

# My Quest for Artistic Identity.

A catalogue of my journey of discovery through BA Fine Art degree studies.

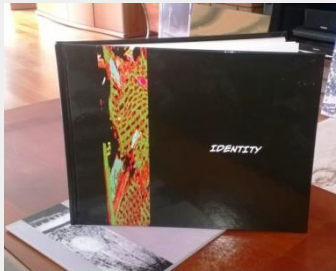
## Post Easter and the Degree Show 2015.

Well, it's all over now!!

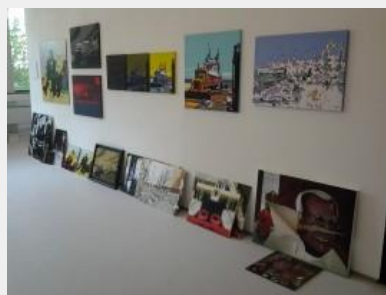
The degree show proved to be a success and many visitors spent time enjoying a glass or two of wine and viewing the exhibitions. I received a number of favourable comments concerning my work, with the promise of a commission from one couple who liked the White Horse Hotel. All but six of the postcards were taken, as well as a large number of my business cards.

## Catalogue.

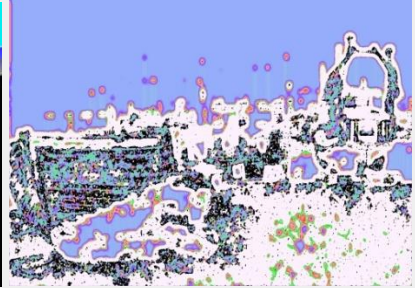
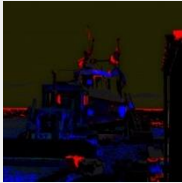
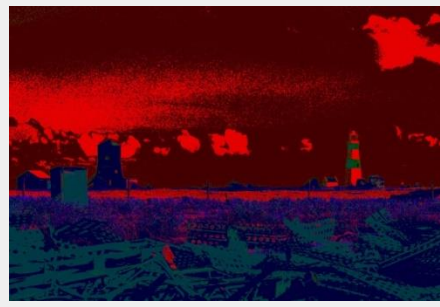
A website will become part of my marketing strategy in the near future but I have chosen to create a 50 page catalogue of work, called *Identity*, to illustrate my 3 year journey at UCS. I believe that this shows experimentation and growth in my art and I am pleased that I am beginning to discover a style of painting that I can build upon. The first draft is shown below and this is currently being edited for final print.



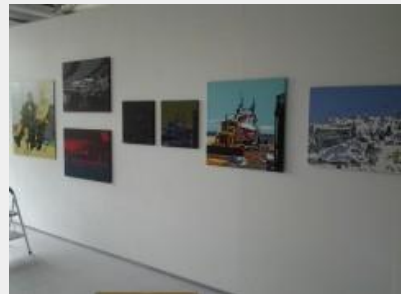
I feel very encouraged by the positive response to my work and my efforts will now focus upon the completion of my website and promotion of my work to local galleries and online sales outlets.



Floor painted and final change made to the selection of images for show, following discussion with Robin Warnes, who preferred to see the complete Aldeburgh Fog Triptych, as I had originally planned. Other images were therefore adjusted in the space to accommodate the change and the result looked far better. I now have 8 Giclee images on show, but the loss of narrative means that my show will now be called *Suffolk Fog* and the works will be titled individually.



Attended the studio yesterday to hang my work for the show and after advice from David Baldry, reduced my selected images to 7, thereby giving a less cluttered layout. I decided on the final selection and placement to offer a cohesive presentation and returned to the studio today for final adjustments to alignment and more considered spacing. I am reasonably pleased with the result although it has now lost the weight of its intended narrative and I will therefore choose a different title. Other work not hung will still be available for assessment.



The Aldeburgh Fog series will consist of 12-13 works in a range of media and sizes. All images are created uniquely from my own photographs and edited/manipulated in Photoshop and Photo Editor software, where I have progressed my learning through many hours of practice and experimentation on my home pc. The multitude of processes available provide limitless opportunity to create subtle abstractions from otherwise mundane photographs and my practice will now include a strong representation in digital media as well as painting.

I have continued to use the edited images as a base for my painting, but trials with inkjet printing onto canvas have enabled me to produce work in a wide range of colour and size, to present in their own right and as Limited Edition prints.

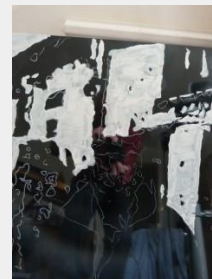
My practice will therefore continue to develop in that direction, with pleasing, colourful images which tell stories of human experience. I have recently become interested in the work of Grayson Perry, who states – *“I’ve never done anything that was consciously just purely decorative. There always has to be a snag in it somewhere. It’s almost the defining characteristic of my work.”*

This philosophy mirrors my own and will continue to be my mantra.



