

Chris Shaw's art brims with allusions both in its methodology and products. As Michael Whitworth has noted of The Waste Land: "Allusion is an ambiguous term, since it can refer both to a process and its product. It shares this ambiguity with such terms as 'invention', 'translation', 'communication' and, as Eliot recognised, tradition ..."

Shaw's recent paintings evoke pleated and crumpled materials with trompe l'oeil exactitude. The works are the outcome of a painstaking process: sheets of hardened paint are peeled from silicon moulds and warped, cut or screwed up before being stitched together. In the stiff, fastidious folds and tidy pelmet of his recent work Culafroy (2010) resides a sense of church drapes or a Masonic ceremonial item. Piet's Green (2010), a black sheet slung across a fragile mount, resembles a piece of dressing room ephemera ("stockings ... camisoles").

Culafroy shares something with the sculptural paintings of Angela de la Cruz, which reveal the canvas's supporting frame so as to accentuate the work's physicality. In Shaw's work however, such a perimeter frame is implied through its absence, the membrane of paint bearing the shape of its rectangular silicon mould. At the same time, the cast paint carries the imprint of a weaved canvas, hinting once more at a nonexistent 'support'.

Shaw's latest work uses a blank page taken from a book of two hundred year old paper, expansive sheets originally used to protect undisplayed prints by the artist Sir Thomas Lawrence at the British Museum – akin in age and charm to the book of blank paper acquired illicitly by Winston Smith in George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four: "Its smooth creamy paper, a little yellowed by age, was of a kind that had not been manufactured for at least forty years past. He could guess, however, that the book was much older than that. He had seen it lying in the window of a frowsy little junk-shop in a slummy quarter of the town (just what quarter he did not now remember) and had been stricken immediately by an overwhelming desire to possess it."

Shaw has screen-printed onto his paper an impression of Lawrence's famous canvas Pinkie (1794) using Nivea moisturising cream that has faded to leave a translucent grease stain – an unobtrusive, minimal 'impingement' on the yellow-white of the page, that will gradually develop a thin membrane of dust.

Winston Smith's book symbolises a half remembered past; his tentative, transgressive act of self-expression and its nostalgic associations (the paper's age, the pen's status as an "archaic instrument") are mirrored in the faintness and subtlety of Shaw's mark. The evanescent imprint of Lawrence's painting expresses the same tentative 'self-writing', the same nostalgic identification with quaint historical objects or images, and same frenetic antagonism with the 'blank' of the page.

The textural difference between the antique paper and the stained field on the surface of the work is redolent of minimalist works such as Robert Rauschenberg's 1951 series of 'White Paintings' or Robert Ryman's white and off-white canvases. Yet Shaw conflates those artists' minimalist interest in the essential materiality of the 'blank screen' with a flourish of nostalgic figuration, the vestiges of a historical image. Reaching back at tradition in the guise of a minimalist gesture, he literally imprints on the page the kind of chimerical phantasm that Ryman or Rauschenberg's paintings might induce during long contemplation.

Shaw has returned to the paper its original intended function of 'bearing' Lawrence's work. The image is doubly appropriate in this exhibition in that it owes much of its fame to its entirely fortuitous juxtaposition with Gainsborough's The Blue Boy (1770) – curiously, a favourite work of the young Robert Rauschenberg during visits to the Huntington Art Gallery. Shaw's 'chance' presentation of his work beside the works of other artists aspires to similar interflow of meaning.

The subject of Lawrence's painting, Sarah Goodwin Barrett, died a year after the completion of the painting. Viewed with hindsight the work becomes a poignant reminder of the blight of infant mortality. There is a wry irony in the use of Nivea, a youth-enhancing product emblematic of contemporary vanities, to glance back at a work that poignantly arrests its doomed subject in time. One of Shaw's enduring preoccupations is 'expenditure'. The using up of cream and its absorption by the paper, highlight the creative potential inherent in the act of expenditure.