

**Conversation between Caragh Thuring and Maria do Carmo M. P. de Pontes in occasion of Question Centre  
London, July 2016**

Maria de Pontes:

When did you start to paint pyramids and volcanoes, two triangular shapes that are recurrent within your canvases, often one morphing into the other? I am interested in the re-enactment dimension that lies in there, knowing that you collect gouache paintings of volcanoes. Yet rather than following the well-known path of 'the artist as a collector/ the artwork as a combination of found objects', you re-imagine these in your work, each time anew.

Caragh Thuring:

I'm not exactly sure when I started drawing the pyramid volcano hybrids.

When I began painting again I was terrified and had no idea what to do. I enjoyed drawing volcano cross sections in geography lessons at school and so my first painting was an imaginative version.

The volcano is a thrilling example of what lies beyond the immediately obvious, an aspect that drives all of my work. A pyramid is roughly the same shape and material as a volcano but manmade. Bricks are made of the same stuff that forms the land and are in turn used to build new forms. I enjoy this two-way interference between humans and their environment.

The pyramid volcano defines this inextricable link.

Sometimes, when there are two drawn on the page it suits me to see them as people in a relationship or interacting. I don't often make drawings in preparation for other work and so these repeated drawings are like exercise. Over the years I notice they have changed and although I think I am always making more or less the same drawing they are actually slowly evolving and no two are the same.

MdP:

This idea of not being able to repeat an exact same gesture twice, that is very pertinent to painting and particularly to the kind of painting you do, is also true for ball sports in general – and of course, snooker. In fact, while researching for our project, you identified several points of contact between the snooker practice and the practice of an artist: the clinical approach, the fact that one movement leads to a whole new setting, (within painting) the shape of the table that emulates that of a canvas, the alternation of fruitful and dull moments... I was looking at Ronnie O'Sullivan, who is someone that you admire: it is extraordinary how some of his matches flow smoothly whereas others seem so stuck. And then there is that moment of epiphany, where apparently he grasps what needs to be done, stands up and do his magic. I guess this creative struggle is quite familiar to artists.

CT:

I have vaguely enjoyed watching snooker for years, but more seriously since watching Ronnie O'Sullivan. The flared birds eye view of the green table, framed by a plush carpet, sometimes in a lurid disrupting colour. The rolling coloured balls, clacking into each other and disappearing into the pockets combined with extreme changes of pace could be quite seductive.

As with anything, individual flair or a lateral approach enhances the task at hand and in snooker Ronnie O'Sullivan provides this intrigue for me.

One day when watching him play it struck me that his approach to the table appeared similar to how I might make work in the studio. Apart from the obvious frame limitations, there is always the chance to clear the table in one visit. Often this is thwarted by the opponent who then pushes the balls into a different configuration.

A rare clear run or the more often messy frame, for me parallels the business of making a painting. Occasionally a picture is made in one go, but most often, every thing put down forces another direction or problem and therefore a back and forth negotiation to completion.

O'Sullivan is also either on or off, he doesn't play a plodding methodical game variously provided by most other players. Equally I'm not keen on laboured painting, it's about getting something across in the lightest way possible.

MdP:

On the other hand, the body of work that we are showing within *Question Centre* could be approached as a quest for the perfect repetition.

CT:

Indeed, but both the fake paintings and the film of Hurricane Higgins make clear nothing has the exact same outcome regardless of intent. There are so many factors that disrupt.

MdP:

I am fascinated by titles, and curious about how you come up with yours. I was reading Luis Buñuel's *My Last Sigh*, where he tells about the process of coming up with the title for *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* – a fantastic film by 1972 that we considered showing in relation to your work – where he says, 'In my search for titles, I've always tried to follow the old surrealist trick of finding a totally unexpected word or group of words which opens up a new perspective on a painting or a book<sup>1</sup>'. Then there is of course someone like Lawrence Weiner – whom we also considered showing, the piece *TO SEE AND BE SEEN* – who makes the naming process very straightforward, since the work and its title are the same.

CT:

I try to be as straightforward as possible with them. It is often a description of what is in the painting or a word related to the content. Sometimes I pinch an already existent title or set of words because they fit.

In the same way I relate to O'Sullivan playing snooker by looking at it purely from my own perspective regardless of the accepted context, certain titles that may appear vague are for me intuitively fixed.

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<sup>1</sup> University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983 (originally published in 1982). P 248. Translated by Abigail Israel.