Benjamin, Barthes, and Baer, the traumatic kernel is the outcome of qualities peculiar to the photographic medium even though they foreground different temporalities (so that Benjamin and Barthes project the future trauma from the present of the photograph, whereas Baer uncovers the historical trauma from the present). It would appear on that basis, then, that painting doesn't possess the same intrinsic relation to the traumatic event. Secondly, there is an awkward question of the scale of tragedy: can we straightforwardly equate the millions that were brutalized and executed in the Nazi camps with the deaths of five women at the hands of one killer? To ask such questions of Priseman's SUMAC isn't to do these works a disservice by demanding a near-impossible historical and ethical standard. On the contrary, it might be argued that Priseman's oeuvre has regularly compelled such questions as we can tell from his various suites of pictures such as No Human Way to Kill (2007-2008) and his Holocaust-addressing *Nazi* Gas Chambers: From Memory to History (2008-2009).

And indeed, through looking at these other paintings we quickly notice how concerned Priseman is to generate typologies of space. Eschewing any self-consciously expressive brushwork, Priseman seems both to depict spaces in a manner that refuses traces of subjectivity as a means of highlighting the objectivity of quasi-photographic visual qualities in his painting, on the one hand, and to allow himself to be drawn to spaces that possess some degree of psychical disturbance. Taken together, the two aspects reveal a dynamic of "witnessing" in Priseman's paintings that seeks to uncover the invisible stain of trauma. But if we are to speak of witnessing, then we must necessarily

ask who is the witness here and what responsibility of testimony befalls them. Presenting us with views of rural Suffolk, the obvious art-historical predecessor to SUMAC would be the paintings of John Constable. To that extent, we might assume that part of Priseman's fascination with these crime scenes resides within the perversion of what is locally known as "Constable Country" which proposes a rather different twist to what John Barrell referred to as "the dark side of the landscape" vis-a-vis the rural scenes depicted by Constable, Thomas Gainsborough, and George Morland. It is as if Constable's pictures are now haunted by the murders to happen later on. Yet while Barrell illuminated the plight of the rural poor in these paintings, thereby establishing their evidentiary status, to my mind we need to look across the channel for a body of work that corresponds more proximately with the model of witnessing that I'm suggesting is present in Priseman's oeuvre in general and SUMAC in particular. That is to say, we must turn to the example of Caspar David Friedrich.

As Joseph Leo Koerner argues in his perceptive study of Friedrich, the significance of his paintings relates to the recurrent thematization of looking and experiential cognition that underscored his pictorialized Romanticism. Unlike Constable, arguably, Friedrich is less directly concerned with mimetically recreating through paint the landscape than he is with recording his experience of the landscape, especially that experience when confronted with specific sensory limit conditions answerable to Immanuel Kant's formulation of the sublime. Such thematic treatment of looking is evident through the frequent presence of single figures and very small groups of people in the foreground of the canvas. Nearly always seen from behind, the Rückenfigur (the name given to Friedrich's turned away figures) is explicitly gazing at the scene before him or her. But if the people depicted in Friedrich's paintings stage looking, then it's important to remark that they actively prefigure the act of looking the viewer carries out in beholding the painting. With their backs turned towards us, they look more or less at the same sublime landscape as we do. Their concentrated act of looking that we "see-in" thus becomes an invitation for us, as beholders of the painting and the world itself, to contemplate our own acts of looking. Referring to Friedrich's The Monk by the Sea, Koerner writes concerning the

Rückenfigur of the monk: “[the monk] does not explain or mediate the picture’s meaning, but only repeats the picture’s essential deferment of meaning; or that he emblematizes the subject of landscape as the subject in landscape; or that he is a mirror of myself, who is at once forced and unable to constitute the picture’s true subject.”

