

PATRICK HUGHES – BIOGRAPHIES/ARTICLES

Biography - 151 words

Patrick Hughes lives and works in London. Widely recognised as one of the major painters of contemporary British art, he is also a designer, teacher and writer. His works are part of many public collections including: the British Library and the Tate Gallery, London; the Gallery of Modern Art, Glasgow; The Deutsche Bibliothek, Frankfurt and the Denver Art Museum. Hughes has exhibited in London and throughout Europe, South East Asia, America and Canada.

Books by Patrick Hughes include *Vicious Circles and Infinity; Upon the Pun: Dual Meaning in Words and Pictures, More on Oxymoron, Left to Write, Paradoxymoron: Foolish Wisdom in Words and Pictures* and *Fifty Years in Show Business: A Bit of Artobiography*. The work of the artist has featured in the monograph *Perverspective*, by John Slyce and most recently in *A New Perspective* published in 2014 by Flowers Gallery, which focuses primarily on work over the last four years.

Biography and quote - 271 words

“In 1963 I had an epiphany on Leeds Central station. I was waiting for the train to London one Saturday morning and I noticed that the lines ahead of me came to a point, the point of infinity. (I had been brought up in Crewe, Cheshire, a railway town, and I often travelled on the trains and still do.) I thought to myself I could make a silver and black set of railway lines that come to a point more quickly. I made these and exhibited them on the floor in my second London exhibition at the small Portal Gallery. About a year later I thought of making a sitting room in the same forced perspective, but this time the wrong way round, with the back wall at the front. I made this out of wood and doll’s house wallpaper. Making things in perspective is taking experience as a solid rather than an ever-changing relationship. By the process of irony – no one believes railway lines actually come to a point – one can make the point that our experiences are relative, fluid, subject to change.”

Patrick Hughes holds a Citizen of the World passport. His solo show in 1961 was the first by a British Pop Artist. He taught at Leeds College of Art in the 1960s and has been exhibiting with Flowers Galleries for the last forty years. Patrick has written books on philosophy and rhetoric exploring how revealing language is when pushed beyond metaphor into the further reaches of oxymoron and paradox. Based in Hoxton, Patrick says he is less interested in his CV than the length of his life.

Biography - 1817 words

At the age of three or four, whilst staying at his grand-parents house in Warmingham Road, Crewe, Patrick Hughes would sleep in ‘The Glory Hole’ - the cupboard under the stairs. Lying awake listening to the air-raid sirens and falling bombs, Patrick would look up and stare at the stairs, “We were looking up at these stairs the wrong way round – up and down, up and down – stairs that only a fly could walk up. It must have made a strong impression: being bombed and in the dark and sleeping with my Mother and seeing everything the wrong way round.” Patrick has made a life-long career out of doing things the other way round.

Patrick Hughes was born, Peter David Hughes in October 1939 in Birmingham, the eldest son of Peter and Florence Hughes. His father was a commercial traveller in groceries and a salesman, and his mother, a housewife. The family moved around, living in suburban Hayes in Middlesex and later in Hull. It was an unhappy household, a quarrelsome and hostile environment and Patrick’s refuge was in books and in his imagination. The books came from the public library as his was a book-less house:

“A book is a way out. They are like little doors – you open the little hinged

rectangle of the book and step out. I escaped from my suburban hell hole of an upbringing through the book.”

In 1950 Patrick went to Hull Grammar School where he studied ‘O’ level art, taught by Ian D. H. Fothergill. Fothergill encouraged the students to write about modern art and Patrick wrote in defense of Picasso, but it was Fothergill’s set designs for the school plays, with their use of perspective and painted shadows which amazed Patrick and left a lasting impression.

At seventeen Patrick left school, home and Hull for London, never to return. He took a job as a window dresser and salesman at Rubans de Paris in London’s West End, near to the Portal Gallery. He spent his spare time reading and writing and visiting local galleries, looking at works by René Magritte, Marcel Duchamp and Paul Klee and taking in the contemporary scene. The following year, Patrick met his first wife Rennie Paterson, then an art student at Reading. Three sons, John, James and Solomon, followed in quick succession and Patrick and Rennie returned to live with her parents near Leeds.

