

PREFACE

“What are exhibitions for?”

It’s a very childlike question, isn’t it. What are animals for? What is the potato for? We’re all card-carrying functionalists. Nevertheless, the question has battery life, if not for obtaining its answer, then for segregating our expectations about the form. Today with the opening of

, , , , , *Andrea Andersson*,

the fifth in a series of Ian Hamilton Finlay (1925–2006) exhibitions, we expect the form to hold our necks back against the blade of resolution.

Over the next year, a number of scholars, curators, and long term appreciators* will each go into Reed College’s Ian Hamilton Finlay collection and come out with a different account. Different minds, different experiences, and all we ask of any is its own validity. As for specifics, we will happily yield to the impartial: the hagiographic, the gushy, the academic, the minor, the un-edified, etc.

Why the elliptical?

Finlay is a great artist. But many artists are called “great.” The word is industrially farmed. In his case it meant greatly prolific, greatly contested, greatly provoked and greatly provoking. Finlay depends on who weighs the scales and how those scales are weighted. Something like that, sure. He was a stamina merchant. He was a concrete poet, and then he wasn’t. He was a printmaker, a sculptor, a gardener, and above all, he was a publisher, founding The Wild Hawthorn Press in 1961.

“Difficult,” is the word that people usually stick to him. Maybe the incline comes from the work’s quiet amplitude, or the way it says both less than you think it ought to and then suddenly more than you think you could ever be responsible for. No doubt, the work can impose linguistic and aesthetic distance, but if it does, it never seeks to do less than bring a particular person as close as possible. Over the course of the Press’s run, Finlay produced epic volubility in intimate ways; and handing it all over in one big go, just cold, feels clumsy. There are some artist’s whose work can be displayed in a smooth fashion, and then there are artists who bay in the box. Quantity limps his work, but if you get it gradually, well spaced, larded with silence, then the work is overpowering. You gotta wait, you know, and wait, and wait, and wait, and we just don’t do that sort of thing much—the world turns—who has time to wait between two exhibitions for just a little shade of aesthetic revelation?

We’re lucky. With some six hundred printed works and artist books, Reed College’s Ian Hamilton Finlay collection begins with the first Wild Hawthorn Press edition, *Canal Series 3* (1964), and ends with work from the tail of his life. The collection was acquired in 2006 through the efforts of Gerri Ondrizek and Gay Walker, without whose appreciation* this work would be out of reach.

*As much as the word appreciate is typically taken to mean to esteem, to find worth or excellence in, its foremost meaning, says the O.E.D., is to form an estimate of worth or quality, and, in so doing, to feel the full force of the thing before us. Such appreciation then demands scrutiny, compassion, and sometimes unflinching ruthlessness.

NOTES FOR LOOKING

Adorno, Theodor. “Enigmaticalness, Truth Content, Metaphysics,” in *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997): 128.

The need of artworks for interpretation, their need for the production of their truth content is the stigma of their constitutive deficiency. Artworks do not achieve what is objectively sought in them. The zone of indeterminacy between the unreachable and what has been realized constitutes their enigma. They have truth content and they do not have it.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: New Left Books, 1977): 178.

That which lies here in ruins, the highly significant fragment, the remnant, is in fact the finest material of baroque creation. For it is a common practice of the literature of the baroque to pile up fragments ceaselessly, without any strict idea of a goal, and to take the repetition of stereotypes for a process of intensification, in the unremitting expectation of a miracle.

Finlay, Ian Hamilton. “Spartan Defence: Ian Hamilton Finlay in Conversation with Peter Hill,” *Studio International* 196, No. 1004 (1984): 59–61.

Now, Saint-Just has been called “a thinker of actions” an action is indeed the basis of the S-J Vs: they have discovered themselves (their identity) in action; their leaders have merged in the course of action. There is no list of members, and there is no list of rules saying what an S-J V is. Yes, the S-J Vs are undoubtedly an organization in so far as it is the role of an organization to have aims and to have the capacity to carry them out in a deliberate way.

Fletcher, Angus. *Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967): 107.

The silences in allegory mean as much as the filled-in spaces.

Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1971): 89.

It is not often realized that all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas to the structure of poetic imagery.

Harmon, Maurice. *Austin Clarke, 1896–1974: A Critical Introduction* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1989): 43.

Their allegorical potential is explicit in ‘The Lost Heifer’ which, as its title indicates, is about Ireland.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Gladiolus_\(K34\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/HMS_Gladiolus_(K34)) accessed July 25, 1013.

...*Gladiolus* was detached to search for survivors. At 2200 she signaled she had picked up one man, and was continuing to search. This was her last contact; nothing more is known of her, and there were no survivors from either vessel. Another source speculates she was unstable due to her refit, and overturned during a violent manoeuvre, but the actual cause of her loss is unknown.

Howe, Susan. “The End of Art,” *Archives of America Art Journal* 14.4 (1974): 7.

Always there is a sense of Order and Repose. They tell us that to search for infinity inside simplicity will be to find simplicity alive with messages.

Joyce, James. *Ulysses* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986): 186.

A skiff, a crumpled throwaway, Elijah is coming, rode lightly down the Liffey, under Loopline bridge, shooting the rapids where water chafed around the bridgepiers, sailing eastward past hulls and anchorchains, between the Customhouse old dock and George’s quay.

Moira, Jeffrey. “Elements of Beauty: New Ground,” *The Glasgow Herald* (April 29, 2004).

These days the work is taking a further turn with materials like cloth, paper and enamel to create distinctive hybrids between traditional oil painting and collage. The Scottish landscape is still there, but a furrowed field or a sea cliff might be captured in a ragged cloth edge instead of painterly line, a sunset rendered in a piece of fraying canvas.

