



INTERVIEW

David Brody and Philip Taaffe

BRODY Let me ask you specifically about painters whom you took a very analytical view of, in terms of how you began to use their formal ideas: Bridget Riley, Paul Feeley, Barnett Newman, Ellsworth Kelly, and others, all of whom are somewhat situated within post-painterly abstraction – Barnett Newman at the very beginning of it all. Were you making a statement about what a painting should be by choosing those particular painters for whom an analytical, formal position seems to be primary?

TAAFFE Yes, probably I was, because those were the painters for whom I felt the closest affinity. As a young artist, that analysis was a way of bringing myself into a closer state of artistic intimacy with the material evidence that I had to come to terms with in order to find my way. We're all lost, in a sense. We're all voyagers; we're all navigating a certain cultural terrain of our own choosing. At that phase of my artistic life I felt I had to understand myself through coming to terms most intimately with the work I loved, in order to find a way forward. But I don't want to get bogged down in any kind of autobiographical dimension to this.

BRODY So let me be your analyst: why don't you want to talk about Barnett Newman?

TAAFFE I *do* want to talk about Barnett Newman.

BRODY Okay, great. In Barnett Newman's writing, he rails against formalism in art, which he calls, the "Pagan Void." Instead he wants abstraction to regain its primitive, religious function. Mel Bochner writes (in 2002) that "one can only conclude that metaphysical and theological issues have been avoided or repressed in recent writing about Newman because they fall outside the conceptual prejudices of late 20th century criticism."

TAAFFE I'm in complete agreement with that. The primitivist aspect of Newman was crucial to me when I was starting out. To my mind, what I was doing was releasing the spirit of Newman's intentions. I've said this before: I was bringing in the dimension of liturgy, religious stagecraft, almost treating this arena as sacred theatre, or the painting as a sacred object that I sought to internalise. Newman is insisting upon a weighted subject matter for an abstract work. I always considered that extremely important. I felt very close to that position. I was including myself in a tribal situation that was loaded with subject matter. That's where I wanted to be at the time. I wanted to declare my affinity with this position. I didn't make the work as a parody of Newman. It was a very genuine wish to be part of the tradition. Newman uses the title "Onement," to be "at one" with something. I responded to that religiosity and the sense of wanting a deeper connection to a reality outside of any formalist considerations.

BRODY Crucially, his "zips" were gestural – textured along their sides. Your remaking them as ready-made patterns, things that looked like they could have come from a sewing trimming shop, it seems to me, cannot be read as other than critique.

TAAFFE Yes, I was imposing a more illusionistic element, but I had seen Newman's paintings as having an illusionistic dimension, especially the one at the Metropolitan Museum with the masking tape left on, *Concord* (1949). That's what enabled me to say that I could collage something there and make it illusionistic, to do something with that space. I know there's a deeper psychological component to these gestures. It's not necessarily a very friendly environment when you are starting out as an artist. So one has to find a way to proceed.

BRODY Does your idea of religion involve play, involve pleasure?

TAAFFE Yes, of course. It's not sanctimonious. It's about liberating the spirit.

BRODY What about Newman, do you think he was sanctimonious?

TAAFFE No, I don't think he was sanctimonious. I think he was trying to take a serious position. He was trying to instill content, to demonstrate that an abstract work had content, that it was not a formalistic product. I came from a very anti-formalist background in my

schooling. I was a student of Hans Haacke and formalism was anathema, so I never wanted to make a formalist work of art. I wanted to make an investigation. First of all, I consider painting to be a field of visual research – that's what it is for me. I was conducting research. I wanted to find my way, to move into a certain area where I would be able to make discoveries. I was always interested in finding out what it is that we are confronted with? As painters we are confronted with a certain history, and we have to respond to this somehow.

BRODY If there was iconoclasm in your investigation, there was also love, that seems clear. W. J. T. Mitchell wrote a book called *What Do Pictures Want?*, and in it he writes that to destroy an image, for example, the World Trade Center or the golden calf, is to make a new image.

TAAFFE An act of destruction is merely a temporary displacement. You're just making another image, yes.

BRODY So aniconism actually empowers images. False idols are so dangerous that they have to be destroyed. But instead of seeking to destroy images, Mitchell says the critic, or by implication the artist, should sound them out like Nietzsche's Zarathustra, wielding his hammer as a tuning fork. In Mitchell's words, "it would be a delicate critical practice to strike images with just enough force to make them resonate but not so much as to smash them." That seems like an apt description of your re-enactments of Newman, Still, Riley, Kelly etc. – aniconists all. They tried to destroy the image, to make an art beyond pictures, but in doing so just made more pictures. Your painterly re-enactments sound these new idols, they don't smash them.

