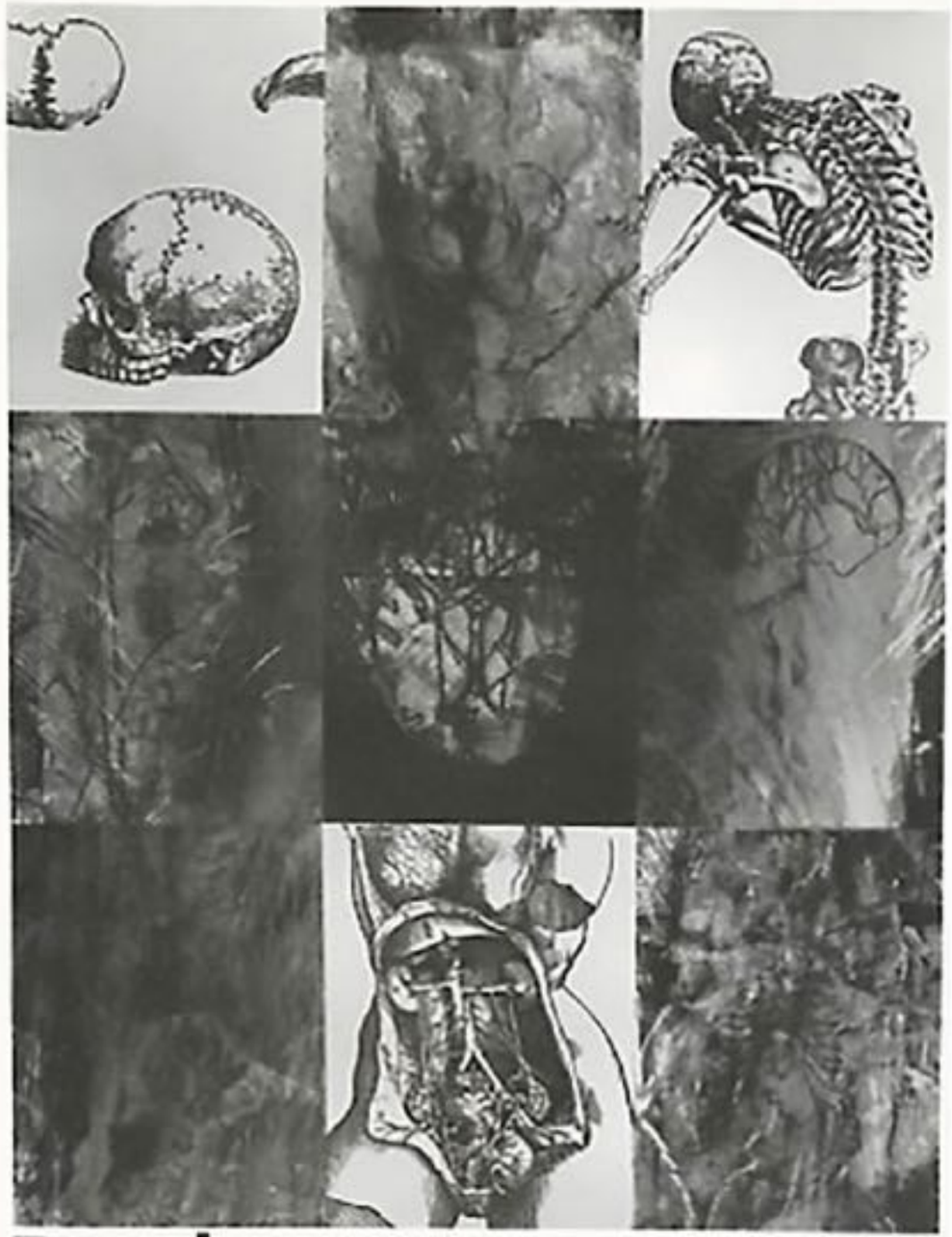

Barbara Freeman

This exhibition is for my mother Caroline Price. Special thanks to Mary and Bernard Loughlin; and to The Tyrone Guthrie Centre.

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DE HUMANI CORPORIS FABRICA

paintings and drawings
by
BARBARA FREEMAN

FOREWORD

Barbara Freeman's art is not abstract. These works are concrete expressions of sensations encrusted with the sort of detail which, for the artist, locates meaning in time and space, and for the viewer can create equivalent experience.

These works are made as a result of experience, not to describe it.

In attempting to make a memorial to her mother Barbara Freeman has moved a series of works which focus on the fragility of human life peeling away the surface of things and echoing the anatomical studies of Vesalius, which she used as a starting point.

Declan McGonagle
Orchard Gallery. Derry

Medulla Acrylic and tissue on canvas 164 x 124cm

Painting the Good Object

Fionna Barber

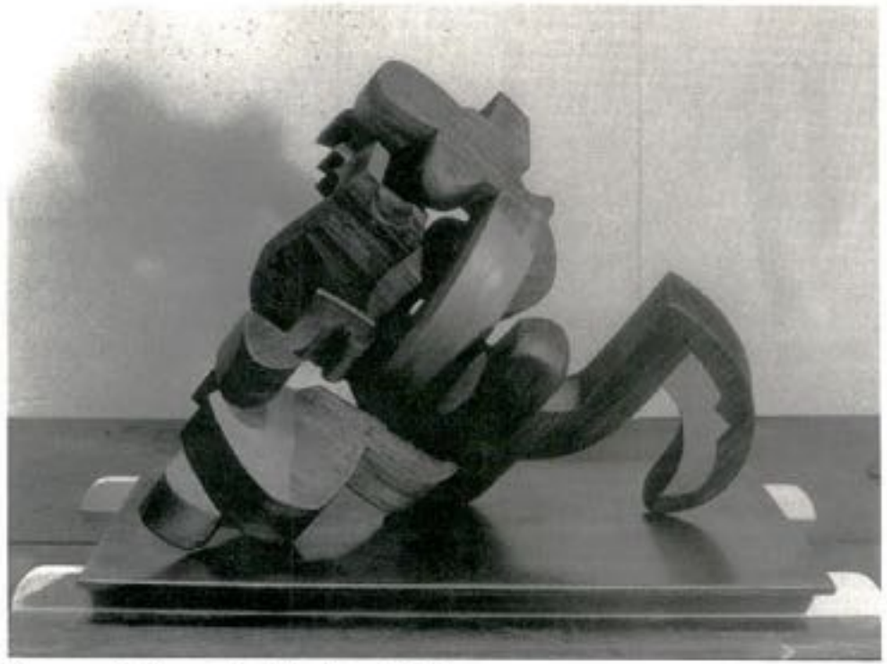
Introduction: On Women's Painting and The Modernist Body

