

THE ILLUSTRATOR

SCOTT LYALL IN CONVERSATION WITH ZIN TAYLOR

Anybody invited to realize a project in 1646 is asked to engage in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

This conversation takes place via e-mail and stretches through the whole period during which the artists develop their initial idea into final results. 1646 invites the correspondent at the other end of this contact to figure his/her way through this actual process.

In trying to picture what result the artists' work is going to, such exchange can become a reflection on the amount of otherwise untraceable choices of the moment which make up to the artists' practice.

This issue is part of the exhibition by Zin Taylor, *The Illustrator*, December 12 2014 in 1646.

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Zin Taylor [ZT] to Scott Lyall [SL]

Conversations need material to start, so here is some material. The exhibition, the idea, is called *The Illustrator*. The work will be a panoramic frieze drawn onto the walls of 1646. The plan is to fill the entire back space of the gallery, from floor to ceiling, from left to right, and possibly creeping into the front room, with a series of thoughts depicted using an illustrative black line.

SL: To clarify, this unfolds over the course of the show, like a performance? Or will the drawings be completed at the time of the opening?

ZT: The wall drawings are to be completed at the time of the opening. I'll be traveling to The Hague with an index of material, and maybe even developing some drawings on-site. These will be executed over the several days leading up to the exhibition opening. Also, a mobile will be set up in the entrance of the gallery: sixty-five eyeballs on a string connect to a spectrum of colour that has been painted on a stick, balanced on the opposite side with two black and white forms (one somewhat elemental looking, the other a curved line). This object will present a structure for the translation of visual information into graphic black and white forms. Walking through this space the visitor enters the back room of 1646 where the drawings are formatted along the wall. A very light patternation of dots will be applied to the entire surface of the gallery space, wherever the drawings are not present. I want to give the impression that the walls are active and the spaces demarcated by the drawings are little voids, the sub-voids, of the exhibition.

SL: Can you describe your index?

ZT: The visual composition will use a style of caricature that I've identified and become familiar with over the years as what happens in the background while I'm trying to think. A visual grammar of ideas emerges when the latter, my thinking, is casually inscribed on paper. I liken this to thinking about hand-writing: an individual's style of drawn communication that is as subconsciously unique to the author as that person's opinions on a subject when engaged in a conversation with somebody they trust. Things like this are 'yours' whether you like it or not - inalienable - so why not give them a job?

SL: So the 'caricature' introduces a trace of personality you observed when you with-drew, so to speak, to be with your ideas? This would make the index idiomatic and intimate. I feel I'm being asked - from my position as an 'outsider,' as someone who has no prior knowledge about this work - to enter into the middle of this intimate sphere where you are 'being-with-your-ideas' as you work toward the show. It's a very different feeling from seeing a show when it's installed. Perhaps our correspondence can try to stay within this 'middle,' which would mean, I think, thinking

about your work by its milieu. (The Deleuzian idea of thinking by milieu describes a thinking that respects its inalienable conditions: the spatial situation, the atmosphere and breezes, the spree of local colors, the immersions, the environment) ...

ZT: Local colour is a great way to describe gesture.

SL: ... but it also means emphasizing the rhythms and recursions that happen as the thinking streams along to find its forms. Further, as for me, to have respect for this milieu requires suppressing the urge to imagine the outcomes of the show. (This seems important: Once these notes are organized and published by the Gallery there will already be some people who can compare them to the work. That's a different perspective from either one of ours now. We're necessarily speculative; but these notes will become a supplement).

Would you say that this milieu, (which is before the installed show, but just after the moment when the thinking began to 'surface') - this milieu - is inhabited by the figure of the Illustrator, this entity you introduced as both an 'idea' and a title, and which as such is not exactly to be identified as 'yourself'?

ZT: The Illustrator is certainly the milieu. A stand-in for the milieu. A tool for a certain kind of description that has yet to go to work. To use another analogy, it's all just haze at the moment, yet to collect into form.

SL: But is the Illustrator already a complete, functioning character, like a drawing machine that turns information into thoughts, and then thoughts into drawings, and paper drawings into wall works? For sure, a transfer process is always going to have contingencies, but I wonder how schematically or prescriptively you're encoding it?