The painting of Fog3 has become a failed experiment in using household gloss paint on aluminium (ala Gary Hume) and has offered continued challenges. Painting a white/grey monochrome image onto black board is more complex than it first appears. In using the black ground as part of the image, decisions must be taken early on where other colours start and finish. So a great deal of planning and foresight is required before painting begins. The composite board is supplied with one glossy surface and one matt surface and my first thought was to use the glossy side, leaving the black gloss showing through. Drawing in white marker proved to be ok, but the application of white paint was unsatisfactory as it still required a number of coats to attain an even finish. The use of household gloss is not therefore providing the additional control that I hoped for and I have altered course to paint again on the matt surface as a final trial.

Preparation of my degree show space began today, with 2 coats of white emulsion to the wall. I have drawn a plan of the intended layout of my work and will begin hanging later this week. The floor will then be painted next week, in time for the assessment and show.



I have found a suitable alternative supplier to Photobox, for the printing of my digital images onto canvas and they have produced excellent Giclee results on their 12 colour commercial inkjet printer, colour matching precisely to my creations. All copies are now ready for hanging the degree show and I shall be displaying 14 images of varying size.

Had a great weekend in Edinburgh and I was able to visit the National Galleries of Scotland. My first visit was to the National Portrait Gallery, on Queen Street where I was able to see Christian Hook's contemporary portrait of Alan Cummings and I was not disappointed, seeing at first-hand how the paint was applied.

Other exhibits varied from monochrome photographs of war and life in the slums of Britain, to other digital imagery and oil paintings.



I was also impressed with work shown by the Scottish Royal Academy at the National Gallery on Princes Street and it's combination of Art and Architecture. Works featured sculpture, surrealist and abstract painting and architectural drawings and paintings and were beautifully exhibited in an impressive location.

The Saatchi Gallery has planned closures during May which co-incide with my intended visit, so will be unable to visit again this year.

However, I am flying to Edinburgh on Saturday 9th May and look forward to my first sight of Scottish art and in particular Christian Hook's portrait of Alan Cummings, which hangs in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery.

Wall space for the degree show has been agreed and this will enable me to show most of my work, as planned. I am also in early discussions with a local author, in connection with illustrating a new adventure novel for children and look forward to this new venture.

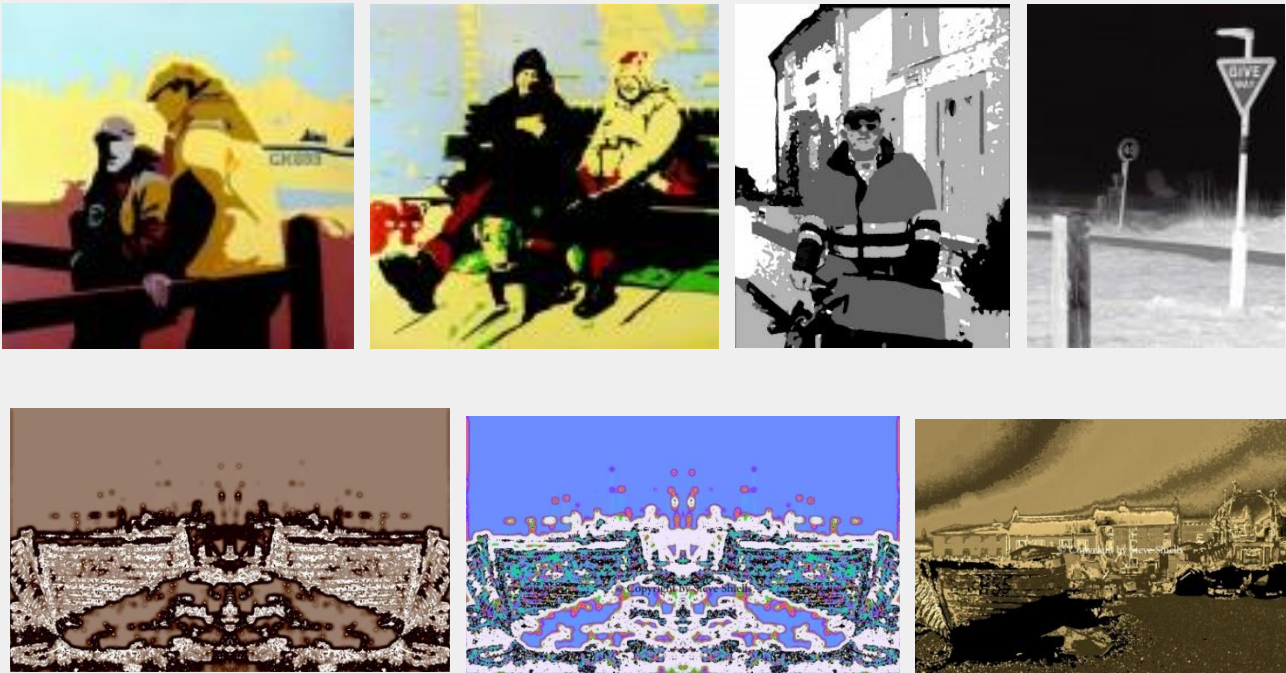
Work continues with Fog3 and my Catalogue. Problems with printing the catalogue at Photobox have continued. despite 3 attempts to get the colours right, they seem incapable of producing a satisfactory tone. Some of the photographs are too red and colours do not match the images on the computer screen. Photobox customer services is excellent, but their production department, is in a different country and cannot comprehend the changes made. I have given them one final chance to rectify the issues and trust that it will be correct next time? It is now too late to start again elsewhere, as I am unable to download my creation from their website.

