

## *Critical Review of Practice Draft*

*Chris Matthews*

The following critical review will function as a critical review of my practice undertaken during the Informing Context's module. I will be highlighting and discussing my influences and motivations that led to the production of my final outcomes.

I have for the past 10 months been exploring aspects of modern masculinity and in particular some of the harmful effects of the expectations of men. The starting point for this investigation was triggered by the reading of Grayson Perry's *The Decent of Man* which was supported by his television series *All Man*.

My research has split into two distinctive pathways at this stage. The first was to explore my relationship with my father and the ways in which this has shaped my own masculinity. In response to this research I produced living monuments to my father which I have continued during this module with two outcomes produced as well as some pieces linked to my relationship with my father that were produced during the lockdown. The other pathway has explored the behaviour of men which at this stage have focused professional boxing shows. I boxed myself for 20 years as well as photographing events so have been fortunate enough to get very close access.

Monument in plaster



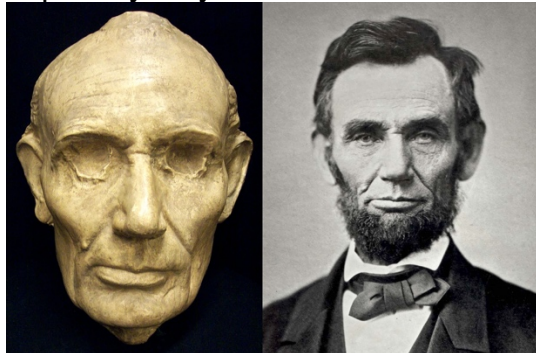
The concept of this piece was drew inspiration from tombs and in particular a visit I made to Cristobal Cemetery in Havana Cuba in 2000.

Looked at Death Masks .Representation of tomb refer to cuba and other death rituals, death mortality.

Will show the faded one alongside. This will represent the mortality aspect well. This became even more relevant given the current coronavirus outbreak, as well as

suffering the effects of a stroke my father has a lung condition and received a letter to ask him to self isolate for 12 weeks. Need to make a comment about life and death re Barthes Duality. After several experiments with printing on plaster I was interested by the temporary nature of the print which would fade over time, the colour would also change to a dark sepia that has an aged feel to it. Upon seeing this change I worked towards producing an outcome that would feature a newly produced print alongside and its own later version. I felt this stark comparison made an interesting visual metaphor to life and death. In the photograph featured, on the left is the original print after two layers of varnish were applied. The application of varnish slowed the decay of the print allowing me time to photograph it in the studio before it began to fade. Due to the porous nature of the plaster there was a minor bubbling effect where air created bubbles in the gelatine liquid light. The air was released with a pin prior to the varnishing stage. The plaster on the right is the same print 3 weeks later, at this stage much of the print had faded with only subtle indications of the original composite image.

<https://mysteryu.com/faces-death-20-death-masks-famous-infamous-people/>



The undeveloped film

Monument in clay. Working title Undeveloped, a play on words



Idea linked heavily to conceptual work, duchamps, Damien hurst


Talk about Richard Billingham and the undeveloped film, how this might be Incorporated. I was aware of Billingham's work and I photographed my father whilst under the influence of alcohol in 2000, he was helpless and pathetic. I felt that seeing the images might be a useful intervention and might be powerful in aiding him to get. I never developed the film, I could not bring myself to do so. I have kept the film for close to 20years. It's a symbol now of the pain caused by his addiction and the film canister has taken on greater meaning because of it. I may never develop the film, it's been so long I'm not even sure the roll is the correct one, perhaps I want to forget it. It's locked away in deep dark storage both physically and metaphorically. I intended to incorporate this object in some way in the work that I produce as I believe it is a symbolically strong object to appropriate in my work. After much consideration I chose to encase the film canister in clay. It seems fitting considering my father former pursuit of pottery. The shape of the brick was chosen much like the plaster as a form of a tomb with the texture and colour of the clay almost like soil. Also from my own personal perspective of being link to Pink Floyd's the Wall, this being another brick in the wall around the pain I have locked away. The Photographs were taken in the studio with a two point lighting flash set up, both lights with soft boxes. I shot the images with a 60mm 2.8 Nikkor lens which is a very sharp prime lens suitable for close ups. The images require further context to understand the intended meaning. In this respected they would need some element of explanation were they to be presented in an exhibition.



