



PRESS RELEASE

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**Exhibition Title: Richard Patterson: *The Kennington Drawings, 1988***

**Exhibition Dates: October 9 – November 13, 2021**

**Open House (artist will be in attendance): Saturday, October 9<sup>th</sup>, 4 – 8 pm**

Cris Worley Fine Arts is honored and privileged to announce, *The Kennington Drawings, 1988*, a solo exhibition of early drawings by renowned Young British Artist (YBA), Richard Patterson. This is the gallery's first solo exhibition with the artist. Born in the UK in 1963, Patterson graduated from Goldsmiths' College in 1986, and was soon after included in the canonical 1988 *Freeze* exhibition along with fifteen fellow artists including: Angela Bulloch, Ian Davenport, Angus Fairhurst, Anya Gallaccio, Sarah Lucas, Gary Hume, Simon Patterson, Stephan Park and Fiona Rae, organized by Damien Hirst in Surrey Docks, London. Considered a milestone, the Freeze exhibition was noted for its professionalism and high ambition level. Rigorously curated, well promoted and with an accompanying catalogue, this artist-organized exhibition set a new standard outside of the traditional gallery construct of the time. It represented not only refreshing dynamism, but a shift in power from the institutions to the artists which prepared the ground for the YBA decade which was to follow.

Richard Patterson was included in *Sensation: Young British Artists from the Saatchi Collection*, Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK; Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin, Germany; Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, USA (1997-00). Other notable exhibitions include *The Rowan Collection: Contemporary British & Irish Art*, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland (2002); *Painting Pictures*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Germany (2003); *Nexus Texas*, Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, Texas, USA (2007); *Attention to Detail*, curated by Chuck Close, the FLAG Art Foundation, New York, USA (2008) and *Size Does Matter*, curated by Shaquille O'Neal, the FLAG Art Foundation, New York, USA (2010). Patterson has had solo exhibitions at Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London (1997); James Cohan Gallery, New York, USA (1999 and 2002); Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, Texas, USA (2000), Timothy Taylor Gallery, London (2005, 2008, 2013, 2021); Timothy Taylor, New York (2018); the Goss-Michael Foundation, Dallas, USA (2009) and the FLAG Art Foundation, New York, USA (2014).

In the following conversation, Cris Worley and Richard Patterson discuss the significance of this early body of work.

**cris worley**

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Richard Patterson, *Kennington Drawing 4*, 1988, gouache and graphite on paper, 10h x 7w inches

**CW:** *The Kennington Drawings, 1988* is an exhibition of selected drawings from your sketchbooks produced within a couple of years after you graduated from Goldsmiths' College. You are known as an original Young British Artist (YBA), having exhibited in the historic Freeze exhibition organized by Damien Hirst and a selection of six drawings from this same sketchbook were shown there. What was going on for you, just after art school, in the time these drawings were being made?

**RP:** I was working at London's largest Film Studio that made feature films and pop promos (I swept floors, looked over extras, dismantled sets, painted the floors and cycloramas for blue screens etc – nothing creative – but it was a great environment to observe – the owners of the studios were allowing me to use a studio space there for almost nothing, where I'd try and paint in the evenings after work – but I wasn't finding paintings easy to make at the time. Meanwhile, I tended to draw on a much smaller scale in my apartment. I think the first year or two out of art school is tough for most art students – the main priority is just trying to stay alive and getting any art made at all seemed like a bonus. I would have been 24 going on 25 at the time.



Richard Patterson, *Freeze drawings #1-6, 1988*.  
Page from "Richard Patterson" book by Ridinghouse. Photographed by Kevin Todora.

**CW:** Where does the title *The Kennington Drawings, 1988* originate and how is it important to this body of work?

**RP:** The title is very personal. I think perhaps for the American ear, Kennington sounds very like Kensington – and therefore kind of Austin Powers. Unfortunately, it was the opposite. Kennington is a district in South London that was close to where Goldsmiths' art department was originally located (it later moved to New Cross) Kennington is now a very desirable part of London, but back then it had a posh side and a pretty run down side that was close to the Elephant & Castle. I lived on the run down side in a somewhat rough ground floor flat in a tatty early Victorian terraced house near the tube station and next to a centuries old church that had been half flattened during the Blitz.

