IT'S NOT ME, IT'S YOU

Review of Iain H Williams' 'It's not You, It's Me

Peter Shukie

Prism Contemporary, Lord Street,
Blackburn

January 16th 2025

1 EXT. RAINY STREET - NIGHT 1

FADE IN:

The street is lashed with rain, slow motion film shows horizontal rain in wild wind, lit by uncertain street lights. Two figures in the street are moving and filming something, lashed by wind and bent over to keep their faces out of weather.

PETER
I think art is better when the weather is drier.

OTHER
The weather it's made in or the weather you go to see it in?

PETER
alright Socrates, the weather I am faced with as I make the effort to walk there poorly cloaked and fucking soaked

OTHER
ah, poetic rhythm, almost, unintentional. I imagine it was anyway. You'll claim different. no doubt.

PETER
I am but a vehicle for the poetry of a life that is beyond me. And the rain is just a rattle shack to my frequency output.

OTHER
That is complete bollocks!
and we are here, through the yellow door, and keep all that nonsense shite to yourself when we pass through it.

PETER
some people appreciate this language as the expression of art in a world of immediate making

OTHER
do they really?

The two figures approach the Yellow Door and pass through into whatever lies beyond it.

2 INT. PRISM GALLERY 2

Sound of chatter fills the air and a clinking of plastic glasses is inaudible, but there are plenty of them. Nobody

looks round and the two new arrivals stand silent for a moment and look around at the walls, filled with canvases. In front of them, between a gathering of people, lies a crumpled paint strewn cloth, raw canvas with speckled paint and marks.

OTHER
Quiet at last

PETER
I am taking it all in, as one is expected to do in refined surroundings, one might say

OTHER
Might one? I see.

OTHER (CONT'D)
It is abstract, did you know the artist was an abstract artist? Before we got here, I mean, not now.

PETER
Yep, I have seen him before, I have heard him talk and one time I saw him at that train station in Manchester, the Art Fair place. Back then, he stood out a lot amongst the other stuff, context can do things to the work.

OTHER
Like rain can, then?

PETER
suppose so

OTHER
It's pretty amazing, I think this place is transformed by every exhibition and this is outlandish, really, Unsettling but inviting. Like that bar near The Swan, where they sell what you want but you know you might get a smack in the mouth before you have finished the drinking of it.

PETER
you think you'll get a smack in the mouth here? I think, given the crowd and the amount of ginger beer on the go, that is unlikely.

OTHER
Not a literal smack, but I think I look at these works and there is something that says I can see it and something else that says, I don't know what it is and I am feeling self conscious about saying what I see. It cannot be what they saw when they made it.

PETER
or what I see, maybe that is the point?
I am not sure if it is beautiful, some of it looks beautiful, like a mark from a delicate touch of iridescent blue brushed on in a gentle caress and then the person who made it sits back and says to themselves,

PETER

'fuck, that's a beautiful little thing.'

PETER (CONT'D)
Then other parts are like the action was made as with a sledge hammer after an argument with a wanker and the rage is high and the thrust of the brush, maybe it's not even a brush, maybe a hand or even a stick, and the movement is wild.

OTHER
I see that, and then look at this, the red splodges, or over here these black ones and they're not like marks at all, more like sprays, like air gun or spray can or whatever makes these things do that. Become things.

PETER
Once we are here, I feel that it's a surrounding that is just right but not where any of it was made. You can tell, it's just where it's shown to others. It's too clean in here, too pristine for the explosions and the caresses, the pairing of them. the swishes and swooshes and the particular care in these tiny little sections.

OTHER
Maybe that is what the crumpled up thing on the floor is for, a clue to the chaos somewhere else?

PETER
FUCK YES! the whole of it is a chaos somewhere else, or a silent place or a dreamy place or a mad place and all of it somewhere else. But here now, like us, piss wet through and ignoring the free wine.

OTHER
Do you want wine? Ginger beer?

PETER
No, there's only one loo and a few of these look like they'll be getting a bit lairy soon enough. Best to keep a straight edge.

OTHER
Unlike the walls, not straight edges on those, every shape but!

The two meander through the crowds and look at pieces of work on the walls and one set of structures on a table to the rear of the gallery.

PETER
I think you are wrong.

OTHER
Oh aye, go on

PETER
the whole thing is straight edges. Look again. We are in a room of what is ostensibly a conservatively hung set of straight edged canvases. At least initially they are conservative, to me, then I realise I am wrong - yes again - and these are something else. If we miss that part we are in a mistaken reading, a clumsy and partial understanding of our own misunderstandings.