I have arranged visits to visit the Saatchi Gallery in London and the Scottish National Gallery in Edinburgh, where Christian Hook's portrait of Alan Cummings is displayed.

Writing this Blog has helped me focus on my emerging identity as an artist and I have attempted to tell a story to illustrate my growth over the last 3 years at UCS. It has also helped in the construction of my catalogue IDENTITY, which tells the same story. Although I have identified a thread and style for my future work, my journey is not yet finished and I will continue to develop, beyond my studies at UCS.

The selection of 8-10 images for the degree show is complete and I am in the process of painting *Fog 3* in my home studio. This will be in gloss on 80 x 60 cm aluminium composite board. The use of household gloss paint should be slower drying and is intended as an experiment to compare its workability with the quick drying enamel paint used for *Fog 1* and *2*.

I am also planning the layout of the collection and making final decisions on size and sourcing of the printed media. *Fog 1* & *2* will be the largest pieces at 100 cm each and the remaining work will be a little smaller at 60 to 80 cm. A large wall space of 5-7 meters will be required to accommodate the collection as shown below:



My planning and preparation for the degree show began during the 2014 summer break and continued during semesters one and two of year 6. My first ideas were built loosely around three main subjects – ***The Mayor's Portrait – Broomhill Lido – and Aldeburgh Fog.***

I was very keen to show the ***Mayor's Portrait*** as this was my first portrait and most important work to date. The painting has not been formally assessed and I was surprised and disappointed to be told that it was not possible to show it, although no reason was given.

***The Broomhill Lido*** is a collaboration and as such, is formed from an agreement to paint my concepts from stills of Ian Moss's movie. It would not be a collaboration if I ignored that agreement and used new photographs of my own. In fact that would be a betrayal of the agreement.

A small selection of historical images from the 1950's, compared to recent photographs of the degradation currently befalling this rare social amenity are shown below. After analysis of the video and selection of the stills, work began in the university studios, by making a number of conceptual sketches on canvas board, with the intention of choosing two creations to reproduce on a larger scale. However, whilst working on the sketches on torn canvas, I realized that they portrayed the desired narrative of decay and desolation. I therefore decided that there is nothing to be gained from producing more polished images on larger canvases and the sketches will now become the finished work.

The Lido images below are of acrylic paint on 76cm x 51cm canvas board and one blurred digital image on a 60cm x 40cm canvas. This is taken from one of the painted sketches and summarises the delicate future of the Lido, in the eternal struggle to open it again, for public use.





## Broomhill Lido Collaboration.

My final year of study will include a collaboration with local contemporary artist Ian Moss. Ian's video, called *Wondering in Time*, which portrays the history and decay at the Broomhill Lido in Ipswich.

I have completed the *Broomhill Lido*, collaboration images which are shown in my studio space as a display of 7 canvasses shown below. Depending on the wall space available, this may also form part of my degree show.





In parallel to my university studio work in Semester 1, I continue work on the *Aldeburgh Fog series* at my home studio, repeating the style of my final work from year 5. I made further field trips to record more of the subject and plan to make full use of the multitude of photographs taken. This is an important step in my search for an identity and digital media will play an important role.

The images shown below are a mix of enamel painting and digital imagery edited from my photographs and will be the foundation of my future work. I continue with an abstract (Warhol/Opie) style and also refer to Gary Hume's work on alluminium in household gloss as shown in the first 2 images below.

As an alternative to using gloss paint, I used matt enamel paint on *Fog1* and semi-gloss enamel for *Fog2*, both on 1m sq alluminium composite board. Accurate drawing is essential to this style as enamel paint dries very quickly and is painted in a horizontal plane, to avoid runs and sagging paint.

