

Clive Hodgson: Signed Paintings
 at 42 Carlton Place, Glasgow
 9 September 2012 - 7 October 2012

By Neil Clements

Identity seemed to be the principle theme of the *Signed Paintings* by Clive Hodgson. Each of the works could be said to, in one manner or another, represent the artist.

The recurrence of Hodgson's name, accompanied by a date, inscribed in some form or another onto every piece, is their most obvious feature, although this is not as repetitive or prescriptive as it might initially appear. Framing, structuring, and sometimes overwhelming the signature and date are a wide variety of other pictorial elements. They combine experiments in mark making with a compositional sensibility which points to the influence of crests or emblems. Furthermore, there is restlessness about these paintings, a sense of intuitive play, which makes clear that this is not just a programmatic or conceptual exercise.

Signing an artwork represents at its very heart a claim to authorship. It is an act that makes literally apparent the relationship between an object and its producer. However, this authorial relationship is arguably inherent to the formal attributes of any artwork. An artwork is indexically linked to an artist's identity, at least as much as their handwriting. In much the same way as we learn how to write our signature, in order that it might stand in our place, the decisions that make up an artwork work to similarly identify an artist.

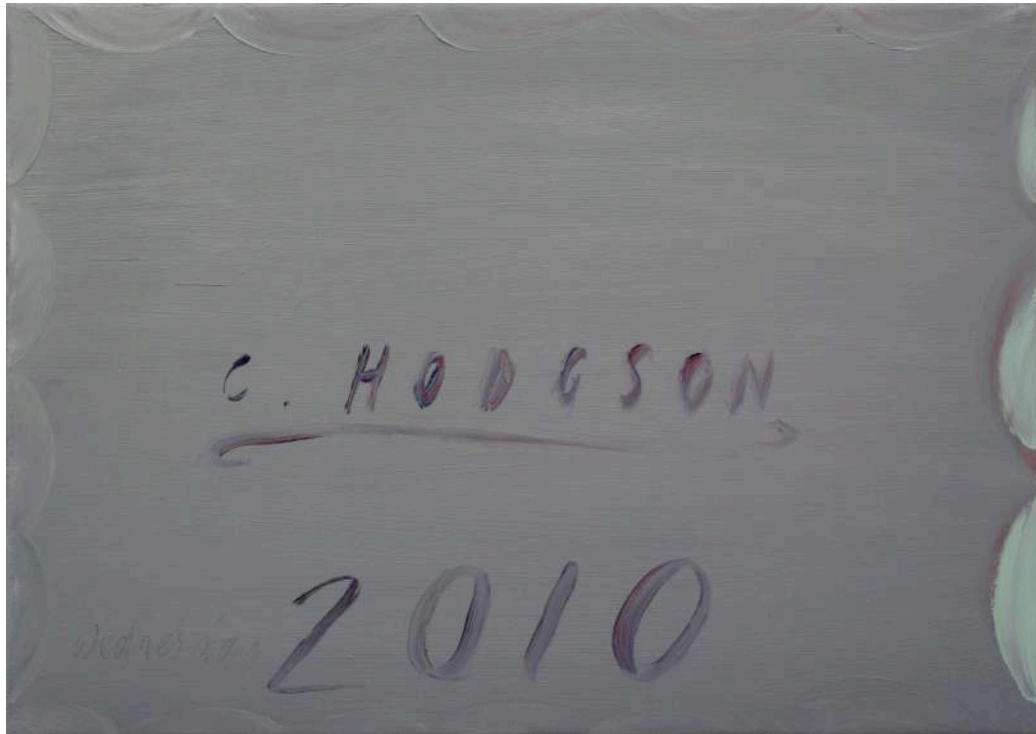
For this reason, a signed painting could be described as a signature placed upon another signature; authorship at its most self-conscious. This form of double signing is most certainly a tautology, but one that appears here to have been developed into a compellingly generative element.

So why sign something that has already effectively been signed? The answer has to do with the way in which signing a painting problematises it, and the dynamic, improvisatory solutions that must be found in order to solve that problem. These solutions must take place on several levels. A signature is on one hand pictorially disruptive, but it also contaminates the painted surface linguistically. On one level it damages the illusionism of the picture plane, hovering artlessly above the field somewhere in an indeterminate foreground between the image and the viewer. It blocks entry into the image, repelling the viewer's eye. This is why an artist's signature is conventionally placed at the bottom left or right hand side of the image, in order to minimise this disquieting effect. The prominence it is given in many of Hodgson's paintings makes such an effect inevitable, but this must also be regarded as an attempt to prompt a more meaningful relationship with the picture plane. It is in seeking to ingratiate itself with the other pictorial elements that the signature asks to be taken as just another painted mark. Frequently it seems to achieve this goal, appearing structurally indispensable to the composition of the painting. Nonetheless, there is a degree to which this integration will never be fully successful. That is due to the involuntary impulse the viewer feels to read someone's name, rather than to look at it.