My artist brother, Simon, and I both lived in the flat and shared a bedroom. If you've seen John Schlesinger's *Midnight Cowboy*, and you know Ratso's place – well, it wasn't quite that bad, but Simon and I would reenact parts of that movie in order to make it all feel OK. In truth, it was similar to the apartment in the Bruce Robinson's film, *Withnail and I* – only not so big. When I first had some success as a painter and had been taken on by Anthony d'Offay, I made a large-scale painting of the final scene from *Midnight Cowboy* – the scene on the bus when Joe Buck (Jon Voight) realizes Ratso (Dustin Hoffman) has died en route to their escape from the misery of New York to Florida. Simon is blond – so he got to be Joe Buck. I'm Ratso. The painting was actually a tragi-comic self-portrait of our early struggle as artists trying to break out of the destitution of our Kennington flat and break into the art world. I called the painting, therefore, *The Kennington Years* – which sounds grand because the painting was grand – but about destitution, and of course also about love. Simon and I now agree (in an Ed Ruscha-ish way) that Kennington is not a place, but a verb.



Richard Patterson, *Young Minotaur*, 1997, collection of Amanda and Glenn Fuhrman, and *The Kennington Years*, 2001, collection of Katie and Felix Robyns. *I'm Walking Here*, curated by Toby Kamps, FLAG Art Foundation, New York, NY, 2014. Photography by Genevieve Hanson

So – this entire set of drawings along with other similar ones – were made in the living room in Kennington, sitting on my old beaten-up green Chesterfield sofa which I'd bought from a junk shop on Camberwell New Road for £25 in 1987. Along with my brother's camera equipment, it was the only object of any cultural value in the flat.

The drawings are all pencil and gouache and I'd often make four or five at a time using a dinner plate for a palette.

The title, *The Kennington Drawings*, is retrospectively applied. It sounds fancy— Like the Volland Suite, or something, but it’s not meant to be - they’re named such simply because it locates them in a place and a time that for decades is a time I wanted to forget, but in a sense now feels like a kind of a touchstone. Sly Stone of Sly and the Family Stone has a lyric: “There’s a rhythm when you don’t know what you’re doing.” It’s a deceptive and perceptive comment, because in truth, if you really don’t know what you’re doing, then you don’t know what you’re doing. I think what he means is, when you’re in this state, you fall back onto intuition and other things guide you. While it can be an uncomfortable state, it’s also a state where you’re perhaps most likely to be creative.

**CW: Looking at this work now, do you find seeds for inspiration in the later works?**

RP: Maybe. I mean to say, not specifically, but in terms of the spirit in which I made them, then yes definitely. There are one or two specific seeds, as it were. Among these there’s my sixth ever attempt at including my minotaur figure which I picked up in a WH Smiths stationers in Watford in about 1982, I think. The figure was in amongst a tray of various pencil erasers, but it was the only one of its kind and with no wrapper and it was as if it had just been left there by mistake. It was slightly grubby even when I bought it. I bought it because it just jumped out – like when people need to buy a puppy from a pet shop window. I held onto it somehow knowing it was a sort of talisman.



Richard Patterson, *Kennington Drawing 7*, 1988, gouache and graphite on paper, 7h x 10w inches

As I moved around and went to art school in London, I had few possessions, but I always knew to hang onto the minotaur. I made five small-scale paintings of it in different styles in my studio at Jacob St in about 1987, but none of them were of any use. I then made the small gouache drawing in this set featuring the figure four times over – suggesting the minotaur wasn’t a unique mythological creature but an actual ‘breed’. In this drawing, they could be bouncers, they could be a boy band, they could be brothers. I have three brothers, so I guess it was probably sub-consciously the Patterson brothers in a line. (FYI: None of us actually look



like this – none of us have horns). Later, in 1995 I finally made the first full-scale minotaur oil painting and have made several of them. In a broader way, the drawings were also about how to create a particular painting space by generating a unique language in each. Even from early on at Goldsmiths' I was unconvinced that art and painting needed to be falsely cloven between abstraction and figuration. So much 20<sup>th</sup> century figurative art was highly abstract, while abstract art often couldn't help but reference the figure or the issue of representation.