We might contend, then, that Friedrich’s paintings and the manner that they thematize subjective experience serves as an historical analogue of Priseman’s paintings and his call to witnessing. And indeed, these two artists complement one another suitably: Friedrich apprehends within the genre of landscape after Kant’s revolution in philosophy the necessity of dealing with the near unrepresentablilty of the sublime, whilst Priseman apprehends within the genre of landscape after the Holocaust and the necessity of the near unrepresentability of traumatic historical experience. The proposed comparison with Friedrich’s paintings, however, may ring as somewhat misleading. After all, there is no Rückenfigur here for us to synchronize our looking with. Moreover, if the boundlessness of the sublime was the ultimate test of experience for the Romantics, then the partial views offered by SUMAC point in a very different direction. Instead of the immensity of earth and sky, the mountains breathtakingly shrouded in mist, or the sea transformed into sheets of ice, Priseman offers us a view of a stream seen as if from too close a distance. There are hints of Friedrich in SUMAC, but the transition from Friedrich to Priseman is tantamount to a transition from the landscape to the detail.

But this is very much to the point. The small scale of the SUMAC pieces engenders a very different relationship to the beholder not just by setting aside notions of the sublime that are prevalent in Romanticism and in landscape painting more generally but also use that smallness to draw the beholder physically closer to each canvas. While our tendency is to initially step back from a Friedrich painting in order to encompass it within our field of vision, the deliberate smallness of Priseman’s SUMAC compels the viewer to reduce their distance between themselves and the painting so as to inspect them with the care required. To that extent, our inspection surely resembles on some level the exceptionally close scrutiny

carried out by the police and forensic teams after the discovery of each victim. Seeing from close-up, we are effectively searching for the telltale traces of murder even if the bodies or signs of the Wright's presence—footprints, broken twigs, for example—are not present within the landscape scene. The smallness of each painting, moreover, means that they could potentially be held in the hand, brought close to the eyes, turned this way and that, thereby facilitating an extremely high degree of forensic examination. And therefore, we find our own looking thematized, albeit in manner very different to that of Friedrich, and to very different ends. There are no subjects in Priseman's SUMAC landscapes, but we are nonetheless the subject of those landscapes.

That would perhaps be a good place to end if it weren't for the ethically problematic issue of seeing ourselves as the subjects of Priseman's SUMAC. Surely, we might worry, it is the victims—Tania Nicol, Gemma Adams, Anneli Alderton, Annette Nicholls, and Paula Clennell—that are the subjects of these Suffolk landscapes, not us. And worse, is there not the danger that in comprehending ourselves as the subjects of those landscapes we deny the victims' personal histories, their tragic fates, thus metaphorically killing them a second time? But this would be, to my mind, to misconstrue our role in this. Through becoming the subject of these landscapes we do not replace the subjecthood of the victims, rather we are called forth as witnesses of their deaths, to remember when the physical traces have eroded and memory has faded. And if our ethical responsibility as beholders is one of empathy for the victims that has been triggered by how Priseman thematizes looking and witnessing of a trauma that is not represented—that cannot be represented—through documentary evidence, then the stake of these paintings as landscape paintings is rather different from what we normally expect. As I have contended, despite their geographical proximity to "Constable Country," it is the works of Friedrich rather than Constable that provide the more accurate predecessor to Priseman's enterprise within the landscape tradition insofar as Friedrich's landscapes correspondingly emphasize the constitutive role of experience, thereby consequentially rendering his landscape paintings studies of subjectivity. And yet, it seems possible to make a stronger although potentially counterintuitive claim. Out of all

the genres within the history of art it is portraiture that is most commonly taken to emblematize subjectivity. Given that, as we have seen, Priseman problematizes mimetic representation, it strikes me that we can plausibly argue that SUMAC is not simply a series of landscape paintings that thematize witnessing. On the contrary, they are non-mimetic portraits of the five victims, and, as portraits, we are enjoined to become witnesses of those victims as person to person.

Matthew Bowman, 2013

Walter Benjamin, "A Little History of Photography" in Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927 – 1934, ed. by Michael W. Jennings et al, trans. by Rodney Livingstone et al (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 510

Roland Barthes, Camera Lucida, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage Classics, 2000 [1983]), p. 96.