ZT: The Illustrator (or the idea of one that I am putting forth) deals with this tracing of thinking: making thought evident in a space; what I am inclined to call presentness, which is form as evidence of thought in a space, reliant on the space and controlled by the inside/outside of an interval of time.

SL: There's also a kind of doubling of 'present' self-experience, (your thought is thinking itself through its drawings on a page), and there is a link by which this consciousness seems prompted by the Gallery. For instance, as a supplement to exhibiting your work, the organizers asked you to provide information about your practice and procedure, its developments, and your goals. The text we're writing here is an example of that procedure. Am I right that you responded by imagining a scenario where the work would seek to trace this kind of development itself? Is this supplementary window onto the path of your procedure the material (and the problem) you want to illustrate with the show?

ZT: The requirement to produce a bi-line for the exhibition influenced, and in this case helped to construct, a procedure of thinking with which to decide where and what my thoughts would turn into once they collected in the actual space of the Gallery. But a conceptualization of the space here at 1646 also presented opportunities.

First, there's the 'background night' where I will present some materials related to illuminating the 'hows' and 'whys' of my ideas, my approach to information as material to think with. This directed me to consider the abstractness of a void as the space in my mind where these thoughts are generated. As I liken what I do to thoughts about a subject, made into forms about a subject, I considered what kind of atmosphere I would like to be within once this event of illustration takes place, when I release the bits and pieces into the air, composing links from here to there. So, I set about making it.

But the other attribute of the 1646 structure, as you say, is the written correspondence that occurs during the build-up of the idea by the artist (in this case it's me), with an outside conversation partner (in this case, you). As I typically write quite a bit in order to develop an initial idea from one place to another, using writing as a tool to stimulate its growth and development, this requisite variable of the exhibition introduced an opportunity to formalize a personal, or interior, process into that of an exterior, or public one. I believe a certain transformation happens when an idea hits the air: it now sits upon a field of other such ideas. It's yet another opportunity to develop an additional turn, translating one point into another.

SL: These 'turns' become the tropes within a public transformation of your thought?

ZT: Since I agreed to the exhibition, I take this to mean that I decided to comply (to a degree) with the contingencies and conditions of this moment in time: the eight weeks that will unravel from the point of opening to the closing, but also the several months beforehand when thinking about this finite piece of time (the length of the exhibition) developed the approach that would eventually be exhibited. I enjoy these assumed rules. It's the conversation with a set of rules that I find generative -that discursive space of agreement propelling a thought forward, just enough to arrive at a point where things start to change direction. Art is full of these contingencies.

SL: There's a way that your approach seems almost deconstructive: you've asked yourself to think of what the Illustrator is doing when there is no preceding text or clear idea to be illustrated. (Not that I imagine you want to illustrate the idea of deconstruction.) One could even say you're working - between a void and the murals - on an illustrative impulse: an idea of illustration-itself.

ZT: Deconstruction is happening, or maybe it has already happened: breaking a whole into units in order to begin rebuilding. The deconstruction of the Illustrator-process underscores this reality in order to rebuild a fiction, one where I want to exist.

SL: I'm just interested in an Illustrator who has no text to illustrate, so that its work, which is usually an embellishment or a supplement, takes 'centre stage' and has to find a way to operate on its own. This Illustrator, freed from the priority of some text to be

embellished, is to you an idea about a happy existence? It's the thought of an agreeable course of action, or an aim? It also seems to me that it is working within directions and speeds, like a trajectory more than a figure. (Or if it is a kind of figure, it exists along a vector - the line of lines - defined in terms of both a direction and a magnitude.) The Illustrator itself, or the milieu of illustration, would issue - would be an issue, the issuing forth of all these other black lines.

ZT: The stage for this idea is my approach to the space of 1646 as a very large Void, the gallery as a space designed to attract and contain ideas. The factual blankness of the empty space can be likened to a definition of the Void that I find particularly favourable for this event because of its generative potential: a bright and empty space where the thoughts of the individual appear as they are composed.

