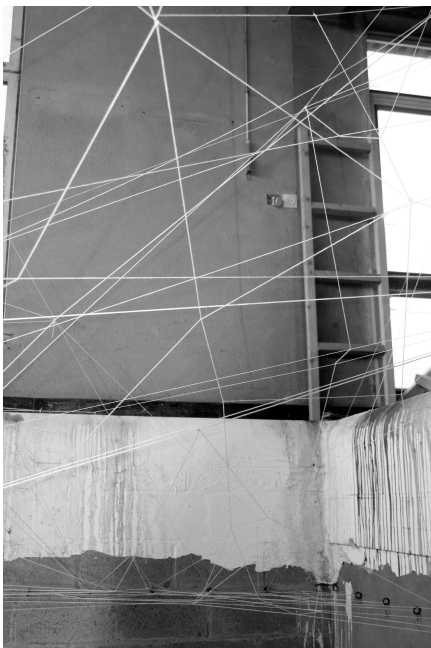


Resistance and the Fracture series

What is resistance? It's a word that has negative connotations. It's rough or hard. It suggests interruption or problems. But it also speaks of electricity. Or of energy in general. In fact there is little energy without resistance. But I like to think more open mindedly about this word, because it is in fact what causes all positive developments around us. Every idea starts with a problem and if we're successful in solving it, ends with a positive result. A break-through. Because we have a flow of intention which is first blocked then released. The negative, through resistance has caused something new to be created. This is everywhere. Our muscles develop through resistance. Evolution through natural selection is resistance. The competition of two species of plants or animals results in a mutation which solves the problem facing one particular species. What arises? Complexity, ingenuity and beauty. Life exists at a point of high resistance with all life competing to the point of being in balance yet constantly interacting at this point of resistance.

We can also think about this in terms of tension. I used to create sculptures and installations which explored this idea of tension as being a positive force for form making. I used string and wire to create large artworks which only had power and beauty of form at their highest point of tension; or in other words, at the final point before breaking. I was inspired by the idea that separate physical parts of each sculpture were in a sort of inanimate conversation with each other. The weakest point finally losing this argument, and undermining the sculpture physically. I would make a web of hundreds of knots and leave them to communicate in a high state of tension. Eventually one would slip and the piece would collapse and destroy itself. Imagine two of these knots at far ends of this web having a conversation with each other. Resistance is travelling through the network as a sort of potential energy.



I realised when beginning this series of paintings back in 2018 that resistance was a hugely important aspect in my process of making two dimensional work also. Whilst working atop old oil paintings I would find at flea markets, adding marks to the uneven surface beneath with knives was slow and laborious but would make a more interesting result. I think resistance, like in ideas in general, is how successful artworks are born. When we have an idea for a painting, in a particular style perhaps we have to force this technique or aesthetic to its limit so that we are pushing up against the ceiling of our capability to create it. This resistance creates energy - sparks of creativity and delight born out of physical frustration. So I decided to try and cultivate resistance in my work. By continuing to work largely with found materials, I couldn't approach a new painting in the normal way; that is with soft brushes, and liquid paint on a smooth white canvas. Instead I had to wrestle with an existing object with its uneven surface, crumbling edges, rusty staples. It felt very correct to work in this way as it felt more like sculpture than painting. I was in dialogue with a real object from the world, pushing against it to will a potential painting into being. The first stage was to fix any problems with the integrity of the surface. This could be sealing old frames with glue, trimming broken edges, or hacking off ancient globules of paint and dirt. The piece often needed holes filling and surfaces sanded down but I was careful to leave it imperfect to allow for unpredictable painting. What I also found very appealing about the process was that through working with this resistance of a novel object, transforming into an art object, I built a relationship with it prior to beginning the actual business of painting. Because practical work needed to occur first I was already familiar with it and so the application of colour began quite naturally. It had already begun to tell me what it needed to become; something that often took days of staring at a blank white canvas to arrive. I'm sure any painter could appreciate this. You need to work *on* a piece for a while before you begin to really work *with* it.



'Resistance (Fracture composition I)' 2018 & 'Sage of the Diviners (Fracture XIX)' 2023

The painting itself, if it can indeed be thought of as separate continues this process by not adding what I want to see as the final result quickly but working with several layers which are slowly built up. The first layers of paint are added using knives and various objects I have taken to using in the studio to apply paint. I add the colours I feel are correct in layers of thick smears which come into opposition with each other. I try to let each layer of paint almost dry completely before adding the next, This allows each subsequent layer to dominate the one beneath whilst picking up a small amount of the previous. A rough, highly textured and particulate surface slowly grows, given integrity by the 'realness' of the object being painted on. I trust in my process and allow for as much accident as possible. Once the under layers feel complete I switch from this more random application of paint to one of accuracy. I start to translate the chaotic surface into one of pattern and tangibility. I do not add triangles arbitrarily, but allow the eye to find them, utilising the eye and brain's ability to recognise and construct patterns, stencilling them in with knives and brushes, adding sharp edges where I feel it is required by printing paint on to the work. This process is difficult and full of resistance. It takes me a painful amount of time but it happens in a way that I consider to be natural and full of a certain truth or sincerity. There is an almost unbroken line of working from the cleaning and glueing of a reclaimed piece of waste to the final sharpening in of the foreground.



'Calle D'avignon (Fracture XIII)' 2023

These paintings thematically attempt to discuss how we sense the world. There is an infinite chaos around us. Energies, invisible spectrums of light, subsonic sounds. There are scales we cannot fathom, from great distances into the cosmos to the micro and nanoscopic. Even our bodies are completing trillions of minute processes we have no conscious awareness of and I find this an incredibly potent notion. What we perceive is a highly distilled reality, which is essentially based on the fundamental requirements we have. Food, water, sex etc. Principally as a sculptor I believe process should attempt to remain appropriate to concept. I try through these works to begin with an unknowable chaos, building up gradually to end with a foreground composed of an opaque readable matrix of geometric forms which is both calm and reassuring, reaffirmed with the palettes used. The end result should be highly dynamic yet serene, just like our momentary experience, but attempt to show glimpses of the true reality beneath.

Greg Bryce, Valencia Spain 2023 (Edited May 2024).