OTHER
What are we misunderstanding about there being straight edges now you have pulled me up on my no straight edges comment? I get why you question that conservative comment you made, that seems like a stupid thing to say given what we are looking at. But why are straight edges our mistake?

PETER
Let me think, but why I am thinking I will talk and let whatever comes out of my mouth be the answer. I think that's the point, the thing as I see it now, these are multiple canvases, they are stitched together, they are stretched, they are made into canvas frames that we know and understand, that we are familiar with. But they are not one, not a single thing. Not a moment of the contemplative and another one, over here say, that is of the wild. They are stitched and placed together, and together they do something else. Like a universe in a bottle. When we see that complexity and it is immense but made more immense by the confines it finds itself in, scrunched up and bottled up, but not really. As if it is too much to be bottled up, it has to be out and the only out it has is us, our innards, vibrating back.

OTHER
Our innards vibrating back. Like the one loo, the way it makes us think differently about the other thing, the free booze. That potential for the lairy to come and that tension we have over things that have not happened. They might not either, there's more ginger beer I reckon. Everyone drives in the rain. Except you.

PETER
Think of the planet, take the bus. I get that, yes, we are necessarily responsive and we can feel something of the moment these were made even when they are hung up now, silenced but kind of calling out from them. Not the anxiety of the almost pissed people gaining momentum in a restricted piss pot scenario. The time of these stretched universes has passed, these marks are of another place and another mind and soul.

OTHER
I was talking to someone who said they went from joy to despair as they first walked around this.
(MORE)

OTHER (CONT'D)
They talked it out a bit and it was their inner joy and despair, I thought. They were immersed and then, sort of, when they wanted to get an affirmation in the work they couldn't describe it, so they replaced it with despair. I understood it, their loss. We want a concrete transaction. I am here, the works says this, I respond this way.

PETER
you'd not get that here, I think, but I agree, at least I think I do

OTHER
you won't get that here. That's where the despair came in for them I think.

PETER
My discussions were not similar, they were maybe but not about joy and despair. There was talk about disconnection and correction, of finishing stuff off and then how you can ever let go and say it's done or not. That was something the artist said too, about recognising these are flux, these moments of feeling something is completed, boundaries not ignored but challenged.

OTHER
There is beauty in it that comes from that tension. incomplete endings. I guess this push and pull of the canvases is deeper because we somehow understand that we are destined to end, and be incomplete. If we ended now it would feel a bit frazzled

PETER
ended? like died? Or just leaving here?

OTHER
either

PETER
I was recording some discussions and the phone died. That is the end of that, even if the best thing they had to say came next.
(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)
I don't feel bad about that, it's life innit?

PETER
The process of selecting which canvas is selected, what part is stretched and where it goes with another canvas, all of it is a movement in time. They could all be redone and all impact differently after that. Maybe the depth is us knowing nothing is ever finished and the despair is realising all that ends is us?

OTHER
Blood n sand, I'll pair you up with the despairing gang, you'll fit in beautifully.

PETER
I'd like that.

3 EXT. BUS STOP 3

Rain falls, a white horse (unbridled) eats from a black litter bin. A man in a wooly hat plays a Sun Ra tune on a battered looking trumpet. The bus stop is 10 feet further down the street, the two figures are huddled in their coats, sheltered by the plastic sheets of the shelter.

PETER
I thought what he said about music was really freeing, so unfamiliar on one level but absolutely what it does. Music to play a part in the work.

OTHER
yes, I knew some of the bands but not the others, so a good question to ask him you think?

PETER
I thought it was a question that gets asked to show a sense of genealogy, like where do you fit in, can you acknowledge your links to what we all are? It's an open door question and he walked past and came in through the back window, and I loved that

OTHER
what do you mean the back window?

PETER
he talked about what music feels like, what it offers him, almost not arsed at all by who makes it. Just what it does in a studio for him.
I get used to these questions sparking long eulogies of those bands and people and organisations that frame everything, that they become prison walls of conventional unconventionality. Like it is not enough for the artists and the work to be the point, but that it is already part of another thread of being.

OTHER
Factory Records, Tony Wilson?

PETER
YES! (laughs) Factory fucking records, Tony Fucking Wilson

OTHER
(laughs)
blah blah blah

PETER
you make me laugh. You love all that nostalgia. I do sometimes, but I loved he walked right past all opportunities to make links anywhere else and it was just casual mention of music ...music in the air that can alter frequencies as the work unfolds, just vibrations from arm to canvas. No links to other artists, not explicit influence, this is fresh and here and it happened and it was made despite all other exhibitions...but not despite life, it is a response to life.

OTHER
It's freezing here, why don't we get a taxi?

