

Graham Fransella: reflections

Printmaker and painter Graham Fransella has long navigated the figure in the landscape, paring back his subjects to essential outlines that hint at an elemental humanity, a vulnerability. His stark, vivid depictions create grand gestural images that flirt with abstraction through a minimal palette. When painting figures, he blocks them in black over yellow, embracing commitment and speed, and will often turn the canvas to reveal new perspectives. 'After an outburst, you start to hunt the image down', he says, describing his technique of slashing with a palette knife and employing various strategies to manipulate his medium.¹ 'Through desperation, you go through hell trying to make it work ... and then you must live with yourself.'

Fransella's recent work, however, also leans towards the non-figurative, the marks themselves becoming the focal point. It is the freedom of the marks that he looks for, highlighting a lack of self-consciousness that speaks to authentic expression. He embraces chance and accident, viewing them as essential to the life of the work.

Fransella admires the disregard of perfection in Edvard Munch's prints, and he aims to make his own printmaking process appear effortless, preferring ordered chaos, 'as if it flows and glows with acid and turps'. For example, *Orange Head* 1998 was sketched in just 25 seconds, but it took two weeks to develop, reflecting years of experience. Fransella believes that simplicity often creates more powerful art, his instinctive responses yielding coherent and distinctive images.

In his works on canvas, Fransella moves from applying dramatic textures and frantic lines in many colours to achieving a looser, more subdued (yet monumental) style with a reduced palette. While printmaking demands acceptance of the final outcome, painting allows for greater freedom and spontaneity. In working quickly, he is not second guessing: 'As the artist you are responding to something—the theatre of making something. The irrationality is much more apparent—and somehow it ends up making a much more rational image.' It is a balance that can only come through a stylistic evolution and the maturity of creative expression.

In 2003, I curated a landmark exhibition of Fransella's work at the Stonington Stables Museum of Art, Deakin University. In the intervening two decades, his practice has come to acquire this maturity, a quiet confidence, a focused engagement with his creative materials and concerns. Time has enabled him to revel in the transformative power of his textured, earthy mark-making. 'Time separates things and lets you see objectively; the imagery is part of my vocabulary now,' he says.

Caroline Field
Curator, ACU Art Collection

¹ All quotes are from an interview with author, at the artist's studio in Brooklyn, Melbourne, 22 October 2024.