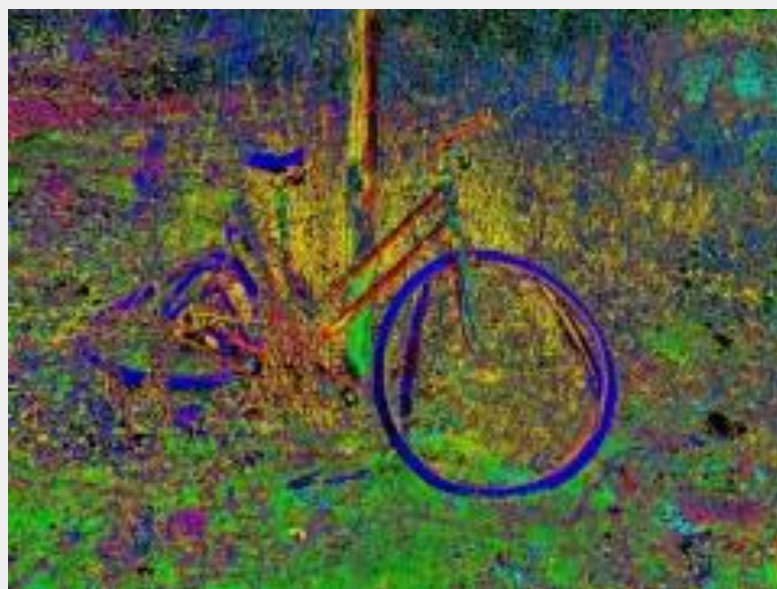
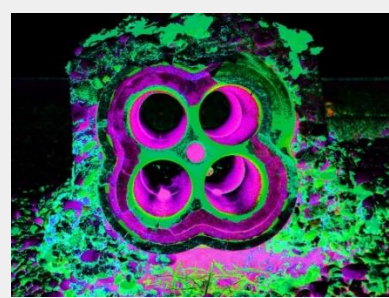
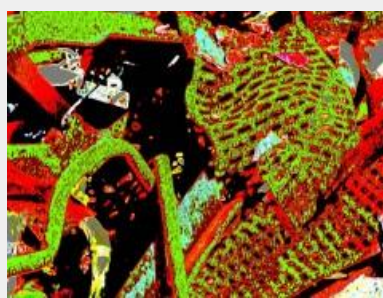
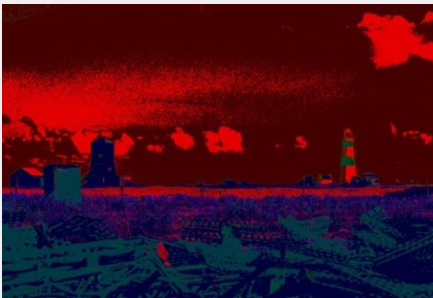
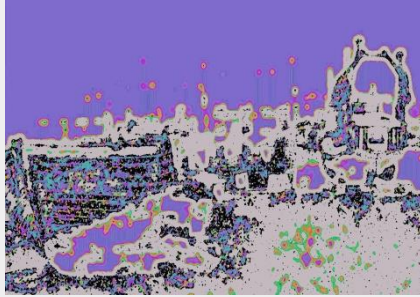
*Fog2* (the dog walkers) was finally completed in year 6 and although the addition of flow medium offered a little more control, I am not 100% satisfied with the results and will continue trials using household gloss, which should flow better and be slower drying. Smaller size prints on alluminium board have also been produced from my originals, as examples of limited editions, and digital work continues as preparation for my paintings as well as creating finished digital images.

The title *Aldeburgh Fog* comments on the social conflicts and divides within the town, which range from Maggie Hambling's *Scallop* to the adverse affects of tourism on the indigenous population. My work therefore illustrates my conception of the folk and fabric of the town.



Above: Work by Gary Hume, which I have referred to for colour and ground.

Below: My paintings and digital images 2014-15.



## EUREKA!! AM I A "CON.ARTIST?"

- Is my work is of today and therefore CON.TEMPORARY ?
- Is my work driven by ideas and therefore CON.CEPTUAL ?



I have enjoyed visits to the National Galleries, Courtauld's; Saatchi; Sainsbury; and Fitzwilliam Galleries plus other exhibitions and degree shows, but visits to the Tate Modern and the Baltic in Newcastle/Tyne have been largely uninspiring.

I am convinced that the contemporary fashion of conceptualism, is one that I do not wish follow and the research and writing of my dissertation on Damien Hirst did nothing to encourage me in that direction.

My desire has always been to create work that the general public might enjoy enough to purchase and hang on their walls.

Sol Lewitt has been credited with saying that conceptual artists are intuitive mystics rather than rationalists. They are free of skill and craftsmanship and leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach and formal art is essentially rational.

I cannot change my genes and am undoubtedly a realist and a rationalist, so therefore unlikely to be accepted as a truly conceptual artist. Nevertheless my work is driven by reflective ideas and concepts of life today, so it is contemporary.

Ideas and narrative have formed my art since the 1990's, and I choose to illustrate those concepts with paint, photographs and digital media. I do not wish to adopt a Surrealist or totally Abstract painting style, but I have been influenced by Pop Art and other Contemporary Painting and will continue to develop reflective narratives with elements of abstraction in my work.