\*\*\* Presenting \*\*\*

THE WORLD MASCULINITY CHAMPIONSHIP

# THE WAR



'MANNING' UP

I'M OK

VS.

'SPEAKING' OUT

14<sup>TH</sup> APR. 2020

LIVE ACTION IN TORQUAY  
YOUR HOMETOWN :TOWN HALL


DOORS OPEN 6:00 PM | 12 ROUNDS OF MACHISMO | YESTERDAY'S HERO \$20

\*\*\* IN THE UK, MEN ARE THREE TIMES AS LIKELY TO DIE BY SUICIDE THAN WOMEN \*\*\*

\*\*\* Presenting \*\*\*

THE WORLD MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMPIONSHIP

# THE WAR



'MARVELOUS' MARVIN HAGLER

NO HOME TV

VS.

THOMAS 'THE HITMAN' HEARNS

15<sup>TH</sup> APR. 1985

LIVE DIRECT AT CAESARS  
RINGSIDE FROM: PALACE

DOORS OPEN 6:00PM | 12 ROUNDS CHAMPIONSHIP FIGHT | ALL SEATS RESERVED \$20

\*\*\* LIVE IN THEATRES VIA SATELLITE \* NO HOME TV \* NO RADIO \*\*\*

Tommy Hearn's and Marvin Hagler poster was inspiration for The War poster. I researched historical boxing and also propaganda posters as I wanted to use this as a subversive or subliminal method of transmitting information. The gorilla girls posters were also an influence. I found the intertextual nature of the poster and its intention to be a useful form to work in as I could manipulate the usage of it. Not being a skilled graphic designer I knew the production of this would be out of my comfort zone and would take me considerable time to create an outcome that I felt was useable as final piece. With considerable fine tuning I was satisfied with the end product. Replacing the centre section with the ring rope was produced through the use of the clone tool and made up from fragments of the corner post and mirrored. I was familiar with Barbara Kruger's work and the way in which she used language to make specific statements about issues that concerned her. I took a similar approach in the way in which I used text on the poster. In Grayson Perry's *The Decent of Man* he talks about the ministry of masculinity as though it's some kind of dictatorship that defines the expectations of men. He talks about a man's man is yesterday's hero. I wanted to play with this concept in the poster as well including a stark statistic about male suicides. Men struggle to be open and talk about their problems. We can hide behind bravado but this can often hide a myriad of problems. 'Where this strange combination of hardness and vulnerability comes from. And whether something as extreme as cage fighting could really be helping men deal with it. Was what I had to find out next.' All Man. Is Machismo holding men back he asks.

There is something of a paradox about this brutal pursuit, it is not so simple as to suggest all men that fight are in some way Neanderthals or brutes. It's more complex than that. During my research I was interested to see so many posts in my social networks by those involved in boxing about male suicide and the need to speak out. In many ways I have found those involved in the sport are rather more open about their feelings and are particularly compassionate people.

On Colin the 'Freakshow' Fletcher – "Fighting was all part of a performance, and maybe macho masculinity was too" All man episode 1. Standing out against the tribe, all of us hold some kind of mythical narrative that we need to play out in some way. We all have to express it somehow, it's normal. 'The cage fighters are working out their aggression and their feelings in what they do.'

The red banners just below the centre form an almost phallic shape which further strengthens this sense of hypermasculinity and competition between men, the need to stand out in the tribe as Perry puts it.

He talks about Masculinity as a callous that protects men. Something that is rigid and inflexible which leads to men being unable to adapt or to speak out for assistance. All too often this can lead to suicide. In the UK men are 3 times more likely to take their own life than women as indicated by recent data from 2019 there were nearly 4000 male suicides compared to approximately 1300 female suicides.

Men and boys are often more vulnerable to taking their own lives because:

- They feel a pressure to be a winner and can more easily feel like the opposite.