TAAFFE As I've said before, I felt modern art was a collective situation, which is why I decided that I would just do a version of an optical work by Bridget Riley, because it didn't matter that it existed before. It was determined tribally. I like to travel in time and make connections, culturally, to figure out what came from where and to decipher the direction of things. It's a way of navigating my way through the world. You're choosing what you want to inhabit, visually. I do it still, only now I am going further back in time, culling things and telling stories that didn't previously have a connection. I'm trying to find ways of bringing things together that have never been brought together before. And ritual is still an important part of my method. It's not just what I do, but how I do things, that is important to me in my work.

BRODY When you cull images, you don't use much in the way of photography, and as far as I can see, no contemporary photography. If you use computers it's incidental, I imagine. This is a very significant kind of rejection. Rather than sample directly from the digitised

ocean of images you cut stencils, you re-draw source images for silkscreening. And when you work with images from natural history, they usually come through the filter of nineteenth century drawings rather than photographs, and never contemporary scientific imaging. So these are very deliberate decisions that you make, and it seems to connect with your interest in making work that is not about being reproduced, but is singular, individual, and has an “aura” – that quality which can only be experienced in person.

TAAFFE What you describe is an essential crisis in art today, a paradox. What we love about art, why we think about it and make it and discuss it has to do with a shared physical environment. We are a part of the same physical space, and we experience art directly, with a sense of immediacy. To me it matters that art exists in a physical place. I defend the aura and the presence of a work of art. Maybe this is why I am dubious about digital media and cyberspace; I have no problem using those things if they can be of help, but I worry that they are being used as a substitute for interpersonal practices. As I mentioned, I was a student of Hans Haacke, so I still see things in the context of social critique: I think to a large extent it’s corporate capitalism that is pushing this technology down our throats in order to make a ton of money and to control people’s lives and their spending habits and to gather information in order to market consumer goods. Perhaps there needs to be a little more resistance to things like this.

BRODY I’ve been looking at your works in reproduction, but it wasn’t until I walked into the studio and was reminded of how one’s experience of texture changes depending on distance, with the very particular way the paintings take light, with the irreproducible character of their colour saturation – it’s a physical engagement, an optical trip. Your work is clearly meant to overwhelm.

TAAFFE Overwhelm is too strong a word. I want to present a complete experience. I want to believe that we can sustain a high level of intimacy and involvement with painting and imagery, one that has a certain visual complexity that people are interested in coming to terms with, that it’s somehow pointing a way, in a creative direction.

BRODY Is it an obligation as an artist with a position like yours to seduce the viewer?

TAAFFE I think it’s less a question of seduction than of creating a dialogue, enabling an exchange to take place. For example when you go to a poetry reading, you’re sitting there listening to the poet read their poems, and that is a very different experience than reading a book of poetry. I think such an exchange is culturally essential, and I think there is a lot of passion out there for this type of experience. Art is about an exchange between one person and another – that’s the beauty of it, that one person has shaped this poem or this painting,

and another person comes to that situation and is transported by it. Art is ultimately about desire, and when you see a painting you love, you feel the desire that went into the making of it. It’s a very personal, one-on-one thing; it’s not about systematic or technical questions. It’s about feeling the story behind what’s there, and how the artist has filtered the information to make it personal, how the artist has assimilated those ideas and images and worked with them and made them their own, to reveal something about the world. But there is an almost Manichean schism between, on the one hand, what we are talking about, what we want, what we’re engaged with, and all the rest – these kind of media-driven, larger, more anonymous constructions. That’s just a recapitulation of the alienation that most people experience in their lives, imitating the worst aspects of Hollywood or fashion or a kind of technological overload. I don’t think that’s useful. It’s not what I think people want. I don’t think that people know what they want, but I don’t think that’s it.

BRODY I don’t want to belabour this point, but I’m really interested to know why you don’t use photography?

TAAFFE I do use photography. This piece of bark you see in the studio was taken from a Douglas-fir tree and sent to me by a friend in Seattle. I wanted to use it in a painting (*Dryadic Figures*, 2004). In order to generate the imagery, I photographed these pieces of bark with a Polaroid camera, and I lit them with a certain kind of raking light. I do studio photography.

BRODY Have you done that all along?

TAAFFE From time to time I’ve photographed seashells, razor ribbon wire, just very specific objects I want to include in my paintings.