Almost twenty years have elapsed since the emergence of a self-defined women's art movement in Britain and America, with its emphasis on figurative and didactic work allied to the priorities of a feminist revolutionary politics. One consequence of this, within the resultant debates among women painters, was relative marginalisation of modernist painting and sculpture as redundant despite the retrieval for feminist art histories of such key female figures as Hepwork, Krasner or Frankenthaler Large-scale abstraction also tended to be closely identified with the gender-specific ideology of the **male** artist and not without good reason, given the experience of many young female painters at art colleges both during the early Seventies and subsequently.

Critical attention has however recently been directed towards the involvement of women artists within non-figurative modes of representation. [1] Rather than being restrictive, abstract painting can be seen as opening up possibilities for women unavailable in figuration, where by comparison the production of meaning appears closely determined. The initial impulse a memory, emotion or specific motif thus becomes displaced through an emphasis on the language of representation, the dynamics of paint on a flat surface. Barbara Freeman is one such artist who welcomes the freedom afforded by such lack of fixity in her work, seeing the very lack of precise definition of working modes as also connected to gender·

I'm not even happy with the distinction between abstraction and figuration. I feel there is a great kind of flow that goes backwards and forwards, and I would have thought that's a feminine thing the discomfort with very precise categories. [2]

Yet to talk of the interrelationships of paint on a supporting plane clearly reinvokes the discourse of modernism, which has tended to be reconstituted as the opposite of feminism. Freeman perceives her relationship to both of these as highly problematic. Living in Yorkshire during the late 1970s she felt very much on the periphery of feminist debates on painting. Partly this was due to family commitments and the fact that she was older than the majority of feminist artists whom she met; but more importantly she felt that the didacticism which she saw within feminist art was too restrictive, in that it tended to ignore the languages of art or any degree of artistic autonomy Freeman's work at this time was in a variety of media including carved wood sculpture, such as a series of **Sawpieces** (1979-81) which (among other things) demonstrated a particular concern for the properties of materials themselves. Yet Freeman's position with regard to modernism has not been straightforward either On one hand she has a great admiration for the work of Rothko or Stella; on the other her distrust of categories extends to the rigid codification of modernist painting within critical writings, epitomised by the position of Clement Greenberg. Modernist criticism furthermore, in privileging the concerns of technical and formal autonomy, simultaneously evacuates from the painting any reference to the importance of subject matter including the personal history of the artist. Yet it is within such autobiographical concerns that the project for this exhibition has been initiated.



Escapement iroko, part painted blue. Base 110 x 50cm.

Painting and Experience

In the summer of 1987 the artist's mother died of kidney failure at home in her London council flat. Barbara Freeman had nursed her through the last illness, tending to all her physical needs; the relationship as a result became the opposite to that at the start of life between the small infant and her mother. Indeed not only had the daughter taken on the role of nurturer but as a painter and photographer she also had the power to represent that relationship visually. Freeman took many photographs of her mother at this time; afterwards they became one of the sources for a body of work conceived and growing through the process of mourning. Yet despite the value of all of this work as part of a necessary adjustment to loss, it is clear that these paintings, drawings and photographs cannot be reduced to a therapeutic function alone; rather they constitute a substantial oeuvre which engages with major concerns particularly of the representation of the relationship to the maternal body within non-naturalistic means.

In the photoworks the image of the mother is always seen partially; not wanting to seem intrusive, Freeman had photographed only her face and hands. Negatives are often superimposed, reversed, drawn or scratched over. Later works in the series also sometimes include reproduced portions of the drawings or photographed parts of

Photowork from A Manhattan Notebook 37 x 50cm.

the artist's own body; however the working of the surface of the image helps to disguise the origins of different components. Sometimes they become almost indistinguishable. Freeman had used similar processes in her **Manhattan Notebook** series (1987), where specific references to location have become eroded through the combination of different images and working methods.

During 1988 Freeman also began to work on the series of paintings and drawings which largely superceded the photoworks. At the basis of paintings such as **Sacrum** or **Palmar** are very precise memories: the laying of the mother's head on the pillow or her occasional words. These memories tended to be not visual but verbal, or the memory of a bodily sensation such as washing or brushing hair. The initial highly specific recollection the artist has described as triggering *"a flood of memories (...) which go to where I was small and looked after by her"* Painting itself thus becomes a dynamic process of searching for equivalents to sensation and emotion within a non-figurative mode of representation.

The drawings involve similar processes in their degree of experimentation. here the surface is also fabricated through a layering of several sheets of Japanese paper, the irregular shapes and variable thicknesses providing an almost arbitrary effect; Freeman particularly values the sensuality of tactile involvement with the process of manufacture. The paper, torn, shaped and layered, becomes translucent like thin tissue or a skin containing the body, thus reinforcing the sense of **interiority** so crucial to this work. Yet the skin is also under scrutiny itself as a site of organic processes. **In Drawing No.I**, for instance, the heavily worked surface of the paper is wrinkled and cracked as in the process of aging and decay within the human body. The drawings often include delineation with charcoal or pencil, but this is rarely specific enough to identify the organ to which it may refer. **Drawing No.II** conveys a sense of density which may be associated with the inside of the skull due to the heavily worked medium; yet the eye is brought back to the surface again by the jagged lines which traverse the image, similar to the function of the red streaks over the blue pictorial depths of the large painting **Iris**. Both of these instances suggest the motor impulses of neural activity, physiological processes of which we are obviously not conscious. Here however they are singled out and given a momentary fixity

