

**ROWAN BELCHER**

**33 RPM.**

Photographs: Rowan Belcher  
Text: Rowan Belcher and Allie Eagle  
Design: Rowan Belcher

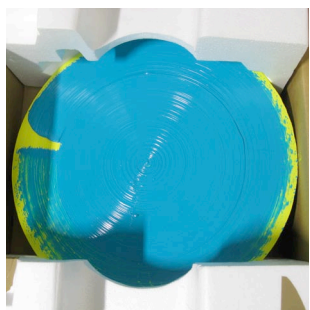
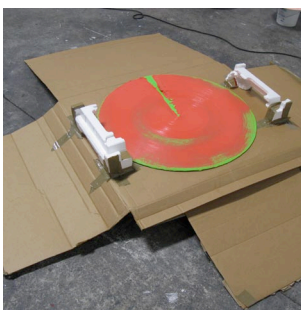
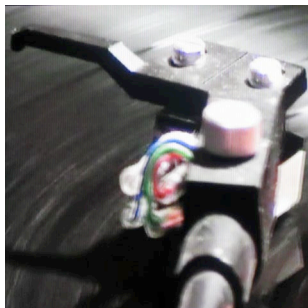
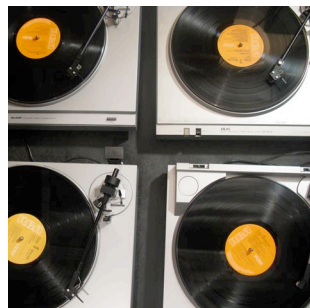
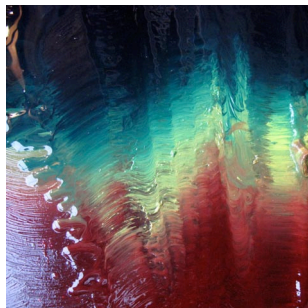
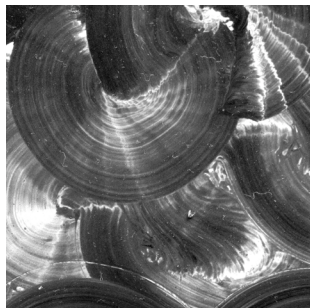
**Contact details.**

Rowan Belcher  
1 Stanley Road  
Te Harpara  
Gisborne 4010  
New Zealand

Phone 06 868 5715

Email. [belchers@xnet.co.nz](mailto:belchers@xnet.co.nz)

Blog site. Rowan Belcher 2009. <http://rowanbelcher.blogspot.com>



The following text is a conversation between the artist Allie Eagle at her mother's home in Otaki and Rowan Belcher in Gisborne. This has been largely made possible through emails, blogs, texts, phone calls and postal communication. This transcript remains true to the conversation, its style and content that took place.

A. Eagle (Personal Communication, November 11 - December 20, 2009).

AE. I read the Tate Triennial 09 discussion you sent me, about our daily lives consisting of journeys happening in a “chaotic and teeming universe”.

At this moment I am living in a rural coastal community, packing up my darling deceased Mum's estate. I am learning how to adjust to the latest version of 2010 Beta Microsoft, give someone a lift who wants me to pick up a food parcel from the local food bank, plus communicate with a colleague about an exhibition proposal; email you to find the good points of the day to talk with you about your masters show, teach texting to another middle aged friend in Tauramanui ... and hopefully, find time to take a walk at the end of emailing you this (and yes...the universe sometimes teems and chaos's! !)