SL: To say 'Void' is for you an idiosyncratic abbreviation?

ZT: For sure! 'Idiosyncratic' is good in my book. I've sourced this abbreviation from a simplified breakdown of the five elements of Japanese philosophy attributing personalities to the role of earth, water, fire, wind, and sky. The sky is the place where mental energy collects, where thoughts 'happen' (the sky is also an old stand in for the mind, or the mental). Connected to a collection of mental energy is the space where it happens, the sunyata, a term that translates as 'openness', 'emptiness', 'spaciousness', 'voidness'. My articulation of this information associates the void with being the home in which mental projection takes on form. Thoughts can have an address.

SL: If the walls correspond to this empty mental space, or represent it for the drawings, we have a case of sublimation. But the Illustrator disrupts this magnificent projection by making what is clearly and materially a deposit (working against the grain of a sublimating procedure).

ZT: Bit by bit, this Void fills in with an orchestration of opinions, translated from the mind, into the area of a space, collected on the surface of the walls as illustrated by the mind of the author. The title, the Illustrator, refers to this characterization of caricature: giving a face, a name and a role, to an idea. Give that idea - the Illustrator - a job. Thoughts compose forms, and the Illustrator is employed to enable this visualization. When a person speaks, or thinks, a degree of personal vernacular, flare and style, colours the communication. I'd like to think this begins to speak about how an opinion comes about, what it can look like as a visual thing.

SL: As a visual thing, again, the thoughts form as 'issues' - an issuing forth of all these graphic traces of the thinking that eventually become the hatch-work of lines on the walls. From a void (an ovum of thought) to the hatching of the drawings?

ZT: The impulse at work is to depict a level of syntactic noise that can exist within, and give, the Void a look. The Illustrator presents a language of graphic ideogrammatic abbreviations of larger and smaller ideas, references

that are executed using a single monochromatic line. The projection of a thought over-exposes within the Void, which is now described as visual calligraphy upon the interior surface of 1646.

SL: I can imagine this release of indirect graphic thought as either something like the hand prints in the Cosquer Caves or the chalkboards full of symbols in a Theoretical Physics department. In either case, the drawings are a materialization of groping that seems to suggest a very hard to grasp object - perhaps a virtual ball of dough, or a concept yet unformed. The Illustrator weaves a great variety of metaphors because a concept - or even a strict 'conceptualism' is absent. I love it whenever an artist starts to think without relying on 'conceptualism'.

ZT: The cave reference is a good one, as is the chalkboard: markings of the hand that are coordinated in the mind to mean something. An alphabet is a series of marks familiar enough to mean something to a certain group of people. Sometimes that group is quite large.

SL: And sometimes very small, because it's available to only a few initiates. I know that physicists always struggle with the problem of obscurity.

By the way, what material will you use to make the drawings?

ZT: The tool to mark the walls is an acrylic marker, 15 mm chisel head. The ink flows out like paint, but it is engineered not to produce drips (-- it kills the 'moments' that were so valuable to a discussion of painterly - and thus artistic - presentness started some sixty years ago. Instead, a neatly uniform line translates gestures into notations. The rhythm of the line comes from a place, it has that quality. As I said before, I link handwriting to drawing, to speaking in a vernacular unique to the author, as unique as the way a hand writes the mind's thoughts. The speed at which thoughts come out through a tool is also important. Typing, writing, quoting, illustrating, these are different speeds. This might be a little too poetic, but it gets me to a place where the Illustrator can have a body.

In this case, I also wanted the presentation to be ephemeral, to belong to the space, to be anchored by the space. The contradiction of this is that the drawings will not be removed, but painted over. Whatever thought translation that occurs as a result of the Illustrator will become part of the architecture, an additional layer of the interior. The rhythm of the exhibition cycle, of other people's thoughts being introduced into this space, will push my sense of presentness into the past.