Barbara Freeman particularly values what she terms as an *"intuitive"* method of working, in the sense that the act is not necessarily understood by the artist at the time but is underpinned by unconscious associations. The use of tracing in the drawings is a clear example of this. The artist had initially intended using photocopies from Vesalius, but due to circumstances had to trace the image instead; in the act, she remembered how as a child she had frequently traced images in order to *"find out the form of things"* Like the tracings the names of the paintings are also derived from Vesalius both function as catalysts for the viewer's engagement with the layering of the work. Freeman has frequently stated her distrust of description as a representational system, but only when it becomes a rigid codification of signs. Within her own work description functions differently as one component within a dynamic pictorial practice which hinges on the evocation of meaning. The finished work thus is a product of gradual metamorphosis of an initial stimulus through a series of painterly equivalents the calligraphic sweep of black in **Pleura,** or the use of paint-dredged tissue on the surface of many of these works. Clearly there are similarities with Freud's analysis of the formation of dreams, whereby what is remembered on waking is the product of any number of impulses and desires in the unconscious mind. In the dreamwork these are subject to processes of displacement and condensation whereby initial emotions and impulses become repressed and transformed; the result finding its way into consciousness thus stands in for the dynamic interplay and contradiction of forces within the unconscious.

Drawing I 76 x 76cm

Sacrum Acrylic and tissue on canvas 124 x 106cm.

Language and Reparation

Barbara Freeman's representations of the relationship between mother and daughter can only be interpreted to a certain point by reference to Freud alone. The lack of distinction between bodies in the photographs or the absence of distinction between body parts in the paintings and drawings begins to suggest a process of narcissistic identification. This implies that the daughter perceives herself as similar to the mother not only for the obvious anatomical reasons but in that the daughter has now taken on the maternal nurturing function. In his writings Freud had acclaimed the mother-daughter identification as a clear result of the Oedipus complex and hence reasserting woman's secondary status throughout her life. Julia Kristeva however while in agreement with Freud on the importance of the Oedipal stage in the individual's development, appears to recognise a much more affirmative aspect of this identification. [3] This applies particularly to the adult woman who is **herself** a mother as indeed was the artist Barbara Freeman:

By giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her mother; she becomes, she is her own mother; they are the same continuity differentiating itself. [4]

Both Freud and Kristeva would concur that the repression of the knowledge of castration which concludes the Oedipal stage has particular consequences for female individuals. There is on one level a reassertion of **pre**-Oedipal patterns of identification with the mother although now predicated on the awareness that she like the mother lacks the phallus, the signifier of power and the possession of language within the symbolic social order. Here however Kristeva goes further than Freud in her focus on the production of **meaning** within the pre-Oedipal period. In psychoanalytic theory the child's successful acquisition of language is a mark of her or his entry into the post-Oedipal symbolic order regulated by (in Lacan's terms) the Law of the Father. The pre-Oedipal domain is therefore also pre-linguistic, although the child is gradually beginning to make differentiations between herself and the rest of the world, and to experience heterogenous drives, pulsions and sensations. Kristeva associates these with a notion of the **semiotic** in opposition to the symbolic domain of language, and she sees them as collected together in what she terms the **chora**. This is a state of continual matter and fluidity which Kristeva also designates as 'anterior to and underlying figuration(....) and only admit(ting) analogy with verbal or kinetic rhythm' [5]

Obviously this description of the production of meaning **without** figuration is similar to Barbara Freeman's desire in this work to draw upon sensations outside of language and to provide visual equivalents for them. Freeman very clearly identifies these sensations as existing **before** language and deriving primarily from the child's relationship with the mother. This aim was one facilitated (although not initiated) by her reading of Melanie Klein, whose psychoanalytic work was carried out primarily with small children, and which focussed extensively on the mother-child relationship. Klein developed a theory of object relations, which derive initially from the child's relation to the mother's breast **before** the acquisition of language. Unlike Freud, Klein argued that the infant ego had a variety of means of organising its relation to the world, such as defending itself from the threat of the bad object or taking onto itself perceived aspects of good and bad objects. [6] This notion of introjection Klein at one point developed in relation to the process of mourning; again unlike Freud, who emphasised the work of separation of the ego from the loved object, she argued for a process of **reparation** whereby the dead person is incorporated and restored within the ego as a good object. [7] However in order for this to take place, the adult unconsciously reactivates the experience of the infantile scenario of loss and

Drawing vi 119 x 106cm.

Drawing vii 106 x 106cm

reparation - that of the mother's breast. It is through this process of introjection that the individual gradually comes to terms with grief and loss.

Once again there are analogies with the work of Barbara Freeman, not only in her desire to make an exhibition **for** her mother but also in the features both of indentification and interiority common to paintings, drawings and photoworks here. Yet the project of articulation of pre-linguistic sensations and drives is contradictory, given that the individual's entry into the **social** order is one predicated upon the acquisition of language. The pre-linguistic processes emphasised by Klein however are also analogous to those in Kristeva's notion of the chora. [8] Kristeva argues that these continue to function throughout adult life in the form of the semiotic, exterior to and creating the limits of spoken language within the symbolic social order.

This domain of the semiotic occasionally irrupts into speech in the form of poetic language, a speaking position which she terms the feminine - without restricting its use to women. Kristeva's ideas were developed particularly in reference to writers such as Lautréamont or Mallarmé, yet there are obvious implications for modernist painting also. [9]

The production of signs which cannot be reduced to spoken language is a key issue within this work by Barbara Freeman. Central to this is the area of personal experience as highly encoded and allusive - a priority which had been largely evacuated within modernist explanations for painting. The work here moreover, is not just the product of the reparation of individual loss. Ultimately it is modernist painting which is also restored; it becomes once again the good object.