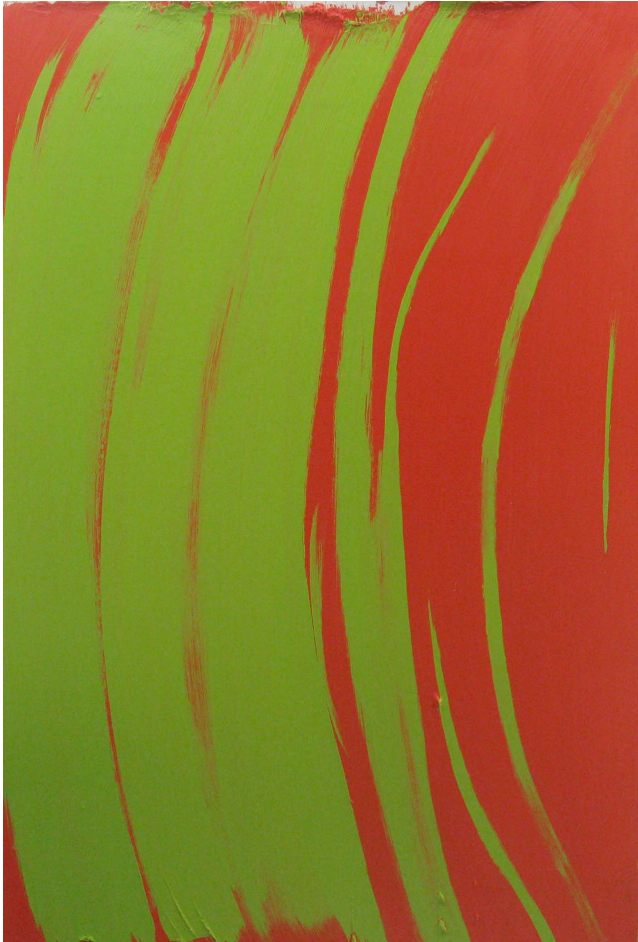
( Finding out what the main thing is and doing the main thing and remembering what the main thing is in this globalised state of culture is challenging and some might like to argue that doesn't matter if there is not a focused main thing that one does!)

But, when it comes to the academic moment of finalizing scripts for theses and catalogues and so on, then it ceases to matter how random the painter might get in making the “messy unformed embryonic objects”, and the process turns, at the point of starting to write about them, into a very focused method of giving a rationale and “object hood” to his/her creations so all the haphazardness starts to shape up.

Being at Art school to explore new perceptions that mix and match to and reconfigure with the old, is a special journey in itself especially if you have had the luxury of weaving amongst your peers and mentors, new notions of creativity and begun to invent new forms of communicating new fresh thought!

Access to limitless minds and ideas and imagery through multi-communications and, the shared experience and exploration of these notions is an important step in defining moments that bridge generations, space and time specific travel.

(Not always the easiest to translate back to our folk in our little sunny spots back home in whatever nook of the land we inhabit.)



Rowan, you have reconfigured your way of painting in this time of being at Whitecliffe and have totally overhauled your understanding and way of operating your work. I am interested in how this relates to the altermodern culture of Art schools and *Art Speak* and how this increased communication with art school peers/teachers and artists globally has tempered how you think and act as a painter.

But can we start at the very beginning Rowan? Traversing for a moment, between your recent formats for expression and communication (you have a blog spot up and running and you are painting on record turntables) ... what are some of the cultural landscapes that you have journeyed in?

RB. This is where the culture of music and expression that I experienced as a youth kicks in, and intertwined with that, what seemed like a sub-culture of radicals – the people, people loved to hate, like Yoko Ono for instance. I notice that where people leave comments about her on YouTube they still can't resist saying "she can't sing" (YouTube, 2009). This level of intolerance to difference was what most inspired me as a youth not to conform and to live on the fringe of my middle class Eurocentric culture. All I experienced of Yoko Ono was a radical artist with a fascinating background who performed and made art that made you think. Listening to Germaine Greer giving her *The Female Eunuch* lectures series in 1970 at Warwick University was also a transforming moment (Greer, G. 1970).

AE. So...How did that get you started? You grew up in the UK, You were around when some huge changes had just taken place in the art world and especially in Britain? This was a very iconoclastic time.

RB. Art school in the early seventies in the UK was full of radicals, people living on the fringe. David Hockney had reinvented painting again and the Royal College in London was the centre of the art school universe. Yes, we were even encouraged to burn work and teachers were there to paint, and anything *but* teach.

AE. That's right, the 60's Art School experience like the Bristol Art School riots and the down-tooling of art students from old academic ways affected how our art schools operated here in En Zed.

Tell me...Rothko's *Seagram Murals* at the Tate in 1970, how did his work affect you?

RB. Yeah, I went on a school trip to London in 1970 and walked into the room in the Tate Britain and there were the *Seagram Murals*, and particularly *Black on Maroon*, 1958 and as Simon Schama recalls, "... I went into the Tate Gallery and took a wrong, right turn and there they were, lying in wait. No it wasn't love at first site" (Schama, 2006, para. 1). I didn't know much about



Rothko then but these paintings were like something from a different universe. I didn't start to paint then but those paintings are as clear in my mind now as ever, they have stayed with me ever since.

