

## DAVE NEWTON'S TALK AT MY DROGHEDA BOOK LAUNCH

Welcome everybody. Thank you for coming out to launch this lovely book by Roger Hudson and to celebrate his work. We have a modernist in our midst here in Drogheda and how lucky we are to get to go through this with him – he may read some related poetry tonight too!

About tonight: we aim to go on a bit of a journey through photomontage (also known to some as collage), art and art-making, as well as working methods and thinking approaches used by Roger here.

He calls his new book “Taking the Scissors to Society” and that is a strong concise name for his approach to photomontage – let’s look at one within the book to start: In the Garden of Sensual Delight (page 41). It is key here to note Roger does not “paint” these images – he “finds” them (appropriates them in artspeak). They are based in scraps of paper printed with media - sourced images. In the book, he notes that perhaps the title is being ironic (not telling it straight) because the overall feeling, for him, maybe is about wealth and fame and how they might “not necessarily deliver happiness” – (in his words). This image is more like a poem or poetical proposal asking us to think than to do what paint usually does – to describe the surfaces of skin and grass and buildings and the sea and fire, etc. with an accuracy i.e. paint equals the described.

As a modernist working right here in our midst using the recent art form of photomontage/collage (it was developed in the early 1900s) – the imagining of a human experience – the X-factor of our experience, not being the worthy goal is a proposal – it is designed to activate your mind.

This art form is quite young – Picasso and his artist buddy Georges Braque came up with it a little more than 100 years ago – there is an example of a guitar by Picasso using collage. Around the time Picasso made this image of a guitar, he wrote a letter to his buddy Braque saying that “I am in the process of imagining a guitar. You can see Picasso is not interested in the surfaces or the guitar as described, painted guitar might be described. He is letting the paper cut-outs say something about the space in which it sits and is playing with a poetical, modernistic idea of a human experience. How do we feel about a guitar – imagine a guitar - understand it as a plucked, noise radiating object in space? (space not a Renaissance space – a cubist space)

Roger, in this modernistic way, has undertaken his own imagining this one is on page 40 of this amazing book and is called Tree of Life/Tree of Death. In the book, Roger describes the making of this artwork by playing with little scraps of paper with creatures and sky and sea on them combining them with a monochrome photo of a

nuclear mushroom cloud! Surely something none of us want to see in our lifetimes! (please Mr. Trump – don't do it! Please!)

Braque, Picasso collaborators of inventing Modernism, Cubism and collage wrote about how the way combining things works in art-making (like Roger does with his birds template): “The subject: A lemon beside an orange is no longer a lemon, the orange no longer an orange. They have become fruit. Mathematicians follow this law. So do we.” (Meaning artists who combine little sweet birds with merciless mushroom cloud perhaps what do say Roger.

A few years after Picasso and Braque invented collage others took this modern form in other directions. George Grosz and John Heartfield in 1918 joined a modern art movement in Berlin called DADA and started making what they first named “photomontage.” DADA is an art movement that embraced accident, nonsense and non-academic ways of making art. Other DADAISTS turned men's room urinals upside down and called them ‘fountain’ sculptures and others glued nails to clothes irons yet Grosz and Heartfield explored Picasso and Braque's invention of collage. Dada – you see the name on the left – artist who joined DADA saw the craziness and mass killing of World War I, if that was what sensible human beings do to themselves, then being filled with “nonsense” and accident may be the proper way forward then – (sort of how pooh-bear Winnie was lost in the hundred-acre wood and kept finding the sand-pit instead of hi home – going around in circles – and decided to not look for home and look for the sand-pit – THEN FOUND HOME – nonsense can be sense!!!

This slide is entitled “Life and Time in Universal City at 12:05 noon.” (1919)

The issue of politics and ruination and playfulness and non-descriptive pictorial meditations are here – as they are in Roger's work. Roger, do you wish to offer anything here – a poem perhaps on this matter of oppression, ruination and empathy? – poem of PREDATOR.

Thank you, Roger!

Roger has three volumes of poetry published – Regarding this theme of Predator and/or Ruin on page 45 of the launching book he discusses his artwork photomontage called Pecking Order. Whilst some might think art is an indulgent or a frivolous activity, all about recording beauty and the surfaces of things, Roger here makes it plain! This is a lament, a sadness-drenched work, existential in its point – (Roger is well aware of philosophy and the existential writers). Oh, he laments, why do we choose to destroy?

Roger notes in his book he made this photomontage 4 years before 9-11s planes struck. Nobody wins in war – Aleppo is our current overview on such human tragedy written large! Art here is nowhere near capturing beauty – Any thoughts on this work? Audience?