Footnotes

1. See in particular Rebecca Fortnum and Gil Houghton, 'Women and Contemporary Paintings: re-presenting non-representation' **Women Artists Slide Library Journal** no.28, April-May 1989, pp4-19. Also the high degree of participation by women artists in the exhibition **The Experience of Painting: 8 Modern Artists,** Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, January 27 - March 19 1989.
2. This and all other statements and references to statements by the artist are derived from conversations with the author, 21.4.89 and 26.5.89.
3. Although in opposition to this Kristeva also recognises what she terms the 'symbolic paternal facet' - one of appeasement of the father, followed by 'melancholia as soon as the child becomes an object': Julia Kristeva, 'Motherhood according to Giovanni Bellini', in **Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art,** ed. Leon S. Roudiez, Blackwell, Oxford 1980, p239.
4. Ibid.
5. Kristeva, **La Revolution du Langage Poetique** p24, quoted in Toril Moi, **Sexual/Textual Politics,** Methuen, London 1985, p161. Moi's account provides a highly accessible introduction to Kristeva's ideas.
6. Juliet Mitchell ed, **The Selected Melanie Klein,** Penguin, London 1986, Introduction by JM, p20.
7. Melanie Klein, 'Mourning and Manic-Depressive States' in op.cit., p156.
8. The similarities between Klein's notion of the pre-linguistic and Kristeva's concept of the chora are also discussed as part of a much more extensive argument about Kleinian and Freudian analysis in Ricardo Steiner, 'Dora: La Belle Indifference' or 'Label(le) in Difference' in Lisa Appignanesi ed, **Desire,** ICA Documents, London 1984, p10.
9. Kristeva, 'Signifying Practice and Mode of production' **Edinburgh Magazine** 1976, p50.

Iris II Acrylic and tissue on canvas 144 x 214cm

Iris I Acrylic and tissue on canvas 141 x 214cm

VOICES

collage text by
Barbara Freeman

I BEGAN THIS WORK WITH THE INTENTION OF MAKING A MEMORIAL TO MY MOTHER. I WANTED TO MAKE SOMETHING SUMPTUOUS AND GRAND FOR A POOR WOMAN WHO NEVER HAD ANYTHING. BUT NOW THAT IT IS ALMOST DONE I SEE THAT WHAT I HAVE PAINTED IS MY OWN MEMORY

Modernity begins with the rejection of the preconceived frame of reference • *the inspiration comes from a pre-verbal or primary source where the transforming of material into an idea does not allow description* • the immediate physical contact with film, the nearness of the image, the automatic muscular control of its speed • *rather as a sign denotes something without describing it* • the fact that as I work, my impulses and reactions towards the film translated themselves into muscular impulses • *her frail body lead me to images in Gray's Anatomy and the illustrations in Vesalius* • it comes to life out of the energy of my muscles • *now this does not mean that I am using these anatomical images* • the Rolleiflex which I can hold in my hands, steady with my neck, press against my chest • *Sacrum, the last bone of the spine* • *not in any perceptual way as they are seen -but as they are felt* • talking about Morton Feldman and his string quartet four and a half hours, over six hours. People asked him how he knew it was finished and he said he didn't know it just sort of died of old age • and hold my breath at the moment of snapping the shutter • *Yes, they quieten down and then they become themselves* • *A crumpled counterpane or a ray of sunlight on her face* • it stops making demands on you • *to honour our closeness in that confined space we shared* • and so you leave it • or the Bolex, with the vibration of the motor running down my arm • A REPRESENTATION FROM THE ANTERIOR ASPECT OF THE BONES OF THE HUMAN BODY • like a cat it permits itself to be held warmly • 'Les raisons de vivre sont autant de raisons de mourir pour sauver ce qui donne un sens à la vie' • I think, she said, one must at least begin to work with the body feelings • ARTICULATED TOGETHER • *I went to see this mathematician in Leeds who told me about expanding and contracting grids. Every measurement imposes a grid on reality. How does mathematical thought map back onto the world? How does pictorial thought I never stop thinking about this* • one must at least begin work with the body feeling. Once established we understand each other and can work better together separately • A moment arrives when things must change... at the beginning of this century the frame was suddenly shattered and the consequences were works which generally speaking had no need of formal musical concepts • *on her grave we wrote 'Be strong and of good courage'* • in this way the past becomes more important and is, at the same time, disposed of • since I've become more responsive to the distance between a table and a chair, my room has become infinitely larger than before • *All sorts of spaces are possible; shallow, deep, contradictory* • so that puts an end to going for walks • *toward ambiguities of space and a sort of layering in which one layer can come up in front of or hide behind another* • *she was mother, provider, housekeeper and everything else that we knew* • it involves an assimilation of the past in such a way that memory can dispense with • and it can't be generalized into a universal ideal • all serious conventions are about one thing only -how to make sense of life • If three days go by and you don't go out on the streets of Manhattan there's something drastically wrong! • *This makes possible all sorts of ironies and reflections, but its not a positive space* • the pleasure of an outing to the forest has disappeared completely for me, because one tree on a Paris pavement is already enough • *It's intuition that crosses boundaries, leaps centuries* • *you can take a Giotto and peel off the space in layers like* • THUS AS FAR AS IS CONVENIENTLY PRACTICAL THE NATURE OF THE MUSCLE FABRIC IS EXPOSED TO VIEW • *You don't remember in grand totals but in concrete details; through very precise sensations recalled* • and when they've been absorbed, the memory can reject them because it has taken what it needs and couldn't care less about the rest • there are twenty crucial minutes in painting • the closer I get to that time the more intensely subjective I become but the more objective too • it may be this doubt that moves and locates everything • In this way the past becomes important and is, at the same time, disposed of • it's clear there's a whole history within each painting; many moments in time superimposed on each other • One tree is enough for me, the thought of seeing two is frightening. Curiousity to see things lessens, because a glass on a table astounds me so much more than before • *this pre-perspective space is quite unlike that of say, Caravaggio, which is continuous; you can bore into the flesh of Caravaggio's space* • freed from the necessity of describing a particular person • the possibilities are endless. The whole of man's experience becomes his model, and in that sense it can be said that all arts is the portrait of an idea • *reality to which the work refers is the problem of how we know our own life. We do this through reconstruction of memory, through very precise sensations recalled* • and for me the concept of modernity involves first that state of circumstances in which thinking cannot be physically adapted to things as they exist, in which thought must invent, for expressive purposes, the formal structure of invention itself.

THERE LIE HIDDEN IN LANGUAGE ELEMENTS WHICH EFFECTIVELY COMBINED CAN UTTERLY CHANGE THE NATURE OF MAN..... SO PERHAPS WE CAN OUTGROW TIME AND SUDDENLY FULFIL ALL HISTORY ESTABLISHED AND TO COME.