AE. What was the effect on you?

RB. Rothko's work stood out like no other at the time to this young bare foot, velvet clad art student fresh out of middle class suburbia, and from then on I knew I wanted to be an artist and I was "the artist" but it wasn't until much later in the nineties that I seriously started to paint. Rothko's work, the sheer weight of these giant brown monoliths as I remember them (in fact they are superior rich deep cadmiums, reds and blacks), but the scale and impact of the mausoleum that the Rothko exhibition had become was overwhelming. Simon Schama and I both had crystallizing moments in the Tate Britain that year, Rothko's paint, painting tempered in me the desire to immerse myself further in the turgidity of their presence. Unlike Schama, I wanted to paint, he went to see the Francis Bacon show (1970).

AE. Funny how there is always a "moment" when people know that's their calling! Mine was at age 8 visiting Peter McIntyre's *Antarctic Exhibition* in Willis Street! Ha ha! Two very different generations of male artists eclipsing totally different artist persona's eh? (Parakowhai, C. 2007).

RB. Funny!

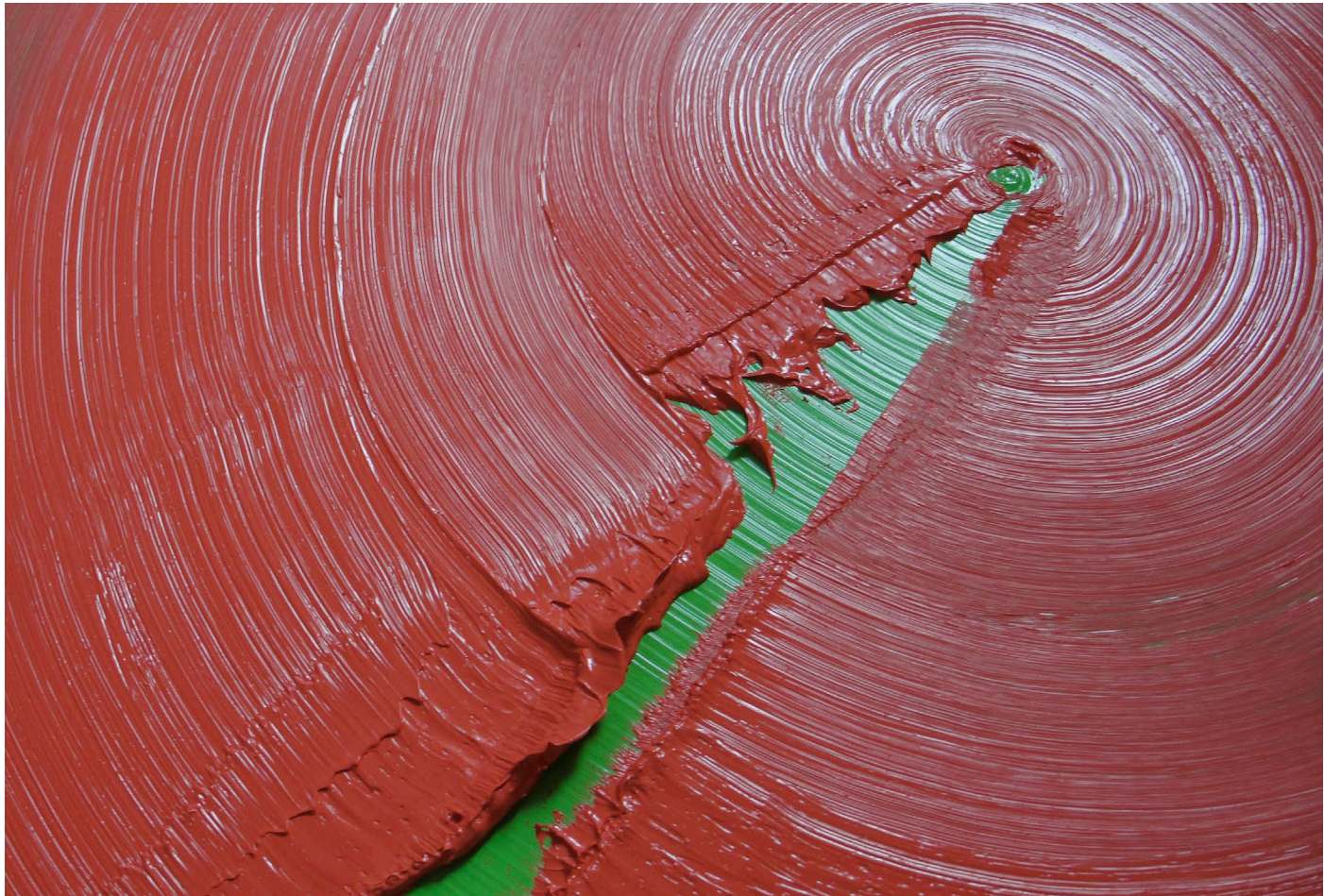
AE. Hey! There's a big genesis story to *Project #10* Rowan? How'd all of this come about?

