



transmission

*"And we would go on as though nothing was wrong  
And hide from these days we remained all alone  
Staying in the same place, just staying out the time  
Touching from a distance  
Further all the time"*

- Ian Curtis. *Transmission*, 1979

Manchester's greatest lyricist (apologies to John Cooper Clarke) Ian Curtis wrote *Transmission* in 1979. Curtis's song remains one of a clutch of deeply melancholic but profoundly arousing pieces of music that many believe have risen above most all of contemporary music from the last quarter of the 20th century.



Curtis understood that isolation (another great song title from *Unknown Pleasures* 1979) is as much a state of mind as it is a physical condition. His widow Deborah Curtis chose the line "Touching from a Distance" as the title of her 1995 memoir of her husband's all too brief life – a poignant phrase that describes how 'social distancing' is for many a condition in itself. Of course, amidst the lunacy of Covid-19 "touching from a distance" may be all we have until the vaccine.

Of course, the notion of 'transmission' has implications well beyond engine mechanics and radio signals. Any pandemics life-span depends on the ease of transmission as has become all too apparent, given Covid-19's effortless capacity for this.

Looking closely at Gary McMillan's exquisitely painted works where his screen of dots energetically jostle for

space on the dance floor, you might just be able to detect "dance, dance, dance to the radio" playing on a loop on the studio tape-deck. Particles of colour transmit energy in a vibrant pointillist exchange that like Ian Curtis was equal part dance and agitation. One senses clearly that the ruminative atmosphere that pervades Gary's images perhaps finds an even deeper commiseration with Cormac McCarthy whose ominous masterpiece *The Road*, like Curtis's lyrics, rises well above the slew of post-apocalyptic dramas that choke the networks.

One even gets the sense that Gary McMillan might quietly view himself as occasional protagonist in his very own series of Cormac McCarthy novellas. Though the vistas Gary paints are hardly at the bleakest end of the dystopian yardstick there is a looming sense, I imagine held since his childhood, in what lies ahead. He and McCarthy are not alone in this, sharing their nervous concerns with H.G. Wells and Ray Bradbury et al.

Of course, Gary has been painting with 'one eye open' for some time now, attuned to the prescient fables foretelling of invasions by cyber-attacks, hackers and viruses (not 5G). But rather than conspiracy theorist, Gary is beginning to look like the calm rationalist we all suspect he is, aware that our ability to reinvigorate vision with authenticity is going to demand that the deluge of transmissible data, no matter how dense cannot continue to be confused with truth.

In Gary's scenes his filmic sensibility is framed by mindful cropping and sensitive adjustments to light and density. This gives the paintings the impression that they are, like vision itself, in flux... impressionist. The sense of unease that the works gently evoke arise from their own visual quiver. Gary McMillan believes the true threats we face as an audience hail from neither Mars nor China for that matter but are increasingly driven by the dismantling of the veracity of our own visual world. This undermining of visual stability is exacerbated by those who willfully join in the distortion and corruption of the visual platforms on which we have long depended but most disturbingly by our own lazy complicity in this.

*'On this road there are no godspoke men.  
They are gone and I am left and they have  
taken with them the world.'*

- Cormac McCarthy. *The Road*, 2006

The atomization of the surface of Gary's paintings is less about the nuclear risks we have faced since Rutherford first split the atom, rather it seems that he is inviting us to actively reassemble sight itself. Having reminded us through his obsessive pointillist procedure that vision is inherently unstable - volatile even, we have a duty to slow our looking down so that we might learn to see again, guided by internal editing and intuition, by feeling and knowledge and not by speed, digitization and compression.

There is a curious liberty in what Gary McMillan's paintings offer. He is less concerned to tell us what to see, even what to look at - rather he seems to be simply saying - here is a slice of observed space. Here are the elements, feel free to reassemble it with me.

And whilst there is nostalgia (that great corrupter of vision) present in many of his images, particularly those "freeway" paintings that recall the evacuated urban scenes of *War of the Worlds* but more and more Gary finds real visual mystery and contingency in the path of a raindrop across a windshield or in the diffusion of colour when a streetlight is filtered through rain. In these quite wonderful paintings visual clarity is not dependent on the dry reportage of what's in front of you but it arises out of knowing that the truth of the painting is informed as much by what he chooses to leave out and that ultimately the images own veracity, its true responsibility is only to itself.

- Andrew Jensen





Jawpress, 2020  
fmgallery.com



*Scene 47 (detail)* 2020 acrylic on linen 450 x 600 mm  
*Scene 10* 2008 acrylic and graphite on board 305 x 407 mm  
*Scene 46* 2020 acrylic on linen 450 x 600 mm  
*Scene 44* 2020 acrylic on linen 630 x 840 mm