Boulez Deren Giacometti Guston Vesalius Rothko Macdiarmid *(and myself)*

Vertebra Acrylic, tissue and metallic powder on canvas 106 x 106cm.

Pleura Acrylic and metallic powder on paper 80 x 92cm.

A conversation with Barbara Freeman

Kevin Volans

KV: I would like to know why you paint abstract paintings.

BF: It's to do with the problem of achieving the emotional impetus in a painting. I always discover that when I start describing things, a painting can go wrong; but if I find an abstract equivalent to the kind of sensation I want, it works. The emotion becomes clearer when there is no description in the painting. So I don't paint abstract paintings in a didactic way they turn out like that, even if I start with elements of representation.

A lot of my painting is about how things are felt, not how they are seen. Behind every painting there's a sensation or memory that's imbued with emotion.

KV: Would you say this was opposed to an intellectual or conceptual basis.

BF: Yes, because when I made sculpture it had a very strong conceptual basis; and it had a very systematic procedure for how it was made. The development of the procedure was often part of the subject matter of the sculptures. Then I changed to painting, in a way because I wanted to start trying to use 'fragments' of reality of visual reality to try and imbue them with a particular emotion. I wanted to be more autobiographical in that I wanted to use my own experience rather than some concept for making a painting. So they are definitely not conceptual, and I'm very conscious of the change.

Painting lends itself to improvisation a lot more. I like the fact that a painting can totally change in a day I know some sculptures can, but not the kind of sculpture I was making.

KV: Before we go any further would you say it was particularly difficult to be an abstract painter today?

BF: I'd say it's unpopular

KV: Why?

BF: Well, I've always assumed that the seventies' move towards figuration was like a failure of nerve about abstraction. There was a lot of very banal, over-simplified systematic abstract painting, and particular critics talking about the 'failure' of abstraction.

KV: Do you think they were confusing conceptualism with abstraction. I'm talking now of course, as a composer for whom a conceptualist is someone who lets a preconceived idea of a piece mould every detail as well as the form, rather than letting the musical material determine which way the piece goes.

BF: Yes, I think they weren't actually clear what abstraction meant. It was very glib to go around saying that abstraction had failed, but loads of people seemed to be doing it! I have a feeling this 'new' kind of figurative painting also involved a 'new right' kind of thinking, whatever it's ostensible subject matter

KV: Would you say that your painting really follows on the traditions set up in the fifties and sixties that you are trying to extend them?

Palmar Acrylic and metallic powder on paper 78 x 84cm.

BF: I hope I'm trying to extend from Russian constructivism and people like Malevich. I'm trying to extend, in my way beyond people like Kandinsky, who came to abstraction in a very slow roundabout fashion, and Mondrian, who had a kind of incredibly simple system for making things that were immensely complex and, to me, immensely emotional. (Some people call Mondrian cold I've never understood that.)

KV: It's interesting you should say that, because in your pictures I see sometimes almost a conflict between a constructive kind of painting (Mondrian) and an improvisation (Kandinsky). Would you say you're consciously trying to combine both aspects of painting in your work?

BF: That's quite a good thing to say One of the central problems of the 20th century has been this notion of the difference between the general and the particular how can you infer a universal thing from particular things? For example, in James Joyce's 'Ulysses' the whole thing happens in a day in particular places everybody makes a fuss about the fact that you can virtually walk Dublin through the streets that he names yet the book is a very universal book. If I had to label things in the paintings I

Drawing v 100 x 76cm.

would say that a lot of the gestures and spontaneous marks are like the particular and the sense of structure (which is always very strong in my paintings) is organising them into something more universal, yes.

KV: I've noticed with most of your paintings, there are at least two different viewing points demanded of the spectator close up, where you're more aware of the improvised, the particular....

BF: The mark making.....

KV: .....and you have to stand back to view the larger forms. You could almost say there was a conflict between amorphic, textural detail and very geometric structure.

BF: Yes, there's a conflict. I don't see this as a problem. One is always trying to unite opposites, always trying to fit one sort of thinking on to another I can't imagine myself actually doing something like, say, abstract expressionist painting. I always seem to have a desire to structure it as well, and the structure doesn't come afterwards. They go along together

The reason I like to use a lot of surface incident in my paintings has something to do with the fact that I once made sculpture I almost like paintings to be different in different lights. I like to feel there is a play of light across the surface, and that the painting would change if you put it somewhere else. Also, it asserts the materiality of the stuff that I'm using. It turns it back into material, so it's not describing something. It's itself.

KV: And the overall structure? Would you say there was a nostalgia for the Renaissance in your painting?

BF: Well, I love the Renaissance. I love Giotto and Piero and Botticelli, because the dramas they portray go on within an architecture. However many figures are rushing about, and all sorts of things going on, the final effect of those paintings is a calmness which comes from the structure. When I'm painting, the painting seems an incredible mess until a certain type of calmness comes over it. The structure becomes stronger and I recognise it as something I wanted to make. So to me that calmness is important in the process of work; and the structure brings the calmness.

KV: Is that when you stop painting?

BF: I think it was Jasper Johns who said a drawing is finished when there's no more energy left between you and the drawing. But until that happens, you go on working.

Actually there's a lot of irony in my paintings a lot of gestural brushstrokes which could portray energy and activity and angst, and then the structure which calms it all down. They're not macho paintings, although some of the techniques are what could be called macho.

KV: If I may play devil's advocate for a moment, would you say this desire for structure and calmness and even 'the general' is a little futile? That it doesn't reflect the diffraction, the formlessness of our society?

BF: Well, it's very hard to have any sense of the universal, even more so now than in the early 20th century I imagine that in other times people had a more coherent social structure. The way you earned your living helped to describe where you were in society Your relationships to other people, the way in which you could form groups, identified you in certain sorts of ways, whereas now you can be anywhere and anything all of the time.

I suppose the main thing that gives my life form is the fact that I'm married and have

Vertex Acrylic and tissue on canvas 106 x 106cm.

Ligamentum Acrylic and tissue on canvas 106 x 106cm.

