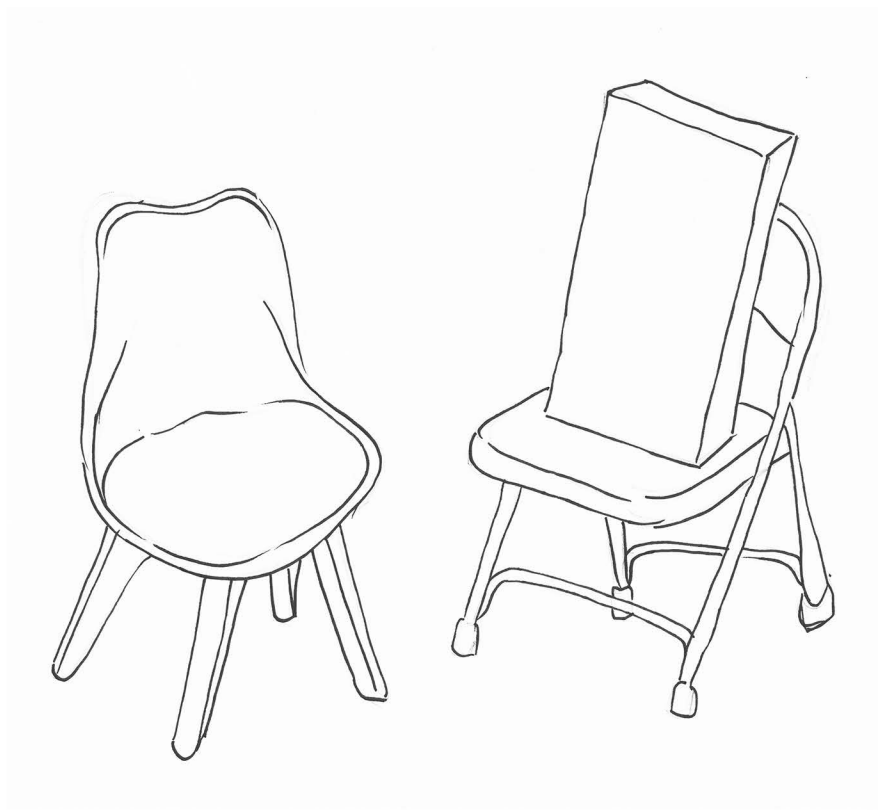


TWO OLD CHAIRS

ARTIST STATEMENT / FLASH FICTION

BY Sammy Frank



Two Old Chairs

Two old chairs sat in a gallery, often moved, yet rarely used. Together, the two watched the many exhibitions and its visitors come and go. The more worn of the two, Claire, had little interest in the art that came through. Unlike themselves, they never saw much function in it. However, the other, Pete, adored the art and their small role in the space.

One day, after the chairs had begun to get sniffly from the gathering dust, a new artist wandered in. He was a little short of tall and only a tad scraggly, but regardless, Claire eyed him with suspicion.

“This one looks like a painter,” they murmured.

“Why’s that?” asked Pete, excited.

“Those conceptual ones dress smarter.”

After moving works in and playing around for a while, the artist came over, picked up Claire and placed them on the wall. Balancing a small painting on their seat. Pete was furious.

“No! Why not me?” Pete exclaimed, heartbroken.

Claire looked down, their feet off the floor. “Ah!” they cried. “I’m for sitting, for people. I’m not a shelf. What has he sat on me?”

“A painting,” Pete begrudgingly assured Claire.

Although, thought Pete, it wasn’t so much painted, as collaged. Studying the works around the room, Pete tried to imagine the artist’s practice. These *collage paintings* comprised of built-up layers of motif and process, primarily pencil drawings of seated figures, gold-leaf, found material, and drips. All bound together by solid backgrounds of textural acrylic, as if stuck in treacle. Pete pictured a practice of an ever-increasing series of steps, steps which seemed frequently swapped around, added to, or omitted.

He squinted again at the painting perched upon Claire, “although, there’s something strange about its composition.”

“What? Please tell me it’s at least good” exclaimed Claire trying to remember breathing techniques as they stared down.

“The elements are clearly intentional; however, their placement feels almost accidental. Perhaps they were dropped or thrown onto the panel? Cuts decided similarly. Compositions decided by fortune, like Jean Arp’s ‘law of chances’ ⁽¹⁾. It creates an interesting tension between the controlled layering of imagery and the moment of relinquishing control to fate.”

“Stuff your pondering and convince him to swap us round,” grumbled Claire.

“How am I going to do that,” said Pete calmly, “I’m a chair.”

“And I’m not a shelf, why has he put me on the wall?”

Pete watched the artist, the gallery had begun to resemble a surreal domestic space, turned and humorous. “Clearly you’re part of the

piece. The painting is only half the work, how it's curated creates the final piece."

Claire breathed and looked up from the floor. Moving around the room, they began to calm. "The space looks so different from up here." Level with the work, they peered across at the many paintings and prints. "Whatd'ya reckon they're about?"

Pete thought for a moment. "Perhaps it's something to do with that idea of control. It's reassuring to control one's narrative, uphold an absolute framework of understanding or function, yet this is ultimately artificial."

"Right..." said Claire.

"Through the imagery and processes in the work meaning is obviously prevalent, yet perhaps any proscribed meaning is unintentional" Pete continued. "Francis Bacon said the goal of his work was to be 'as factual as possible and at the same time as deeply suggestive' ⁽²⁾. The lack of an explicit narrative from the artist doesn't make the work meaningless, rather that meaning is imbued through interpretation. A final relinquishment of control."

"A chair is a chair" replied Claire.

Pete looked up at Claire, "depends on the angle."

1. Dachy, M, (2008) *DaDa: The Revolt of Art*. London: Thames and Hudson. pp. 31.
2. Francis Bacon 'Fragments Of A Portrait' (1966) [Television Programme] BBC 1 18/9/1966. At: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoFMH_D6xLk (Accessed 19/05/2024).