For a fuller discussion of these photographs that is germane to Priseman's artistic practice, see Ulrich Baer, Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: MIT Press, 2002).

See John Barrell, The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting 1730-1840 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

Joseph Leo Koerner, Caspar David Friedrich and the Subject of Landscape, 2nd edition (London: Reaktion Books, 2009 [1990]), p. 250.

An Interview With John-Paul Pryor

John-Paul Pryor Interviews Robert Priseman on the SUMAC series

JP: Tell us about SUMAC, what drew you to such dark subject matter?

RP: The five paintings which form the series ‘SUMAC’ depict the deposition sites where, in 2006, the serial killer Steve Wright deposited the bodies of five women he had murdered, all of whom had worked as prostitutes in Ipswich. Earlier this year I decided to produce a set of small pictures depicting these locations.

SUMAC was the name given to the police operation undertaken to catch Wright. Each of the paintings in the series takes its title after a letter from the operation’s codename and I have displayed them in the chronological order in which the bodies were discovered. ‘S’ portrays Belstead Brook where Gemma Adams, who was aged 25 when she went missing on November 15, was later discovered on December 2. ‘U’ shows the stream by Copdock Mill where the remains Tania Nichol, then aged 19, was discovered on December 8. ‘M’ depicts the location where the body of Anneli Alderton, aged 24, who was pregnant at the time, was found laying in a cruciform pose in woodland near Nacton, opposite the entrance to Amberfield School on December 10. ‘A’ and ‘C’ show the sites where the bodies of Annette Nicholls, aged 29 and Paula Clennel, aged 24, were both found on December 12 in close proximity to each other.

I live and work just 17 miles south of these sites which are located just outside Ipswich and so had an interest in this tragedy from a local perspective. Yet, more personally, as a child of eight I was abducted and taken to an area of waste ground by a paedophile and often wonder at the fact that I’m still alive after the event. I was too ashamed at the time to reveal all he did, but he was caught and sentenced to prison.

This is a small incident compared to an event like the Ipswich murders, or the many other worse fates people face every day and it is this event which led me to consider the SUMAC series as a subject suitable for painting.

JP: Why are you drawn to dark subject matter generally?

RP: I am fascinated by our human drive for cruelty which is reflected throughout our history and my approach to art is underpinned by a belief that all creative acts are driven by emotions which we rationalized at a later stage, a process which appears to reflect how many of our actions in society are driven by irrational feelings which we slowly make sense of further down the line. Painting is one way I believe we may attempt to comprehend the incomprehensible, with paint acting as a metaphor for the potentially overwhelming nature of human emotions, while the physical constraints of the canvas act to hold them in place. For me, painting is a deeply personal creative act, yet what is most personal is also most universal.

JP: How has your own personal experience of abduction shaped your view of the world?

RP: I used to see the world as a dark place when I was younger and viewed most adults outside of my own family as suspect. However, growing older forces you to confront the fact that you become what you most fear, an adult living in a world of grown-ups. You become, in effect, a member of the enemy. This means that in order to continue living you have to learn to find peace with yourself and those around you. It makes the transition from childhood to adulthood difficult and I can see why many people who have suffered early trauma turn to drugs or alcohol as a means of blocking out these complex emotions.

JP: This feels very different to you previous work... Is this a marked change in direction for you?

RP: The ‘SUMAC’ series demanded a different approach to other series I have painted in the past such as ‘No Human Way to Kill’ or ‘The Troubles’ which tend to be more focused around abstracted social issues such as the death penalty or war. With

this new set I have focused on a much more personal narrative and as a result I made the decision to create them as a set of miniatures with each painting being framed by a roughly treated antique Indian shrine. I was drawn to the idea that these paintings would need to be seen intimately, experienced by the viewer on a one to one basis. I have aimed to paint these pictures as beautifully as I can, setting a contrast to the treatment of the locations as areas of waste ground for bodies which were treated as waste. The history we now attach to these places creates a shift in our perception from one of the previously ordinary and non-descript to one which is scarred by some kind of residual energy attached to violence. This is the same landscape Constable painted of rural life, re-framed by a tragedy which makes us aware that we view what we see through the lens of personal knowledge and experience.