Currently the most inspiring work to me is Christian Hook's recently commissioned portrait of actor Alan Cumming, after winning the 2014/15 Sky Arts Portrait Artist of the Year. Not just the finished work (shown below), but the process of collaboration, communication, empathy and involvement displayed in the project was exceptional to watch. <https://i.guim.co.uk/static/w-620/h--/q-95/sys-images/Guardian/Pix/pictures/2014/12/30/1419966559314/Alan-Cumming-portrait-010.jpg>



Brief clips showing only part of the experience are available on Utube, but please try to view the complete video and enjoy the process of the finished work. Christian Hook works spontaneously and expressively on the base layers of his paint and a true image emerges from the canvas. He refers to the sitter's character, by the inclusion of a small selection of meaningful personal belongings.

For this portrait of actor/dancer Alan Cumming, the artist included a tartan kilt, hung around the shoulders of the naked Cummings, plus a top hat and a honey pot to personalise a truly dramatic composition.

Portraiture will feature in my portfolio, but many other artists do it very well. However, I possess the ability to work in a flexible style to suit the varying concept and context of my subject and will continue to create figurative work in different formats.

I prefer to edit my own photographs as a unique basis for painting. Finished digital images are edited individually, and uniquely, and are also available as limited edition prints of the paintings.

I believe that contemporary painting, holds equal value to any other media and the YBA fashion of conceptualism is not exclusive. It is therefore wrong to take my work at face value, and dismiss it as “pretty pictures.”

LIFE EXPERIENCE and IDEAS drive my work:

1. ***Kestrels Courting 1995***, is partly photo-realist, but through a cloudy, grey sky and a fallen tree, conveys the conception of threats to the birds’ natural heathland habitat.
2. ***Orford Ness Contrast, Red Sky and Legacy 2012***, three images illustrate the concepts of beauty and ugliness in this wild natural landscape, scarred by mans’ intrusion.
3. ***Woman, Mind Body and Soul 2013***, is a symbolic, conceptual representation of a trilogy of life illustrated by a mix of drawing, painting, printing and sculpture.
4. ***Abyss 2014***, is a comment on woman’s, beauty and Freud’s reference to mans’ supposed fear of her sexuality.
5. ***The Mayor’s Portrait 2014***, is a contemporary portrait driven by my conception of his larger than life character, his impending retirement, and his future. (see Tag 5). I have also created a new work of the subject called ***200 hours***, which will form part of my degree show.
6. ***Aldeburgh Fog 2014/15***, is presented as a collection/series of 8 paintings and digital imagery, commenting on social conflict within this quaint Suffolk seaside town. (see Tag 8).
7. ***Broomhill Lido – Use it or lose it 2015***, is presented as a collection of 7 images in mixed media and comments on the seemingly eternal struggle to re-open this once important social amenity, which has been left to deteriorate for many years. (see below).

All of this work, and almost everything I sketch/draw/paint/print/construct, is driven by my desire to tell a story.

## **Year 6 Auction 2015.**

The auction finally arrived this evening at 6pm and represents the groups best opportunity to raise funds to finance our degree show.

I prepared a draft of the catalogue which was edited by Hannah, who has done a great job with photographs and logging of the work to be shown, and all is set for this evening.

I contributed two works in digital prints on canvas shown below.



## **My Dissertation 2014/15.**

I was diagnosed with Dyspraxia and Dyslexia issues in 2014, which had seriously affected previous essay results and I began year six with enormous trepidation. The dissertation was looming on the immediate horizon and the diagnosis had caused me to consider ending my studies.

However, armed with the knowledge that I had lived with the issues all my life (without knowing it) and had coped with the effects throughout a successful career, and with the support of the University's Student Services Department, I decided to meet the challenge of the dissertation and enrolled for the final year of study.

The first semester began with preparation for my dissertation, and a programme of workshops was offered to prepare and advise the students on their subject options and research. My selected subject was Damien Hirst and I chose to investigate his appropriations and exploitation of the art world and his dramatic rise to fame and fortune. Research proved to be challenging but enjoyable and with help and guidance from UCS Staff, I managed to complete a reasonably coherent dissertation and eagerly await the results and continue to prepare new work in preparation for the final Degree Show.

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## **The Mayor's Portrait 2014 and Year 5 Show.**

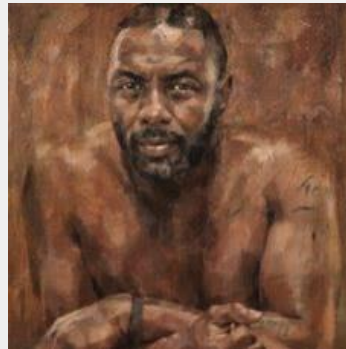
### **The Mayor's Portrait.**

As part of Professional Practice study in year 5, I negotiated my first commission to paint a portrait of the Mayor of Ipswich, Councillor Hamil Clarke. This was my first portrait and it offered an opportunity to work in collaboration with the Mayor and Ipswich Borough Council and is my most significant project to date.

