

CRUSHING

AMANDA DAVIES

1 – 30 JUNE 2019
SCHOOLHOUSE GALLERY
ROSNY FARM



1 Paraphrased from Bertetto, P (2017) 'Concept, Sensation, Intensity: Deleuze's Theory of Art and Cinema' *Sociology and Anthropology* 5(9): 792-797.

2 Ibid.

3 Deleuze, G (1981) Trnsl. Smith, D. W (2017) *Francis Bacon: The logic of sensation*. Bloomsbury, London p. 49.

4 Amanda Davies in email correspondence with the author.

5 Graw, I (2018) *The Love of Painting: Genealogy of a Success Medium* Sternberg Press, Berlin.

6 Paraphrased from Graham, S. (2002) 'A New Report Explains the Physics of Crumpled Paper' in *Scientific American* Accessed at <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-new-report-explains-the/> on 20/04/19.

7 Graw, I (2018) *Op cit* p. 51

Amanda Davies
Portrait of Rob O'Connor
Oil on linen
2019

Dorothy Stoner (1904 - 1992)
The artist's studio, Paris 1949-50
Oil on canvas
72cm x 54cm
1949
Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

Amanda Davies
The artist's model, standing with crushed Stoner painting
Oil on linen
2019

Amanda Davies
The artist's studio, Richard Wastell and crushed Stoner, detail.
Oil on linen
2019

Amanda Davies is represented by Bett Gallery
www.bettgallery.com.au
www.amandajanedavies.com



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AMANDA DAVIES

CRUSHING

ON LOVE AND PAINTING

What happens in an artist's studio resists description, so how can I say it without saying it?

...to speculate is to look without certainty, to take a guess, to leap across the gap... convergence happens between thoughts and forms...concept and sense flow in tandem towards the event of making...feeling shifts from body to object and back again... dimension and life bind space and time... all this is open, intrinsic but undefined...



This is how the love for painting begins. A nude woman sleeps on the arm of a chair, unadorned, elevated, the only living object in the room. Dorothy Stoner has travelled from Hobart to Paris to paint her, placing her at the centre of a man's studio, she is illuminated as figure and sign of the unconscious. An abstract painting holds steady watch over her, seemingly at odds with the angled surroundings, the flow of making and unmaking, the surreal sense of a dream. Above her, two palettes echo the myths of the artist's studio, the gesture and trace of so many histories, hovering, just out of reach.

...in the moment when art arrives, it senses the presence of the body behind it...two forces, one over the other crushing, sensorial pressure overcome by mass...the painting gives in to the weight of feeling 'the vibration, the embrace, the clinch'...before releasing it back, compounding sensation through the artist's body... the process consumes and is all consuming... 'the unity of the sensing and the sensed'²...

In 1949, Stoner takes instruction from Édouard Mac Avey in his Paris drawing studio, navigating the conventions of the visit, the interplay of privilege, painting and gender, through the impossibilities of the nude. Resisting tradition, she interrupts the usual transaction between woman and canvas, creating a quiet discomfort in the pleasure of looking, '*(s)leeping, desire, art: these are places of confrontation and resonance, places of a struggle*'³. Hardening her contours, Stoner stacks her nude into space, props her up on the arm of the chair...*comme une poupée, une marionette*...decentres her beneath the dominant eye of abstraction. Weighing up the gaze of her tutor against her own, she paints his style within hers, blending appropriation with surrender, a rebellion of sorts.

... in theory, the man's gaze rehearses the act of possession, prepares the body for the object it desires to have, dresses the woman up as a possible reality, an irrational fixation...such fantasy and projection is painful, suffocating... it plays between the man's mind and the woman's body....a maddening contraction of space that, like desire, empties everything else out...painting and desire is wasted on such romance...

Responding to the energy and history of Stoner's painting, Amanda Davies enacts her desire to occupy its boundaries and revision its tensions, to awaken painting to a moment that escaped our view. In her studio - her 'private place for gesturing'⁴ - Davies is embedded in the histories of painted women and women painters, tracing the volatile lineage of body and image and the transgressions required to undo its grip...*it is not the visible that is in question, but what makes it uncomfortable*...Taking herself as both subject and object, she becomes a material boundary upon which woman's body fluctuates throughout history, a medium through which painting's 'fantasy of liveliness'⁵ is embodied and revealed.



In a quiet act of sabotage, Davies dismantles Stoner's nude, photocopies and enlarges her, crushes her, positions her, wears her, makes her perform through an infinite process of exchange... *gesture first, then tension and release*...Her attempt to become the nude is awkward, impossible, enhancing the discomfort of the original, but connecting to a vitality beyond representation, beyond what is visible or sayable. Coming to terms with the nude like this is a form of love, an embodied process to see what it feels like...*to see and feel and like*... each time gaining energy between points, storing it in the creases.

*'...(a) crushed thin sheet is essentially a mass of conical points connected by curved ridges that store energy...(w)hen the sheet is further compressed, the ridges collapse and smaller ones form, increasing the amount of stored energy within it...the crumpled sheet displays a phenomenon known as hysteresis, in which the effect of forces acting upon the object lags behind its cause...'*⁶

Such processes of transformation are not easy...*material histories become material traces*... convergence gives way to divergence as Davies uncovers a series of incongruities and failures... *love is a form of erasure*...Teasing out a new continuum, she positions Stoner's nude in the studios of contemporary male painters, testing it against new histories and fictions, unsettling the frames of recognition, gender, the portrait, the self.

Reworking the spaces of painting, she paints portraits within portraits, artists within studios, Stoner within Davies. Her crushed portraits play with painting's power of masquerade, its ability to conjure a ghost, 'the phantasmatic impression of a presence that turns out to be absence'⁷. Conflating the identity of the artist with the act of painting, each stifled face is a site of tension between the gesture and its trace, an image of compression and intensity in the moment of making.

... resonance is a vitality that spreads through time...as rhythm and undercurrent...as a source of life...the artist always adds, giving energy to her materials, making them perform...working with resonance, she loosens the bonds of representation to reveal her history, not painting what is seen, but asking the question of what painting can and cannot do...

In Davies' studio, crushing is an emotive, material and metaphoric event, a means of capturing the intimate metamorphoses that escape our attention as they unfold in space and time. She offers us a glimpse of the processes of painting itself, its pressures and forces within the body and self, the vitality of the relationship between the artist and her images.

...this is the dream of waking stored as a memory, the crease that embodies the act of its making, the boundary that in breaking becomes defined...

Dr Eliza Burke, May 2019.