PETER
It IS freezing and that's what we feel. Not a long history of low temperatures we have experienced, the best ones, the most definitive cold snaps we have known and then start talking of how in to the cold we are

OTHER
Diversional thinking?

PETER
I am making a comparative to...

OTHER
I know what you are doing, but stop it

PETER
this is why abstraction in art is necessary, this, the music, the AI, it made me excited. Not knowing what this was about opened up doors...and windows. It was an invitation to think and feel. Not a closing up, not a lecture in visual form

PETER (CONT'D)
and not Linkedin

OTHER
I thought AI was interesting, he never mentioned Linkedin, did he?

PETER
He did not mention Linkedin but he offered the antithesis, same with AI. The work we felt as we saw, and it was not so literal as a 'so excited to be at a Health and Safety conference at Barnsley College' or whatever people post. It made me think, we reflect life in different ways and some - if we are brave enough - is like this, raw and open and vulnerable.

OTHER
And AI is influence or it is guide?

PETER
AI is not something feared but seen and incorporated and it was not in his canvases, or on them, but it is in the world and so it is part of us. That was what he said, he talked to it to ask questions he cannot ask of other people in everyday life, and it responds. Just that, recognising AI is there, here, with us

OTHER
like it or not?

PETER
Like it or not

4 INT. PRISM GALLERY 4

The gallery is set up with chairs and an impressive looking film camera. A filmmaker is moving around the room with an equally impressive hand held machine. The room is filling gradually and Iain H Williams is stood by the two chairs at the pinnacle of this layout. Peter is sat reading the handout again and again to avoid the awkwardness of being there alone.

OTHER
here again! You can't get enough of this exhibition.

PETER
I am here for the talk, I think it might add something else. This is third time and I am seeing new stuff each visit.

OTHER
Deeper insights?

PETER
Different weather

OTHER
Freezing out there tonight

PETER
That has made a difference. And the layout, the chairs and the air of expectation, a talk. I came one time in the week and there was just me. I even had a little lie down, tried to see it differently. I saw it as more than now but less too, it was if I was not clued up enough and I had read the outline too, about the life lived, the loss, the fractures and things that the artist faced and then thought whether I could see that. Whether I needed to.

OTHER
Did you see it? Those themes? In the pamphlet it says a lot. I think we talked about all of them, in one way or another. Not as good with the language, we mumbled but is that what you see?

PETER
I see the disconnection and the rebuilding, I mean, it is literal as well as embodied in the art innit? The stitching together, the choices made. That's been what I kept coming back to, the skill in this. Like skill skill, real skill, not just artistic skill. The stretching, the framing, the stitching. How to make these paired works, it is so ace, so perfect. Like the kind of skill that people like, appreciate, the ones unlikely to be here or to talk to me, but do appreciate stuff made well.

OTHER
So artistic skill is not real skill?

PETER
I knew you'd pick up on that. It is, obviously, but we are all bringing our own shit here. Mine is an awareness of all that dismissal of the artistic, a lifetime of that. The same people who talk about 'good skills', they are all around me. I cannot just sit and see, and not bring that. So I kind of take some physical or spiritual warmth in appreciating that, I think. Another layer, maybe not the point of it, but it's there.

OTHER
so we are here and we see and we hear but we can never understand the same thing or even see the same thing?

PETER
I guess not. Just a guess though. I read his pamphlet a few times, the language is open. It creates a space for you being you and me being me, the artist being themselves and all of us allowing that to happen.

OTHER
Is that true of all art though? We all bring ourselves to it?

PETER
All art says it does that...
(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)
sometimes it is as if the artist is coshing us with their intentions. I like the generosity of this exhibition. Not right now as much, the talk layout, the chairs, the formality is a bit on top. But the work, the life in it, that it is fluid, not a 'this is what this is' moment.

PETER (CONT'D)
That's me again. We are all our broken pieces and smooth spaces and we bring them with us even when we want to let them go.

OTHER
The wild swoosh and the gentle caresses

PETER
That's what it is, the allowing of this to hit somewhere other than the head. Fuck the head, we might say. It always lets us down, Like that Elmo Phillip's gag...

PETER (CONT'D)

I always thought the brain was the most important organ in my body...then I remembered who was telling me that

OTHER
very droll. I do like this idea of the body being what does the appreciating.

PETER
They are not disconnected, the body and the brain, even if we seem to carry on like they are.

OTHER
that's what art does, that skills cannot, maybe? The skill of the engineer or craftsmen, only made perfect or valuable when it is coupled with the skill of the artist. Body and Brain kind of.

PETER
Right, shut up, camera's on, we are just audience now and nobody wants to hear you on the video. This is the next level

In a walled pond in the park, two figures sit on a bench overlooking the frosted landscape. A white mist lies above

the water and ducks are sat on the opposite bank. A dog shits behind the resting fowl, a figure searches in a body length coat, steam rises from their body.