By the Spring of 1988 I'd seen a very astutely conceived exhibition by Anthony d'Offay titled, *The London Paintings*, featuring two strands of Gerhard Richter's painting practice. The exhibition comprised seven small realist landscapes featuring the English countryside, and fourteen large scale abstract paintings. The two sets of paintings were shown in separate rooms. It was the first time I'd seen an exhibition which showed simultaneous and apparently contravening sets of work by the same artist. It felt at the time that being an abstractionist was like having a committed belief – almost like a religion, while figuration was a separate one. You couldn't be both, just as you couldn't be both Catholic *and* Protestant. And yet here was Richter showing two sets of work that were apparently antithetical to each other and yet both were entirely sincere – not to mention brilliant. I actually can't remember the precise dates, but I think all of these drawings must have been made only a short time after the Richter show, since the *Freeze* show took place in the Summer of 1988 and six drawings from these sketch books were shown at *Freeze*. It's possible I was making the drawings concurrently or even before seeing the Richter show, and my drawings weren't a reaction to it. Nonetheless, there was a very specific narrative in the dialogue of painting at that time, which was whether painting had become exhausted and how was one to carry on. It did not seem like the stylistic free-for-all of today where we appear to be in a post-history moment.

Richter had been grappling with these questions for decades. When I saw his exhibition it was hugely optimistic since it suggested that heightened seriousness of endeavor – even if you were painting somewhat blind – was enough to carry you forward. The questions of whether something was good or bad, relevant, or not, you could leave to other people. The more pressing thing was to try and get something down – be it on paper or on canvas – and to be serious about it. (Which didn't mean abandoning humor)

It was a massive moment for me, seeing *The London Paintings* and how decisively and cleverly it was presented while at the same time the work felt alternatively slippery, graspable, but elusive. These days, perhaps, in our hyper post-post-modernist moment, this just seems like a matter of switching styles; but it was much more than this. For Richter, he was asking the question, what can a painting be? And, how do you make it compelling to the point that it is watertight.

At the age of 24, I wasn't anywhere near trying to make a painting that I felt was watertight. But drawing presented a certain honesty – like making a document or a message of intent. Like a vow, almost. Like when you sign your name on a certificate, or if you can't sign your name at the airport because you can't write (as I've once witnessed at DFW) they'll make you issue a thumb print in lieu of a signature. At this time, for me, drawing felt indelible and real. It didn't matter so much if it was “good” or “bad”, well-drawn or not, but that it was something rather than nothing. Within any narrative you establish, you begin to imply the things you're not going to say as well as the things you do say. A drawing has the license to be very open ended.

**CW: Do you continue to draw in your practice? Are your oil paintings derived from drawings or do you have other sources you work from?**

RP: Once I got taken on at d'Offay in 1994, I'd already established a way of painting that was very intensive and singular (in technique, not in content). Running up to that point, most of my thinking was done in conversation and proximity with fellow

artists, and more finally on paper - either drawing in the more conventional sense or conflating and composing ideas through collage. Some of this involved gouache and other paints and some dry drawing media, and a certain amount of found imagery which I might laser copy and distort a bit. Putting things together in this manner – often from a jumble of imagery on a large ten-foot work table – was how I brought ideas together and is what I would call ‘drawing’. Drawing is thinking, in this sense. But it’s also a type of happenstance.

Some of the most ‘creative’ moments came from making a mess over extended periods and then clearing or tidying my work table where there would be layers of stuff stacked on top of each other, and as I went looking for something that was underneath, I’d perhaps reveal two or three different scraps or images or whatever that had slid across each other and caught my eye – it might just be the colour, but more often it was the psychological dissonance of unlikely juxtapositions – bear in mind, this was before the days of personal computers and the internet. If something caught my eye like this, I’d rearrange it further, cut bits from it – maybe just glue it in place to capture whatever it was I’d just seen.



Richard Patterson, *Blue Minotaur*, 1996, oil on canvas, 82 x 123 inches. Collection of Amy and John Phelan.

The business of being creative, was more often when you weren’t trying to be creative – (it’s back to the Sly Stone thing). It’s more than just accident however, because you’ve already set up a situation where accidents become useful things. Much like improvising in jazz or something. You have to know your scales, you can’t just freeform with no structure at all. If you know the entire circle of fifths in music and you know how to modulate, you can improvise until the cows come home. This is how Bach could be so prolific because his speed of composing relied on incredible musical grounding (and a certain level of genius, of course). This is why Miles Davis once accused John Coltrane of taking way too long on his solos, because Coltrane was the consummate musician.