BRODY And if you do use photography by other people, it tends to be photography of an earlier era. Is it because of the textures of older techniques?

TAAFFE Yes, I prefer gravure, the continuous tone.

BRODY So I’m wrong. You do use photography. You’re not religiously opposed to it.

TAAFFE No, not at all. I want it both ways. Categorical ambivalence is in the nature of what I do. It has to do with a kind of mediation – it’s about being inside the work and outside the work at the same time. I’m finding ways to construct a picture that is very much me, but I also fade away, and I no longer exist at the end of the process. I’m absorbed into the imagery; I enter the work in that way. It also has a psychological dimension because of the emotional struggle that takes place. The decisions involved in making a painting are clearly

not objective ones, although they have their own logic that is geared toward allowing the painting to move forward in its own right.

BRODY In the 1990s you moved away from the analytical approach that characterised much of your work from the 1980s. You were analytical in the forms that you chose, but you began to get very complicated and permutational and combinatorial.

TAAFFE I think I had no other choice at the time. All of these different tropes and strategies that we have been talking about were tools in my development. They were ways of developing the vocabulary and means whereby I could move in a more emotional direction. I was always interested in shaping a situation that would have a kind of emotive signification. You used the word 'seduction,' but I would say, rather, 'presenting a set of emotions.' Seduction is a very problematical way of describing what goes on. It's *almost* seductive. I think what the viewer finds seductive are the traces of emotion and the decisions that are physically evident that created these emotions. How are these images constructed? The constructive aspect to what you're looking at carries emotional content and power.

BRODY The New York School work that you focused on was at the relatively un-gestural end of the spectrum. What do you think of European expressionist painting of the same period – Tachisme, Art Informel, COBRA? Painters like Pierre Soulages, Antoni Tàpies and Jean Fautrier have never made much headway in New York, being seen as neither wild enough nor calculating enough. Their international reputation is much higher though, and there have been attempts to look at this work afresh here.

TAAFFE As interesting as the European counterparts in the 1950s were, compared to what was going on in New York they always seemed rather aestheticised, even though there were some good things that came out of that. Soulages, Fautrier, Tàpies. I like all of these artists, but in my view they don't remotely stand up to Rothko and Still and Newman. The context of the United States and New York provided a rawness. Here artists recognised they were faced with an artistic frontier. Even the European painters who came to New York in the forties and fifties were compelled to seek a less cultured or less refined version of abstraction, in keeping with the American standard. On the other hand, I am not seduced by the heroic myth of Abstract Expressionism: I actually prefer the psychic claustrophobia of early Pollock to the drip paintings.

BRODY You use words like "trance" and "ritual" to talk about your practice, which suggests, if not drug use per se, an orientation toward shamanic disruption of ordinary reality. Sigmar Polke never made it a secret that he was sometimes taking LSD when he was painting, as I understand it, and there's plenty of other examples. Pollock's great surrealist meltdowns,

pre-drip, might well have been fueled by alcohol. Utterly sober art practice, of course, can produce parallel insights. Do you see any fundamental distinction between these two ways of knowledge?

TAAFFE Psychedelic is a word that only was invented in the late forties, but I think it applies to a lot of earlier work. The sixteenth century Sieneese painter Domenico Beccafumi is a prime example. He was the most psychedelic Renaissance painter, to my mind. I don't think the question of drugs matters. I've experimented with these things, but I've never used drugs ritualistically in the work. When I talk about the trance-like state that results from the work, a good example is the *Floating Pigment* paintings that I started to make in 2002. In making those works I constructed two enormous pools of liquid in the middle of this room. I mixed gigantic quantities of carrageen moss, which is a liquid, viscous porridge, and then I had another swimming-pool-like vat of water. I was pouring and throwing and manipulating liquids and pigments, for days and weeks on end. The entire studio was dedicated to this process, and it is was an incredibly hallucinatory experience – ectoplasmic, bordering on delirium, like watching the origin of the cosmos every time. I was not taking any drugs, but a process like that does something to your brain. It's extremely chimerical. In this case the pigment is like a drug.

BRODY Are you comfortable with your paintings being seen in the context of a new psychedelic vanguard?