Drawing III

Drawing iv 102 x 75cm.

children. Which means you are committed to something throughout your life. So that gives me form; but I don't think social structure can any more give you form. It's hard to locate yourself in a coherent culture.

I think a coherent culture only exists when you have mythologies or religions or these universal ways of looking at the world. This I would call the general. Does that make sense.?

As I said, there's a conflict, but I don't see this as a problem. There may be no centre, but if that's what we've got we ought to embrace it. or make ourselves the centre.

KV: Does this search for the general occur within the making of a painting; do you pre-plan the work at all with preliminary sketches?

BF: No, I don't make any preliminary sketches. Sometimes I would do a smaller painting, but it would have nothing to do with the final form of the big one.

The paintings certainly take a long time and they go through all sorts of stages. You can watch how I discover the final image. Because I certainly don't know what it is to be when I start. There are times I regret that some bits have gone. Sometimes I throw away lots of things that I like. I have this notion that there's a perfect match between what I feel and what's on the canvas, and I don't give it up or say it's finished until I've got that match as true as I possibly can.

I feel that what I do is like an open book nothing is hidden. I hope that nothing is pretence. It's all there. It's what I do.

KV: Tell me about subject matter

BF: These pictures are about my mother's death and my childhood; they started off with images of my mother's flat, and this crumpled counterpane. Now they are shifting weight; the drawings, for instance, are covered with these bits of anatomical tracing and it's no longer my mother's body, no longer that particular experience, but a more universal sense of fragility. I think that the drawings, although they are very dark, are about fragile things. They are made on torn bits of paper that are reassembled with tissue so the paper surface is of different textures and translucent, like skin. There's this sense that your life is very fragile. Your mother is always between you and death; when she goes you know that you are next in line. The sense of fragility becomes a metaphor for mortality.

It's almost like discovering memories I thought I hadn't got. You discover them as you paint. There are some quite peculiar elements that go on: for some reason you have a notion there should be a red bit there, and you can't describe to anyone why that should be...and after a while you realise exactly what that bit was there might have been red, say, on my mother's kitchen lino. But immediately you also have the notion that red is blood, red is all sorts of things. All sorts of analogies come in with just putting a colour down. You don't always understand what you are doing. I don't.

KV: Matisse in 'Jazz' wrote: In art, truth and reality begin when you no longer understand anything you do or know.....

BF: In a way it's almost as though the painting is developed through a series of NOT understanding and just NOT predicting what happens. You could sit there and say; if I put a red here and a green there, they'd balance one another as complementary colours. That's very systematic. But if you just wait until you have an intuition that you should have red there, while you're painting, that red takes on all sorts of meanings, and though it's 'abstract' all sorts of allusions will grow. Allusions to things in the outside world.

KV: There is something Beuys said that struck me saying he wanted to go beyond the visual image and I think that's more or less what you are saying. You may start with an image; then as it were you paint it out and paint beyond it. In other words, you don't actually compose these paintings?

BF: I certainly don't pre-compose them.

KV: You are saying that because it is a process that is on the canvas, in the end it can't be a composition (in the sense that you've put a red there and a green here to balance it). It's more than composition, because it's like composing plus the history of its own composition. That interests me because of what Morton Feldman was saying about scale; that he felt composition was no longer an issue in music, but scale was. You know he collected antique Turkish rugs and he used this analogy He explained it by saying that a certain pattern on a rug would be repeated on a much smaller rug, but only at the same scale. Things stayed the same size, because the scale of an object is terribly important. And I feel that applies to your pictures as well. The scale of your brushstrokes do tend to change a bit with the very large works, but in a sense it's still the same distance as you stand back from the picture; the same two distances, so that the scale of the thinking remains.

BF: You know, I've been doing these drawings recently. I thought it would be nice to do some smaller ones. I couldn't do it because each mark was too big for the size of the paper and I couldn't make smaller marks. I even tried with a pen or a pencil. As though the marks on the drawings have their right size and I couldn't get them down onto a smaller piece of paper

KV: So you work more by reaction than by calculation. But the catch in this, surely, is that your have to be highly educated. If there is no calculated craftsmanship in your work, then, if your work is to be distinguished from finger painting, you have to have an enormous knowledge of what NOT to do.

BF: I think it's incredibly important to know and understand past painting; but each painter creates her own history And the history I know best is the history of pictorial structures that tells me when I'm repeating myself or repeating someone else.

But you have to love them as well as know them. I think you must have a certain degree of humility about not understanding how things come about, so long as you can recognise that they are right when they do come about. To me, it's a danger to predict and plan.

KV: Are you prepared to say that it's an artist's responsibility to be educated? I think it's important.

BF: Of course. But I don't think it means that the viewer has always to be educated.

KV: But you need an audience that trusts you, and you have to earn that trust.

BF: It demands a responsive public who are prepared to sit and 'listen' to a painting. I like the word listen because it helps them spend some time.... I like that experience of slowly discovering a painting and finding different things in it. I don't like it when the whole meaning is up front and there is nothing to discover I think that the painting I do respects the person who is looking at it, if only they are prepared to look at it longer Even if I had less viewers. I'd prefer to do it that way You have to respect the viewer but not play on the most obvious thing in the viewer's mind.

One mustn't always succumb to the surface of the world out there. After all, most people experience life in very similar ways.

Vastus Acrylic and tissue on canvas 214 x 214cm.

A note on Barbara Freeman

Leland Bardwell

"My father went out for fish and chips. We never saw him again." "My mother's mother danced for Marie Lloyd."

There was a war on. They were bombed out several times, evacuated, dragged back to London, new accomodation somehow found. The 'country' was a foreign threatening domain to this adamant Cockney woman.

Determined to keep the family together her mother fought all attempts by the authorities to remove the children. She rebuilt each new home, 'took in' work.

In spite of this unsettled life, Barbara remembers these early years as happy ones. She remembers a step here, a window there, an old chair, a cat. They all worked, made artificial flowers, poppies for Remembrance Day Her mother scorned the latter- they lacked originality

"Are you not bitter about my father?" Her mother answered simply "War does strange things to people."