What about the neighbouring image called Poverty is Relative? Any thoughts on this image? Roger or audience?

And what about this work by Hannah Hoch? Something is being said about puppets and human beings – she was working at photomontage during the rise of Nazi power in Germany – surely some form of political statement or mood lies in this work, yes? No? A lament?

What about his image of Roger's from page 11 – one of his first photomontages (1980) called Only the Famous have Wrinkles – thoughts?

Roger, with you here, do you wish to comment or add a poetical view or poem – or venture a thought on art as a political instrument?

Thinking about the “Wrinkles” collage, an African-American artist, Romare Bearden, said of his work and I believe it suits Roger's work too. Here is his work The Dove, 1964, and here is what Bearden said: “I think a quality of artificiality must be retained in the work of art, since the reality of art is not to be confused with that of the outer world – Art it must be remembered, is artifice and the primary function of art is to add to our conception of reality” – and here Bearden emphasises the bird – the dove – at the top of the doorframe near the centre – this was made about Harlem, the African American neighbourhood on Manhattan, it is made after Martin Luther King's “I have a dream” speech and it is about a hopeful peace symbol - A DOVE – all may be well? Does this add to our conception of reality – a calm street with a dove up in Harlem?

So Roger is here with Bearden using symbols cut from magazines – even birds! If we look at the book cover's image – a bird – a predator with a man (with glasses) looms above some dystopian surging world – Sean Hillen notes – Sean is an artist who also uses photomontage – says of Roger's work that it has the ‘aura’ of real art – a “powerful presence” which is a thrill to experience”.

In Roger's artist statement on page 6-7, he says of his way of creating this artifice – this powerful presence – “Scavenge among this garbage mountain of images, people like us, not like us, living, dead, long gone, smiling, laughing, serious, terrified, rich, poor, oppressors, oppressed, successes, failures, enjoying, suffering, working, playing, posing, faking.”

I say, Roger, surely to take the flotsam and jetsam and garbage and detritus and help us see something true and eternal is really something! Art has its own duty – a dereliction is to not say it, it has a duty to speak to power, to truth – an artist speaks up.

Lets look at his Watcher in a Cold Future. Good gosh! A lament if ever there was one, Roger! Dead family members – War – like a Picasso -GUERNICA! Burning – and as a boy Roger has shared he was sent from a burning London out to the rural sections to be safe – Roger knows that of which he speaks...

Any thoughts on this in the audience? Roger?

It is a photomontage that led us into this strange photo-drenched, media-saturated, mass-social media time.

Let's look at a key one by Richard Hamilton – Roger's work holds up to it, I must say – it was made in 1956 – well before Warhol and Lichtenstein's cartoony pop images of the 60s – it is called Just what is it that makes modern home so different, so appealing? Note the tootsie roll – tootsie 'pop' lollipop – the photomontage seems huge, yet this is a tiny photomontage made up of magazine cut-outs – note the planetary image on the ceiling – not unlike Roger taking the mushroom cloud into his image.

He and his fellow photomontage artists speak to power – use simple things – scissors, glue, magazine scraps – yet somehow – as Roger called this book so aptly, so concisely. "Taking the Scissors to Society." Roger laments for the lost of London – Hamilton mocks a ferocious, voracious consumerism, - Hoch worries about how people will treat each other under Hitler – Bearden dreams of a people in peace in an outer reality – Grosz and Heartfield get nonsense – Picasso imagines his guitar.

Roger and his photomontage crew have created in this very new and modern form a very human and powerful expression – one that can question our human frailties, our human oppressions.

Lets look at one more of Roger's before I close up – 2 minutes tops – page 34 holds one where we are all held up – NOW! We are asked about vanity. Any thoughts? It is called "In the Land of the Vain, the One-Eyed Lens is King"

Roger – thoughts (our vanity – selfie)

Ecclesiastes 1:

Vanity of vanities says the preacher. Vanity of vanities. All is vanity.

This issue of vanity – of echo chambers and selfie focus over acknowledging difference is still and perhaps even an increasing issue today!!!

Vanity beyond selfies – conservatives calling others liberal or elites: elites calling conservatives racist or misogynist or others not listening in their echo chambers – ALL is vanity – AND we are all peering so happily at our reflections on social-media now.

To close up tonight – Roger has made a gorgeous human statement in his life's work as shown in this presentation tonight – I hope you can see it! AND Roger Hudson has made a limited run of these special edition books (200!). He has made something very special for us here – something special indeed. I hope our journey together through photomontage today has led you to a greater appreciation for Roger Hudson's fine achievements in photomontage – work that holds up internationally and places him firmly into this crucial modern medium of photomontage.

Thank you for coming – thank you.