

Artist Talk: Fergus Feehily and Matt Connors

In conversation with Jeffrey Grove

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Dallas Museum of Art, Horchow Auditorium

Lisa Kays: Hello everyone, thank you so much for joining us tonight. My name is Lisa Kays. I'm Manager of Adult Programming here at the Dallas Museum of Art. We're so pleased to have you with us to celebrate the opening of our latest Concentrations exhibition and I know you're all excited to hear from the artists tonight. One bit of housekeeping as a courtesy to everyone around you, I would like to ask that you take a moment to make sure that your cell phones have been turned off.

Our Concentrations series celebrates its 30th anniversary at the Dallas Museum of Art in 2011 and the new installation is the 54th in the series. Of the many artists included in the series, a number of individuals have gone on to gain international acclaim and to be featured in important museum exhibitions in the U.S. and abroad. And here at the DMA we have the great opportunity and privilege to build relationships with artists at seminal points in their career and I know that we're all looking forward to hearing more from Matt and Fergus this evening and to see what they do in the months ahead.

I hope that you'll take a look at the list upcoming lectures and Arts and Letters Live events. We planned a number of exciting programs exploring works of art from around the world with distinguished scholars, authors and artistic leaders. And please join us for these programs in the months ahead. We have plenty of information on the table outside. I'd like to also mention that the exhibition is open for you to visit after the lecture this evening. So after we've heard from the artists I hope you will of course go see their art work.

Now it is my great pleasure to welcome Jeffrey Grove who is the Hoffman Senior Curator of Contemporary Art here at the DMA. He leads the Museum's department of Contemporary Art and oversees his exhibitions, programming, publication and acquisition programs. He organized the Concentrations exhibition and he's done a number of exciting things since joining us since 2009. He's working on a forthcoming exhibition entitled *Silence and Time* which opens this summer and he will introduce our guest artists and I hope you will join me in welcoming Jeffrey.

[00:02:07]

[Applause]

Jeffrey Grove: Hello, good evening everyone. Thank you for being here. I can't see you. I'm being blinded by the light. So I just wanted to introduce on my right, immediate right, Matt Connors and Fergus Feehily. We have had a great time the last few days installing these exhibitions and we want to have a very freeform and open conversation about their work, about the experience of working together on their exhibition here. And we want to leave time also for you to ask questions of the artists as well.

And what we're going to do as a format is have some images of Matt and Fergus's playing on the screen and perhaps we'll reference specific works, talk about the work in general, and also talk about again, the exhibition here in particular. And I should just say I tried really hard to grow a beard for tonight but it didn't work, so --

Male: Try better.

Jeffrey Grove: I'll try harder next time. So thank you Matt and Fergus for being here. I hope -- did everyone get a chance to see the exhibition yet? Can you raise your hand if you did? Okay good. As Lisa said there's time after we've concluded our conversation to go see the exhibition if not and of course it's on view until August 14th, so I hope that you'll come back many times. So Fergus and Matt again, thank you. We've been spending a lot of time talking about their work and we're going to try and change that a little bit tonight. But I would like to ask you because there are lot of artists in the audience tonight and lot of artists are fans of your work.

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These are the first museum exhibitions for each of the artists but there are many people who have been following each of your work for sometime. And if I could just ask each of you briefly to tell me a little bit about your education and where you came from in terms of your art training. Matt?

Matt Connors: I went to college at Bennington College. It's a really small college in Southern Vermont which has a pretty rich history in art history. I think Jackson Pollock had his first show there and Martha Graham started the dance program there and it's kind of a Bohemian haven and I had some amazing teachers there. Amy Sillman was my main teacher when I was

there and there was an art historian named Josh Dexter who was a big influence on me when I was there and that kind of primed me.

One of the things about Bennington which is amazing is you're immediately kind of treated like an adult when you walk in the door and you're treated as -- if you're studying art, you're treated as a kind of fully formed artist. So I took that with me after I graduated and I took ten years in between undergrad and graduate but I spent the whole time kind of working in the studio and keeping at it. And then ten years later I went to graduate school kind of just to escape New York and to get some studio, unadulterated studio time.

And I went to Yale for two years where I got to study with like Peter Halley and Mel Bochner and various people and that was really great because Bennington is really small. And Yale, I felt was really large and I got to take classes at Yale proper and took literature and philosophy classes. And so I was like the adult, older grad student and --

Jeffrey Grove: Did the young students come to you for advice?