TAAFFE Certainly. I think psychedelics are informational. It's like going to church. It's a way of achieving a certain moment of internal focus. The same thing can be achieved in meditation, in prayer, in reading good poetry or listening to a great piece of music. It's all part of that fabric of existence that we need to reiterate to be able to understand who we are and what we're here for. Psychedelics can put one in touch with the archaic nature of one's own being, digging deeper into our DNA and the genetic code. It's about our humanity, not just the pulsating vibratory visual experience. It takes one very far back – frightening, but essential to getting at a certain knowledge of who we are and where we come from. Psychedelics are a form of wisdom.

BRODY I see a real relationship between the kind of profusion you seek in your work, the dense clarity, and those early Miró paintings, beginning with *The Farm*, (1921–22), and well into the pure abstractions of the thirties. And also a sense of color as a substance whose texture can go all the way into the weave of the canvas. There's something hallucinatory in almost every mark that Miró makes. Of the School of Paris masters, he seems to be the one that influenced you the most.

TAAFFE Miró is pure mind. Those early paintings you mention, especially *Harlequin's Carnival*, (1924–25), in the Albright-Knox, are absolutely essential images for me. They are intimist, yet incredibly expansive. The implications for abstraction are so far-reaching, yet there is such an economy of means. There is a richness and luxury to them that emerges from the poverty of pure invention.

BRODY Matisse's near abstraction of hovering planes also seems important in your work, notably in your use of Moorish ornament to similarly spacious ends. The sovereignty of geometry, and the light, has always been part of Orientalism, beginning with Delacroix and Ingres, going through Gérôme and the "grandes machines" salon paintings, and climaxing in Matisse's *The Moroccans*, (1915).

TAAFFE There's nothing preventing me from moving in any direction at any given moment now. I'm poised, I'm open. I've constructed my pictorial world in such a way that I can move between these things in an instant. I was examining recently the Portuguese Renaissance architect Diogo de Arruda who was active during the early years of the sixteenth century. The Portuguese went to India and established trade colonies, and the ships returned festooned with all types of exotic specimens and crustaceans and other exotica. The ships were just dripping with all this stuff they found. It was mind-blowing to this architect, so he incorporated marine ropes and strange coral formations and other items. There are also sculpted arms and other parts of human anatomy in his architecture. It's an absolutely amazing conflation of symbolic, exotic imagery, all commingled. It's figurative as well.

BRODY So in a work like *Old Cairo*, (1989), were you consciously commingling French Orientalism, and all its baggage, with those architectural motifs?

TAAFFE No, it was really a diaristic concern. For me the paintings are always experiential. It was made after a trip to Cairo – the only city in the world I've ever gotten lost in. I was just wandering aimlessly, ten hours a day. I was breathing it in, taking notes and doing drawings as a way of possessing all the things I was seeing. I had a desire to see a painting that did not yet exist. When I returned to my studio in Naples, I made *Old Cairo* by reconstructing these notations and visual materials, to try to shape an extravagant, rapturous experience. I wanted to create a synthesis, using all these diverse materials. It was a constructivist effort. The point is to have a world that is open to all these things, to have a decision making process that allows for openness – or rather, how to build openness into the decision making process.

BRODY There are a few paintings where you use balustrade shapes, if that's the right word – staircases that intersect and cross over in the middle. In those paintings there is flatly applied ornament, as ornament would be applied in Arabic architecture, generally.

TAAFFE You are absolutely right. It's flatly applied.

BRODY But then you make this very interesting space that is quite different from the other paintings you had been making up to that time. You almost imply that they're three-dimensional. You're making an atmospheric fold in space, not quite illusionistic.

TAAFFE I want my paintings to separate from the three-dimensional. I want them to exist on a flat surface. I don't like a lot of built-up things on the surface. The paintings have a lot of layers but are also very thin. I don't like them to be too physical. I try to put them in a more cerebral frame, so you read them as you would poetry. I don't want the viewer to be hit over the head by the physical experience. I'm seeking more of a synesthetic encounter. All of this extends from that very limited, focused, flat surface. I want them to be talismans, in a sense.

BRODY In the kind of painting space that you're interested in, which is related to colour field painting, the colours are absorbed into the surface. It's like Rothko space.

TAAFFE Colour field painting for me is always very limited. The problem for me is that I see a lot of abstract work as being fragmentary, when it settles into systematic niceties, or is somehow self-congratulatory, or accepts a certain mannered inevitability of outcome. I'm seeking more of an orchestrated whole, I'm not satisfied with just a colour field. I want more *stuff* in the painting.

BRODY Are you a skeptic of the kind of sacred veneration with which many people regard Rothko?

TAAFFE No, I venerate Rothko – I actually have a small painting of his from 1943.

BRODY From his surrealist period?

