

| | | |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Penny Hallas, <i>Towpath Triptych 1,</i> 2018, oil on board, 122 x 257 cm (48 x 101")</p> | <p>initial analysis</p> | <p><i>Towpath Triptych 1</i> has a pendant <i>Towpath Triptych 2</i>, which has not been included in this analysis and will be a necessary part of the development of the analysis as it progresses.</p> |
| <p>There is a sense where the continuity of the workers' project is understood as a disruption and in need of a necessary critique by its visual presentation.</p> | <p>The overall visual effect is of a number of reports on the perceptions of the phenomena of lining a canal. The overlapping elements of the images, the water pipe, the worker's leg and the black painted section between the centre and the right all assist to visually combine the three panels into a singular experience.</p> | <p>There is an enhancing visual passage of grey-blues from the lower left slats to the centre concrete to the brighter blue wet sheet in the top right.</p> |
| <p>In the left hand section a pipe discharges water, draining the canal ready for lining. Behind the pipe a worker dressed in pale green-yellow clothing with a white helmet with a black strap across its front. The pipe is attached to a pump depicted in the centre section. The connection and entrance to a larger pipe on the lower right shows a black neoprene ring as part of its compression connection. On the left, part of a red frame and part of a wooden one and some grey slats or shadows from slats on the ground. The overall structure is that of framing, breakage of frames and the visual interruption of frames.</p> | <p>The centre panel shows the pump with the water inlet and outlet pipes. To the right of this a worker in orange and black protective clothing bends to fulfil part of the required work. The figure's feet are in newly laid concrete represented in grey paint. To the left and corner a circular form painted in magenta with a green pipe across it.</p>  <p>The strength of the work is sustained by the organisation of the structures and the disruption of those shapes. This is a clarity achieved through breakage of completion and necessary interruption.</p> | <p>In the righthand section a prominent red framing with guard-railing configuration. Behind this structure a number of coloured foils, a green sheet over a purple layer, an ochre layer on top of the green. A black sheet in the background with blue overlapping sheet. Two grey timbers are at acute angles to the main frame. The leg of a worker from the centre panel connects the righthand panel to the centre using a similar graphic device to that of the painting of the water pipe, overlapping and thus connecting the two spaces. There is a clear comprehension of the multiple spacetime of events to give air and visual passage from the middle right bottom to the near left top via the interruption of the purple disc.</p> |
| <p>There is a displacement of the bucolic by the engineered basis.</p> | <p>The painting facture is achieved with a series of flourishes and considerable skill in terms of positive mark-making and use of colour, but also in terms of uncertainty and leaving some elements without conclusion.</p> | |
| <p>Notes: Detail already provided by Penny Hallas in the exhibition leaflet, could be usefully added as an addenda.</p> | <p>The painting was on exhibition at the Andrew Lamont Gallery, Brecon, from 5 October to 12th November 2018, as part of a large display of related works by Penny Hallas under the banner <i>CANALWORKS</i>. The display included a considerable assembly of materials all related to the work on the Monmouth & Brecon Canal at Llangattock over a two-year period. This environment included three videos (Pumping, Lining and Cement Pouring), thirteen large works on paper titled <i>Canalworks</i> and numbered 1-13 and a variety of paintings from the 27 part <i>Towpath Series</i>, 32 <i>Found</i> in a small formats on board, a complex set of 42 works on paper called <i>Theatre</i>, and a set titled <i>Operatives 1-3</i>.</p> | <p>The overall effect is to lift the viewer's spirits. This is partly done by the range of materials, the context of their interactions and the complexity of their relationships to the canal project and its operatives. But the overall lifting effect is to recognise the brilliance of the achievement, its frailty, lightness and more than anything else, its confident strength.</p> |

subsequent consideration

Towpath Triptych 1, with the context and knowledge of the workings on the canal provided by the exhibition, turns the process into a metonym for human activity on the earth. The engineers dig down, they drain, they seal off, they conceal, eventually they provide a pretence of calm and bucolic serenity. The pipes into the earth and from it, conceal what is extracted and what is dumped.

The visual analysis and presentation of pipes, wires, industrial nuts and connectors is part of the tool box developed by Penny Hallas in the development of her art. The viewer can experience a number of attentions, metaphoric and metonymic. The attentions engender reports of perceived phenomena and their associations with the negotiations between that which grows without attention and industrial activity, between a natural world and farming, or natural world and digging into it, between tools for human benefit and tools of destruction.

The visual interaction and articulation in the triptych draws from perceptions and give these structure, readability, connectedness. The aesthetic of this interaction is a multiple conversation, interference and exchange between concepts and functions, the interactions of the uncouth and ignorant deliberations with industrial finesse or engineering success. It is an engineering that relies on disruption displacement rearrangement imposition. The interactions with this context – the world of the canal, the tow path, the local communities and the complex of regional and international interfaces and interferences – are provided in the exhibition through the artefacts and frequently the artefacts are readdressed through the videoed recurrences, informed by the summary in the exhibition leaflet, and most of all, by the other artefacts in the environment of the gallery.

Towpath Triptych 1 becomes a catalyst for extended connectedness and debates about the interaction of human activities and the Earth. By catalyst I mean opportunity to act, encouragement to act, a demand for attention to what is going on. That is the metonymic aspect of the work and its aesthetic programme – it provides an ethics that takes a stand in the face of ambiguous activities or practices that suggest one activity in its displacement or destruction of the potential of another. The painting is uplifting in this regard – it gives the viewer air to breath again – it explores the complexity of the activity without pretension or demand in its refusal to summarise or fully cohere what the engineer and their corporate employers want it to appear as. The triptych provides a pivot among others to experience the larger gather of artefacts and layout and gives an impetus to see again these artefacts with a deeper comprehension.