In 1959 Patrick enrolled at the Leeds Day Training College to study English literature with a view to teaching English and a writing career. On the first day, asked to write an essay on six books he had recently enjoyed, Patrick wrote about N. F. Simpson, Eugène Ionesco, Franz Kafka, Lewis Carroll, Samuel Butler and Christian Morgenstern. However, to his astonishment, the English teacher Mrs Hanson declared this was not English literature. English literature was the nineteenth-century writers; George Eliot, Jane Austen, the Bröntes and Charles Dickens. Mrs. Hanson suggested Patrick should study art and passed him over to the art department and so it was that Patrick’s art career began out of acts of rejection and suggestion, not through intention.

The Art Department was run by Muriel Atkinson and John Jones and unlike the English Department welcomed and actively encouraged creativity and experimentation. Patrick began making low reliefs in plaster and later, cut-outs in paper and wood, painting white emulsion paint as the ground and using household gloss paint as the finish. It was a surprise gift from John Jones for his twenty-first birthday - a subscription to Art News and Review - that stimulated Patrick to send off slides of his work to the Portal Gallery in early 1961. On the Monday after the Friday when he completed his course at Leeds Day College Patrick opened his first solo exhibition at the Portal Gallery, London. It was the first one-man show by a so-called Pop Artist and a huge success. The critics of the day George Melly and David Sylvester were early champions. Sylvester wrote,

“This artist has the gift, synonymous with creativeness, of being able to be surprised by what the rest of us take for granted. Here is a painter who really has something to say, and his arrival on the scene gives me a rare sense of exhilaration.”

Parallels were drawn with the works of Harold Pinter, Paul Klee, Samuel Beckett and Spike Milligan. Patrick sold two-thirds of the forty or so paintings exhibited.

With the success of his Portal Gallery show in 1961 Patrick’s job moved from school teaching to art lecturing at Bradford School of Art in 1963, and then in 1964 at Leeds College of Art. His colleagues included the artists Anthony Earnshaw, Robin Page and George Brecht, and his students - Trevor Winkfield, Glen Baxter, Les Coleman, Jeff Edwards, Les Evans and Paul Hammond. It was whilst at Leeds, that Patrick made two of his seminal works, *Infinity*, in 1963, inspired by standing on the railway station at Leeds and looking at the railway tracks and his first reverspective, the *Sticking-out Room* of 1964.

In 1968-69 Patrick was giving lectures about paradoxes and jokes in Exeter, London and Leeds with George Brecht, the Fluxus artist. Several years later, in 1975, they were to collaborate on *Vicious Circles and Infinity, A Panoply of Paradoxes*. The first ever book on the paradox went on to sell 100,000 copies and was translated into Japanese, German, Dutch and Spanish. Around this time, Patrick began painting vicious circles and versions of the ouroboros in search for a theoretical basis for his ideas. He had moved his family back to London and commuted to Leeds to teach.

In 1970, Patrick was one of ten artists invited to take a room at the Institute for Contemporary Art in London. He constructed a 12ft by 8ft sticking-out room within the room – a large paradoxical object, which visitors could not just look at but could experience for themselves. That same year Patrick met Angela Flowers who was setting up her own gallery and asked him to be her first artist. Patrick has been showing with Flowers Gallery ever since.

In 1970 Patrick and Rennie divorced. In 1971 Patrick married the artist and writer Molly Parkin, they parted in 1980, divorcing in 1981.

The first half of the 1970s saw Patrick living in Chelsea and Ladbroke Grove and painting rainbows. The rainbows became very popular as prints, which he made with Coriander Studios for Christies Contemporary Art and as postcards for Camden Graphics. Over the years about 1,000,000 rainbow postcards and 10,000 screenprints have been sold. People thought the rainbows were cheerful, but Patrick felt they were misunderstood; they were acts of subversion, visual puns. His interest lay in the contradiction of turning or fixing an experience or event into a solid thing.

In 1975, sustained by his sales of the rainbows and his book, Patrick moved to St. Ives in Cornwall and leased a studio with a ladder down to the beach. It was here he made *On Reflection: St Ives Bay*, which he describes as one of the best pieces he has made about mirrors. In 1979 he left the village of St. Ives for the village of the Chelsea Hotel in New York, another artists' colony where he started to write *More On Oxymoron*. He hung out with the artists Keith Haring and Kenny Scharf, the musician Klaus Nomi and the theatre director Charles Ludlum. These underground artists were using comedy in their work; comedy was Patrick's abiding interest. It was whilst in New York that he began to work entirely on paper as he found he could get more ideas down than in his St. Ives days when he was still working in gloss paint on board.