Olson, Charles. *Call Me Ishmael* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1947): 11.

It is geography at bottom, a hell of wide land from the beginning....

Owens, Craig. *Beyond Recognition*, ed., Scott Bryson, Barbara Kruger, Lynne Tillman, and Jane Weinstock. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992): 57.

This blatant disregard for aesthetic categories is nowhere more apparent than in the reciprocity, which allegory proposed between the visual and the verbal: words are often treated as purely visual phenomena, while visual images are offered as script to be deciphered.

Patrizio, Andrew. *Contemporary Sculpture in Scotland* (London: Craftsman House, 1999).

The dramatic northerly coastline provided not only driftwood used for cooking, heating, and furniture-making, it provides a

powerful focus for an imagined narrative based on the lives of those who first made boats who went to sea to fish or travel. The evocative Point of Stoer, where the bothy is located, is very rocky, and a dangerous area for seafarers.

Quartermain, Peter. “Thinking with the Poem,” *Jacket* 30 (July 2006), <http://jacketmagazine.com/30/z-quartermain.html> accessed July 15, 2013.

In 1962 Ian Hamilton Finlay wondered how serious Zukofsky was in sending his poem “The” for Finlay to publish in the sixth issue of *Poor. Old. Tired. Horse.* (May 1963). He was puzzled and dubious.

THE

The desire of towing (CSP 232)

...Zukofsky explained to Finlay that he’d been thinking of tugboats, which tow very seriously; and he pointed out that none of the vowels in the poem repeat....

Richardson, Craig. *Scottish Art Since 1960: Historical Reflections and Contemporary Overviews* (London: Ashgate, 2011): 166.

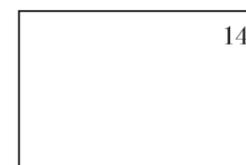
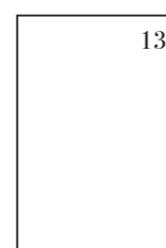
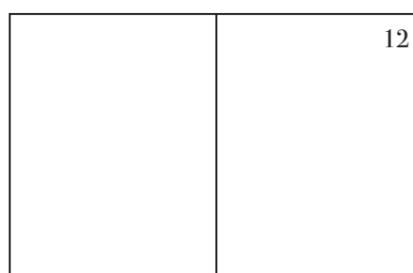
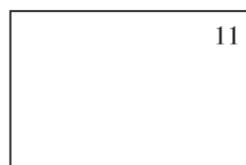
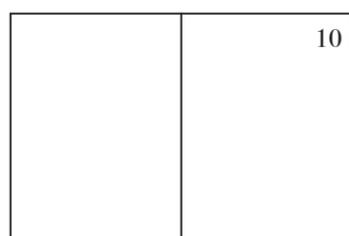
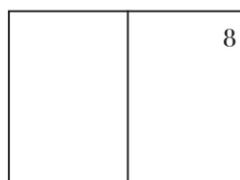
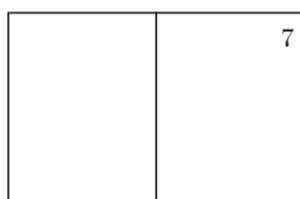
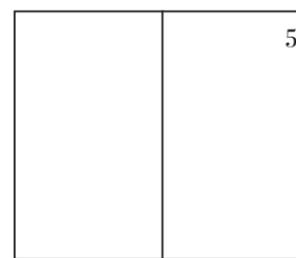
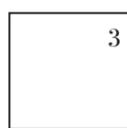
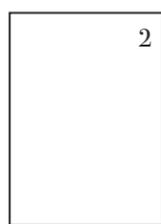
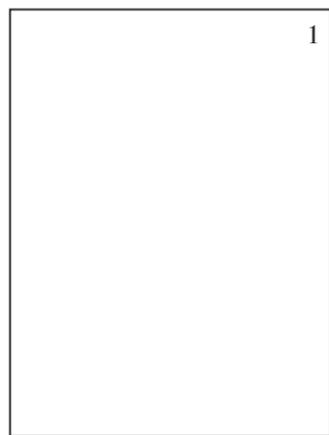
The irrelevant theme of the exhibition hinged on its title and was a long-winded reference to Scotland’s Venetian connections and did little to contextualise the artists’ work in meaningful ways. Nor was it meant to.

Sprague, Rosamond Kent. “Parmenides’ Sail and Dionysodorus’ Ox,” *Phronesis* Vol. 12, No. 2 (1967): 98.

And, further, as I do not believe Plato to have been shaken by the objections of a Dionysodorus, neither do I believe him to have been shaken by those of a Parmenides.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C.K. Ogden, intro. Bertrand Russell (London and New York: Routledge, 1988): 189.

My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them... then he sees the world rightly.



IAN HAMILTON FINLAY PRINTS on show

Case 1

- 1 Two Visions from *The Saint-Just Vigilantes* , 1987
- 2 Echoes series: TT 117, 1996
- 3 For lemon read Zulu, 1998
- 4 Echoes Series: After LZ, 1996
- 5 Spread from *5 x I*, 1999

Case 2

- 6 Tidings: the collected, 1998
- 7 Spread from *Interpretations in Hegel*, 1984
- 8 Magic Vessel, spread from *Jibs*, 1972
- 9 Spread from *The Olson Excerpts*, 1971
- 10 Homage to Christopher Wood, a spread in *Painting by numbers*, 1997
- 11 21 Centimetres, 1996
- 12 2 Examples, 1991
- 13 A Sail in Plato (Parmenides dialogue), 1995
- 14 The Wanderings of Ulysses, 1997

Library

- 15 Line Boats, spread from *Honey by the Water*, 1973