

Creative Process & Andrew Lanyon

Delpha Hudson

Andrew Lanyon's studios are time-poly-tunnels. Their likeness to grotto-like caves of treasures, increases as he talks of creative process. This is a meditative space of play. The books and objects become a source, inspiration and material for a vast range of creative processes in different media. His ability to weave between these media shows a well-honed creative, and imaginative practice.

Lanyon works on 'lots at once'. In talking about his range of practice he uses a series of notebooks to jot ideas, which may start in one media and then be switched if deemed more appropriate in another media. As Lanyon's work spans assemblage, film, song, real-time animation, painting, as well as writing books, which combine a range of photography, painting, drawings, and text (stories and poetry), to keep all these projects going at once, he does 'lots of little things', then leaves them.

Lanyon lucidly describes how 'problems' are solved by the creative imagination. The thinking brain is a tool designed to make choices, originally flight or fight. Once it is set a problem, it reacts immediately (for example to a material, an object, or a set of ideas), by dropping the problem into the sub-conscious imagination, which works on it without the conscious knowing about it. There is no forcing, or struggle. These things can be left once 'set up', to imaginative play.

All his work is idea driven. Materials suggest ideas, and working on 'lots at once' creates multiple relationships, as well as a rich textured layeredness, and skill in 'getting the poetry' out of them. Looking at a range of concepts and associations, it is the 'recognition' of chance that becomes a skill in playing with meaning. This he describes as 'playtime'.

As research has shown there is no singular working method for creative processes. There are however striking similarities with Lanyon's descriptions and various theoretical models of creativity. He is constantly 'incubating' ideas, a phase described as the conscious and subconscious mind working on the idea, making new connections, separating unnecessary ideas and grabbing others. Lanyon's 'recognition of chance' is serendipitous, but also a long practiced skill of recognising 'illumination', once it has happened (sometimes likened to the 'eureka' moment!). He is constantly open to a huge range of ideas and stimulus, and feels free to play and carry on playing by putting the pieces together (synthesizing), in different ways.

The whole process is enhanced by his confidence, curiosity and imagination, but is also possible because he is rooted in the process itself. There is never only one solution. There are always alternatives, and always assumptions to be broken. This is the basic premise of Creative Process. The kind of lists that exist for 'models of the Creative Process' are re-ordered constantly by creative practitioners. Think of 'implementation' and 'evaluation', processes

placed at the end of such lists, they rarely happen at the end. Artists are constantly experimenting, and playing as they go along.

Part of the Creative Processes described, have led to a body of work that Lanyon calls *Hollow books*. They transmogrify and transmute the idea of a book (a 3-D object with 2-D interaction = reading) books into kinetic, interactive 3-D sculptures. Many of them are in fact boxes (made to resemble a book), or found objects (combs, compacts, glasses cases, cigarette cases...), or assemblage object-poems.

They are crafted by hand, and are intended to be held by the viewer, at the same 'creative distance' between the hand and eye, as when made. They are multi-sensory objects, intended to be handled, and in true sculptural, stereognosticism (Hepworth's term), Lanyon uses the senses of touch, smell, weight, temperature (of material) as well as size and space to engage. The viewer negotiates, and manoeuvres before becoming the 'reader'. Meaning could reside as much with the contrast of the material, or the weight of the manipulated objects, (as with the one that uses silk and a large piece of lead), or the difficulty of pulling the cover open (as with the one that is bound by a spring), as with the activity of reading (or in the latter's case, it resides with the effort of doing both at once).

Lanyon chooses a 'between the wars', 1930s aesthetic. His work does not just refer to a Surrealist, antique 'look', but when he works with materials (which are old, worn and may well be from this era), he is making an aesthetic 'tonal' choice of colour, texture and tone.

The movement involved in picking up these lovely objects and making them come to life is like an offering. Lanyon used to do conjuring tricks. Like a magician he has the 'patter' (the language), the narrative, the sleight of hand, and the punch line of poetic discovery. Lanyon considers laughter and humour a very hard hitting tool, or at least a 'firm poke'. His punch lines are not intended to be jokes out of a cracker, to be thrown away and forgotten but enmeshed as they are in a corporeal aesthetic state, they are intended to make us think.

Hollow Books are just one part of Andrew Lanyon's creative practice, and are linked to the other media that he works in, in many ways. For example, they often refer to a whole lexicon of bizarre characters that play out in other songs, books, films and stories, like Mervyn, Walter's clone (307), and Vera, scientific but emotional. Andrew Lanyon tells stories that make you start and laugh.

Like Guy Debord's *Memoires*, a sandpapered covered book, intended as a *detournement* to lasting works (the cover was made to destroy other objects or books around it), Lanyon's objects are not about reading, or imparting knowledge in traditional ways. They are intended to make you laugh with surprise, or conceptually, aesthetically or sensually assault you.

