





It's a quiet place. The houses have fields and space between them and their lights reach out to each other through the thin twilight. There is a sense that mist or sea fog are never far away. And then they close their shutters to the darkness. However, if you listen in the morning you will hear rock music, maybe Led Zeppelin or Damien Jurado, coming from a flat sided white building - much like the other low flat sided

white buildings that occupy the surrounding marshland – and Peter will be warming his fingers up for the day. He will probably be drinking Jo's coffee from their repertoire of beautiful mugs, each one chosen because it carries the earth and human touch directly in its construction.

Pete and Jo live in a world of beautiful things. Their world is monastic in its dedication to purpose, scientific in its precision and its scrutiny and archaeological in its determination to reveal. They eschew the aesthetics and noise of the town or city, and play out their daily life in a quiet and mutual searching for pleasure in the physical world around them. Their day begins and ends with a walk along the nearby digue, examining the light and texture of the sea, and urging encouragement to Doug the dog. She is similarly curious and alert.

There is something singular and profound about their living arrangements but it would be a mistake to consider it in any way pastoral or old fashioned. They are instinctively contemporary. Sparse, focussed, endlessly restless and anxious for knowledge.

Peter Joyce (b.1964, Poole, England) is a scientist, social historian, archaeologist, cartographer and naturalist. His paintings are immediately beautiful and almost ridiculously complicated. His biggest struggle is always how much information to leave out – that is why they are always scratched and erased. They are *always* scratched and erased.

'Cale et Digue' (plate 7) is a good example. There is a lot going on here. The surface is lightly touched in some places - a hint of colour and texture. The red on the left hand side has been added and removed and painted over but not quite obliterated. The central black shape is almost definitely covering up the first marks as crudely as possible. As you move around the painting each area gives and takes in equal measure. It creates a 'tension' of information; the snow white on the right hand side, the central fin of green and brown, the latticework of corn in the middle.

These hidden landscapes are full of common elements. Here is a corner of a field, a bend of wood, at dusk, in the morning light, after a storm, before the wind changed it, in spring or winter or after the beat of wings passed over. It has taken me over twenty years to understand that Peter's works are not so much composites but exquisite scientific dissections, done with a scalpel and steady hand. Incisive in every way.

Pete and Jo moved from the suburbs of Poole, Dorset, England to the Bouin marshlands, Vendée, France with great care. They had scrutinised the Purbeck landscape (Dorset) for two decades walking every hill and cliff top, pointing out every bird and flower and moss and swimming in every cove. They spent months living on the cliff top and dipping into the quarries. It became the home of their intellects, emotions and, of course, the paintings. But suddenly a new place began to emerge in our conversations. It started with a holiday, and then another and a part time home soon turned into a beautiful white house in the marshes, a short walk from the shoreline, and a wonderful new body of work has evolved.



Across Kimmeridge Bay, Purbeck, England.



'Red Flag' 2007, acrylic on canvas board, 30cm x 44cm, 12" x 17.5"



'Quayside' 2007, acrylic & collage on board, 28cm x 55cm, 11" x 22"



'Portside' 2007, acrylic on canvas board, 28cm x 36cm, 11" x 14"

These three paintings, and many others that have marked this transition, occupy one end of Peter's output. In these works he is a landscape painter, a metaphorical easel and water colour palette, at the beach. In the painting 'Red Flag' he has found a flag at the channels edge (a remnant flag that has since disappeared), and noted its manmade colour in the landscape. Something is happening to its left and it is surrounded by water, mud, sky and grass. This is an enormously brave and simple painting of a new place beginning to reveal itself.

'Quayside' extends this approach. It is a more complex landscape with more elements. There is the water inlet, the digue, a clear horizon and the harbour side edges. We are looking straight on, at eye level, as if taking a tourist photograph. We accept the telegraph poles and wires and assume the hulls of the boats. There is no mistaking what we are looking at. Peter is exploring the shape of his new surroundings.

'Portside' extends this further. We know what we are looking at because we have read the other works. There are the telegraph poles and wires and the horizon. The hull shape, ever present, is both a boat and an inlet. We have entered Peter's world now.

This process of transition, laid out simplistically here, is continuous for Peter. He moves between these approaches to allow himself to look again, to go back to the beginning, to keep things simple and let complexity follow. His journey in and out of the world around him keeps the work fresh and full of endless discovery. This should not be surprising because it is this modest approach that gives the work its integrity. Peter wants us to understand what he is looking at, he wants to share it and hold your hand as he travels.

When you go walking with Peter he tells you everything he sees. Then he goes and paints it.