Coltrane famously replied to Davis once that it was impossible to know how to end or resolve one of his solos, because each passage took him somewhere else – to which Davis, replied, “You just take the damned horn out of your mouth!” Music did and does mean a great deal to me. There are many aspects of these early drawings that directly relate to the business of learning to play an instrument and/or improvising music. Particularly in relation to breathing (in woodwind and singing) and in terms of rhythm in general.

I draw my paintings out very carefully. These are not drawings, per se, but more engineering diagrams. I learned early on with the paintings I became known for, that even when you’re painting a blurry section, you have to know exactly where you are with it, so I make linear decisions, even in diaphanous blurred sections of paintings. The more precise the drawing, the less mistakes get made during the painting procedure. The first couple of paintings I made in my professional career – like the first *Motocrosser*, were gridded out with a very large-scale grid and then drawn by eye – but somewhat loosely. Within a few paintings I’d reduced the scale of the grid and was taking measurements. (To be clear, I don’t paint one box at a time, like Chuck Close did – some people seem to think that’s what starting with a grid implies.) It’s merely to make sure that the drawing is where it needs to be. Say I’m painting the arm of a figure, I’m following my drawing not the grid – I start on one end, say at the shoulder, and paint in the darkest section of the shadow and work through each colour to create the form. There is no layering and I’m not doing the pre-digital pixel Chuck Close method. I paint using the same method that you would have to use if you were painting into wet plaster whereby each part has to be correct and finished before you move on to the adjacent section because revisions aren’t possible. It’s not a flexible method of painting. A la prima, I guess they call it.



Richard Patterson with *Dr. Soaper*, 2016 in his studio, Dallas, TX

Once you start the painting, the drawing is gone as is the grid, and if you go wrong, you’re a bit lost. So better to be as accurate as possible right from the start. You’re always reiterating the drawing as you paint with the paint, but at a certain point you’re painting, not drawing. Say I’m working on the mouth of a face at first I’m following the shapes in the drawing – I don’t do that “peinture” thing where I’m self-consciously ‘mark-making’. I’m simply filling in shapes to make form, trying not to leave marks at all, until it’s physiologically similar to a face, or more often to the image quality of the image that I’m evoking. I’m not really painting the face, per se, I’m painting the air in front of it and around it, or the light that falls on the object. The object in the painting is only there in order to establish distance between it and the viewer. The object is more often not the real subject of the painting. The painting is the subject. By the final stage its almost not even like painting, it’s like creating something that you know can’t be there, but seems to be there – which again, might not be the object, but an emotion – like yearning, loss, sexuality, or desire. Most of it is about edges. Where one thing ends and the next begins – which is of course, mostly infinite (at least in painting it is.)



**CW: This is the first time your drawings have been shown exclusively. Do you have plans to create a new body of drawings in the future?**

RP: Well, I showed a set of six drawings from this group at *Freeze* back in 1988 – and I’ve shown collaged drawings and things I’ve made in the computer (which I see as drawings) as parts of other shows. I don’t have immediate plans, but I think drawing is totally key. I want to get back to it. Get back to it on paper, I mean. I like its immediacy and it’s also less demanding than painting in so far as I don’t have to fight against drying times (I need things to stay as wet as possible for as long as possible - as the actress said to the bishop) Drawings are essentially far more abstract than paintings. Paintings are always clunky awkward things that you have to hang off nails in the wall.



Richard Patterson, *Kennington Drawing 10*, 1988, gouache and graphite on paper, 7h x 10w inches

If someone said, I’ll lend you some art out of the museum for your home for a while – what would you like, you can choose anything? I’d say, maybe some Cezanne drawings. Some Picasso drawings. This sort of thing. You can see the artist’s thoughts out loud, as it were.

They feel like windows into the soul and they’re the immediate workings. Drawings have a status way beyond their modest form. Actually, I’d take some Picasso paintings as well, if I’m being totally honest.

I need to get back to drawing. It might be the thing we’re most losing in our digital age. It’s similar to talking or writing – it’s immediate. Our culture is losing the ability to maintain discourse. Drawing is a type of discourse. It doesn’t have to be as formalized or complete as painting. It doesn’t have to say anything rational. It perhaps may have to be logical in some way, but logical and rational are two very different things. Drawing is for the most part a more open process than painting. Paintings are always meant to be finished and resolved even if they’re aesthetic is to look unfinished – they’re always finished in a fake unfinished sort of way. A drawing though... it can be everything and nothing all at once.