I was able to meet the Mayor in his chambers at Ipswich Town Hall where we discussed what the format might be. I tried to make him feel relaxed and he warmed to my vision of an informal portrait of him as a man, rather than a stock image of him in the mayoral robes. I prepared a number of sketches which were emailed for the Mayor's approval, but no comments came forward. I therefore progressed with my own vision of him nearing the end of his tenure with robes cast aside behind him, thus giving narrative to the work.

I referred to artists that had painted portraits of black males and was impressed by the work of Jonathan Yeo, as shown below. Because of the Mayor's busy diary, there were no sittings and only one photo session was possible. Working from photos proved to be restrictive and I decided to begin with a freehand sketch on the canvas in an attempt to replicate the feeling of a sitting. I painted in oil and acrylic on a 90cm x 70cm canvas, and the work took approximately 200 hours to complete, and was presented to the Mayor at Ipswich Town Hall on 21st May 2014. As a business contract, the collaboration was successful, but I was less than satisfied with the likeness of the image.

I was pleased that I captured the Mayor's character, and the conceptual element of narrating his retirement. It was however very disappointing to learn that, after so much effort, I was not allowed to present the work for assessment at UCS.



## Year 5 Show 2014.

However, other work in year 5 proved to be equally significant in my journey towards artistic "Identity" and the images attached show a style that I am keen to develop further.

The fishermen, entitled *Aldeburgh Fog 1* was painted in enamel on 1 meter square aluminium composite board and is the first of a series I intend to produce in 2015.

The figurative painting entitled *The Abyss* is painted in acrylic on an 80cm x 60cm canvas and will feature in a future series of figurative work.

I have referred to the work of Andy Warhol, Allen Jones, Gary Hume and Julian Opie, and examples of their work are shown below.

The printed images and colours of Opie and Warhol have influenced my painting and I have adapted this as elements of abstraction in my painting. The work of Hume and Jones has also given me inspiration to use colour and alternative grounds for my work and Jones's abstracted figurative paintings showing movement and colour have been particularly inspiring.



Below: My paintings and work in progress



## Year 4 Show, 2013.

The Project Brief for Semester 2 was to produce one piece of work, incorporating each of the chosen study subjects.

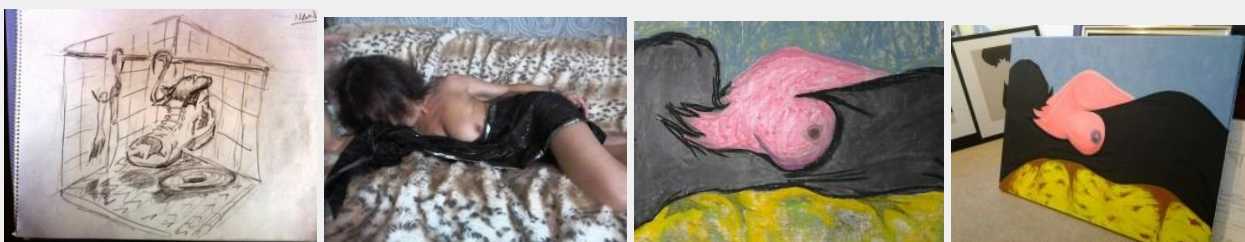
Life drawing and painting inevitably formed a basis for the work and, following the death of my Mother, I chose to portray woman's life as a trilogy entitled: "*WOMAN – Mind, Body and Soul.*" Based upon a construction format, and taking individual pieces from my work as a collection to portray a conceptual view.

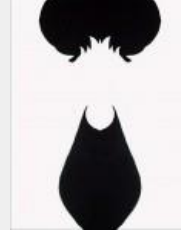
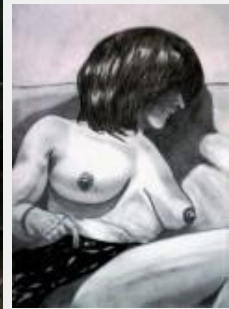
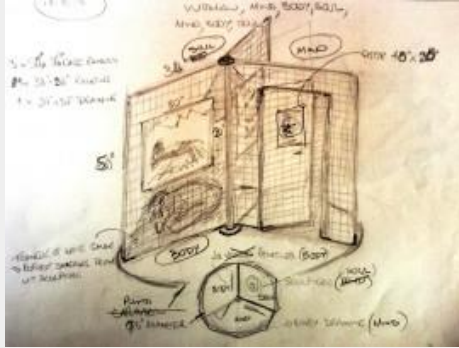
Personal experience of a partner's breast cancer gave me further incentive to comment on ageing and illness and the Trilogy would also include illustrations of beauty, ugliness, money, greed and death. The piece was completed by a wooden skeletal sculpture, which represented death and re-birth, as a tribute to my Mother.

The construction is of 3 steel cages on a platform, which can be seen as the symbolic imprisonment experienced by many women, during 3 stages of their lives.

Although represented from a male point of view, the piece was developed from my own life experience and is intended to conceptually portray a provoking and sympathetic view.