An artist's response to a new place is often profound and there was a great sense of anticipation as the transition between the vertical worlds of the Purbeck cliffs slowly gave way to the flat lands of the Bouin marshes. It is literally as if the world has a new axis and spins in a different plain. Peter did not choose to radically reinvent his style, materials or palette. He had no reason to as his methodology (as already



Entrance to La Louippe, France

described) has been honed and refined but a determination to translate this to his new world facilitated a sense of creative urgency that has, in turn, prompted a new rhythm. These flat marshes contain a number of elements that make them immediately compelling to Peter and created a sense of joy and love and discovery very quickly.



Bouin Marshes, France

Peter's work has become more urgent and daring at the same time as it has become more workmanlike. Whilst this may appear to be a contradiction it is actually the heart of the technical and philosophical brilliance of the work. Peter has laboured hard to find a rhythm and now the work comes from the joy of the rhythm.

The land meets the sea here and this has always been a point of fascination. In Purbeck it was sculptural, vertical and visceral with defined edges. It was sculptural land art thrown up by the geology of centuries. In Bouin Pete and Jo live *in the sea*. Their house is literally built on the sea bed in the handful of kilometres that make up the reclaimed land. Remember that Beauvoir-sur-Mer (*sur mer!*) is five kilometres inland of them. Whilst it may not have the immediate drama of the cliffs it is extraordinarily mysterious and strange, insidiously so. It has something of the 'night' about it, a place where man has meddled with nature and taken a healthy chunk out of the natural order. There is nothing Wordsworthian or Romantic about this place; it is a very spoilt landscape. It is a living sculpture, an intervention into the natural order of things, a construct.

The touch of human hands, of sweat and toil, are here. In Purbeck Peter must have visited the quarries, current and historic, hundreds of times. He befriended the quarrymen and stole lumps of quarried stone and placed them as sculpture in his home; he worried about the economic decline and envied the texture of their hands and faces. Peter is a labourer. It has long been my belief that Peter's real fascination is human industry - particularly the transformation of natural elements inherent in quarrying. His paintings are 'alchemy' writ large. In Bouin not only are the marshes entirely constructed, and held in by the insidious digue wall, they were created to facilitate another intervention. Instead of the quarried stone of Purbeck it is 'les coquillage' – sea food. Mussels, clams, oysters and many more. The fact that it is also a salt factory adds a mineral element to the abundance. Salt of the earth.



Port des Brochets, France

It is equally and precariously an economy and industry in transition, holding on to economic viability by its tough hands and weathered faces, and Peter is concerned to be their biographer. He is too shy and courteous, too sensitive in his observations and too determined an historian to be sentimental, but his eyes are always on the human endeavour, past and current. I am sure that he now knows the tides, the rhythm of preparing the boats and the hanging nets, the best places for catching different species, the workings of the sluice gates and daily routine of the sorting sheds. He will also know the rhythm of the men that work here. He will comment daily on their cars, whether they are late or early, their clothes and routines. It will be obsessional. His painting is driven by a constant sense of failure, a failure to see this place with the same wisdom as these working men. I am quite clear that he envies the honest endeavour, fresh catch lunches and hard drinks that characterise their industry. In every sense this place is human, a construct, and not natural. Like a Peter Joyce painting.

So he is, despite the obvious first impressions, more a painter of human endeavour than an illustrator of the natural world. It is the 'created' world that compels him. Peter makes paintings, layer by layer, colour by colour, piece of information by piece of information. He is, despite the abstraction, entirely literal, utterly an illustrator.

How does this construction happen? Peter's work is architectural and elemental. Each work evolves and revolves around the following consistent elements, to create a sumptuous exploration of similarity and difference. Colour, drawing, scratching and rhythm.

Colour. Peter's colours are real and not imagined. They are not decorative despite their tonal rhythm and surface attractiveness. They are glazed from the earth like a ceramicist. His palette has become more varied and more beautiful as it has become more literal. Like the meter of a poem they reveal themselves slowly and can easily be misunderstood as decoration. In 'Discovering New Routes', for example, the initial impression of beiges and greys soon gives way to the green and then the blue. At this point our reading of the work is comfortable and seductive; it is Romantic. A longer gaze begins to unravel the left hand side of the painting and we move through its deeper colouration. Behind the black lines, that are actually brown, lie the multiple greens, blues, mustards, reds and brown blood. The left hand side green is so much browner than the right. And the aqua blue props up the whole assemblage. Meanwhile we have a Turner sky capping the upper half of the painting.

