

# Nick Malone

essay by Sacha Craddock

Malone works in a large number of media at an accomplished and sophisticated level each time. He aims to control perception in order to expand it. Something happened, in fact, many things happened, and he is keen to tell. But how can an artist best convey whatever that is, and in what form it should arrive? What role does understanding of a professed situation play? And what comes first?

Wary of an easy morphing between forms, he is respectful of the difference between media and genre. In a way Malone adheres to some sort of hierarchy, knowing that a picture can say all at once, while a novel takes time, he is more than aware that animation can unfurl a story while a controlled procession through an exhibition space can progress the narrative better than when all is seen at once. But the need to force, drive and tell, arrives out of an artist, writer, and animator, sent to be handling a hot potato forever. Childhood and fiction merge in a realistic and apparently truthful manner.

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The famous painting *Man Killed by a Snake*, 1648, by Nicolas Poussin in the National Gallery conveys a flow through space, in which a number of states of comprehension are able to exist on the same plane and in the same place. A man is attacked by a snake, someone along the way calls for help, people further on fish in ignorance of what has happened while the background represents a pastoral state. Space recedes; sound and knowledge disappear across the same plane into illusory space. This happens often, understanding and incomprehension are able to exist in the same conceptual and actual place, and still carry all before and within it.

But what happens with such an apparently simple, even naïve, need to speak, show and tell. How does time really foreshorten, can it also expand to include moments that extend experience? In what order are elements initially seen? Perhaps this is simple, because as we have already said, a novel carries narrative with some sort of time within it, while dance and performance have a middle, beginning and end, and yet still the residue of context can remain constant. The frustration an artist may have each time with a struggle

between the metaphoric and the illusion of direct account is palpable. Of course, there are tactics and deceptions, the stronger the adherence to the narrative and details of context the further away actuality may lie. Malone, who does not use much colour in his work, is frugal in the way, he equates outline with truth and so writing and drawing can become almost one. His adherence to the principles of a formal relation to the Romantic in literature, is the same with fine art but to a different extent.

The boy encountered in a room next door, also exists in the story on the podcasts so strikingly similar in appearance to the narrator, is also for the narrator the perpetual excuse, a milestone of experience. This is, in fact a tale of two minds. At long last there is someone to play with, with whom to share. Malone is concerned that he did not start painting till later in life. As a successful writer of poetry and prose, however, his artistic work reflects a particularly conscious approach to the relation between image and text. You imagine he is forever watching what something might look like in terms of what it might be saying as a result. Malone runs a great pace, alongside his painting and drawing, in the expectation that the relationship will extend and develop. Bringing in the use of animation, as well as each time catching a three-dimensional tangle of pulled and manipulated material, set back into relief. Malone, who knows that great work is not ever just about 'getting it', uses narrative as sort of a parallel excuse. His production of a series of podcasts is fascinating, in that it reveals an artist not able to trust any one medium to show a direct way through.

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The relief, however, has general sensations rendered out of paper and wrangled white material which enforces a strong sense of the organic. A black creature; a fly, moth, or octopus extends across the deep plane. Malone brings this together with the suggestion of a breathing amalgam, a set of things. The recollection, perhaps, merges easily with the symbolic. A mass of fluttering bats, teeth or wings, built up with layers of words drawn across a splattered painted surface, is held together by skeleton and feather. The memory remains of the birds on the balcony and is re-interpreted here, the logic is missing, somehow, as the sensation of being trapped, not seeing particularly clearly, over and above the apparent ease of subject and remains. Relief, a wonderful means of expression, allows a real sort of place nonetheless. The reference to depth alludes to the actual and does the job. Malone's drawing extends across levels of depth; dark eyes, almost caricatures, are enmeshed and trapped, in the skin of the structure. Malone is still within the experience and outside telling us how it is.

He talks of the thing happening 'Up North', somewhere, elsewhere. The surrounding atmosphere, written and spoken, appears a touch Gothic, with the paper cut to trace the cartoon elements of a jaw, for instance, with discarded and decayed fish bone.

There is a Victorian villa, from the story, 'the trees reached out to each other' but Malone still seems to use all he can to control the order in which things arrive. Strikingly similar in appearance, both of the boys play, while leaves, overgrown shrubbery and clipped lawns, convey a sense of nature cured yet wild at the same time.

Malone writes messages and notes to self and folds them somehow, in the manner of Cy Twombly, between the surface of everyday life and artistic production. He writes, blogs, illustrates and paints. Working between real and imaginary, true incident and incidental, he needs to tell. Used to adopting that same core story about a shipowner next door, the tousle haired boy, and owls that would look in from the balcony, the artist is encouraging us to go far even though we know it is also always autobiographical. The man next door, the ultimate frightener, brings actual youth, imagined youth, as well as death together. Age does help, clarity returns, and a need to envisage, imagine, reconvene becomes even stronger.

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In his most recent work Malone engages with the physical in a different manner. Rather than paint and draw in the one place, on one plane, he encourages the audience, to walk through, to participate in a different manner to capture the situation 'inhabited' by the secretive man, for instance, by characters, the aftermath, the incident, the web of narrative, compounded and compressed. Setting up, in more recent work, almost a stage set, the drawing is cut into, so that light shining through from behind promises a perpetual further stage of understanding and experience. Caught between the imagery of moment, the shared construction of incident, framed often to hold the drama still, by walking through and into the space or place. The sense is still that this is anchored in reality. Trees reach out to each other; real owls sit still on the balcony of the villa and the experience of a split personality, a double act, which makes up the artist's extra, substitute, ego, remains.

For Malone, the world is divided into fixers and dreamers. The fixers exist in reality in order to really understand, while the dreamers live out of time and place. We are caught up with the description but not the rationale. Malone too, is inside as well as outside the process of his own work. He knows the 'boy' is just a lovely extension of himself, the core, or centrality of a story to be constantly embellished, polished, carved, taken up over again and again. Ambiguity of comprehension is part of the work, as with the ambiguity of direction in the mode, manner and method of any literary device. Engaging forever with a range of media and method to say it better, Malone shows a strange frustration with, as well as excitement for, his very own subject.