Patrick returned to London in 1983 and stayed at the Chelsea Art Club and had a studio in Notting Hill Gate for a short while. After showing at Angela Flowers Gallery that year, Patrick had decided he needed to change his method of working which had typically involved a slow gestation with months of thinking, a few days of making and a few minutes of contemplation by the viewer. Moving again, this time to a squat in Thornhill Square in North London, with his son James Heartfield, Patrick began painting small watercolours, usually three a day. This technique liberated him to have lots of ideas and variations on themes. Motifs included the crucifix, skeletons, eggs, Yin and Yang, and shadows, amongst other ideas. He made hundreds and sold most of them. This change enabled Patrick to see where he was going and what really interested him.

When Patrick moved to Belsize Park in 1985 he went back to painting on canvas but in oils. In pictures like *Self-criticism* he began to look at the relation between representation and reality. He re-examined the rich vein of the old *Sticking-out Room* of twenty years earlier, he explored reverse perspective, shaped boards and used all kinds of imagery.

In 1987 Patrick met and married his third wife, the historian and writer, Dr. Diane Atkinson. Together they moved to 72 Great Eastern Street, Hoxton, which is where they live today above his studio. Every weekday, through the large plate glass window, Patrick can be seen with his team of studio assistants painting his highly successful and hugely enjoyable reverspectives.

In 2011 Flowers Gallery celebrated the artistic achievements of Patrick Hughes with a retrospective, *Fifty Years in Show Business*. To coincide with this half century, Patrick published his third book on the paradox and oxymoron, *Paradoxymoron*. Throughout 2012 and 2013 Patrick's work was shown in Europe, America, Canada, Japan and Korea. In 2014 Patrick celebrated his 75th birthday with a new publication, *A New Perspective* and with exhibitions in The Hague, New York, London and Japan. In 2015, Patrick has three solo shows in Germany and another one in San Francisco. His work will also be exhibited in Canada, Paris and Japan.

“From 1959 to 1989 I spent most of my time as an artist thinking about what I should do and how I should do it; and a small amount of time actually doing it. When I started making the reverspectives in 1990 more time was spent doing the art, because it was more laborious to construct and paint in the illusionistic

way works could take up to six months to make. The process changed and speeded up when I started using a computer to do the geometry.

I can see now from the perspective of fifty-five years making art that in the first half of my career I was interested in showing people the absurdity of life, but in the second half, with my Reverspective three-dimensional paintings, I let people experience this paradox for themselves (just as a good teacher should). Another way of looking at the career is that my early work was poetic and my later work prosaic.”

Article 573 words

”Why do my still paintings appear to move? Your eyes are telling you that you are moving to the left, your feet are telling you that you are moving to the right. We prefer to believe these solid bodies are moving than our bodies and eyes are out of kilter, as if we had been sawn in half. And they continue to move even when you have been to the side and seen how they are constructed. Near things move faster in our visual field than further things, so as we move about the front of my pieces this information is completely misleading because my paintings imitate the receding of reality in detail, but in the large make receding reality advance towards you. Marcel Duchamp says somewhere that the spectator is half the art experience, the artist only the first half, and I am pleased that in my work that is particularly true.”

Patrick Hughes' works invite the viewer to experience the relation between the self and the work of art. With their rhythmical shapes and meticulously painted surfaces his witty combinations of painting and sculpture not only illustrate multiple points of view from a three-dimensional perspective, but defy the senses with a dizzying sense of paradoxical motion.