Matt Connors: Kind of, yeah, I felt I was -- they made fun of me for knowing -- for being like knowing every artist's name and stuff like that. I was already knowing that that's what I was officially going to do for a living.

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So, and they were just figuring that out so -- anyway it was a good experience. I took full advantage of that being -- spending my own money on it and knowing exactly what I was going to do so that was really great. And then I moved to Germany directly after grad school just to kind escape the expenses of New York and to keep the momentum I had started just in grad school having like a lot of time to work. So I moved to Germany where it's fairly cheap and there's a lot of access to art and artists so that was kind of my trajectory.

Jeffrey Grove: And Fergus you know live in Berlin but only --

Fergus Feehily: I do, yeah.

Jeffrey Grove: Fairly recently.

Fergus Feehily: Uh-huh.

Jeffrey Grove: And Dublin is where you're from.

Fergus Feehily: I'm from Dublin and then I studied in a very small art school Dún Laoghaire which is in the south of Dublin. Really, really kind of tiny place and it was -- yeah, I studied there. I went there I think was -- I went there at '86 and I was I mean I was really young. I was 17 when I went I think I turned 18 in the college and graduated three, four years later. So I was really young when I did all of that and then spent a little time kind of trying to figure out what it is that I wanted to do as an artist in Dublin installing work in a public space there for a while.

And then I applied for and got a scholarship to go to Tokyo and I studied at the Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music, first as research scholarship and then I did my MA there. So that was between 1998 and 2002 then I came back to Europe. And I spent a bit of time in Ireland again for a while and have been splitting my time between there and anywhere I can find to split my time with, you know, Germany would be one.

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So there's a kind of similarity there, I think with Matt a little bit of kind of spending a lot of time in different places and trying to seek out different experiences, I suppose you know.

Jeffrey Grove: And we're showing just as I said juxtaposing each of their work and I should say that Matt and Fergus were both very generous when I proposed to them the idea of having an exhibition that was both a joint exhibition and two solo exhibitions at the same time. And as you know this is the 30th year of the Concentration Series which began in the Dallas Museum of Art in 1981. We have not had a Concentrations exhibition for a few years and when we were thinking of rebooting it this year and how we wanted to – re-invigorate that program.

I've been thinking a lot about the DMA's collection and the strengths and the history of the collection and the exhibition history of the museum. And the DMA is very clearly known for strength in abstract painting, non-objective painting and has done a lot of major exhibitions around artists who are well-known for their work. And so at first I wanted to do something completely opposite but, actually, because of my own interests and the tendencies of abstraction among younger artists, I was actually talking to a lot of young artists and keeping files on people and Matt and Fergus among a whole roster of other young painters I was thinking about doing a larger group show.

But then the studio visit process really changed that in having conversations with these two artists and the idea of creating a dialogue between two people that had never initiated a dialogue with one another I thought could be a fruitful way to open up another series of interpretations into the work.

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And I think that both of you guys were very brave for agreeing to take that on and if you wouldn't mind just talking a little bit about that, how that experience has unfolded in the exhibition.

Matt Connors:

I mean I think -- I was excited to show at the museum and I like -- I'd only seen like one or two of Fergus's pieces in the flesh, at like an art fair. But I kind of sensed a kindred spirit and I mean I used to -- I felt I used to make a smaller scale work that felt very akin. And even as I moved away from that scale I feel really kind of committed to the idea of what I conceive of Fergus's kind of *modus operandi*. So I didn't think -- I thought it was really made interesting sense.

And then, yeah, then it just kind of -- it panned out exactly as I might as I thought it would, which kind of--we're ping-ponging ideas off each other and very easily able to kind of see each other's work through the lens of each other's work. I think our work is pretty different and any fears that I had to the contrary were pretty rapidly dispelled. And I think they kind of bring up really interesting points in each other. I mean I think it's just to your credit, I think, it's a really interesting kind of juxtaposition that also maybe seemed kind of -- could seem obvious but then could also seem not obvious at the same time. I think it was really interesting and the way the installation panned out, I feel really happy about it.

Fergus Feehily:

Yeah, I mean in a way I think it's a kind of show of connections and contrast in a way and non-connections, there's both going on which I found interesting over the week.

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I knew of Matt's work and I knew -- so like but I knew of it but mainly in the virtual world of JPEGs and things like that. So and I was -- yeah, I was quite interested when you brought up the idea that we would show alongside each other and together and then that's been a very -- I think it's been a really interesting experience this week. I mean, I think, yeah I mean I think we've both found the week to be probably quite an intense

experience as well, like of being in the museum and then installing our own work and meeting a lot of people and seeing a lot of work and going to a lot of collections and all that stuff.

And in the midst of that, we've met each other and seen each other's work and had kind of a dialogue about that which I think we both found fruitful. I think and we've also been looking at the work that's in the other show that's outside our show and all of that has been -- yeah, it's been an interesting experience I think for both of us, perhaps.

Jeffrey Grove:

I think when you mentioned in the other show and for those of you who've been to the exhibition right now in the Hoffman Gallery we've installed a selection of paintings and sculpture from the collection. These great things in our collection that I mentioned earlier mostly abstract paintings from 1945 to 1970. We're talking Pollock, Gorky, Kline, the sort of epic heroes of abstract expressionism and that could be a daunting proposition for a young artist facing their first museum exhibition. And what I have found and I think that the artists have found really interesting is walking through the space and looking at these graphic, iconic images in relationship, different languages of scale, different approaches to methodologies and techniques of painting...

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And also the continuing vibrancy of painting and abstract idiom and I think that for me that was what exciting about both of your work that we continue to be surprised, even as jaded as we become looking at art all the time, that there is something new. And I know that for instance with Matt and Fergus, your work has changed suddenly and radically at different times. And I mentioned that I told Matt some of my colleagues in other parts of the country when I mentioned I was working with these artists is say, "Oh, I know Matt's work," and they would describe and I said, "No, that's not what it looks like at all." And if you would maybe just address that sort of the evolution within your work --

Matt Connors:

Will I think it's interesting to think about the work in that kind of antechamber galleries because this is work that Fergus and I both probably consumed. And then as an experiment to see what two different people kind of spat out from having kind of dealt with that work and in my evolution has been, I mean especially going to Bennington, that was kind of like a weird ghost, like cloud falling the AbEx thing was really loomed large there and whether I knew it or not.

And I mean my work, I've kind of turned evolution or like change into my MO basically and which can be problematic for short term viewers of my work but I've kind of made the thinking that goes into making the work and changing the work into my subject. And I think, if anything, that's maybe our commonality is this open -- is that our subject isn't necessarily a formal sub -- I mean our common subject isn't -- or our commonality isn't informal. It's kind of like a permission that we give ourselves to kind of follow. And follow our guts or whatever art to follow kind of internal logic.

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And it's interesting when that formally coincides and when it formally doesn't coincide especially given that we both probably grew up on the work that was in the gallery before us. I think it's really interesting and I'm, yeah, I think having to paint from one to the other is really interesting.

Jeffrey Grove:

And Fergus, just as we're going through the images and those of you who have looked at the painting in the gallery closely will know this and certainly neither of their work, particularly these two artists work is not represented well in these images. But Fergus, your paintings also encompass a lot of material that is not paint. And if you would talk about I guess these issues of materiality and the found object and the elements of collage in your work and then I'd like to come back to you Matt and talk about sort of the bricolage and the frottage in your painting.

Fergus Feehily:

Yeah, I mean I think sometime ago, I suppose when I really started out, I mean it was -- the work that I was making was very much -- it had a sort of three-dimensional aspect to the painting but it was very much about paint. And then there was probably even -- I think there was a kind of confusion when I first started painting and kind of showing painting that there was kind of confusion maybe in how people saw the work about being kind of process painting or something like that which I was not also terribly interested in being associated with or making, in a way. But now I suppose those -- I was talking a little bit this morning and yesterday about how I kind of tried to create a situation where I could -- I suppose make the work out of almost anything.

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So whether that meant it was made of paint of a piece of paper or a board or some screws or a piece of cloth or whatever like it didn't really

matter to me that that would become painting. And despite the fact that these thing may be made of quite disparate in the materials and even that some of them may not have a great deal of paint involved in them, for me they are absolutely paintings and I'm profoundly interested in the painting, I think, as Matt is.

And then so there are quiet a few instances where there are found objects and materials used in the work and I'm not entirely sure perhaps why I'm doing that. But one of the reasons I suspect I am doing that is that this kind of bridge between the outside world and the work somehow and kind of bringing the world into the work and bringing sort of the stuff that's around me into the work. I think that's one of the reasons that's happening. I think the other reason it's going on is a kind of just trying to create a fluidity in making things and actually being fluid and being able to take any kind of avenue at any time really that seems interesting and seems to be maybe fruitful in some way.

And then so I suppose -- I'm trying to open up things for myself as an artist and as a painter without it being so open that you don't know where you're going but that there is a great deal of openness. I'm trying to create that by using these objects I think, yeah.

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Jeffrey Grove: And Matt would you - - I had frozen an image for a minute that had this squiggle gesture and then some of the paintings that are in the exhibition you might talk about how one for instance is actually, I think you said is not painted at all, but everything is a transfer.

Matt Connors: Yeah.

Jeffrey Grove: From another painting.

Matt Connors: In our talk earlier today I was kind of thinking about Fergus bringing stuff from the world into his work and I kind of have gone in the opposite direction and try to just like kind of stay in the studio and use just what I have at hand and I think sometimes I think it comes from really poor student days when I have no art supplies whatsoever and I had to use like pencil stuff and leftover paint cans. But yeah, I mean I would have my own kind of system of found objects which can also be found gestures that I look to in my work and in other work where I'm kind of recycling images or motifs that I see and just kind of examining what this gesture is. And I mean the squiggle thing, I mean I've kind of been of trying to examine what's the hierarchy like.

Fergus and I were joking where like when you're an abstract painter or you have other artist's friends coming and will pick up like just a piece of palette paper on your floor and will be like "That's awesome, you're done."

That was really great and it's really infuriating when you're an abstract artist but there's always that question like when am I done, what's like you know what's -- when -- basically the one of my done thing is like this weird hovering thing for an abstract painter. And I was kind of wanted to interrogate the hierarchy of like authority versus like doubt and so the squiggle things seemed to be at least authoritative mark I could think of. It's like a random, rogue thing.

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And as I explained earlier I'm also thinking a lot about Matisse and Picasso in their older years kind of regressed into this really rough short hand mode that I found really amazing and assured. And like the mark of like an incredible confidence but in the guise of like an incredible freedom that seems almost childlike. So I kind of made up this system of squiggles and just made a bunch of works based on them. And then like in this piece here I'm kind of searching for these like these stand-in gestures for like expressivity. And so the half-moons were based on -- you know everything kind of turns into another -- each idea kind of like spawns the next one.

So it's a real generative process for me and it's kind of -- at the end of the day it's about me thinking through ideas and then the paintings are essentially like a residue or like a prop or like a picture of that kind of thought process. And it sometime never leaves the studio, like the ideas and the forms kind of generate themselves.

Jeffrey Grove: Right, quite a solitary process.

Matt Connors: Yeah.

Jeffrey Grove: Well I love that you mentioned Matisse, Picasso because I would like to go into this aspect of the work in both of you bodies of work. One of -- I would say also one of the reasons that I was interested in Matt and Fergus in particular is I would say that many of the artists or most of the contemporary artists that I speak with and most artists who are interesting are deeply invested in interrogating the history of where they come from. And what went before and that is also a constant interior

dialogue that's going on in most artists' mind if not expressively in their work. And we all talked about that at different times and I think in a certain level sophistication and understanding or reading of the history of not just painting abstractly but art.

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And I'd like to talk about that a little bit but also that leads to you Fergus. I mean, in the very first conversation we had and talking about the opportunity that having exhibition in a collecting museum, why this is different than being in the Kunsthalle or being in a contemporary art center, express to them that we have this platform and these collections around us and that people will see their exhibitions and the context of this larger story and you asked almost immediately...

Fergus Feehily:

Well, yeah when Jeffrey came to Berlin and was in the studio with me and we spent a bit of time and talked about the work. And one of the first things I asked him was -- I mean there have been some tiny conversation before this so I had an idea that perhaps this show was going to take form. And I asked him would it be possible that I could show something from the collection in my own space and therefore create some kind of dialogue between the DMA collection and my show. And maybe even both our shows in some way.

And Jeffrey very kindly said, "Yeah, everything is open. We can -- that could be a real possibility." And then we started to work on that idea that that could be done and over the few months that followed I looked through the collection online and also in catalogues and then kind of made notes and ideas of what might be interesting for me and what might make some kind of sense of my work within the collection and talked to Jeffrey about that as well. And I chose three objects to show in my space that I think kind of in a way they kind of bridge somehow in a way one of the things they do.

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And it's not the only thing they do and probably it's not necessarily the most significant thing that they do, but one of the things they do is they kind of bridge the space between a kind of a contemporary show coming into the museum and the museum as a whole and its history as a museum and the idea of the collection or a collection of objects and all the multiple complex histories that are involved behind those objects. And so I chose a glass bead from Africa to show which is in the space which I'm sure you've noticed if you've been in the room, an Indian

painting which I find really fascinating and this cabinet which from England and made around 1660 I think.

And in all sorts of different ways those objects I think have some significance for me, maybe how they're made or it could be to do with the scale of them in say the beads case so whatever that are somehow that I'm drawing attention to in some way or that we are drawing attention to by putting them in space. And that's kind of fluid and I think it's something that I'm - oh, for the week I suppose I'm kind of learning about or I'm kind of learning myself why they might be in the space. It's not like there was a kind of an idea behind putting them in space and kind of creating this dialogue but I would be wary I think as an artist of having this overriding idea that you know absolutely why you did this. I think that can kind of come through the process of doing it.

Jeffrey Grove: Well I think that that part of the excitement of doing a show like this is that it's -- the process of the installation is the completion of one thought that it begins another dialogue or another set of discussions.

Fergus Feehily: And even putting up the work in a way as we -- you know.

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Jeffrey Grove: Right.

Fergus Feehily: Yeah.

Jeffrey Grove: And moving it around and also this radical shift of scale that happens amongst all three sections of the exhibition and people are really fascinated by that little bead because it insists on being looked at in a very specific way which is completely different than the space that you give to a different type of painting. But also the issue of scale in your work and I mentioned that in the very brief essay, or it's not even an essay, short piece I wrote that in reading about what other have said about your work this term of modest scale that people have used other words to describe it, it's a signal quality that people mentioned that your work is small and that's a choice that you --

Fergus Feehily: Modest.

Jeffrey Grove: Modest is the term I used. But I also say in its modesty it has it commands a lot of space and I think that you would agree in the installation, wow, you see what one thing can do on the wall and when did you or have you always, because I don't know what you painted

when you're 20 years old. Have you always work in this scale or is that something you've come to over time?

Fergus Feehily:

I think I mean when I was in college I made generally kind of quite small scale work but I did attempt to make some very big paintings when I was young and I didn't find them terribly successful. So generally the work has been very attainable somehow and kind of within body size, something you could stretch at and touch the edges of or yeah and now at the moment I suppose you could kind of think about them as being head size, torso size that kind of thing. But I have -- I did make a couple of larger pieces which would be --

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I mean they're not incredibly large, I mean they're kind of the size of a couple of painting in that space, you know probably their beds. And I made those in the last kind of five or 10 years and -- but I think one of the significant things about those pieces even the larger ones is that they're - the larger ones are sort of they're almost less there than the smaller ones -- they're barely there at all that what's on the surface of the painting and how they're made. And so they're almost kind of -- they're almost less than the small ones and somehow in how I decided to make them and -- so there was a kind of -- I suppose there was a deliberate intention to undermine the scale, the larger scale of the painting. And I think one of the reasons perhaps my paintings are small or modest is -- I think there's a couple of reasons. One is just a simple fact of a kind of a natural inclination you have as a person to do this or that and that's just a kind of a natural thing. But I think there's also -- when I was much, much younger I was of course really intensely interested in the paintings that we have in the space outside our work. And I am still interested in a different way now, I suppose. I've always been interested in those paintings but I mean, I think I've made a deliberate decision to try and make abstract work that was different to that that had a different intention and that could do something different than say a Kline or something like that. So that it would be abstract and sort of non-objective in some way but it would have -- you would have a very different experience of it.

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And I think the paintings that are in the space at the moment here in the museum are looking for a very intimate kind of experience with the viewer. And they kind of bring you in to have this one-on-one kind of experience rather than you're going into the piece. I think that's kind of what's going on.

Matt Conners: I mean I feel like my work is the same thing just through a different scale.

Jeffrey Grove: I think so, yeah.

Matt Conners: I'm kind of grateful for the objects in Fergus's side just because I imagine that would create a confusion for a person just walking into two solo shows and then that those pieces are obviously not needed by either of us and they just create a stop and the bead creates a scale, the person is going to have to bend down and look at something small, and then when they look up again they're going to have to adjust their thinking to look at the small blue lines. And I think that's kind of the thing we both share is just like investigative, open -- like not necessarily formal process-based, but like intellectual process-based. We're wondering why whenever we do anything, wondering why we're doing it, and then maybe changing it or doing it again just to reiterate that. And so I think scale-wise, I was saying my big paintings feel small big --or you were saying that there are small big paintings and I've always thought that too because I used to make -- when I shifted up in scale, the first time I felt comfortable making a big painting was when I just kind of forced myself to forget the difference between the two and kind of sunk into internal scale of the work. And so I think it's more like a -- I'm just really grateful -- I think those objects create a real stop in the viewing process which is think is really valuable.

Fergus Feehily: You said something interesting this morning about like an initial idea that larger paintings might mean that they were more finished or something or more the -- I don't know what was that?

[00:34:08]

Matt Conners: Slick or something.

Jeffrey Grove: Yeah, yeah.

Matt Conners: Yeah. I mean I think when you're a student or when you're becoming an artist or something, those paintings that are in the other room loom large and like they're really large, I thought my -- I always thought the paintings like the paintings that I have up now in the gallery seemed really large to me. And then once I got them in the space, they actually seemed small then. Once I looked at them next to Motherwell and Louis they seemed really small. Yes, I just -- I think it's --just figuring out a non kind of knee jerk scale, a scale that's organic to your personal taste and interest. And I almost think it's like -- I think either of us could make small or large paintings at any given point and it will probably happen.

Jeffrey Grove: This is interesting just to look at these two because something you'll see in the exhibition and something that came up in conversations with both of the artists at separate times where the edges of paintings or the edges of the objects and it's something that is crucial actually in considering that these things that you encounter -- they're always three-dimensional objects. But one almost approaches a painting like one approaches a photograph or a work on paper in a two-dimensional relationship. And each of you draw attention to the edges and what goes on around the painting in interesting ways and I'm just curious like at what point that became manifest as a concern or an issue to address.

Matt Connors: I mean for me, I was kind of relates to a story I told earlier about like you know, when you build your own stretchers, I have this point where I was like -- when you build a perfect stretcher it becomes this perfect beautiful sculpture object that you're really happy with before you start to make a painting.

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And after a million times building a stretcher I just -- I was so aware of it as this object and it was like it was just something that was going to be part of my life. I couldn't then go backwards and pretend that this was like a picture plane, that the edges and that wood and the canvas didn't exist. I became so invested in -- just the physical reality of building the work that you're making and knowing that that was a reality of my life as a painter. And it just was really an organic process for me. I couldn't rewind and not understand these things as physical things. And then the work I love in general is not necessarily just painting but it's just kind of things in the world. And I don't know, I just could not think of every aspect of these things. And especially like the way I've grew up thinking about paintings was really wondering how they were made and looking at the edges. And when you become an artist you would start to demystify the process of art making the part of that is learning that material, physicality of making a work. And I couldn't then divorce that from my future art making, so it just -- I mean it helps -- I mean, an abstract painter is more likely to think of their their paintings as objects. But that's going to how imagine my trajectory towards understanding paintings as objects.

Jeffrey Grove: Fergus?

Fergus Freehily: Well, I would feel very, very similarly to that. I mean something that I -- I mean I think maybe if you're a maker of things, if you're a painter in a way -- you might slightly think about things in a different way than people

do. But I mean I don't think that just say a big stretcher or a small stretcher of a canvas or whatever is a physical object.

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But I mean, I mean I think about a piece of hot pressed water color paper as not a surface but as an object. I just do -- I don't just see it as a surface no matter how kind of melamine flat it may appear to be and all that. I just don't think of it as something that is 2D, I just don't. You know even if it's in French [inaudible] thick, I just don't think of it as being flat, I think of it as an object. So it's probably no wonder that I think about my own paintings as being an object in space or -- I just think about the physicality of things, even if they appear to be very slight. And I've always felt about painting like that and -- it kind of even irritates me that I do think about painting like that. I have to say when I do look at other painters' shows maybe especially maybe kind of representational painters, whatever, I love that idea that going into your show and somebody's made an oil painting on linen and it's just there and there's no monkey business, there's no funny business. And I kind of feel -- but that's exactly what you should be doing kind of it's just an image and it's on this thing, but somehow I can't really do that, you know.

Jeffrey Grove: Maybe it's the doubt.

Fergus Freehily: It could be, yeah.

Jeffrey Grove: Listen, I think that we should bring the lights up a little bit and give the audience a chance to ask questions of you. And if someone would like to, I'll probably repeat the question back so everyone can hear, may we see a hand up.? Yes?

[00:40:04]

Male: Coming to see the shows and looking at the working relationship with one another and relationship to figures like Louis and Francis and Motherwell, [inaudible] thoughts about speed in painting both in terms of the making and in terms of viewing. I wondered if it provoked similar reactions or any reactions from you either in regard to each other's work or perhaps there's some things you might have had about the figures in the other work.

Matt Conners: I mean, I feel like there's always the guilt issue for me if I make a painting really fast, because how fast is fast? Well, I have this -- this is another grad school story that -- there's a famous Philip Guston story when he switched to making the more figurative paintings and someone was like, "how long that take to make?" And he was like "45 minutes or 45 years"

because it took him a really long time to get to the end of that and I kind of feel that. I mean that's like a real intense story that sticks in my mind because if I do make a painting in five minutes and I do have this residual guilt so I'm like -- like there's a labor. I actually really resist artwork that hits me over the head with its labor is one of my biggest pet peeves, like if someone's like, "checkout how long this took me to make" and I'm like -- oh my God like -- because then -- I feel like being like, "this took me five minutes like, watch out!" But I really don't think it has any thing to do with anything, the speed of making or viewing or I think it should be taken as any number of elements of ingesting an artwork, like the Morris Louis paintings are totally like a mystery. I mean, aren't they actually a mystery? Nobody knows how he made them because he had this --

[00:42:02]

Jeffrey Grove: Well, I do.

Matt Conners: Well he does. I'm sure that there was a lot of work figuring out how to make them and then when they were actually -- when the gun shot off and he was making them might have gone relatively quickly, but they're like complete crazy conundrum mysterious Sphinx objects. And who cares how long it took to make them, it's this thing that exists now. And I don't know, I think it's really an interesting question actually.

Jeffrey Grove: Well it is, I mean Morris Louis is a perfect example and Jackson Pollock is a perfect example. Because there's this mythology still even among people who know better about how those pictures were made. And the fact that they weren't random choices but pre-selected, you know, predetermined actions. And I think there's a difference between approaching the canvas where the making of a painting, it's like I mean you rarely use canvas actually. No, I won't say rarely, but there's --- there are -- many of your works don't have a canvas per se.

Fergus Feehily: Yeah, very rarely, I think, but I mean I have, but just to break that one up. But yeah, I mean I think that is interesting. I've been --we have been exploring those paintings outside the space and I think there is -- in a way there's -- yeah, there's a kind of mythology about those paintings and I suppose ideas of intuition or speed or... and those ideas then connect to the kind of ideas of genuineness I think in a way. And you know sometimes in my own case, I mean, things are made in an hour or something or sometimes things are made in a couple of months or something. I don't distinguish between the two things and I think it's what's there in front of you when you're finished or whatever but --

[00:44:03]

Yeah, I mean I think it's interesting seeing both the work in the context of these looming predecessors in the other room. There's all sorts of things setup there between how you view them and I'm losing my way here clearly.

Jeffrey Grove: I will take another question, don't worry. Another question, yes?

Female: Can you talk a little bit about the [inaudible] of titling your work as a part of your process?

Jeffrey Grove: Did everyone here the question? She asked if they'd speak about the significance or lack of significance in the titling of their work. So I'll ask each of them to respond to that.

Matt Conners : I title almost every painting I kind of hate of have an untitled but it happens. I think of it as like a second or as an equal element in the work informing the meaning. I mean, I'm kind of jealous of writers, I'm kind of obsessed with writers, I wish I was a writer kind of somehow, so that's my one avenue of being a literary figure as to writing is the titles. But I do, I mean, I depend on an interested viewer who's going to look at the painting and then read the title and then sit with both of them and put them together in their head and then walk away and have it stew together in a pot. And I guess I don't care about that viewer that isn't going to read the title and do that. So I mean yeah it's really important, very personally to me its very important, it's like a -- it's a equal element to any of the marks on the canvas and it carries a lot of weight for me.

[00:46:08]

And a lot of times it refers to initial impulse that created the idea for the painting or it will be like a finishing note to the painting that kind of -- will hopefully be kind of be the period to the sentence or something that. I mean I'm very interested in writing and language as an idea and as a formal exercise. So it's pretty important to me and I understand that most of the titles are kind of super opaque unless you ask me, and then if someone were to ask me I'm totally -- I will explain any title. But I also really appreciate the experience of confusion and discontinuity which I think most of my titles probably create if you don't have the opportunity to talk to me. I like both experiences, so it's pretty important to me.

Jeffrey Grove: And Fergus?

Fergus Freehily: Yeah, I think I would feel somewhat the same -- the language around the titles of the work is very important to me. I think I'm also very interested in language and I kind of feel that it's not the title of the work but it's

part of the work, it's not something added to it, it is actually part of this thing, what it's called. And there are some pieces that I make that just -- Resist.

Matt Conners:

Fergus Feehily: They resist, yeah, they completely resist any kind of title and there is a piece in the show that is untitled but the rest of the work is titled. And for me it is very important and I think a great deal about what that is or what that might mean or how it feels for me. But again I'm relatively happy with the idea that that may create a kind of ambiguous and yeah kind of slightly ambiguous experience as you kind of see these things together.

[00:48:15]

For me they're the same thing, they're not being seen together. They are the same thing, but you know.

Jeffrey Grove: Yes, there?

Female: I have a question just continuing on this subject, do you ever think about changing the title over time? And could you also talk about how view your individual painting in a different way overtime?

Jeffrey Grove: Did everyone here the question? Yes.

Fergus Feehily: Yeah, on both cases yes. Very rarely would a title what I think maybe it could be changed in someway. But there was a piece which will remain nameless that I -- like in this show that I really did think about re-titling and I've never really done that before but somehow I thought maybe it needed to be re-titled. But seeing work overtime I think is a very interesting experience for any artist, any -- it can be refreshing but it can be also be extremely humbling I think to see something that you made five years ago or even a year ago or whatever. And it can be reveling in a way that you see something that maybe you've made and it's being shown in another country and maybe has stayed in another country or whatever then you get an opportunity to see it. And of course you're probably also seeing it in a different context as well and that can be for me that can be really revealing. I mean, sometimes I can feel really -- I suppose like probably most artists I think there is a kind of tendency to think how things could have been better, how you could have done something in some other way or whatever.

[00:50:12]

And that brings us back to something we talked about this morning, the doubt and kind of double thinking yourself and all those kind of things. But I mean generally I kind of like to see it as something that happened at a particular time. And that seems in many ways separate to me when

I see it later, not -- like very often I might see something that I've made and it doesn't really feel like I made it, I'm looking at this thing probably in the way that maybe that you might look at it or if somebody else in this room might look at it as a curious observer. And yeah, I mean if that makes sense yes.

Matt Conners: I have the same thing where I like -- I can't remember making a body of work. I feel really distanced in a way that I don't feel bad about from the work after it's out of my --

Jeffrey Grove: Just walk away.

Matt Conners: Yeah I mean, and yeah I do agree with the humbling, it can be humbling to see work. I mean, you imagine things you could have done differently. But I mean, I feel kind of mystified about my own work pretty consistently. I feel vaguely like, "huh?"

Jeffrey Grove: Just read that.

Matt Conners: Just read that, yeah, I know, I understand. I'm really grateful for that. No, but actually that it's amazing to read, it's a really interesting experience to read other people writing about your work especially --

Jeffrey Grove: Especially if it's wrong, right?

Matt Conners: I mean -- yeah I do feel a distance from my work after it's made and I don't feel bad about it, I think it's an interesting part about the way I'm really in a weird trance or something when making it and titling it. It's just -- you're really working organically and then it's done and then you get incredibly involved in the next thing.

[00:52:07]

I really -- there're artists that I like that are kind of upending the -- I mean I really appreciate the screwing with the idea of a finished work and you know people that continue to change their work. I think it's really interesting thing. And I like any kind of confusion-producing activity in artwork but I just -- I kind of -- I'm on a really fast progression evolutionary type of person through my work.

Fergus Feehily: I mean I think -- I mean it's likely -- I mean it's a little bit different in what I'm doing. I think it's not probably doesn't have that kind of speed and fluidity that Matt's work has. But at the same time I think as an artist when you come back to something you made, I'm sure this must be the same for -- well I mean you would hear it in an interview with somebody

who'd written a novel or whatever, you ask them about the characters in that novel and they're going –

Matt Conners: Yeah.

Fergus Feehily: Not quite sure who that is. And I think for anybody who makes anything that must be a similar experience. I mean my work is made probably in less of -- in a slower way say the math whatever but, I think when you come back to something overtime, it has something to tell you whether that's negative, positive, or whatever and it's probably a bit of both. I think when you see your own work and overtime and in different contexts. Yeah, I think I mean sometimes it can be uncomfortable and sometimes it can be really something that's going to springboard something else. And I think you can see something that you made two years ago or three years ago, five years ago whatever, and when you see it again, rather than it being sort of in any way unpleasant experience or something that's going to bring up ideas that it wasn't as good as it could have been, it's like it's almost like something that you might have almost forgotten that you could do. And that comes back in to the process in makings of making something.

[00:54:12]

Jeffrey Grove: Well thank you both and this has been a pleasure. It's been a pleasure making these exhibitions with you and I hope that you all have enjoyed this evening. And I encourage you, if you haven't seen the exhibitions to go back and do so and I encourage you to come back and visit them many times over the next few months. Thank you.

[Applause]