RB. It's a big genesis story Allie. For me *Project #10* has been transforming not only my art practice but I have had a big shift personally so it's revolutionary. *Project #10* was the culmination of eighteen months of digging, digging within to really find out what was lingering under the surface. The axis of the project, which is the production of transportable painted surfaces, is motivated by performance of paint and sound, echoing the language of painting to incorporate flow or flux. The depth and breadth of the project is infinite as it develops strands of activity that can branch out via the internet to the global community (Belcher, R. 2009).

AE. And you are so out there! (blogging!) (You have become the consummate creative pathway maker for multiple format thinkers!) Expression and communication! Yay!

RB. Yes, blog technologically offers a communication platform to project! I have enjoyed making links between different





platforms such as Trade me and Facebook. Buying equipment for *Project #10* became possible over the net and communication on Facebook broadened my audience and I could link my friends to my blog.

AE. It's kind of audience development as we have never known it really eh? I would love to hear the *soundz* that you have been producing Rowan. Is your film out there on YouTube?

RB. No it's not yet Allie, living in Gisborne means slower Broadband which I think is holding me back from putting films on YouTube but I have one on my blog now. Rowanbelcher.blogspot.com. The *soundz* really have to be experienced first hand to have full impact (2009).

AE. Did you use house paint Rowan? And did u stick with oil or acrylic? Or both?

RB. Oh no! Not house paint, I'm afraid this is the real stuff.

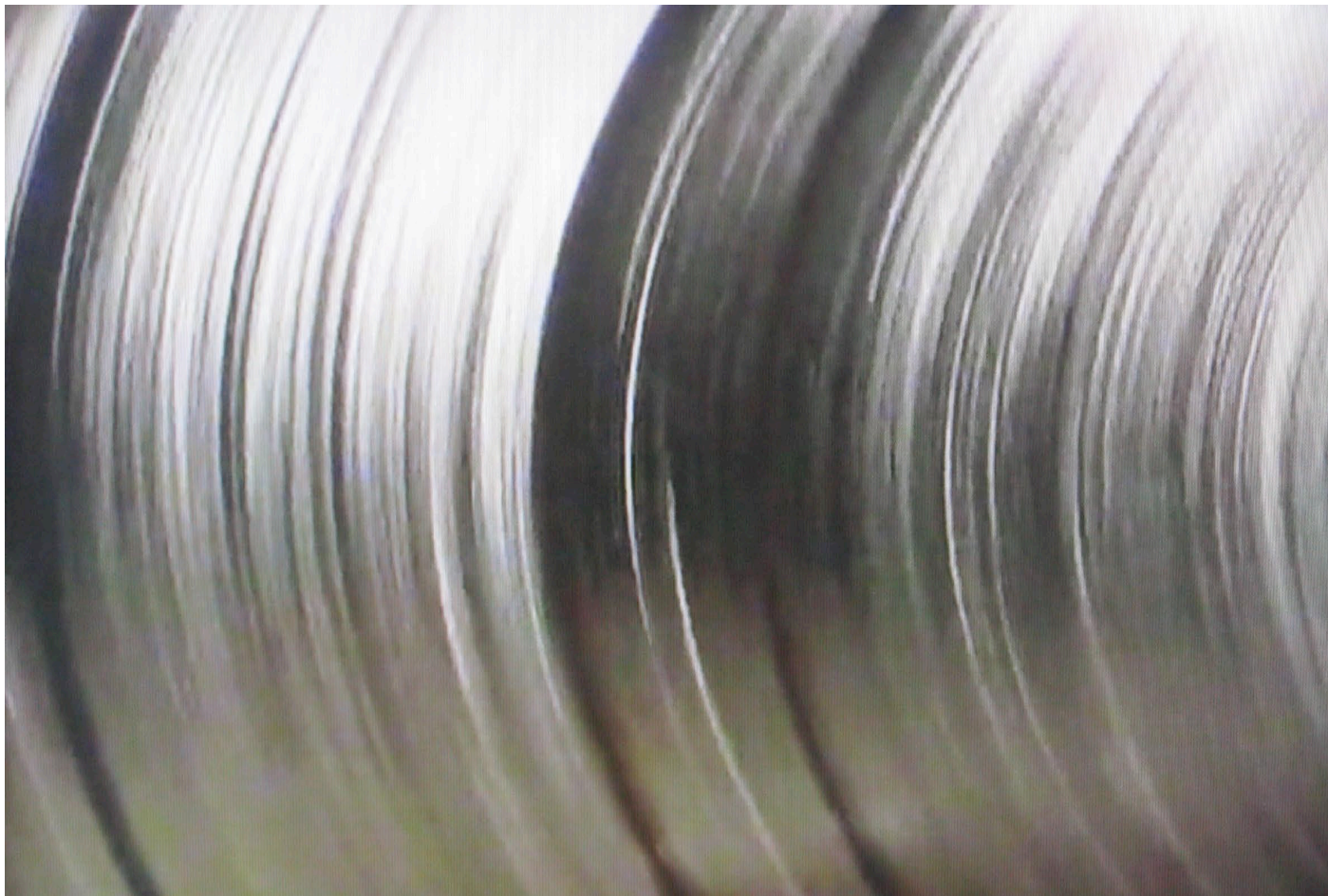
AE. Did u have sound going while you did all this?