For this close-knit family the outside world was a mystery When she was bright enough to get into Highbury Hill Grammar School she found herself in a surprising milieu; here were girls with 'ordinary' homes and fathers! She was faced with a brand-new set of problems. Simple things like joining the local library had to be done with caution: she watched first to find out how you filled up the card, what steps you took how you spoke to the librarian. Always a perfectionist she had a horror of 'doing the wrong thing' But she became an avid reader- even, in time, described as the best read art student in London.

In a similar manner, when she was given a place in St. Martin's School of Art, problems like entering by the correct door assumed unusual proportions.

With the influx of many nationalities after the war, Cockney solidarity had begun to crumble. "We lost all sense of belonging to anything" So when she found a facility with clay she didn't then feel she was part of a great European culture. She simply did what she could and did it well.

For her mother 'art' was as foreign and inexplicable as the countryside had been. But once on this trail, Barbara persisted, keeping herself by charring and factory work.

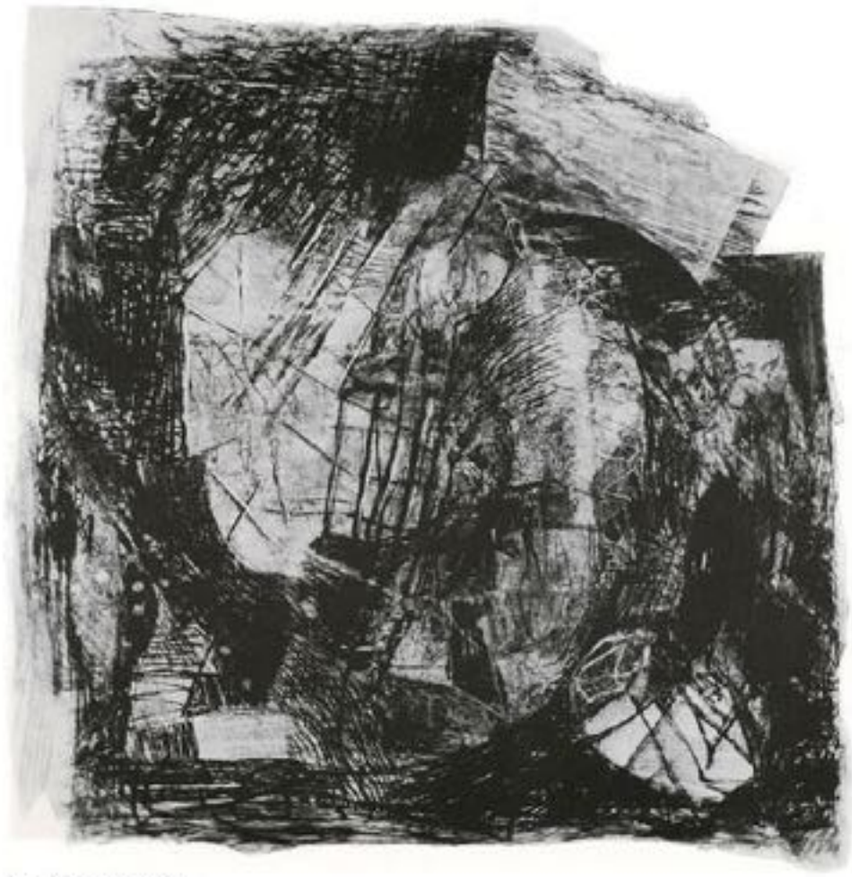
Gradually Barbara's brother and sisters left home as well; her mother's lover "she still pleased men" gone too. She worked on alone. Occasionally Barbara would take take her to her new home in the country and although the fogs and unexpected forms still made her nervous she began to take an interest in Barbara's garden, sowed a few seeds. Look, look, potatoes, beans! But she knew she must live out her days by the yellow lamps of the City Road.

When her last illness came Barbara took her away from hospital. "I'm taking my mother home" And watched by her till she died.

Her mother is in all her recent paintings not figuratively, of course. But her presence, her flesh, her nervous hands are a pervading influence. The biscuit-browns, scarlets, water-blues. If you stand, as it were, on tip-toe and look within you see the flesh and form, the quiescence, the invisibility the suggestion. The ancient face is faded leaving its memory of sap, intestines, bones spring greens, blood purples, poppy red. The nearness of kindred flesh. A latent image made manifest.

She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.
I am important to her She comes and goes.
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.
In me she has drowned a young girl.....

Sylvia Plath.



Drawing ii 74 x 72cm.

Barbara Freeman was born in London (1937) and studied at St. Martin's, Camberwell and Hammersmith Colleges of Art. (N.D.D. 1963). She has taught part-time in several colleges, and has travelled widely. She now lives and works in Belfast.

Previous exhibitions include:

1964	Manor House Gallery, Ilkley (carvings and bronzes)
1965	Jefferson Place Gallery, Washington D.C. (carvings and bronzes)
1968	The University of Leeds (reliefs)
	Park Square Gardens, Leeds (constructions)
1971	The Traverse Gallery, Edinburgh (reliefs and drawings)
1973	The University of Bradford (paintings, constructions, reliefs)
1974	Cartwright Hall, Bradford drawings)
1975	University of St. Andrews (drawings and constructions)
1975	Wolfson College, Oxford (paintings, reliefs, prints)
1976	International Exhibition of Photography, Piran, Yugoslavia
	International Exhibition of Women Artists, Zagreb, Yugoslavia
1977	'Bradford-Debrecen' exchange of exhibitions; Debrecen and Budapest, Hungary (sculpture, photomontage)
1979	Istvan Bathory Museum, Hungary (woodcuts)
	International Exhibition of Photography, Piran, Yugoslavia
1981	The Industrial Museum, Bradford (sculpture, prints, drawings entitled 'Annals of the Machine')
1982	LitG Gallery, Carlisle (ditto)
1983	Imperial College, London (paintings and etchings)
1984	The Fenderesky Gallery, Belfast
1985	The Solomon Gallery, Dublin
1986	Art Space Gallery, London
	The Corridor Gallery, Lurgan
	The Fenderesky Gallery, Belfast
1987	Art Space Gallery, London (exhibition entitled 'Two Cities/Roma New York.) also at
	The Solomon Gallery, Dublin
	The Fenderesky Gallery, Belfast.