It is tempting to think that these colours are invented during the painting process to create a complimentary whole. They are not. Each colour exists in the physicality of the place represented. Peter will not wear sunglasses in the sun as he likes to see the colour as the sunlight naturally gives it to him. The colour moves from the land, through his retina to the surface of the painting as literally as possible. Photographs are his prompt and scrapbook. This is alchemy: the transmutation of natural elements into something else. It is science.



'Discovering New Routes' 2009, acrylic on board, 26cm x 56cm, 10" x 22"

‘Evening Portside’ (*plate 13*) extends this approach to colour. Whilst the colours are no less real they are used to create an additional emotional effect. Peter has always made black paintings and if they were exhibited together they would be overwhelming. Emotionally. This work uses colour fragments to create a discourse like a small raw song. It is confrontational and up close. A fragment of energy. But the critical point is that it is still in every way ‘literal’. It has always been my experience that these works act as a coda against the tonality of the other works. They are reminders not to be fooled by the surface beauty of the other works.



‘La Coupelasse (low tide)’ 2009, acrylic & collage on board, 91cm x 81cm, 36” x 32”

Drawing. ‘La Coupelasse (at low tide)’ and ‘La Coupelasse’ are all about drawing. Just as with Peter’s approach to colour there is nothing imagined about the drawing in these works. The same two channel marker poles exist in both images because they exist in reality in that way. I would contend that you could take a theodolite into the field and discover that Peter has angled these poles precisely. He has caught the engineering they contain. They are beautiful because they are executed with a draughtsman’s confident touch. To the left of both pictures the wire of the channel fences is exquisitely drawn, again both delicate and confident. This is the second layer of drawing. We don’t know what the ‘ball of string’ lines are under the post but we know they are a Peter Joyce signature and we understand that they give energy to the work. This is the third layer. The fourth layer is the drawing in the paint itself: the mustard yellow ‘v’ and brushed lines in the first painting, again echoed in the second one, and then further added to by the green painted lines above them. We do not neglect the additional yellow lines drawn in paint in the bottom right hand corner of the second painting either. This is, by any definition, a complete feast of drawing and draughtsmanship.



'La Coupelasse' 2009, acrylic & collage on board, 91cm x 81cm, 36" x 32"

As always there is a coda, a discordant revelation in the approach, just as there is with the colour. The drawing in 'Up to the Channel' describes itself and is the architecture and archaeology of the image itself. It is part of the 'black' side of the works for me.

Rhythm. Peter's journey of discovery into this landscape is profoundly driven by a desire to find the 'order of things'. His various methods of research – walking, photographing, Google - mapping, reading, eating



Bouin Marshes, France

and flying – all give him different parts of his jigsaw. The paintings utilise all of these techniques, and like any empiricist, he is forensic about telling the truth, about piecing it all back together to make an objective whole.

Some of the works are fragments of a larger body, some tell it as straight as possible and all have a rhythm running through them.

Peter does not find the world an easy place to be. That is why, in his daily routine and his carefully created home, he has tried to put a delicate carapace of order around him.

He is an artist and a human being looking for optimism and order in a chaos he examines hour by hour. Visual rhythm is his answer to this. It is more than composition, it sings like a landscape on a summer's evening. It is polyphonic and orchestral. You move from left to right like a musical score.

You can dance to these works.



'Up to the Channel' 2009, acrylic on board, 20cm x 18cm, 8" x 7"

Peter's paintings are musical compositions and sculptural constructs. They are the alchemy of fact and the joy of discovery. They hold the reality of light and colour in their hands. Their hands are human and patterned with history and work. They are anxious and celebratory. They are craft and song and sadness. They are rhythm and smile. Dance.

Pete and Jo end their day with a glass of local wine, gathered wood in the fire, making a fuss of Doug and the quiet of the marshes. They replenish their energies behind the shutters and Peter prepares for the light of the next day. The paintings wait quietly for attention in the studio outside.

Gary Topp, Consultant and Writer, Melbourne, Australia.