Hughes' signature 'stick-out' paintings begin their life as several trapezoidal or conical board constructions are fused together into pristine wall reliefs. The inherent repetition of each structure sets the tone for its unique theme, which is then rendered with meticulous attention. Much like an architect, Hughes utilizes linear perspective in conveying spatially correct relationships, painting the edges of rectangular shapes to converge on vanishing points, painstakingly rendering the texture gradients of floors and walls and illustrating objects in perspective as diminishing in size from front to back. As enticing as a spider's web to a moth, Hughes' 'paradoxical on perspective' becomes more complex with every line. His three-dimensional sceneries not only defy the static sense of a painting as frozen in time, but also reverse the apparent sense of perspective, where shapes that seem near are actually receding in space. This effect, referred to as perverspective in Hughes' terms, contradicts the viewer's perceptions by giving the impression that the paintings are moving sideways. While moving our head to look at one of Hughes' works, we experience the eerie sensation of accelerated motion of body extension, which gives way to curious observations whereupon one seems compelled to pace from side to side to accentuate the motion. This perplexing stance is often referred to as the 'Hughes dance.'

Hughes's works are at once visually engaging and surprisingly familiar, playful ruminations on the history of art, perspective and Surrealism. Most of the paintings feature key elements in Hughes' craft such as rectilinear forms: gallery walls, buildings, books, doorways and works of art that serve as anchors to the reverse perspective effect.

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Article 1528 words

Seeing is Believing

Brendan Flynn

Curator of Fine Art, Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery

For Patrick Hughes, art has been a means of intellectual enquiry rather than an end itself. His paintings are machines designed to change the way we think about the world. The art of representation has always been linked to knowledge and understanding of the external world and the ways in which we perceive it – what we see and how we see. The notion of perspective has been central to the evolution of Western Art since classical times, its principles closely linked to the empirical view of the world, logic, mathematics and geometry. The ability to create a facsimile of the exterior world has been highly prized and perfected at precisely those periods when the knowledge itself has been most eagerly sought and argued over.

Hughes is developing a line of enquiry which has preoccupied generations of European artists. The architect Brunelleschi (1377 – 1446) was one of the first to make an interactive artwork that demonstrated the principle of perspective. He painted a view of a building on a silvered background with a spy hole in the centre corresponding to the vanishing point. The viewer looked through the hole at another mirror that reflected the image including the sky and moving clouds, so increasing the illusion of reality. For contemporary audiences, the effect must have been amazing. It placed the viewer literally at the very centre of the work. It was experimental with a serious purpose but it was also entertainment and this has been a fundamental aspect of Hughes' work – its ability to capture the attention and imagination of the viewer and involve them in the process of enquiry.

Command of the law of perspective allowed artists to create complex illusions that mimicked reality to an astounding degree. The Camera degli Sposi in the Gonzaga Palace in Mantua by Mantegna (1431 – 1506) for instance, remains an astounding tour de force of illusionistic painting in which solid walls are effectively dissolved by the coherent manipulation of perspective, coupled with the viewer's expectation – we see what we expect to see and our mind fills in the blanks. Three and two-dimensional elements were combined to dramatic effect in the work of Gaudenzio Ferrari (1484 – 1546) at Varallo, where life size painted figures emerge from the fresco into the viewer's space.

The Dutch painter Carel Fabritius (1622 – 54) created some extraordinary hybrid works which combine elaborate architectural perspective with foreshortened still-life motifs and figures. His View of Delft with a Musical Instrument Seller's Stall (National Gallery, London) is amazingly modern in spirit and defied the picturesque conventions of his day. If David Hockney is right, he may have used a camera lucida, an optical instrument, to project the images on to his canvases. His compatriot Samuel van Hoogstraten (1627 – 1678), went a stage further with his three-dimensional peep-show boxes with interior scenes painted on the inside surfaces which look real when viewed through the spy-holes. The fall of light in the scenes corresponds to the actual fall of light on the interior of the box through the open sixth side thus reinforcing the illusion created by perspective. These boxes are perhaps the conceptual ancestors of Patrick Hughes' painted constructions. They rely on the active participation of the viewer and exploit our reflex response to visual stimuli. The knowledge that it is an illusion does not make it a less effective – if anything it makes it more enigmatic and thought-provoking as normal mechanisms for reading space are disrupted.