RB. Yes, and since I have been painting on the potter's wheel I find my body contributes more to the quality of the application of the paint.

AE. I used to get so scratchy as an art teacher when *boyz* did this. Right at pack up time some kid would behind my back sellotaping paper onto the potter's wheels and give them a burl with the good Derivan paints! And here u are! Doing this so seriously! (What a spoilsport I was!)

RB. Yeah, um.... I was worried when I started that I would be producing results that might seem clichéd or too obviously potter's wheelish, but I just found the painting so satisfying particularly the continuous brush strokes and the durations implied by them.

Christian Marclay significantly affected the way I work. He uses sound and our reactions to it to form the basis of his investigation (Belcher, R. 2009. p. 28).



AE. Oh yeah the guy who dragged a guitar around the desert and filmed the sound of the gat dragging behind his jeep. You mention Hany Armanious . Tell me about him. The Egyptian who lives in Australia. He has a bit of a random thing going on too doesn't he? Reminds me a bit of the Catalan painter Tapies (Another generation though).

RB. I discovered Armanious and very much liked his site specific use of clay materials in sculpture and the potters wheel. However Bernard Frize had more impact on me because he continued to paint throughout the post modern period where some considered that painting may have died. Then I discovered Bourriaud's viatorisation of forms.

AE. This is an art speaky word Rowan; tell me how you are using it.

RB. Well, the Tate Triennial descriptor says: comes from *viatorisation*, "viator is derived from the Latin for travel or traveller. Artists' perspectives are simultaneously geographical, that is: mobility, displacement and cultural nomadism become methods of composition" (Belcher, 2009. p. 15)

AE. Hmm. Sounds like a thing "Boyd Webb" (Parakowhai, C. 2007) did for his pre-lim in our 6th form art class called *worms drowning in a puddle*. I think it was a bunch of coloured tissue paper cut up and layered into wallpaper paste glue. Left track marks. (Brassed me off! That it took him all of five minutes to do!) giggles)

