

Lawrence Carroll

*As I change the painting changes,  
and as the painting changes, I change.*

Lawrence Carroll

*Everyday I am here*

For more than thirty years now I have been acutely aware of the privilege and risk of entering an artist's studio. Creative sites can be loaded with the atmosphere of invention, littered with clues as to the conjuring and alchemy that is practiced inside. Most often however, there is an oddly prosaic configuration to many an artist's studio, a secular system that serves to contain unruly materials and marshal uncertain processes. Lending organisation to systems and thinking that - at least in my romantically inclined mind - could easily become hazardous, must be a prerequisite for making.

Lawrence Carroll's Bolsena studio, roughly two hours north of Rome, does a good job of mimicking a nondescript Italian farmer's shed - the large aluminium doors could've been concealing a dusty Fiat tractor and a small selection of harvesting equipment. Discreetly located at the end of a covert driveway, the exterior gave precious few clues as to what went on inside. And on a warm autumn morning where our senses were being steadily cushioned by the soft Umbrian atmosphere, we were not prepared for the interior of those two spaces, let alone the glimpse inside of Lawrence's mind.

The privilege I speak of is that so much can be gleaned from such visits. Being with paintings in various states of undress grants insights into process and cognition, simultaneously de-mystifying and seducing us with chance insights. Lawrence's studio was brimming with material, notes and clues in every nook and cranny. I felt a little like a child in a fantastical chamber, curious almost to the point of being impolite, wanting as I did to look around, under and behind everything.





*Untitled*, (detail) 2014/17

Oil, wax, house paint, plastic flowers and canvas fabric on wood.  
64.5 x 47.5 x 7 cm

Restraining myself to consider individual pieces, it became apparent that each one in fact, was brimming with material, notes, clues, nooks and crannies. Even the most orthodox paintings Lawrence made speak of concealment and veiling. The process of assembling the surface by laying fragments of cloth down, painting, stapling and collaging as he went - continually masking and camouflaging much that lay beneath feels central to Lawrence's practice. Though it feels less about disguise than about rehabilitation - the thin washes of acrylic paint - a balm, the abraded fabrics - dressings that stem the implied structural fatigue and fragility - not of Lawrence's paintings per se, but a recognition of the sensitivity and essential contradiction that painting offers, one where powerful and delicate gestures alike, are evidence of the strength and frailty of our very existence.

Lawrence's larger works radically extend the usual morphology of the painting well beyond stretcher and linen to an utterly unconventional form. Constructed so as to reveal glimpses of their interior compartments and cavities would allow Lawrence to occasionally place objects inside the painting. These works take on something of a funereal sarcophagus, complete with reserves of implements and utensils, shoes and folded canvases, readied for work on the other side of the Styx. They are seldom bleak though - leavened by Carroll's humour and the approachability and unpretentiousness of Arte Povera. They signal through their humanity and quirky organic actuality a kind of triumph over death.



**Untitled**, 2014/17  
Oil, wax, house paint, plastic flowers and canvas fabric on wood.  
64.5 x 47.5 x 7 cm

*What interests me the most is expressing what's in nature,  
in the visible world, that is.*  
Giorgio Morandi

**Untitled**, 2014/17

Oil, wax, house paint, plastic flowers and canvas fabric on wood.  
64.5 x 47.5 x 7 cm