5 EXT. BENCH BY A POND 5

OTHER
Do ducks feel the cold?

PETER
Nobody can really know that. Anyway, I was back at the gallery the other day and the artist was there, packing stuff up. The whole thing. I saw the canvas piled up, that'd been there the whole time, and now it looked dominant, it fitted perfectly. The closing of the exhibition and the removal state and the canvases all wrapped up and empty cans and coffee cups and there it was, still in place. Perfectly in place. Next to it was a pile of plastic also screwed up into a huge ball of debris and the canvas, the canvas heap just lay there, dormant really, but like it glowed. I loved that, seeing it next to actual debris, real waste, and it was something else, it hummed, seemed to have another frequency to all of it. I could swear it was almost cocky in this stage, owned the place. And that room was transformed from when we saw the talk. But it was still an exhibition, still doing what it always was meant to do. Showing something beyond the everyday.

OTHER
How did you manage to get to that? To see that?

PETER
Good question, and serendipity, I was at a thing in the same building and through that yellow door and turn left not right. But i saw, I saw the curtain fall and there it was. An exhibition in deconstruction phase, it was beautiful.

OTHER
a chance encounter with the end of history.

PETER
All we said was still there. The fragmentation was even more pronounced but not... not because of the taking things down. It was because it added another element to me, a sense of things ending. Death. Yes, the end like a death, but a good death. Like an end that required the life previous to have been one lived, expressed and made real, not just dragged through and ended. Not endured, painful sometimes but lived. And that made me think again of the ways that we came to this as a desire for something more, in us. Why do people go to galleries? Why, and what is the difference between the filmed talk and me lying down on a mucky floor and feeling glad I was alone in there for once? And you not being there. Nobody watching me watching. That changes everything. And then, the whole gallery in flux, a tiny death. We talk about the sweetness of endings so infrequently and then I started to think about the whole thing, and wondered if death was not just a theme for the work, in the work..

OTHER
I saw so little about death in the work. You know in French, little death is what they call an orgasm

PETER
La Petite Mort. I suppose we have to bring that with us, a propensity for contemplating death? It comes in so many ways, not just literally the end of life. Death in all things, death as little endings, we build up death, we stitch it together, from contrasting experiences. Death like Petite Mort, just where things stop being as they are for a brief moment in time. Death and death and death and the life is all we have between deaths

OTHER
bit maudlin innit?

PETER
No!
(MORE)

PETER (CONT'D)
Its life, the in-between bits are better because of the deaths. Like that pile of canvas and not-quite-discarded work not selected, how that grew in the final act. Became the greatest marker of the end. It is the ending of things that best shows us the life in things, the contrast between the two. Bloody hell, maybe that's all we have to go on, stitched together contrasts of our memories. In good moods we bring it all, swooshes taking precedence over the dark splurges. Other times, we are all contemplative and quiet and drawn in by the intricate blues carefully drawn across the canvas. Raw canvas, like the earth maybe, he talked about that. About the canvas necessarily being untreated, just there as a base for what comes.

OTHER
Terracotta like, terracotta, raw earth, an earth we scorch or tend, or till, and all of it the base of where we do things. I liked that in the first visit, it grows as the exhibition lingers on.

A squabble of ducks on the far bank indicates a new dog walker with a few crazed beasts off the leash.

PETER
So the canvas is the sort of closest thing we get to what we all see, all share. Before the act of creation, when no marks are made. We can all see that as a clean base? Earth, shared space?

OTHER
OK, I can go with that and the choice of it was important, that absence which is not absent at all, it is the very basis of his marks and our understanding. We do need that, the shared space, the sense of engagement with it as something we also involved in - or on.

PETER
yes, It IS me, It IS you. just thee, at the raw canvas stage.

OTHER
soon as it is marked, it is not you anymore, just me

PETER
Always, I suppose. You are no longer part of the narrative, just the audience. Then you are either alienated, and I was some of the time, or you get encouraged to think more of what it means. You are out of it, but I got something from talking with you, even if you were not really part of anything I thought

OTHER
I feel I am being Othered

PETER
Yes, well I have had that gag about it being literally your name through the entire script. I could think of no better way of getting it said than that.

OTHER
Not really worked has it, bit lame you might say. A lame duck, to make a place based analogy

PETER
Fuck you.

The two characters rise from the bench and walk slowly toward the arched gateway of the walled garden surrounding the pond. Behind them, in the middle distance a pair of wild looking dobermans speed towards them, silent raging purpose in the dew mist.

THE END

FADE OUT