Like many young artists and poets of his generation, Hughes was inspired by the work of the European Surrealists. The 1950's and early 60's saw a revival of interest in Surrealist art, film and literature which became widely available for the first time. Hughes admired Paul Klee for his subversive wit, underlying geometry and experimental drawing, also Rene Magritte, for his exploration of the pictorial paradox – his way of laying bare the process of perception. In Magritte's work, *The Human Condition 1* (1933), we are confronted by a painting of an interior in which we see another painting of an interior on an easel depicting the implied view through the curtained window. It encapsulates the idea that we experience the world only via a system of elaborate constructs. Hughes says it is his desert island picture, but states "I don't particularly like what Magritte's paintings look like, I like what they think." (Interview with Murray McDonald, August

2003). Hughes shares the surrealist fascination with the absurd and oxymoronic, relishing Milton's description of the fires of Hell as: "No light, but rather darkness visible." (Paradise Lost, Book 1. 1, 61) Perhaps the equivalent of Meret Oppenheim's Fur Cup and Saucer (1937) is Hughes' *Circular Train* (1971) trapped in its funny, pointless gyrations.

Hughes' paradoxical paintings are visual one-liners designed to raise a smile and to question the immutable constants through which we form our view of the world – hard and soft, near and far, up and down, in and out. Each one challenges in turn: light becomes solid, interiors and exteriors interpenetrate, distant objects protrude disobediently into the viewer's space. In the screen-print, *Déjà Vu* (1976) the schematic image of the receding road is seen through what we assume to be a rear view mirror while the inner frame of the print becomes a windscreen. The correspondence of the two images implies motion as the white lines vanish into both horizons. In *Realistic Paint* (1977) the surface of the picture is cut away to expose the real painted wall behind it. The elliptical hole is given three-dimensional value by the lines of the floor boards – so we read it as a pool of paint seen from an oblique angle. They are jokes, but in the words of the Georgian satirist, Charles Churchill, "A joke is a very serious thing." (The Ghost, book 4). For Hughes, they are a means of analysing the way we think about the world. The famous rainbow works explore the realm of the paradox in a systematic way. The rainbow is taken through a series of permutations that contradict its nature. The cipher of prismatic light becomes a solid, casts a shadow, appears at night, enters rooms but its associations are so fixed that it retains its value as a signifier. Over one million of the rainbow cards were sold during the 1970's, integrating seamlessly into popular culture.

His discovery and development of reverse perspective gave Hughes an even more potent mechanism for loosening the grip of experience on the viewer's imagination. It relies on the fact that the human brain and eye are adapted during early childhood to apprehend space in terms of linear perspective – converging parallel lines imply recession and distant objects appear smaller. Reverse perspective exploits and simultaneously denies this learned response. The brain will persist in decoding the information in the customary way even though it knows the information is wrong. Hughes also uses painted cast shadow to underpin the illusion, creating convincing synthetic environments that ensnare the eye. A particularly elaborate example of this is seen in *Billy Bean's Silly Machine* (1995) where the interior appears to be lit from a light source in the adjacent room. He naturally favours the architectural themes which lend themselves to perspective manipulation – gallery interiors, libraries and high-rise buildings – familiar shapes and places which are ingrained in our consciousness. His use of panoramic landscapes, beautifully painted with atmospheric recession again reinforces the perception of actual space. In *Steel Sunflowers* (2003) the prison doors appear to be open (or closed) on a radiant Provencal landscape to present opposing visions of freedom and confinement. A similar conjunction of opposites occurs in *Nature and Culture* (2000) where the control panels are set against exquisitely detailed mountain scenery. Because they are slowly and partially revealed, the eye is compelled to explore these landscapes actively and urgently. Over the years, Hughes has gradually refined the geometric structure of the three-dimensional works to make them operate to maximum effect. The longer works of five or six projections fill the viewer's peripheral vision. Often, the content of the deserted libraries and galleries offer insights into the artist's own creative imagination – the books that have inspired him are on the shelves, the paintings on the walls. In *These Are a Few of My Favourite Things* (2003) he gives himself a mini-retrospective – a manifesto of his ideas.

There are no human figures in Hughes' paintings. They are like empty stage sets ready for us to enter and explore. Like Duchamp, Hughes believes that the observer is 50% of the art work. The viewer is empowered to interact with it and to explore its effects and implications in a direct way on a personal level. During the exhibition of his work in Birmingham in 2002, it was enlightening to see the visitors moving back and forth in front of the painted constructions in a kind of contemplative dance. The appeal of the works was not only visual but also intellectual and many visitors returned again and again to study them and left with their views of the world and its immutable rules subtly changed.

Ends.