

# art of england

THE SERIOUS GUIDE TO UK ART

Matthew Collings on  
**Oliver Marsden**  
At FAS

**Iggy Pop**  
On His Music and Art

**Cecil Beaton**  
Photographer, Socialite, Painter,  
and Textile Designer

9 771744 193051



Issue 51  
November 2008  
**£3.70**



## PETER JOYCE: TRANSITION

By Gary Topp



top left: Oyster Shell Path, 2008 - acrylic on canvas, 122 x 102 cm

top right to bottom: Harboured boats at la louippe. (photo)

Harbouring Boats at La Louippe, 2008 - acrylic & collage on board, 42 x 107 cm

Entrance to La Louippe (photo)

above: Marsh Landscape (photo)

Reference photo's taken by the artist

The digue is so low you could easily miss it as the wider shock of 'flatness' concerns you. You need to go through a period of transition to enter the Bouin marshland. Even the rats are bigger. There ought to be an introductory briefing session by the local people that care and drag a living, and their loves, out of this man made reclaimed, deeply unusual place. A place watched over by the 'reaper like' black bills of the Ibis birds. A place that has a standing stone made from a jettisoned world war two fuel tank.

This is a landscape hiding from the sea, dominated by salt and brown water protected casually by the digue and worn but functional sluice gates. It is a place without light at night but lit by an enormous uninterrupted dome sky during the day. It feels secret yet it could not be more open. It is a place of transition.

The jettisoned fuel tank stands upright in one of the ubiquitous squares of green, rimmed by the water channels, that is the landscape here; half buried as though it missed the bulls eye and everyone is happy to let it be.

Peter's work has been obsessed with edges for two



decades now. Principally the edge called a 'cliff'. A place of abrupt transition, of flight and erosion and occasional death. In contrast the Bouin marshes are a place of gradual reclamation, of the sea returning the land. A reverse process of giving. A different kind of transition.

We flew early out of England in the dark. The flight was soulless and painless. We saw Pete and Jo through the glass and settled in for the ride to their new home. Pete pointed at the horizon at a barely raised area of land with a church on it -Bouin- and declared it the biggest hill around. We live in the sharp valleys of Yorkshire and I assumed he was joking. This place is about as serious as flat ever gets.

Peter's work is often misguidedly described in abstract terms but if you spend time with him in his 'landscapes' you soon realise that it is you that has been abstract as his eyesight could not be more literal. If you know the Dorset coast then you will have seen all of his imagery unfold in front of you as you walk. It is no different in France, but it is a fresh place and the images are new and inquisitive. This is a good thing. He is walking out into new colours, shapes and forms. And the horizon

here, in this flat quiet place, simply could not be bigger.

At various points we shuffled out with Doug (the dog) and Pete and Jo to scale the digue at the end of the road. It is such a low wall but it keeps the sea out of sight and you have to scale it or pierce it to get to the beach and the water. Even here the horizon is miles away, beyond a long expanse of mud flats, seaweed and oyster and cockling baskets (Les coquillage). The sea wall (the digue) is probably three or four metres high at most.

Power lines string out across the landscape. They are sketches in the sky drawn with single strokes and arcs, punctuated with the towers that hold them to the earth. They are the current architecture of Peter's work, giving form and function, line and edge. Perhaps they are replacing field hedges and markings. They certainly stitch the marshland and sky together. This is not a natural place but it could not be more full of nature. Ibis and egrets teem outside the big windows of the house. This is a working and constructed landscape taken back from the sea to provide a living from the shellfish and the salt and the cows. A series of small ports decline around the bay from the most grandiose at Port du Bec. Three things distinguish these ports:

Low utilitarian huts for sorting and selling the catch:

Rows of teetering wooden jetties individually fashioned to cope with the high marsh tidal system.

Rows of Chinese fishing nets suspended alongside their owner's sheds waiting to scoop the catch as the tide retreats.

All three of these features will give colour, shape and substance to Peter's work as he moves from the 'cliffland' to the flatland.

We talked and ate and listened to music for a few days. Finally we said goodbye to the year (2007) by walking in the pitch black of midnight down to the water's edge. The tide had disappeared as we walked into the sea on the concrete road fashioned by the local fishermen. Our torches could not find the water - it was so black and silent. Moisture droplets reflected in the flash of our cameras. We were standing out in the sea's territory, at the cusp of the year, learning new things about each other, gently moving into new spaces.

Reproduced by kind permission of Gary Topp, 2008

*Peter Joyce: Recent Paintings runs 18 October - 15 November, at Anthony Hepworth Fine Art Dealers, 3 Margarets Buildings, Brock Street, BATH BA1 2LP Telephone +44 (0)1225 447480 Illustrated catalogue available [anthony.hepworth@btconnect.com](mailto:anthony.hepworth@btconnect.com)*



right: *Between the Slipways*, 2008 - acrylic & collage on board, 20 x 27 cm