The work was inspired by one of my earlier sketches of a concept of MAN,s symbolic imprisonment, as shown below:





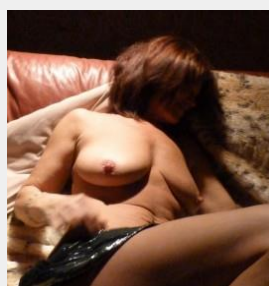
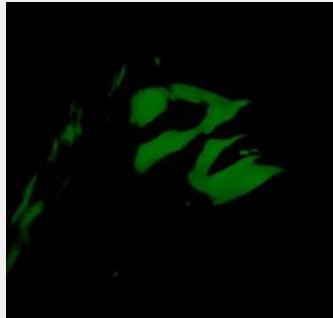
## Year 4 Figurative Photography & Painting/Aldeburgh Field Trip.

A study field trip to Aldeburgh in 2013 provided valuable photographic material for my future work a small selection of which is shown below, including a 1 minute sketch of the moor.

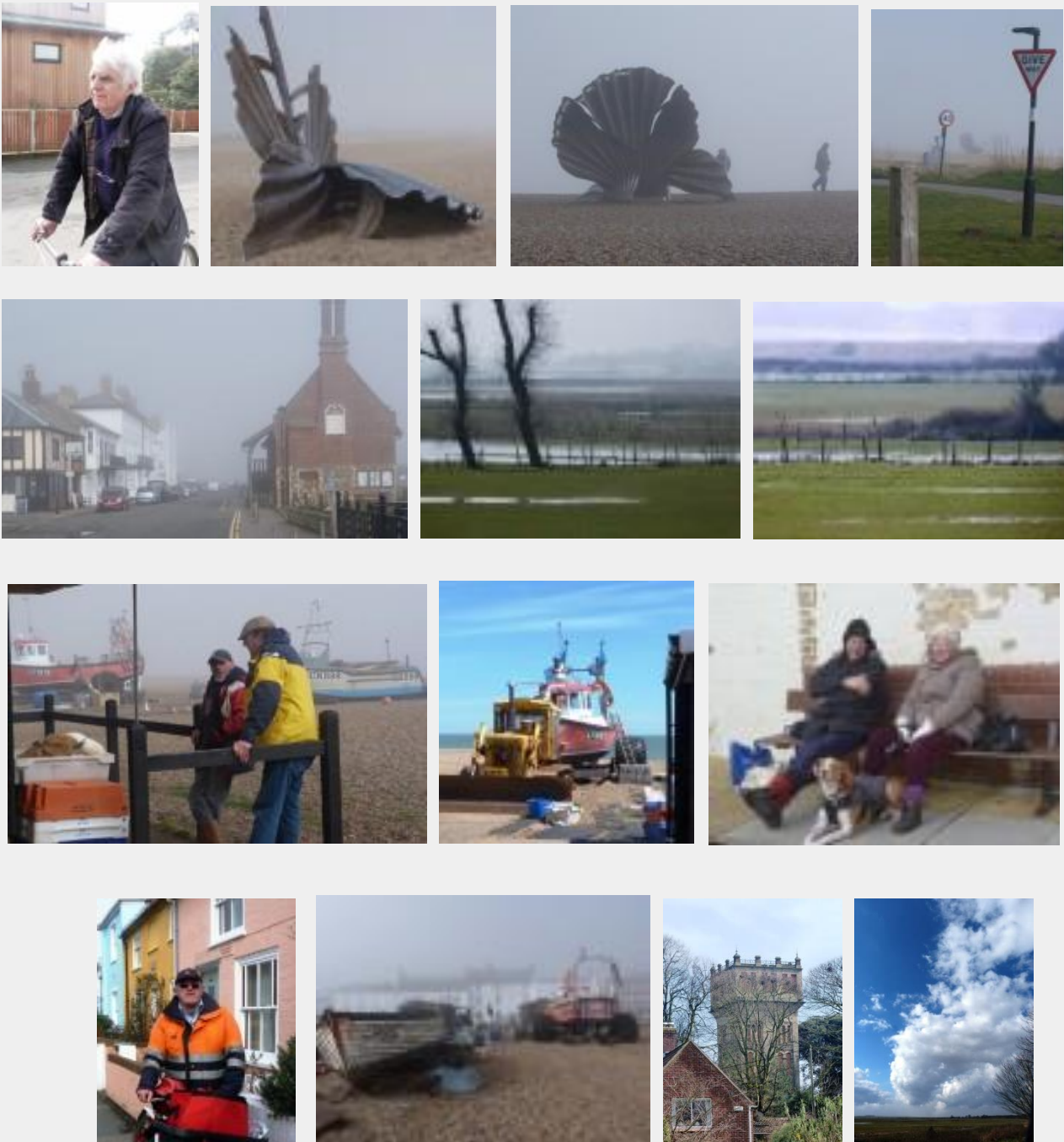
Using my own photographs as a source, I experimented with digital media, abstraction and colour. My reference was from Pop Art and work by Andy Warhol, as well as more contemporary painting and story-telling, by Allen Jones and Andy Warhol, as shown below. Their use of colour and contrast is something that I admire.