SL: And that past will have a material correlate: this slight thickening of the walls, what I called the deposit. It's nice to think of a Gallery getting smaller and smaller as it succeeds and is able to keep putting on new shows. But this makes me want to return to your notion of emptiness - the allusion to a Void that is aligned with the capacity of the gallery to 'erase' the visual record of its shows. All the other shows that have occurred within the gallery left similar deposits that preclude the theme of emptiness. I'm sure

that all your drawings survive this fate by being documented, so what interests me most is that you seem to have internalized or accommodated to your thinking this refresh rate that's so common to contemporary programming. Does the infra-thin relief that survives in the gallery suggest that you have approached the theme of emptiness with irony? I wonder if your work doesn't take the shape of a comedy?

ZT: A comedy of Units! Humor and absurdity have a particular way of introducing abstract ideas. I'd like to think they can have the function of putting the viewer/reader at ease, into a position where an idea that is a little more ambitious, or sideways, can be engaged with. It's a recurrent tool in much of what I do and in how I treat the proposal of information.

Each illustrative gesture is a unit, one that is made available for speculative projection. This is how I came to think of them in the first place. Absurdist sketches coming out of a degree of energy, in time spent when ideas go nowhere (or so it would seem), when progression really does seem to slow down, even staying put within a mental space of one's own making. Yet, this time is still generative - movement needs degrees of rest to form a rhythm. There are times when there aren't answers or even a direction that was evident. I was still just 'there'.

SL: I can't help but think that the Illustrator's function will culminate in something like the hardening of a crust. The walls of the gallery, like the sides of a bread pan - (I've decided not to go with the geological analogy) - would seem to offer something like an outer spatial model: a surface extension, support, and a quantifier of air in which everything starts rising toward the copula of the whole. This crust would be a lining (pun intended) and a skin. And because of this the Void would be the gap between the lining of the milieu and the displacement (ex-position) of the drawings in the show.

If your drawings straddle the space between a milieu and an exposition, are they also a kind of mask for some middle-way aesthetic (an emptiness that is neither the 'trove of the unconscious,' nor the mindless issue of thought via tweets or a Blog? Neither/Nor: [Non-surrealist transcription, non-Blog-like circulation of the self]; a middle way (the Void of sunyata), but one from which a structuralist diagram might also be possible.

ZT: The surfaceness of them, how the drawings become a surface, is where I would locate this comment: the drawings as an intermediary layer, a skin (or a mask, certainly) separating you from something else that was there before. It's the in-between part where the activity is recorded and occurs. I think of Greek statuary and the way skin and features were painted on the surface of the marble to lend characterization and narrative. I say lend because these surfaces eventually vanished because of erosion. The natural cycle of an environment can diminish one intent while opening things up for another. I think that is where I get the 'empty' designation for a Gallery. More accurate would be to say a fade occurs with every gesture in the space.

SL: And also, Zin - you've said a couple of times that ideas are very colourful. What happens to this colour when it is illustrated or streamed - or even graphically precipitated - by black pens?

ZT: My use of the term color is a florid one for sure, a little 'purple', to enable an older definition. Colorful is the stand-in describing what goes into, and what can come out of, an idea that can otherwise be quite abstract, contradictory, and hard to pin-down. The black line, or the analog of black and white, is a tool to calm down the absurdity or ambition of a proposition, translating the gesture into a state that may be more easily read, digestible. Black and white are pretty simple things, and a thought can take many turns. At times, the language the thought speaks may not be as coherent as it could. The black line introduces just a touch of the discursive area, a shared spot that can be accessed by the writer and the reader. A mark on the wall, like the field of dots all the images sit within...

SL: It's florid, but it's also a traditional metaphor: 'putting colour' for something that is otherwise hard to pin down. And yet, I get a very clear impression that your 'colours' have mobility, so that they shift like the colours on a slide bar as opposed to being fixed in different identities, like squares on a colour chart. It's a general metaphoricity, and not a single metaphor. As you said, it seems to take the haze of any-image-what-ever and break it up and model it into a set of legible drawings.

ZT: My cast of character-forms is as follows:

- A large ostrich
- A series of hippies with blown out hair and glasses
- Stone walls with faded murals
- Posters
- An acrobatic body with three limbs maneuvered in the air
- A series of nooks
- Clay vases
- A person who's upper body has turned into smoke (or maybe it's haze?)
- A very large prehistoric bone
- A sandwich

The list of figures and forms is ongoing, and some pieces I have yet to name. I just don't know what they are yet. I'm hoping the void will help out. I'm careful not to fully control what will ultimately be the spatial narrative experience of the show. I'm no puppet master. I prefer a space for possibilities.