TAAFFE Yes, I love the Surrealist Rothko. *Slow Swirl at the Edge of the Sea* (1944) is one of my favorite paintings in the world, and the polyform paintings are fantastic, too.

BRODY Rothko was very similar to Newman in that he was explicit about the sacred aims of his work. There's tremendous analysis in their work, but they're seeking to go into the poetic beyond, and they're explicit about that. Whereas the artists who took Rothko and Newman as founding fathers were radical in disavowing the poetry: what you see is what you see. So in a sense, your Newman paintings were misunderstood in the same way the originals were.

TAAFFE Yes, perhaps. The psychic gravity of Rothko's work and the emotional space that he was trying to create in the paintings is what appeals to me.

BRODY The kind of ornament that you brought into your work, from Celtic carving and tribal art and Hindu art, some Gothic and Romanesque art, Islamic art of course, all these traditions of ornament equate visual intricacy with a sacred dimension. They are sacred texts, in some cases literally. Your work seems to be in sympathy with the luxuriant, hallucinatory richness of invention of these anonymous artists. Is a Persian carpet equal to a Mondrian?

TAAFFE No. A Mondrian is a Mondrian and a Persian carpet is a Persian carpet – something entirely different. I have a great Persian carpet, but it's an entirely different species from a Mondrian. You could learn how to organize every aspect of your life from looking at a Mondrian; it's a very stimulating thing that can inform many aspects of existence. A Mondrian painting is the ultimate paradigm for life, in a sense. There's also a profound metaphysical dimension to his work. It's like watching a mystic be a mystic. It's the spiritual dimension of the work that sets it apart. And the intensity of the involvement, the material physical involvement, the artistic transformation of this prescribed space, the decisions that were made to make this thing, the way he brought his intellect and his mystical concerns to this situation is what gives it this power.

BRODY It seems that your work is evolving from the Mondrian end of the spectrum to the super-profuse end with the recent folded, marbled works on paper, which are positively phantasmagoric in their density.

TAAFFE My work goes through phases of being more or less dense or complex. It reaches a point of saturation and then it becomes possible to empty it out. What I've always tried to do in my work is allow myself complete freedom to change directions and to move in different areas of research and exploration, and to change the weight and velocity of certain kinds of things in the work. I think it's good to periodically change course and work on something that has a very different quality, although I will say that a certain amount of density is important to me. I like a rich visual field, however the way I arrive at that changes. Even though I take certain minimalist approaches to things, in terms of the organisational austerity of a work, I like a certain fullness. That comes in the editing process, too.

BRODY Let me ask you about *Martyr Group* (1984). The target practice figures have something that look like halos. They're overlapped in a way that relates to Byzantine art, but they also seem to point to Andy Warhol's repeating silkscreen appropriations, especially because of the dark subject matter of gunshots, assassinations.

TAAFFE You're the first person who ever made that comparison, I never thought about Warhol in relation to that.

BRODY You didn't think about Warhol when you began using silkscreen?

TAAFFE Not particularly. I have a much more hands-on gestural approach to silkscreen. I use silkscreen as a gestural tool, like a paintbrush.

BRODY Can I psychoanalyse a little more? I wonder if your aversion to using contemporary photographs might be related to making a distinction between your work and Warhol's.

TAAFFE Maybe. There's something inevitable about Warhol, almost like a cultural fact.

BRODY I'm curious about the mindset of the young Philip Taaffe who had an enormous poetic ambition about art, and was willing to take the kinds of risks, social risks, to form friendships with older outlaw artists such as William Burroughs, Harry Smith, and others.

TAAFFE Thanks to Diego Cortez, early in 1985, I first collaborated with William Burroughs. It seems he was interested in getting involved once again with painting, and he was looking for new ways to be inspired, and to refamiliarize himself with this type of work. I had been deeply involved with William's books since I was in high school. He was very much a hero of mine. I also knew of his involvement with the visual arts through Brion Gysin, also an important figure for me. We made a lot of work together. That was a very rewarding collaboration; we exhibited the results at Pat Hearn's gallery in 1987. Harry Smith I never met. I moved into the Chelsea Hotel in 1991, the same year he died there. I was living in Italy for three and a half years, and then I moved into the Chelsea. I knew he was there, and I donated a drawing to help pay his rent at one point. I was very familiar with Harry Smith's work, but unfortunately I never met him.

