

**Mindy:**

I had a proper look at the paintings—they work extraordinarily well and I found them really affecting. Your clear empathy and sensitivity to both what Jakob, your son, is making and to how he makes it means it feels genuinely collaborative and a collaboration of intimacy and affect rather than planning and intellect. I was also struck by the distance travelled from earlier work in how you conceptualise and depict the body. Neither the earlier nor this new work shy away in the least from the brute facts of our wet, slimy, smelly interfaces and processes, awkwardnesses, mutability and the possibility of (and, in a sense, inevitability) of it all going very wrong, but whilst the earlier work seemed to me to encapsulate all this in a somewhat foreboding (and therefore genre-limited) sense of body-horror or at least body-discomfort, here there is serene acceptance and even joy. *This* is what we are. *This* is how we function. *This* is being human. I think perhaps you have a two year old to thank for this broadening.

I wish I'd seen the show. Let me know if you are showing this, or new, work in the future.

**It's a bit scary**

It's amazing how seamless (not a terrible pun!) the collaboration is. I love the way bits of figuration emerge and feel wholly of a piece (Gosh!—isn't it odd how much metaphor is related to clothes and clothes-making/mending?) with everything else.

The very distinctive topography of the hybrid objects is hugely engaging—you tap into that current thing going on for non-standard—'collapsed' or 'extending-beyond' painting supports, but somehow the facts of the collaboration make this cohere in a way that some of those others (they can feel a bit random, over-willed, unmotivated, slave-to-fashion [*Fashion!*—there, another!]) don't quite do.

I've long been interested in these sorts of collaborative situations and how one levels the playing field whilst still acknowledging differences of skill and experience and I like the way that what is happening here clearly emerges out of deep thought around this.

I'm interested that you use the word scary—is that Jakob's description? The work actually comes over as joyful. There's a mysterious quality to it too but I'm not sure I find it scary or threatening in any way.

If you make more work please do send me images. I'm agog to see how things develop.

**I felt a kick**

I don't know whether I'd noticed it quite so much before but there's something about this particular item of clothing which has a 'stability' that makes it almost look as if it had been intended precisely as a support for pigment and other ways of marking. It could be that you're becoming more comfortable with wrangling these things because Jakob's contributions are so tightly integrated into the whole—there's a strong sense of unity here. (I don't mean by that that I think unity is something always to be sought after, simply that I see it here and it gives me visual and conceptual pleasure...)

Even if one knew none of the background the piece leaps out to greet the viewer simply *as a painting*—it delights and it intrigues.

I also very much like the title which is energetic in a nicely ambiguous way.

## Boo to your ribbing

This new piece seems to ‘triangulate’ the others, setting both a sense of the diversity of the project but also establishing a sense of a core language across the series as a whole.

This one in particular gives a whole new thrust to the notion of ‘hanging’ works and the more you make, the more handsome I can see them looking as a group.

I very much like the use (well, the *centrality* here) of text and particularly one which conjures your relationship with Jakob (the language being recognisable to any parent—I hear it now, in my mind’s ear—as typical ‘play’ language)

Aside from the orange lettering there seems to be an orange penumbra around the words—was this added after or is it simply where pigment has soaked in and diffused out?

Is the blue pigment around the ribs on the reverse an addition? This is where photography, however effective, lets us down—it’s quite difficult to separate everything out from a photo. I’m looking forward to visiting and seeing the works in all their physicality.

## Back to back breaker

I’ve had a chance to look at the new piece now as well as returning to ‘*Boo to your ribbing*’ in the light of the notes you sent.

What I find really interesting in both works is the difference between an artist’s view of what s/he makes and even an external observer who is looking very, very carefully. (Lots of zooming in in Photoshop!)

What I mean by this is that you are much more aware of the component elements of the pieces and your memories of the process of making whereas even with a commentary from you (and whilst looking with an eye that is deliberately analytical) I still naturally see the work much more holistically—there is a kind of ‘viewer-gestalt’ effect at work—we want to accept the piece as a unity, even whilst trying to understand its facture.

So where you feel that you have made huge changes in process from one to the next piece—I see more a satisfying diversity but one nonetheless quite clearly held together by a set of commonalities.

Coming on to ‘*Breaker*’—first of all it makes a simply marvelous pairing and contrast with ‘*Boo*’ and with the others—each new work you make further establishes the parameters of the series as a whole—a Wittgensteinian *family* (appropriate word!) *resemblance* rather than something able to be articulated as *rule-governed*. What I also detect in the new work is a continuation of the growing confidence you have in working both with and against what Jakob does, so the collective language is unified and unpickable (*whoops I did it again!*—those expressions just keep coming.) This is really quite extraordinary, this sense of the melding together, the weaving in and out of, broadly, equal voices. *Counterpoint* is a term I might borrow from music.

## Losing my head

I was talking to someone the other day about her grandchild’s mark-making and how she has to actively resist the temptation to intervene to prevent what she and we might see as a child’s

overworking, as more and more pigment is added and the resulting piece is increasingly an undifferentiated dark brown and ends with wet and jagged holes in the paper. I was reminded of this when I saw these intensely worked blocks of Jakob's (**you say:** *'It was gleefully painted!'*) and I thought how right you were to similarly trust, firstly because he has clearly developed unusually sophisticated painting chops for his age and careful examination of the densest sections reveals them to be far from uniform or lacking in visual event, but because there is a second kind of trust present, which is a trust *in yourself* that your response will *work*. And it does *work* but what interests me is that, by this point, it can be a fairly minimal thing. A hand on the tiller.

**You say:** *'I thought it was such a striking painting I kept it almost completely intact, just cutting around his activity with only a few gestures lost'*

**You say:** *'I have offered my ghost physical form (the shirt itself), a little stitch work as space for my contribution to the front of the piece (as his painting needed little else.)'*

**You say:** *'Once I saw his painting with my shirt, I realised his work replaces my head. He holds so much space in my head, he has taken over my thoughts, but also disrupted my thinking so there is less thinking and more instinctive...responses... less calculated... [than] I was before.'*

**And you say:** *'I adapt as he evolves.'*

### **Comfort blanket/Ghost mother**

**'Comfort blanket/Ghost mother'** is simply quite extraordinary and confirms me in my view that this whole project has been a white-heat crucible of development for you. *Discovery* and *problem solving* are words used often somewhat loosely and idly in both artist statement and criticism but they seem to me amply justified in this context. In this latest piece there is a sense of complete *command* of the language you have been developing in the past months. In particular the portrayal of Jakob is simply a fine and rich piece of figuration. No apology for it is embedded anywhere within the piece, there is no trace of irony. Good. It simply is and is the better for being so. It is as if you had decided simply to trust your eye, heart and hand completely. By this I don't mean to imply some sort of backward lookingness in either you as artist or me as commentator, for the ensemble here is as contemporary as anything I have seen. Your gifts as a colourist, with that range of muted and not so muted reds, pinks and mauves, are inserted into an equally unerring feel for geometry, both the horizontal/vertical dialectic—the banding on the negative space ghost side and the strong sense of verticality summoned by both the image of Jakob and that second ghost behind him, the whole laid onto the uncertain, trembling, 3d-embedded plane of the fabric's surface.

The 'absent' standing figure is simply the most viscerally present absence I have experienced. If it has a precedent it is in John's mid to late career self-shadows (I don't mean to suggest influence—I have no idea and neither do I care, your work stands literally on its own two absent feet) and comes with exactly the same bolt of lightning charge of recognition of what it feels like, what it *means* to be an embodied presence in the world.

### **Michael**

Michael Szpakowski October 2016-Nov 2017