

Paul Emmanuel artist's statement November 2010

I would like to say that I try to portray the body as a site of metaphorical and literal struggle; and that I explore the way mental and physical landscapes interact in their construction of memories and identity. I would like to say that I am committed to deconstructing limiting cultural assumptions concerning masculinity. But the truth is there is no such cleverness. My explanations are all retrospective.

I am not sure if my work comes from a profound intellectual grasp of social realities. It comes out of being a sensual participant in the world and sometimes it feels as if I have only a tenuous grasp of reality. It is inspired by feelings and aesthetics rather than words and ideas.

When I do have ideas, they are not grand literary constructs, profound philosophies or urgent political messages. My ideas are simple frameworks within which I can move. They act as a kind of scaffolding, not as descriptions, explanations or maps. They allow me to perform my feelings through the labour of intense, rigorous, time-consuming mark making.

The photographic references I work from are devices that allow emotionally laden textures to emerge on a surface.

The obsessive mark making is the only real control I have over confusing feelings about my own identity, gender, sexuality and power. Categories blur and it feels as if I dissolve into the spaces in between the marks.

The only thing that is certain is change. I hardly ever know where I am going – it's a wonder that forms appear at all.

When I was younger, I was seduced by the potential of something emerging out of the soft velvety blackness. I have always worked reductively from dark to light.

The process feels insubstantial and tenuous and often leaves me feeling scared and uncertain about what is trying to emerge and whether I can keep going.

The viewer may embed meaning in these surfaces and they can never be right or wrong as I don't assume to know the meaning myself.