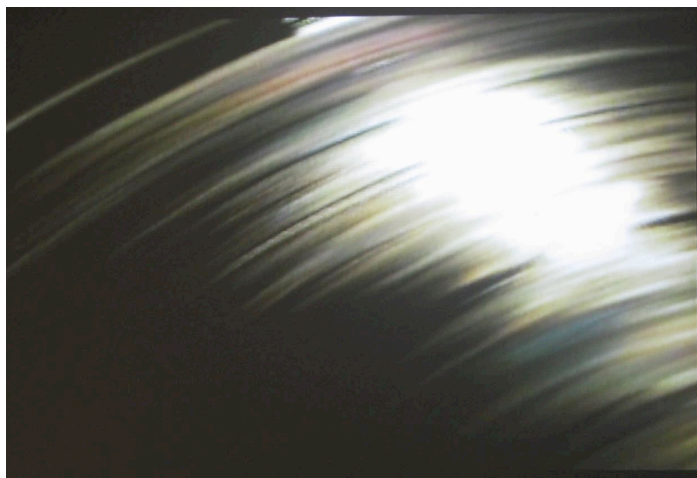
Your layered sounds, like layered paint is interesting. What happens when you run out of turntables to paint on?

RB. I don't actually paint on the turntables, Allie; they are instead a machinated platform for the display of painted vinyl. The potter's wheel is the machinery I use for the production of the work.

AE. Uh hu. Do you have loads of disks with paint on them? Do they have a stacked presence somewhere?

RB. There are many painted disks vinyl and board, disused vinyl is the perfect surface on which to paint and historical associations are easily implied (the b-side is left unpainted) this time the turntables are displayed in a stack.

The TV Set is another work that deals with the discarding of outdated technology as a stack of TV's the three dimensional nature of the TV sets themselves and the awkward discardedness of them produces a sensation reminiscent of the phenomenon of the information bubble that is this era.



Like the LP and the turntable they are interesting forms, the glass screens and the weight of them bring the *heterotemporal* quality back to the “confused mass” that is this generation. The digital manipulation of the layered sound also taken from the original vinyl brings Bourriaud’s *heterochronia* to the fore.

“Heterochronia, hetero – different or other, chronos – time the altermodern framework describes the works of artists that cannot be easily fixed to a specific time” (p.42).

A.E. Bourriaud had a big part to play in the Tate show didn’t he? As a theorist he collects these artists who he considers *Altermodernist*, and in his book *The Radicant* he emphasizes the new modernity is about lived experience. How have you been thinking about him that he resonates for you so much .....

R.B. Well, “art critic Lauren Palmor (2009) on her blog site ‘The Art Object’ introduces Nicolas Bourriaud as a critical inventor. He is the co-founder of the hip Palaise de Tokyo, (the new Museum of Modern Art) in Paris. He is responsible for the term ‘relational aesthetics’ which evolved into the new term ‘altermodern’ ...” (p. 14)