'La Louippe', France

# PLATES

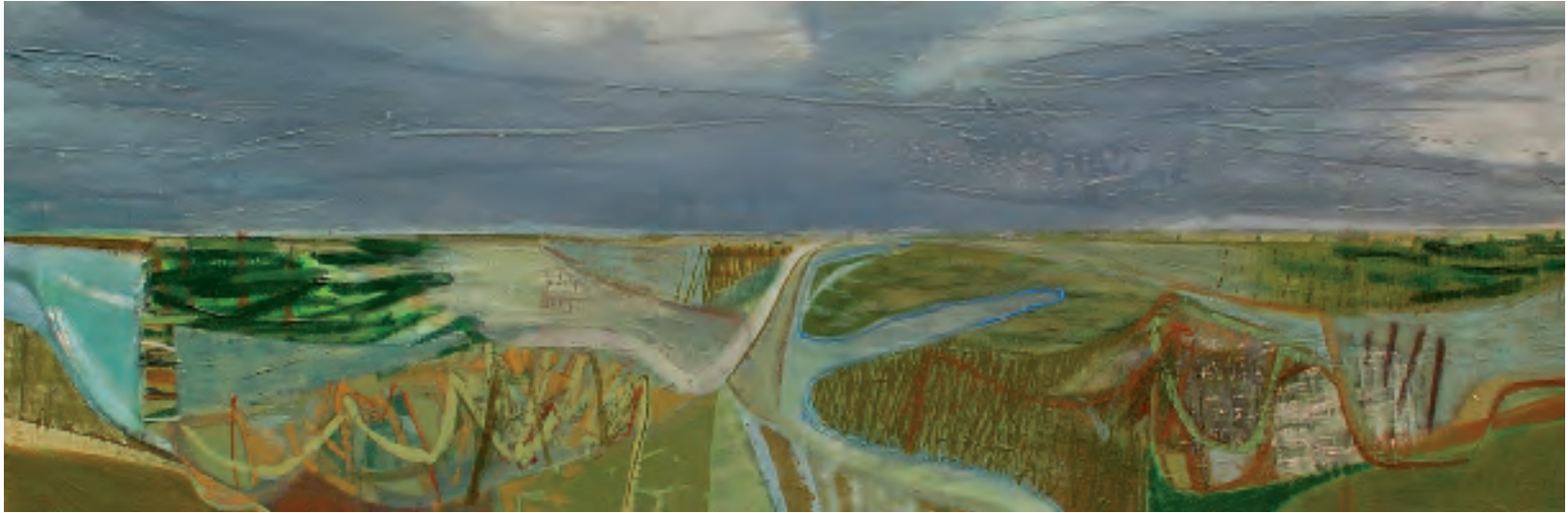
- 1 'Quayside Structure' 2009  
acrylic on canvas board  
26cm x 82cm  
10" x 32"



- 2 'Study for Port des Brochets' 2009  
acrylic on board  
22cm x 20cm  
8.75" x 7.75"



3 'Late Spring Meadows' 2009  
acrylic on canvas  
51cm x 153cm  
20" x 60"





above:  
4 'Evening Bridge' 2009  
acrylic on board  
19cm x 14cm  
7.5" x 5.5"

facing page:  
'Re-discovering La Louippe' 2009 5  
acrylic & collage on board  
23cm x 57cm  
9" x 22.5"



6 'Study for Port des Champs' 2008  
acrylic on board  
30cm x 20cm  
12" x 8"



7 'Cale et Digue' 2009  
acrylic & collage on canvas board  
33cm x 94cm  
13" x 37"





8 above:  
'Summer Heat' 2009  
acrylic & sand on board  
38cm x 15cm  
15" x 6"

