Abstract

“From the surface of the image to the surface of the psyche: A practice-based research into the ontology of painting onto photographs.”

In his book *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard wrote, “The poetic image is a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche”; a phrase that perfectly captures the sensation I experienced when first viewing Richard Hamilton’s artwork *Portrait of a woman as an artist* (2007). Encountering this image created a sudden salience on my psyche due to, what was for me, the unexpected combination of media employed where the artist had painted the central figure of an otherwise completely digital photographic print. As I reflected on why one would paint onto a photograph, a potential research question began to form, which has become the locus of my practice-based PhD of painting on photographs: ‘To what degree can an art practice of painting onto digital photographic prints illuminate the ontological relationship between representational painting and photography in the digital age’?

Curator and theoretician Peter Weibel notes that the first phase of the ‘post-media condition’ has given ‘the media’ equivalence, with the art of technical media, created with the aid of a technical device, having achieved the same artistic recognition as the traditional media of painting and sculpture. However, by painting onto digital photographic prints, Hamilton attempted to emphasize the medium specificity of painting in order to assert that discipline’s superior status to these other practices, with the digital and photographic being deployed by him as a means of underpinning the pre-eminence of painting in the western European tradition. Whilst Hamilton’s agenda in these few works was to foreground painting in its relation to photography and the digital, combining elements in this way chimes with contemporary artworks that embrace a fluidity of media. In particular his working in this way highlights the potential for further interrogation of dialogues between the analogue and the digital. Though contemporary artists such as Gerhard Richter, Matt Saunders, Matthew Brandt and Sharon Core engage in practices that examine the boundaries of painting and photography, painting mimetically onto digital photographic prints still remains a largely unexplored avenue of investigation. My research aims to position itself in this space, with the practice being now in the initial stages of producing photographic imagery onto which experiments with paint can be made in order to probe aspects of the ontological relationship of these two media. It is anticipated that from this juxtaposition the objective properties of painting and photography combined within single artworks, the performative nature of this practice and, ultimately, viewer engagement with such artwork can be more fully understood. Methods for explicating understandings of these relationships will involve self-reflective evaluation of the work in progress in the first instance. The work I present will investigate to what degree the act of viewing is disrupted due to a potentially anomalous combination of mediums, and whether this leads to a more reflective experience for the viewer?