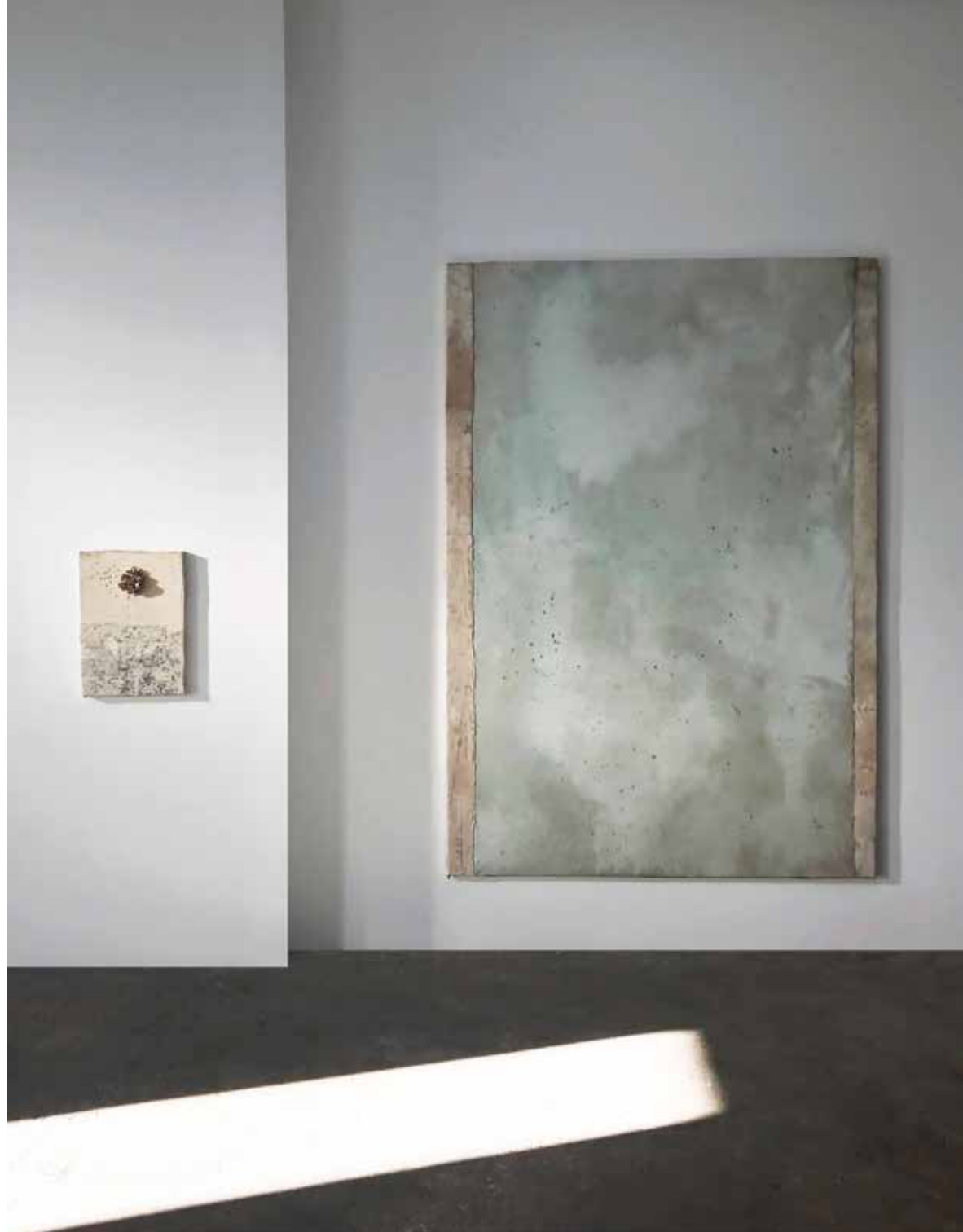
**Untitled**, 2016/17

Stain, house paint and canvas on wood.  
300 x 190 x 4 cm

Installation: *Permafrost*, Fox Jensen, Alexandria, Sydney, 2019

*Victory over Death 2* by New Zealand painter Colin McCahon uses the simple statement *I AM* on a heroic scale. McCahon's announcement, taken to be the utterance of God was central to his relentless search for faith and meaning in his life. Lawrence Carroll, who like McCahon shared a great love of poetry repeated the phrase "I am" on multiple notes and on paintings sometimes extending the shorter phrase into "Everyday I am here". The existential gravity of *I AM* is lightened a touch by the inference that he may simply have been saying "Every day I am here"- at the studio, at the coalface. There was a strong sense that this was how Lawrence approached his tasks - not flattering himself that he was doing more than simply working and yet despite this humility Lawrence Carroll's works now amount to one of the 20th century's most poignant and complex visual proclamations.

In a sense rural Italy was happily compatible with his sensibility. Away from the grandiosity and suffocating weight of history that Rome and Florence can provoke, there is an arcadian climate and mood that drew Twombly close by, that sustained Morandi and Fontana and engendered the unpolished resistance of Arte Povera. This defiance of the mannered elegance of the late Renaissance no doubt appealed to Lawrence especially given the availability of Trecento and Quattrocento painting whose curious richness and modernity he loved and kept his feet firmly astride the Atlantic, away from his other home in America. However, it was to America that Lawrence was turning his attention again in recent years. Meeting him and Lucy in late 2018, they were excitedly recalibrating their lives to accommodate new opportunities in America and thrillingly for us, with Australia. Lawrence was born in Melbourne and he still has family in Victoria. To say he knew it well is an overstatement but he was delighted that by working with the gallery there was the opportunity to visit the country of his father and build ties there that were practical...and mystical.





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Stain, house paint and canvas on wood.  
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Installation: *Permafrost*, Fox Jensen, Alexandria, Sydney, 2019





Colin McCahon.  
**Victory over Death 2**, 1970  
Synthetic polymer paint on unstretched canvas.  
207.5 x 597.7 cm

**Dust**, 2003  
Oil and wax on canvas, wood, plexiglass.  
250 x 193 x 10 cm

**Cloud**, 2003  
Oil and wax on canvas, wood.  
52 x 68 x 32 cm (floor)  
Installation: *Lawrence Carroll*, Studio Trisorio, Napoli, Italy, 2004





**Untitled, (cocoon painting)** 2014/17  
Corrugated paper, oil, tape, house paint, glue and wire.  
40 x 14 x 13 cm  
Installation: Kunstmuseum Magdeburg, Germany, 2018









*The better and more realistic test would therefore seem to be:  
In what cause, or on what principle, would you risk your life?*  
Christopher Hitchens

**Untitled**, 2014

Wax and canvas on wood, paper, newspaper, light and cable.

226 x 185.5 x 97 cm

Installation: Carroll studio, Bolsena, Italy, 2018

Andrea Mantegna, **St Sebastian**, c.1506

Tempera on canvas.

213 x 95 cm

The Galleria Giorgio Franchetti alla Ca' d'Oro, Venice, Italy







*She lit a burner on the stove  
And offered me a pipe  
I thought you'd never say hello, she said  
You look like the silent type  
Then she opened up a book of poems  
And handed it to me  
Written by an Italian poet  
From the thirteenth century  
And everyone of them words rang true  
And glowed like burnin' coal  
Pourin' off of every page  
Like it was written in my soul  
From me to you  
Tangled up in blue.*

Bob Dylan

**Rain**, 1997/2002  
Oil on canvas on wood.  
64 x 46 x 7 cm



**Untitled (Grey Sleeping Painting)**, 2010/12

Oil, wax and canvas on wood.

184 x 121 x 18 cm

Collection Milwaukee Art Museum, Wisconsin, USA

Felix Gonzalez-Torres,

**Untitled (Couple)**, 1993

Lightbulbs, porcelain light sockets and extension cords (dimensions variable).

Installation: Milwaukee Art Museum, Wisconsin, USA, 2015





**Rose**, 2019

Archival ink jet print on velvet fine art paper, Ed 3 of 5.  
Paper size: 55 x 42. Image size: 41 x 31 cm

*Everyday I am here*





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