Awards

1972	S.P.A.C.E Award. (Arts Council of Great Britain)
1973	Arts Council of Great Britain Artists Bursary
1974	Yorkshire Arts Association Bursary
1975	Guest Artist: International Symposium, Prilep, Yugoslavia International Exhibition of Photography, Piran, Yugoslavia (Bronze Medal 1976) (Guest Artist and Silver Medal 1979)
1979	Guest Artist: Nyirbator Alkotohaz, Hungary
1988	Arts Council of Northern Ireland Award.
1990	Artist in Residence, Orchard Gallery, Derry

Recent group exhibitions

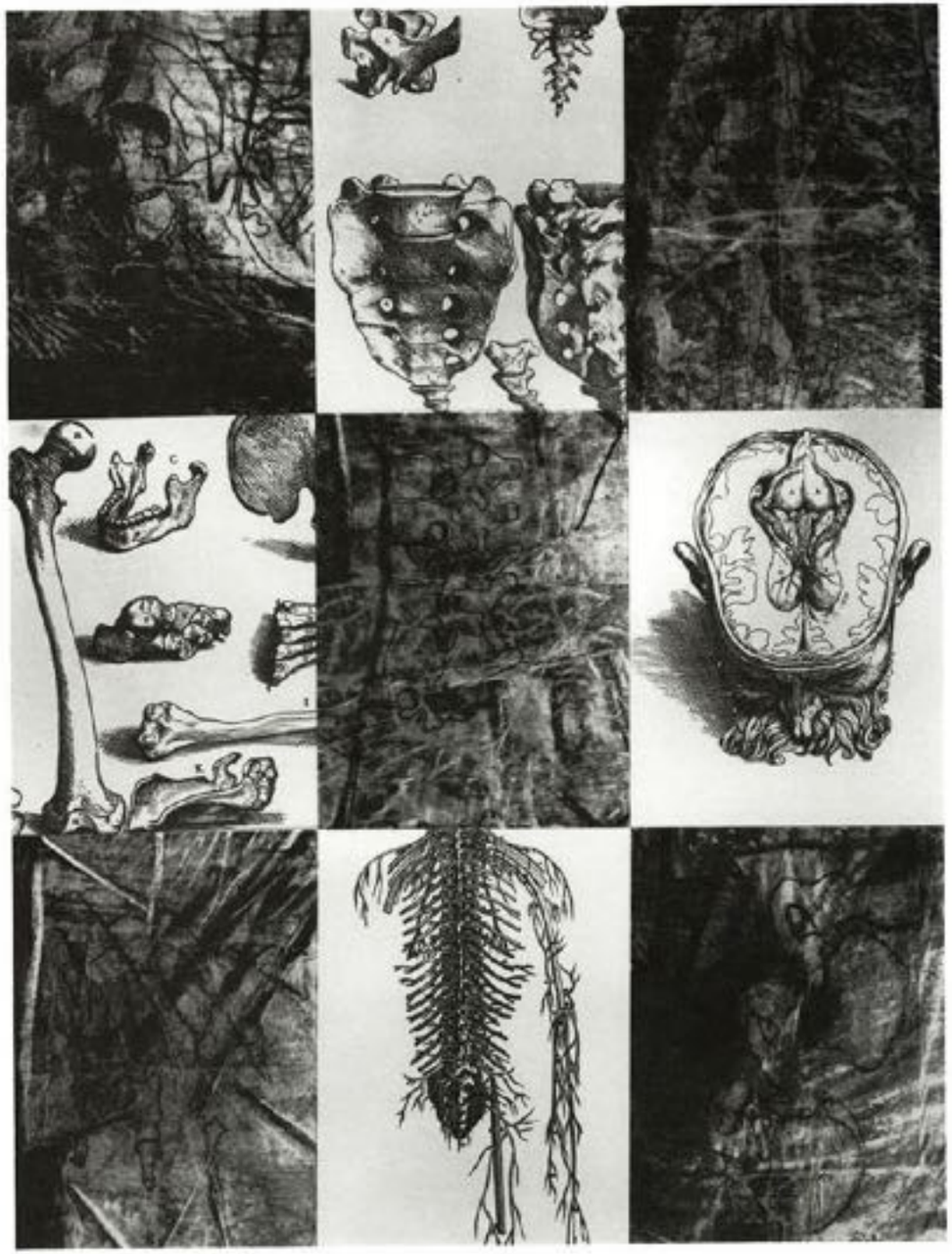
1984	'Four Artists from Belfast'. The University of Ulster, Belfast.
1985	Cork Art Society, Cork.
1987	'Irish Living Art', Dublin
	'S.A.D.E. Cork
1987	'Magnetic North' The Orchard Gallery, Derry. (photoworks by four Northern Irish artists, now touring Britain and the U.S.A.)
	'Celtic Vision' Dublin
1988	Claremorris Open Exhibition
1989	'Art London '89' International Art Fair, London. Gallery artists: Art Space Gallery, London.

Work in Collections

Private:	in Great Britain, The United States, Ireland, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Kuwait.	
Public etc.:	West Yorkshire County Council	Allied Irish Investment Bank Ltd.
	The University of Bradford	Jefferson Smurfitt Group
	Leeds City Council	Contemporary Irish Art Society
	Greater London Council	Life Association of Ireland
	Yorkshire Arts Association	Allied Irish Bank Computer Centre
	The University of Debrecen, Hungary	Dept. of Environment (N.I.)
	Mestna Galerie, Koper, Yugoslavia	
National:	National Museum, Prilep, Yugoslavia	
	National Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary	

Relevant publications include

Tilless B. 'Neveleo Strukturak': Muveszet (April 1976) Budapest.
Freeman B. 'Growth Structures': Leonardo (April 1975.) Paris
Malina F. ed. 'Visual Art, Mathematics and Computers': Pergamon Press. Oxford (1979).
Freeman B. 'Open Space; Inside and Out' Circa No.20 Jan. 1988. Belfast.



Cover: details from 'De Human Corporis Fabrica' by Andreas Vesalius (1543) and from drawings by Barbara Freeman

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