

Hello, my name is Richard Wathen. We're here at MOSTYN in Llandudno at the opening of my new show called 'New Eyes Every Time'. The show consists of nine paintings: two from 2019 and all the rest from 2020.

I think I focus generally on these works wanting to, in a way, simplify my practice. To make the paintings more pared down and reduced almost to their essence, and placing the figures in a kind of non-space, certainly not a kind of recognised landscape.

The painting here I was talking earlier about – the large painting – previously had been a scene, a kind of recognised bathers' scene, but I just realised that they wouldn't function particularly well with the other works; where you've got this, kind of minimalist aesthetic, the kind of block, almost the non-space. And so it just had to become what it is now really, just so that it could work with the others. But that, it's again it's just that thing of not leaving the work sort of open to interpretation. There's no definite; you can't pin it down I suppose.

I've always been interested in the timeless, or the kind of slowness of painting. So that things reveal themselves, both to me and... That's partly what the title is referring to. So I discover things new all the time but, hopefully, the viewer will as well.

When I was back in art school, I was making predominantly abstract work and I think the work that I was most inspired by was the abstract expressionists, and later, probably more importantly, I'd say the work of Philip Guston. And so, in a way, the idea of making portraits was not something I had ever really considered. And then I think probably around 2002/2003, I don't know, I'm not really sure why, I ended up making a painting of Frankenstein's monster.

And I think I was just I was interested in the notion of the kind of things being brought together – the construct. And suddenly, as soon as I made this painting, I just knew that was the right way to go. And certainly the relationship that a viewer has with a portrait within a gallery, for me anyway, I'm always drawn to the..., it was almost like the kind of contact, the face always draws me in. So like I say it's not.. I don't ever see them as... I'm not interested in making a portrait of somebody. It's more I'm interested in the nuances of being alive, fragility, vulnerability. And a lot of it stems from autobiographical references I think, and that's not something that I necessarily want the viewer to be forced with, but it allows me an opening or a way into the work, I suppose.

Certainly, the imagery that I use is very varied, a lot of sourcing imagery online, old books. And it's something I really love doing. It's almost allowing chance to... You find an image here or an advert there from the 70s or something, and then there's a sort of melting pot in a way, over time. And so I will attach this image to that film, or that memory and so it's just a case of things, somehow, finding maybe three or four elements that seem to make sense as an idea for a painting in a way. But like I say it's very intuitive, and I'm quite happy to rely on that as a good way to start. It doesn't mean to say that they stay like that. They will often change quite a lot during the making. And I think a part of the reason the works take so long to make is purely due to... because I mean you can see in terms of the actual finished painting then there's nothing there to suggest that there's months and months' worth of work. But I think, certainly if you were to x-ray any of them, there's numerous other pictures underneath and that's where the time is spent really. And I quite like allowing the work to

lead me in a way, and to almost accept that there's a sort of point that you almost find within the work that you reach, and then you kind of then: all right that's it, I know where it's going now.

But that could be straight away so, I mean, funnily enough, this, the painting over here was the last one I started but actually was the first one to be finished, because it resolved itself very quickly luckily.

I always work on more than one, I very rarely ever work on one at a time. I quite like building them slowly over time. And there's something I've really enjoyed with these works, as I mentioned earlier in terms of emptying out, is also allowing the work to breathe a lot more, and not be so refined, and just accepting of the flower just being, an initially a kind of plot for me – that was where the flower would be – or something, but actually I don't think it needs it, needs any more work than that, so that's that and I feel kind of good with that actually.