- They feel a pressure to look strong and feel ashamed of showing any signs of weakness.
- They feel a pressure to appear in control of themselves and their lives at all times.

<https://www.thecalmzone.net/help/get-help/suicide/> 9<sup>th</sup> April

### Suicide rates for men and women

In the UK, men are three times as likely to die by suicide than women. In the Republic of Ireland, the rate is four times higher among men than women.

Samaritans

<https://www.samaritans.org/about-samaritans/research-policy/suicide-facts-and-figures/>  
date accessed 9<sup>th</sup> April

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/causesofdeath/datasets/leadingcausesofdeathuk>  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/deathscausedbysuicidebyquarterinengland>

2019 Suicides in UK 3962 males and 1286 female. This figure correlates to the Samaritan statement.

George Bellows – smoke filled arena, we have the perspective of the audience as Dempsey is pushed back into the ring before eventually defeating Firpo

I hadn't come across Gildens photographs of unlicensed boxing before, previously I was only familiar with his warts and all portraits. These images capture the unregulated and underworld environment that is associated with this particular form of boxing. There is a sense of danger in this place, both for the participants and the spectators there to watch. He focuses on the elements outside of the fighting. From personal experience these events rarely feature seasoned athletes but generally men and occasionally women that don't fit the disciplined mould of amateur or professional. Some have criminal records or medical issues may mean they can't get a professional licence from the BBFC. As spectator it's an intoxicating environment, the sense of adrenaline and danger is palpable. It's a dirty form of what is generally called a noble art. This adds to the attraction for many. There's something base and seedy about that appeals to the darker aspects of human nature. There are moments of courage, shame, humiliation and machismo.  
(could mention duality here)





Man Check (2020)  
Chris Matthews

In 'Man Check' this image was captured during a heated battle between two young men. The bruising nature of the fight seemed to physically age the young men. Their features were contorted by the blows that were being landed. This moment was captured between rounds as a distressed and exhausted fighter was being pleaded with to follow their instruction. One of the cornermen opens the fighters shorts as though is checking for something, in this case with the name of the image I am suggest he is checking that he is still a man. The reason the shorts are pulled out is to allow the diaphragm space to allow the boxer to take deep breaths during the 60 second break, it allow prevents overheating. (To me it allow had the appearance of how a model might be prepared in a make up chair)

In Baptism- Rights of passage, mentors etc

“I sometimes watch the evening news on television and think all the world’s problems can be boiled down to one thing: the behavior of people with a Y chromosome.”

– **Grayson Perry, The Descent of Man**

“Has modern man always been in crisis because his ‘instinct’ to feel superior is at odds with the central concept of the modern world post-Enlightenment, that we humans are all equal?”

– **Grayson Perry, The Descent of Man**

Grabbing hands – man to the right add context, there is love in this blighted place.

Man mountain- Almost looked like a mountain range, mount rushmoor. Gasping for air



Do I include the audience images as well?

In the final section of my WIP portfolio I have include 3 images entitled Abandoned, these were captured during the lockdown. Much like the piece Undeveloped (2020) they were inspired by my relationship with my father or at least in relation to it during my childhood. I felt a sense of abandonment as child and in response to this I felt the lockdown period might provide me with some interesting objects that have also been abandoned. I should clarify my sense of abandonment was not from my father having left me but from him abandoning his role as a father due to his alcoholism. The objects featured resonated with many of these unresolved memories from my past. For example the toy car signified childhood to me, the adandoned bottle brought back memories of finding hidden bottles tucked under sheds of car seats and finally the image of the coat hanging on the post reminded me of a family unit looking longingly at a home.

Eggston the Bike, mississippi etc Personal posessions, things left behind, the way he elevates the mundane interests me, it creates narrative. I've always had an interest in the way Shore and Eggleston were arguably pioneers of colour photography permeating into the realms of fine art when black and white work was the norm. They have a 'movie' quality to them that reinforces this narrative

Could mention Jeff Wall. Stephen Shore American Surfaces 1972

Conclusions drawn. Next steps if room, what has this research shown me about about masculinity and men? Is there hope for a better future and change