

Spring without End

Stevie Dix, Danny Fox, Norman Hyams

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Interview with Danny Fox by Riccardo Pillon

Riccardo Pillon: The title *Spring without End* is freely inspired by *Frühling und kein Ende (Spring and No End)*, the title initially chosen and then discarded by Gustav Mahler for the opening movement of his *First Symphony* in 1888. The symphony is described by the composer as a journey of its protagonist facing life, beginning with the joyful days of youth to the darker years of maturity. How does this title resonate with you?

Danny Fox: It's a good title, I like it. It makes me think of being young and waking up in a single bed at 10am with the warm sun coming through the window and having nothing to do all day; and of course, Dylan Thomas' "spring, moonless night in the small town" and John Fante's *Wait Until Spring, Bandini* and classic FM Vivaldi in the truck, but I don't think I'll ever enjoy it no matter how long my ears get. It seems classical music and literature have claimed spring as a subject.

RP: The scenarios you present in *Spring without End* are mostly rural and the figures emerge from a bucolic background: the teeming life of a pond, a garden in full blossom. Are they all portraying glimpses from St Ives in Cornwall, where you live and work?

DF: Not particularly. The landscapes are mostly imagined, and the figures are worked from found photographs. There's a general feeling of my immediate surroundings which is inescapable and always permeates my work, but the flowers were painted in winter before the daffodils came up, which is the earliest sign of spring here. Sometimes the feeling associated with spring is actually anticipation of change, rather than the actual season itself. I think the paintings are more about that mood than anything else.

RP: Varied are the references you use in your work, from historic photographs, over images stolen from old artbooks, to elements borrowed from your everyday life and characters you encounter. *St Michaels Mount* could be described as an autobiographical painting. Do you want to talk a little bit about the story behind it?

DF: I don't think it could be described as autobiographical really, but perhaps in the sense that my life and work has been informed by reference and art reference books, especially in formative years, but also today. I made the Turner painting a couple of years ago so reasons for using that particular painting have faded on me, except for the Mount being a local landmark. I believe at the time I wanted to pay homage to paintings that I grew up overlooking in dusty library books and revisit them now that I have studied further.

RP: The painting *Toxic Chemistry* is rooted in the history of St-Ives. Who are the two figures in the painting and what is the narrative hidden between the brushstrokes?

DF: The title explores a double meaning. Taken firstly from the popular phrase ‘toxic relationship’ or ‘toxic love’ which have become a constant in the current lexicon, especially in the digestible digital slang of Instagram’s algorithm. Also, this title refers to the characters used in the painting. Figuratively they are based on photographs of Marie and Pierre Curie. ‘Toxic chemistry’ relates to their careers as chemists working in the field of radioactivity. The concept of this painting formed after reading an article in *New Scientist* that references Marie Curie’s work with radium at a St Ives mine and a car park at the top of St Ives, which I believe to be the car park that I use on a daily basis.

See *New Scientist* article below:

South Terras was not the only mine in Cornwall to produce uranium. Trenwith Mine, above St Ives, produced 694 tons of pitchblende and other ores over the period 1911 to 1917. Recovery of the ore was mainly from the dumps, where it had been discarded as worthless because it had originally been confused with black copper ore. Radium, discovered by Marie Curie, was first isolated by her from pitchblende from Trenwith Mine. The dumps were a plentiful source of stone for local streets and houses. Now they provide hard core for the large car park that occupies the mine site. One recent visitor was quite alarmed when he found several rocks used in the car park walls to be radioactive, claiming that the whole area should be cleared.

In the early part of this century, the dangers of radioactivity were not appreciated and it was even considered beneficial. In the 1950s, an elderly patient of one of the local doctors in St Ives was found to be keeping a large box of pitchblende under his bed. At one time, the tailings of South Terras Mine were offered for sale as “radioactive manure”, and a scheme was proposed to promote a “radium spa” at St Ives, using water from springs in Trenwith Mine. Although this never came about, the mine was the principal water supply for a large part of St Ives until about 30 years ago, being used without any treatment.

RP: The titles of your paintings, such as *Baden House / Methadone*, are always carefully considered. What does this title relate to?

DF: On a Wednesday morning I drive my friend to the pharmacy where he collects his prescription of methadone. I wanted to depict the reality of drug use, addiction and rehabilitation in all of its humdrum monotony. I associated the serene lake with the slime green juice and the user floating like a swan among the lilies.

RP: *What Became of Hannah Kettlewell* draws inspiration from one of the most famously unhappy marriages of literary history, the one of Leo Tolstoy and Sophia Behrs, and merges into the intricate dynamics of a private relationship. Do you want to talk a bit about this work?

DF: The figurative/photographic reference is quite loose, I only started with the photos and changed them to fit my own narrative, especially the face of the woman - to resemble my partner. Sometimes paintings are too jumbled up with references to explain them in a straightforward way. I think, at some point making this painting I wondered how close some great artists came to never making great art and how often that fate has hung in the balance of love/a relationship. Recently, I found myself having to make difficult decisions in love and my relationship and I have taken some solace in reading Wikipedia pages of famous people I admire, in particular the ‘personal life’ section that details long lists of disastrous marriages - ultimately, I

take reassurance in the fact that despite personal tragedies, heartbreak, grief, incarceration - whatever - artists keep making art.