JP: Is this the marking out of a psycho-geographical landscape?

RP: Yes it is. I am very interested in the idea that our perceptions of places can be shaped through personal history. That how we feel about what we see in front of us is informed by what we know or what we have witnessed. It makes our emotions more tangible and heightens our awareness of life while revealing a remarkably superstitious aspect to our psychological make-up.

JP: You talk about residual energy – do you believe that energy remains if the viewer doesn't know the history? Isn't that rather a metaphysical notion?

RP: I would like to think that residual energy remains even if the viewer doesn’t know the history of a place, because I like to think we all leave a trace of ourselves behind. Yet I am fascinated by the idea that extremes of emotion when they are experienced, as in an execution chamber for example, seem capable of being just wiped clean away. It is as though we don’t matter and when we are gone, are gone for good. I suppose that in painting these subjects I’m attempting to define and categorize the trace of human existence, and in that sense then yes, it is a rather metaphysical notion.

JP: What is the link between Constable's painting and these

works, and why did you want to make that link?

RP: As a child, I used to go to sleep at night with a copy of John Constable's painting 'The Cornfield' hanging over my bed. 'The Cornfield' which is on display at the National Gallery in London was painted in 1826. Like many great paintings it can be interpreted in a number of different ways. Constable himself referred to it as 'The Drinking Boy' and in the bottom left-hand side of the picture we see a small brook. By the brook lies a boy on his stomach, he is wearing a red waistcoat, blue scarf and white shirt, his face immersed in the water he drinks. Behind him stand a dog and sheep being herded up a lane, ready to pass through a gate to a cornfield which gives the painting its title. Beyond the gate walks a man wearing a black hat, red scarf and white shirt, with two further men working a distant field in the background, on the horizon to the rear of them stands a church. The boy, the gate, the man in the field and the church are drawn along a straight axis which gives us a cause to read this painting as a narrative of life which moves from childhood, to adulthood and then ultimately to death and the final resting place of the graveyard. The sheep remind us of the Christian flock and the brook of the cleansing act of baptism, whilst the gate appears to act as the threshold between the innocence of youth on the one hand and the experience of the adult world on the other. The gate itself hangs off its hinges, indicating that we loose something as we gain experience.

The lane is thought to lead from East Bergholt in Suffolk towards Dedham, with the church in the background being an artistic invention. Many of Constables most famous paintings are based in and around this small rural area which lies just south of Ipswich, and is the same small area which Wright defiled when he deposited the bodies of the five women he murdered.

The five paintings in the SUMAC series work to create a visual narrative along the lines of Constable's 'The Cornfield' and begin by viewing the earliest two scenes close-up and in day-light, while the second two take a broader view and move towards sunset. The fifth painting draws back completely to reveal the night lit woods at Nacton. This creation of a

narrative arc over a set of images is similar in approach to one I took when I painted the larger six foot by nine foot 'Gas Chambers' series on the Holocaust. The scale of these paintings allowed the paint to be applied in an increasingly impasto manner while the size seemed appropriate for the subject.

JP: Why do you think prostitutes are so often the victims of murder, and what does that say about our species?

RP: Street prostitutes live on the margins of society and place themselves in situations where they are easily identifiable to predators. Further, they get into cars with men they don't know and allow themselves to be driven to dark and remote places where they are unlikely to be seen by passers-by. They often get beaten by their clients and are perhaps more tolerant of dangerous environments than most people. This allows serial killers to easily target them. Serial criminals and killers also target other vulnerable groups within our society such as children and the elderly who live on their own and are easy to physically overwhelm.

As a species, I believe we should endeavour to go out of our way to care more for the vulnerable and marginalised within our society, to place the needs of others beyond our own and create a community which is founded on principles of inclusivity.

Interview conducted 2011

Thanks due

Art of England Magazine

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