BRODY I've been looking at his films and there's one where he uses Hindu hand gestures, mudras, and they're just cut one to the next, with other imagery on top. His montage and use of nineteenth century engravings, his layering of images, the way he physically imprints and saturates colour onto the film stock, strike me as being influential, directly or indirectly, with how you work.

TAAFFE Oh, he's my relative. I'm related to Harry Smith, there's no doubt about it.

BRODY You had a friendship with Stan Brakhage. He has a similar approach to space, which has to do with endless saturations of layers.

TAAFFE He was also a hero of mine when I was a student. I went to see him at Millennium Film Workshop a couple of times, where he would always present his new films. I loved his work. I also saw it at Anthology Film Archives.

BRODY He was really a poet, it seems to me. His talking about his films is part of what they are.

TAAFFE He was a Bard. He was hand painting on film when I met him, and he liked to work in public. He would sit in the cafes in Boulder, an incredibly expansive individual, totally accessible, but he was doing this visionary work, very precise, like a watchmaker. Painting and scratching away, hour after hour, shaping these masterpieces. It was almost like he was manufacturing a bomb or something, making this thing that would explode and alter your sense of reality.

BRODY Obviously today we have non-linear editing techniques, and image processing, and all this ubiquitous digital fantasy. But with Brakhage, all the layering is essentially manual. They're not strictly unique objects – Brakhage could distribute prints, and you use reproductive techniques – but the experience of viewing his films and your paintings is not reproducible.

TAAFFE That's true. One thing that always impressed me about his filmmaking is the rhythmic aspect, the fact that you have lyrical passages combined with frenetic moments, hypnagogic pulsations. There's a controlled velocity. He was always experimenting with pauses and lengths of sustained visual incident and changes in the velocity and changes in the colour and quality of the gesture. I think there's a direct parallel there to my work. I'm very interested in different speeds of gesture in a work. What you noticed about the painterly backdrop in my paintings could consist of three or four different applications. There are different speeds and physical forces. Those are locational clues, and they become an important part of the time-based gestural narrative that underlies the work as it develops. There's a lot of editing in my work, piecing together gestural sequences or visual passages. That definitely parallels many of the things Brakhage was doing in film.

BRODY In reading *What Do Pictures Want?*, Mitchell talks about how it was only in the 1790s that western European imperial societies became in contact with tribal art, and it was at exactly the same time they came to understand the meaning of fossils. You've used tribal art and fossils, as well as nineteenth century scientific drawings of discovered species, plants, microbotany. It seems like a lot of your imagery does converge on the nineteenth century imperial worldview. It's tempting to read some kind of critique into that.

TAAFFE I'm more of an explorer, although of course I have a dim view of empire. I'm more interested in exploration and the slow gathering of knowledge.

BRODY Is there nostalgia for a time when knowledge and aesthetics seemed unified?

TAAFFE In a sense, though I wouldn't say it's particularly nostalgic. The material has to fit a certain psychological profile. I perform a type of detective work to find material that has potency. It's true that scientists today are extremely atomized in hyper-specialisations, that's just how it is. But it's not like I have great nostalgia for the nineteenth century, I simply feel it's more available to me, in terms of its aesthetic use-value. Getting back to exploration, I will say that a lot of what I find is not readily available. I deliberately try to find things that are fairly obscure, because I'm interested in unique material. For me, these nineteenth century scientific memoirs are fossils in and of themselves.

BRODY You spoke earlier about the sense of the immediate presence of the work, something like the return of the 'aura,' and the sense of a community of viewers created by their common experience of that presence.

TAAFFE I try to instill sensitivity to the surface through the sense of touch. There are certain things that cannot be achieved without that direct relation to a work. It also has to do with the organisation of the space and the scale of a work and the quality of the line and how weak or strong it is. There are lots of little things that go on that are barely noticeable at first, and yet the cumulative effect of these subtle marks constitute a painting's presence or being in the world. Art is caressing, it's erotic. Isn't that why we like looking at art? I think that's what we like most about art, whether we realise it or not. It's about the intimacy of one person shaping something in a very delicate, personal way, that another person can experience, and that's what we need more of in the world today. We're losing that sense of the tactile.

BRODY Painting was once high technology, it was once virtual reality. But now, vivid technological microcosms are available on one's phone. Yet your work eloquently proves that painting can still do things that technological fantasy and spectacle can't. Does painting matter less and less or more and more?

TAAFFE I think that painting informs the visual culture *essentially*: that painting is a paradigmatic synthesis and that it can inform other kinds of cultural activities such as design and architecture. I see art as intrinsically at the center of our culture, whether it is realized at the time or not.