

## **Extended Collage in Imminent Change**

For Geoffrey Olsen painting was an activity of construction initiated by “the perception of an external world mediated through subjective experience at distinct points in time”. His paintings “oscillate between representation and abstraction” in precarious states. The “fragmentary images” that they incorporate “allude to past certainties” at the same time as they “exist in a condition of imminent change”.

In a statement about his work made shortly after he arrived in Miami he wrote: “The parallels I perceive between painting and processes such as layering, superimposition, obliteration and the ways in which belief and value systems, particularly those that concern the built environment, can be constantly revised in the light of changing ideologies are of specific interest to my current work”. As this suggests, he worked in series and devised layering systems distinct to particular bodies of work. Series were often built up through a process of “extended collage”: selected fragments of existing works were recombined to make new ones. This way of working grew out of an early series of works on paper in the late 1970s that responded to the social history and industrial landscape of South Wales. In the 1980s and 1990s he produced a number of large-scale paintings in oil and acrylic that developed these ways of working to encompass themes of “growth, decay and regeneration”. This evolved into a growing interest in the Renaissance painting and architecture of Florence and Rome. The hidden and multiple levels of the mosaic filled church at San Clemente in Rome, whose darkness gives way to an intermittent dazzling surface of frescoes, provided an important reference point for his own practice and analogies he saw in the surfaces of the Miami landscape.

His practice was informed by European and American traditions, from European landscape painting, to Abstraction and medieval wall painting. He worked “to establish a sense of ambiguity, imprecision and flux” and to construct paintings that could “contain ambiguities of space, scale and meaning” in dynamic contradiction. This was further explored in the knowingly temporary paintings for walls he made during his first residency in F.I.U. in 1996-7.

Many of the Miami paintings were made “by pouring thinned acrylic paint onto the canvas laid flat, or by applying it directly to walls”. In the notes which he wrote to accompany the showing of the series entitled “Above Eighth Series” which he began in 2001 and continued to work on after he had been diagnosed and begun treatment for leukaemia, he wrote that they were “intended to reflect shifts and modifications to a given order, which although established also seems impermanent”.

## **Redell Olsen**

**All quotations are from exhibition statements made by Geoffrey Olsen.**