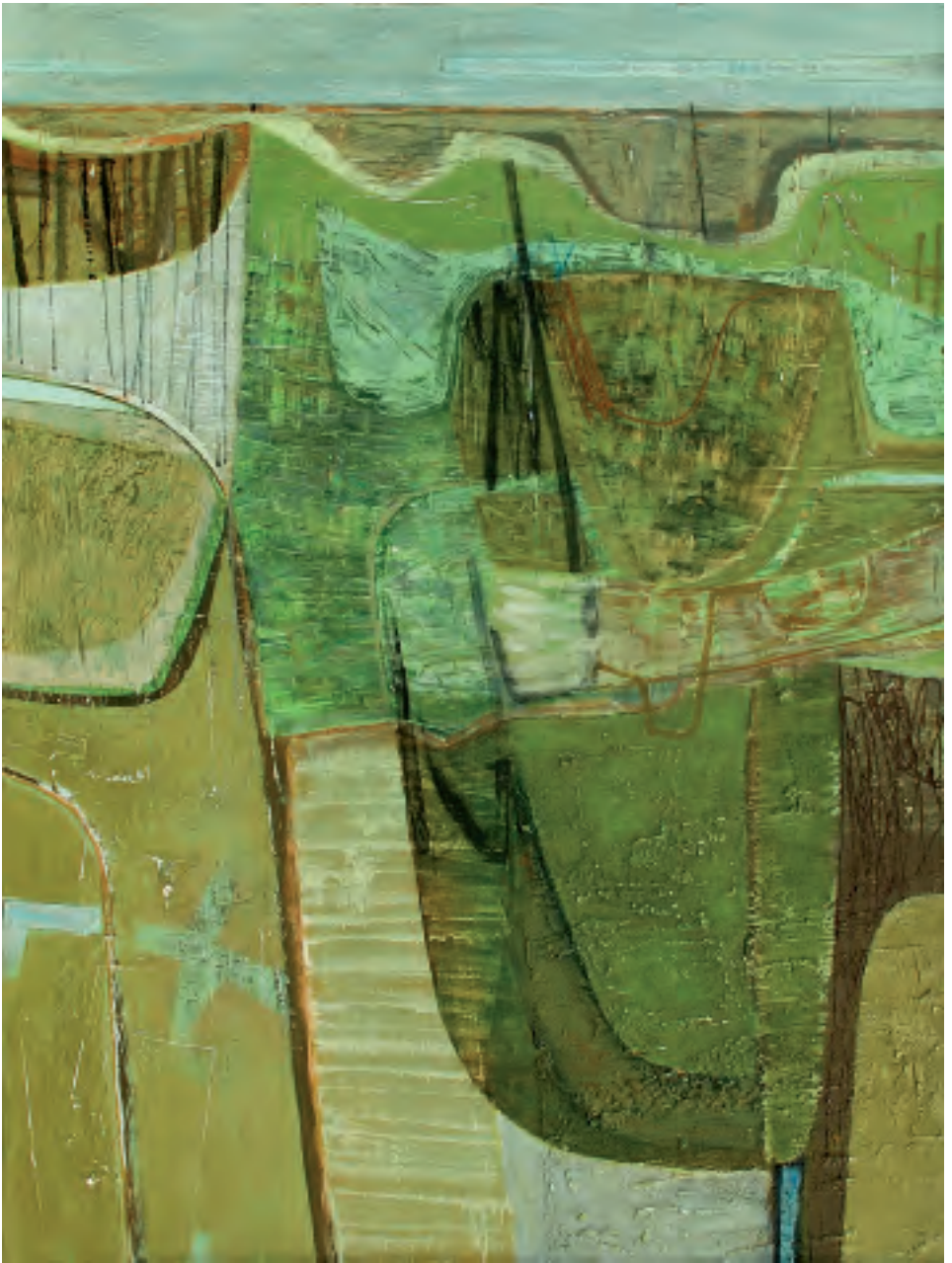
facing page:  
'Flooded Fields, Evening Light' 2009 9  
acrylic & collage on canvas board  
15cm x 62cm  
6" x 25"





above:  
10 'New Route' 2009  
acrylic on board  
18.5cm x 13.5cm  
7.25" x 5.25"

facing page:  
'Mapping Fields near des Poloux' 2009 11  
acrylic & collage on board  
122cm x 92cm  
48" x 36"



12 'Beyond Brochets' 2009  
acrylic & collage on board  
26cm x 26cm  
10" x 10"



13 'Evening Portside' 2009  
acrylic on canvas board  
17cm x 21cm  
7" x 8"



14 'Le Marais d'été' 2008  
acrylic on canvas  
38cm x 117cm  
15" x 46"



15 'L'écluse' 2009  
acrylic on board  
19cm x 19cm  
7.5" x 7.5"





above:  
16 'Summer Route' 2009  
acrylic & collage on board  
127cm x 15cm  
50" x 6"

facing page:  
'Ebbing Tide (New Moon)' 2009 17  
acrylic on canvas  
148cm x 112cm  
58" x 44"



18 'Jetty at La Louippe' 2009  
acrylic on canvas board  
26cm x 44cm  
10" x 17"



top left:  
19 'Rising Tide' 2009  
acrylic on board  
32cm x 32cm  
12.5" x 12.5"

bottom left:  
21 'Low Tide, Tractor Route' 2009  
acrylic on board  
32cm x 32cm  
12.5" x 12.5"

top right:  
20 'Full Tide' 2009  
acrylic on board  
32cm x 32cm  
12.5" x 12.5"

bottom right:  
22 'Low Tide Quay' 2009  
acrylic on board  
32cm x 32cm  
12.5" x 12.5"





above:  
23 'Early Flight' 2009  
acrylic on board  
25cm x 13cm  
9.75" x 5"

facing page:  
'Evening Coast (Oyster Beds)' 2009 24  
acrylic & collage on board  
23cm x 56cm  
9" x 22"





25 'Summer Wind, La Louippe' 2009  
acrylic & collage on board  
51cm x 97cm  
20" x 38"