Untitled
2012
Oil on canvas
40 x 35 cm

Courtesy of the artist and 42 Carlin Place, Glasgow





The division between looking and reading is an insoluble difference that is held in perpetual abeyance in these works.

It would be ill advised though to cast the other elements that populate Hodgson's paintings as mere supporting parts. In order that the fragile symbiosis between mark and text can be maintained, and more importantly continually renewed, these other elements play an equally crucial role. There is a quality of penmanship to these marks, a calligraphic sensibility that at points betrays more than traces the heraldic. Rendered with the same economical brushwork that characterises the signature, they are understated yet

direct. Just as the artist's name attempts to become compositionally integral, the array of arrows, lines, and spots used to construct the image become a kind of sketched shorthand comparable to the flourishes that embellish handwriting. It is difficult to describe them as entirely abstract or representational, diagrammatic or decorative. This is to their credit, as it is this elusive quality that signals each painting out as its own discrete enquiry into the relationship between mark and text. None of the unswerving fealty shown to the signature or date is afforded to these other elements. They are repeatedly cast off in favour of another set of potential answers. Each could be regarded as an imaginary

coat of arms, although if these paintings can be described as heraldic, it is a precarious heraldry. The sense given is of a pictorial vocabulary that has been found or happened upon as opposed to taken. It seems to be a language in the process of being established as opposed to one that is assumed complete.

All of Hodgson's paintings have been dated, fixing that object to a certain time. A date generally denotes one of two things: the entire period of production, or the endpoint of that production. The date of completion is most significant to the viewer as it marks an artwork's beginning, freed from its producer's control. The air of finality, the signing off on a document, is reinforced by the



Opposite page: **Untitled**
2010
Oil on canvas
25.5 x 35.5 cm

Left: **Untitled**
2010
Oil on canvas
40 x 36 cm

Below: **Untitled**
2012
Oil on canvas
51 x 49 cm

All courtesy of the artist and 42 Carlton Place, Glasgow



process of dating, preventing any further changes to that document beyond this point. Likewise, in painting, any action, addition or revision that transgresses this temporal boundary becomes automatically inauthentic, a disservice to the pre-dated act. These are observations that appeal to common sense, but were the signature and date really the last things added to these paintings? The most casual scrutiny indicates that this is not always the case. In a yellow and green work from 2012 the signature has been partly effaced by the addition of a glaze of some thinner material, effectively submerging it in further labour. If signing off doesn't mark the completion of a work, what does it

actually indicate? Contrary to first impressions, time is being presented in these works as anything but an exact value. On one small purple-grey canvas, dated 2010, the word 'Wednesday' has been inscribed into the wet paint, presumably with the end of a brush handle. Which of the fifty-two Wednesdays that took place in 2010 this refers to is left unclear. What these inconsistencies articulate is the extent to which dating an artwork conceals the kinds of time that took place in its creation. Dates implicitly present time as a rational and thoroughly consistent value, whereas hidden within a completed artwork are periods where time is deeply inconsistent. In addition to

the gradual progress there are periods of complete inactivity and indecision, often followed by hurried affirmation. The imprecise dating of works reveals the indeterminacy of time, not its dominion.

Whilst having dealt with a variety of mechanisms of signing, what kind of identity is put across in these paintings? If signature is supposed to be psychologically representative of an individual, following the logic of graphology, can we learn anything from these paintings about Clive Hodgson?

The more specialised term for the signature is the autograph. It is this term that best articulates the auratic function of the signature: a claim to the privileged status of that individual.



While a signature could be described as functioning administratively as a mode of identification, the autograph has a more ambitious purpose. It seeks to transfer the aura of an individual onto something else, externally bestowing it on an external object. It is doubtful whether it is appropriate to read Hodgson's painting along these lines because of how inwardly focused they appear. Put simply they are not self-aggrandising images. Again and again they reassert their identity, but this seems to be more concerned with self-recognition than self-promotion. The act of signing operates more as a question than as a statement. These paintings could be described as resistant to their own iconicity. They operate curiously on

their own terms, wilfully unreliable documents of the moment they came into being. For this reason, the wealth of references to other artists that could be brought to bear on such generic terminology as signature and date seems equally extraneous for the same reason. Perhaps what is most remarkable about these paintings is how such elementary concerns can be dealt with in such a personal manner.

Untitled
2010
Oil on canvas
25.5 x 35.5 cm

Courtesy of the artist and 42 Carlton Place, Glasgow