SL: Your list makes the work seem very engaging. My final question is therefore whether, once the work is installed, you anticipate people actively interpreting these drawings? What I mean to ask is whether, like the physicist at a blackboard, you intend the illustration to be retrievable by others as a specific set of thoughts, opinions, or ideas, you have had? Will people be tempted to think they can decipher the actual message? Or, like Cosquer Caves, do you imagine an experience where the returning temporality would arise from the spectators' affections: wonder, emotional triggers

(including humor), and little chains of associative and projective thinking. This would relate the tasks of the Illustrator to a far less determinable and open-ended reflection. Crucially, the experience of the accreted illustration would not depend on the specifics of the figures in the drawings. The figures would be interchangeable, contingent, and arbitrary. They would not have the symbolic value assigned them on the chalkboard. Like in Proust, they would be caught but not entirely determined - not settled in their meaning - by the outer shape of the work. You mentioned the times when nothing seems to develop. Does drawing retrieve this 'Lost Time'?

ZT: The imagery I'm working with developed from wanting to translate the parts I found interesting about something I'd observed. I'll give an example. One of the graphics appearing in the space is the western alphabet, illustrated in a font of my own stylization, that extends along the ceiling nearly the entire length of one wall. This might address the cave vs. chalkboard analogy. An alphabet is a series of letters formed through gestures (strokes) that when choreographed together produce moments that can/could be read. I see this illustrative example in the show as a little bit of a 'wink' that introduces the other graphic elements (ones employing a little more representational humor and absurdity) to operate as temporal spaces, more than a code to decipher. While horizontality in a space, and the narrative impression this gives, is difficult to ignore, the space is one that surrounds the visitor/thinker. An abstract leap would be to say that being in the space is something like being within the font-form of a single letter, except that this font-form is now a dinosaur bone, or a hamburger, or an oversized ostrich. The interesting parts, as I say, are the little voids produced when looking at, or thinking about a 'thing' at hand. In particular I'm talking about the parts of a subject that have encouraged the development of ideas and thoughts. Addressing what I do as Thoughts about a subject, turned into forms about the subject, I look to information as a generative tool. Translating forms into ones where the good stuff, the generative stuff, stands out. At the same time, the drawn has the ability to visualize things that could never exist, so this is another opportunity.

SL: For you the cave-image and the chalkboard would not be opposed.

ZT: Could a blackboard be a contemporary cave wall? I agree they are not necessarily opposed. Preserving the dialogue between the two is important if we are to agree that seeing and experiencing an idea in a space (an argument for sculpture, perhaps) is actually important. Interpretation contains elements of the generative in order to produce a version of understanding. I see the cave as the scenario where one reads for intent. The symbols become passive in their historical presence, traveling from then to now (although it's when a person encounters them that they could begin to exist). The chalkboard, even ignoring the modernized space of invention it stands for, facilitates the conception of active and abstract thought utilizing a language of code that one has, at least the ability or opportunity, to become fluent in. Although the way things are going these days,

the language of a physicist may as well be finger prints on the cave wall.

SL: I'd say the handprints in the cave are like 'pure' deposits - we do not know the reason they were placed there at all, or even if they were meant to be 'visual'. As marks that have been separated for all time from their milieu, they inspire people to wonder (a feeling that comes before rational thought) and tempt us, as you say, to interpret them. Some would say that this is an Ur-image for the whole history of art, going back through Western tradition to Winkelmann.

ZT: My descriptions of the intentions behind the work could be approached as a giant footnote. A waterfall cascading from an asterisk. Maybe that could be a title.

SL: A terrific image for your work!

ZT: The space of 1646 is located in The Hague, The Netherlands. I was a student in this city from the ages of 15 to 17. I could in fact be attempting to re-live an opinion my mind has made about the memories associated with this locale. I am suspicious of this.