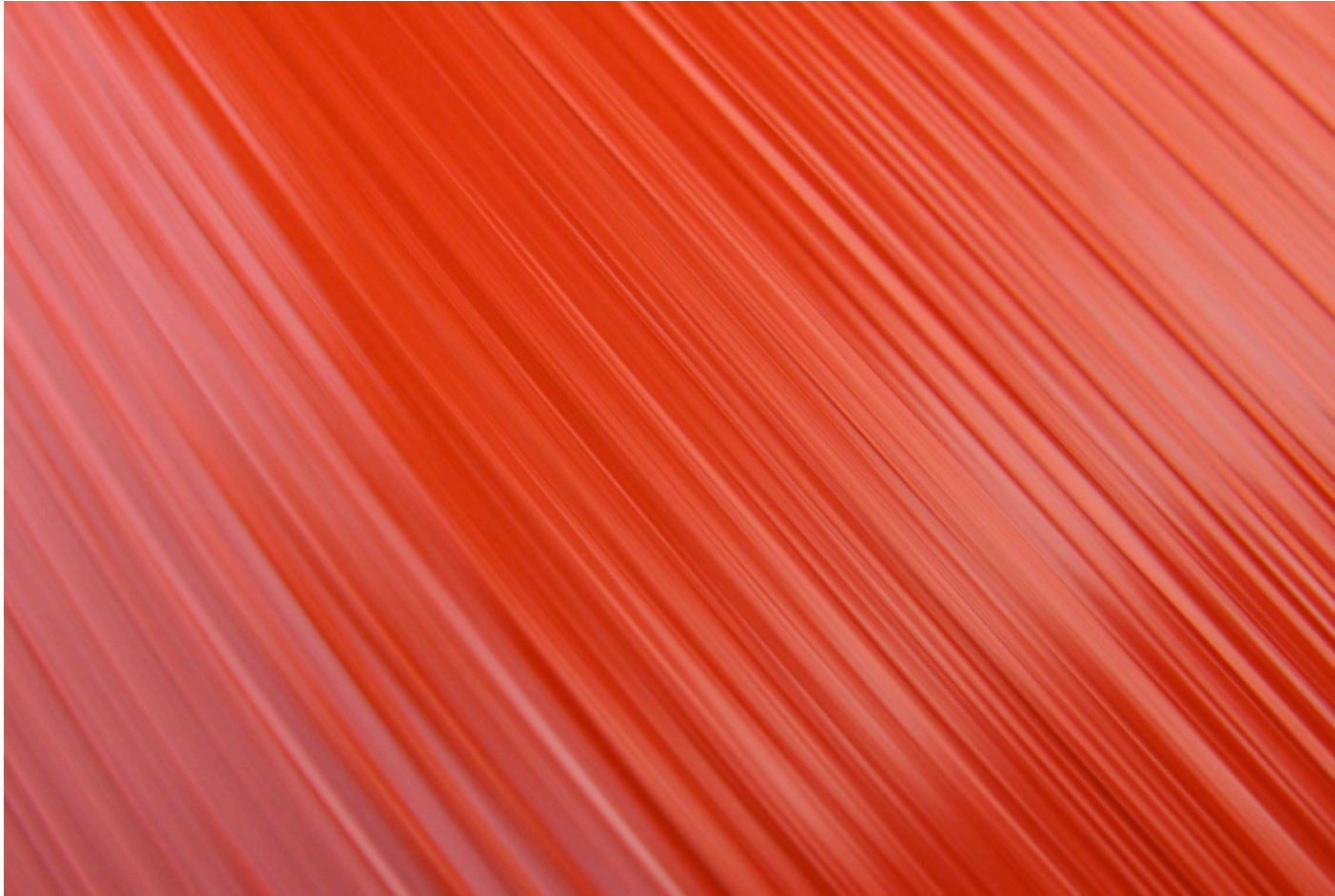
According to Bourriaud (2009), “[The] Altermodern, a dynamic term for this era, brings hope of a new modernity to act as an impetus or structural framework artists can use to formulate fresh positions from which to work” (Belcher, R. p. 11)

AE. Are your works part of a transporting plan? Are you, then, off somewhere? Did I pick up somewhere that there was a transport thing going on? “Mr Bourriaud says: *All modernity is vehicular and exchange based* (p. 22)

RB. Yes. These turntables can be transported easily, especially across borders both traditional geographical borders or borders within aesthetic conformity. According to Bourriaud,

Often works are not conceived as finished – they are clusters of thought and production, or points on a continuous line. Artists transform ideas or signs, they transport and translate them. They show their navigation between the signs ... one sign points to another, which in turn leads to another and so on” (p.22).

A.E. Hmm. Again! Is this a bit like Paul Klee taking a line for a walk in another generation? But um...placing a bit more on the “objecthood” of the “thing” you use. I mean there is something you are saying about the turntables too isn’t there and not just the movement in time of the paint?



R.B. I am driven by the performance of the paint and I have an ever increasing interest in bringing it further into space and time-specific formats. The symbolic transportation of paintings, artworks moving from one place to another and nomadic crossings of borders by the artist are analogous to Bourriaud's (2009) concepts "about viatorisation" (p. 42).

My work is an exploration of my inner being in relation to the environment and the world I inhabit. New project based activity examines my memory-based experiences along with nomadic activity both within the studio and from life experience (Belcher, R. 2009. p. 60).

A.E. I get the feeling that there is sense of relief and connectedness about your location in the Antipodes, as someone from the U.K. It is as if your focus has been re-honed by a sense of relationship that you get from Bourriaud and his "cohorts".

R.B. Yeah? I am a painter in exile living away from my country of origin and the concepts of the altermodern manifesto have considerably contributed to a new sense of belonging to a world culture rather than a diaspora and it is from that position that my displacement has been eased.

A.E. So tell me a bit now about the first time you heard Germaine Greer talk about her brand new book *The Female Eunuch* at Warwick University?

RB. L8Tr! Let's keep that for next blog eh?

My sincere gratitude to Allie Eagle for mentoring me during this period of study and for her kind contribution to this document.  
Rowan Belcher 2009.





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