Some of my early Life work from my own photographs, are shown below:







## Tate Modern and Orford Ness Field Trips 2012.

In 2012, an organised trip to London and the **Tate Modern**, introduced me to Contemporary/Conceptual Art and although I went along with an open mind, I found that blank monitor screens, and collections of detritus with pretentious, elitist labelling offered very little evidence of craftsmanship, and I was left cold and uninspired by the experience.

However, a field trip to **Orford Ness** in Suffolk, provided a rich source of material for my work. I was struck by the contradiction of beauty and ugliness within the wild natural landscape, when seen in contrast to the legacy of redundant, degraded, man-made fabrications.

My work is driven by the concept of man's destruction of a beautiful, wild landscape. My attempt to portray that contrast is represented by conceptual images including:

**Contrast1:** An inverted black and white oil painting on a small canvas board.

**Contrast2:** A black/white and red illustration of beauty and ugliness with hazard warning signs and a warning sky.

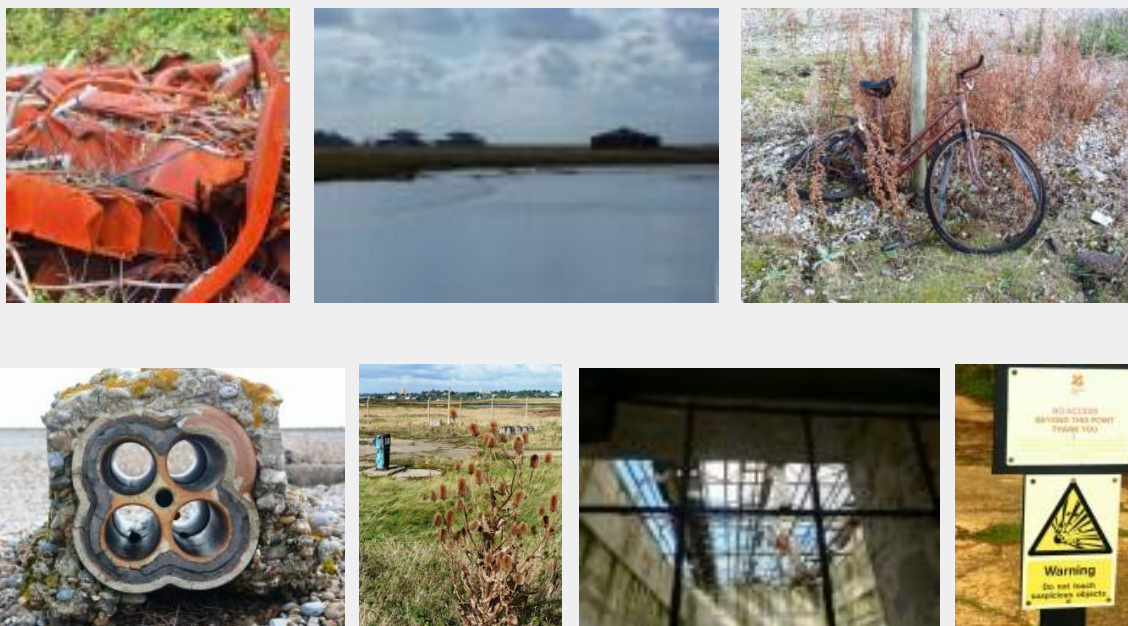
**Legacy:** A cardboard construction with edited contrasting photographs and detritus from the site.



These were my earliest attempts to portray a conceptual narrative in my work, which was influenced by Robert Rauschenberg's Combines, as seen below.



Below is a selection of my photographs and images from the Orford Ness visit.





## Scratching the Surface and the Beginning.

### Scratching the Surface.

My degree studies included experimentation with drawing, painting, sculpture, printing and photography and I began to produce work from life studies and abstraction.

The use of digital media and image manipulation, became instrumental in the transformation of my photographs as a base to create abstract drawings and paintings.

The use of colour is essential to my work and I found that the use of digital editing provided me with a freedom to experiment. I took particular interest in Pop Art and the work of Andy Warhol, who's style would begin to influence my work.



## The Beginning.

Prior to my degree studies, I attended evening classes at Ipswich Art School in the 1990's, where my practice focused on painting wildlife in Gouache.

I referred to work by Terence Bond and worked from photographs in a part photo-realist style, adding movement and narrative to create originality. I enjoy relating stories and even at these artistically naïve times it was important for me to add concept to the basic photographs.

For example, the Kestrels are much more than a pretty picture of birds in flight. Constructed from separate photographs from different books, to create the courting scene, the grey stormy sky and a fallen tree within a heathland setting, refers to the threatened destruction of the birds natural habitat, from house building.

My desire was to break away from the confines of photo-realism and become more expressive in my drawing and painting:

