

Ceci N'est Pas 1921

"2020 was a huge year for me with the publication of my book, 'Me, According to the History of Art'. As you've probably heard by now, I set out to get around international copyright law by personally illustrating all the paintings I reference in the text. Legally this mad gambit wasn't entirely successful, but it did reconnect me with my own golden age of Modernism: early 20th century cubism, with emphasis on the Synthetic period, which generated an outcome further down the track which still confounds me.

During the final stages of the book's production, I was lucky enough to visit the Reina Sofia Gallery in Madrid where I saw and photographed a fantastic collection of Juan Gris paintings that I had never seen before. The effect on me of being in a room full of these gorgeous paintings, all in their perfect museum frames, was overwhelming and the idea started to grow then that I could conceivably recreate a similar sensation back home in Auckland. A bit like being moved by any moment in the 'real' world that inspires you to somehow codify it into a portable experience back in your studio/workshop.

I continued with the A4 sized illustrations of all my Gris, Picassos, Warhol's etc when I got back home but gradually started to test the limits of the concept by reproducing a couple of the key works (Picasso, McCahon) to scale...on canvas...with all the underpainting, corrections and textures inherent in the original work (for some godforsaken reason I'm quite good at this stuff).

Then I did a few more... which naturally segued into the original fantasy: reproducing the hugely romantic and nostalgic rush I experienced back in the Reina Sofia. Lots of serendipity there...story of my life.

When Jonathan invited me to restage the exhibition I jumped at the chance, but soon ran into a 'problem'. After a bit of a slow start the Auckland show ended up selling quite well, so I was obliged to paint several new 'remakes' to make up the numbers for Christchurch.

And this is when it got interesting: because of serious time constraints...not to mention framing, couriering etc... I had to go at the new paintings with a heightened sense of pressure and as an unintended consequence I found a surprising new connection with the idea...more light-hearted and direct somehow.

This new spirit of devil-may-care is not necessarily apparent in the works- but the *raison d'être* changed. The more wicked the short cuts and the less concerned I became for any contextual rationales...the more fun it became. You can pick it up in some of the titles: 'Picasso's Fish' etc. I was painting them more directly as 'things', and not under any earnest conceptual umbrella.

A lesson in 'letting go' I think! Somewhere along the way I seemed to make painting Pablo Picasso and Juan Gris a perfectly natural thing to be doing!"

- Dick Frizzell 2021