



LAURA LANCASTER
Unitited (2007)

Courtesy of the artist and Workplace Gallery, UK

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PAUL SMITH

(Maximo Park)

A short personal history

alongside artistic work of:

PETER J. EVANS

RACHEL LANCASTER

LAURA LANCASTER

*Three Artists,
The North East
& Me*

written by Paul Smith

illustrated by Peter J. Evans,

Laura Lancaster &

Rachel Lancaster

I WRITE THIS AS MY BAND, Maximo Park, and I drive past the mountain ranges that dominate the Swiss countryside, with their irregular patches of milky, grey rock that seem to have been etched into the gradient by a giant pair of compasses. An early summer heatwave continues outside. And, still, we will return to our homes in Newcastle and be grateful that it is the place for us.

Perhaps a decade ago, there would have been less reason for a bunch of university graduates to remain in the North East of England. Perhaps opportunities for work and leisure would have been more limited. It's hard to say, since I'm constantly learning more about a city that is growing. The close proximity of the sea has inspired me both generally and in specific songs. A short Metro ride leads you into a unique landscape of crumbling, stone piers, elderly lighthouses and stunning geological surprises.

Certainly, Newcastle has been beneficial in terms of my own path, providing a comfortable environment in which to develop as a musician and writer. Musically, there is a sense of isolation from any fabricated 'scene', and the welcome lack of industry leeches is no barrier to future success; it's a chance to remain unique instead of tailoring your craft to a particular fad.

There are examples of young people staying in the region and attempting to start new initiatives, for the benefit of the area as well as themselves. By following a passion, the cinephiles who built and run their own cinema, Star and Shadow, have shown how independent thinking can help the North East flourish. I feel privileged to have had so many different experiences after wandering down the hill to the quayside on a Sunday night to visit the old Side Cinema that the same group of friends operated. It is important to me that other people feel involved in such projects and are made aware of alternatives to an increasingly homogenized entertainment industry. I've seen some of my favourite films in the Tyneside Cinema and its recent refurbishment has restored yet another grand, historic building to Newcastle's city centre.

Over the past few years I've been trying to figure a way to marry reflective, romantic lyrics to urgent, melodic music, and I'm glad I met a bunch of people who understood those aims and, sometimes unknowingly, encouraged me. Meeting someone like Peter Brewis of Field Music, for example, has made me realize I'm not alone in my aims as a north-eastern musician. In this magazine, I thought I'd turn the spotlight on three of my friends who make visual art that inspires me and, indirectly, the music I make: Peter J. Evans, Laura Lancaster and Rachel Lancaster. All of them are represented by Workplace Gallery, another instance of a new regional initiative that's gaining momentum.

I really just wanted to highlight how good this trio are, but if you're looking for a link between them and this issue, then there is the engagement with time and how we process information that is presented to us in a lifetime. In Rachel's case, her paintings 'remember' seemingly insignificant moments in films and television programmes to create newly alienated environments. Her sister Laura has been working with 'found' imagery, such as a bundle of forgotten photographs that you might find at a car boot sale. She then distorts these memories with her brushstrokes, usurping the original. Like Rachel and Laura's, Pete's practice spans different media, but is perhaps more overtly eclectic in its physical output, ranging from performances and wooden sculptures to intricate layered pencil lines on graph paper. The obsessive nature of his desire to catalogue the thought process and, in turn, the creative process, results in painstaking end products that betray his search for the sublime. His works are like mini-histories of the lengths he goes to in order to complete them.

As a qualified art historian (!) I can attest that the North East is a home for creativity. As long as people have individual thoughts and desires, there will be a drive to make something new; to add something to the world. I think these three artists are welcome additions to the likes of Richard Hamilton and his student, Bryan Ferry, as modern-day members of Newcastle's

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art historical background. I once met Ferry and he said that as a young member of Roxy Music, he felt he had to leave the North in order to be noticed. He added that it wasn't the case anymore, pointing out that our band gained recognition without geographical compromise. When I speak to my friends in the art world, they say it somehow feels necessary to follow the well-trodden career path towards London, despite their instinct to buck that trend and remain where they're happiest. The three people whose work you see here seem comfortable with their location, forging their own routes from the North East out...

Switzerland, 2009



Peter J. Evans
Supernova Moment (2006)

*Beech Parquet – 1000 x 1000 x 1000 mm
Courtesy of the artist, Seventeen Gallery
and Workplace Gallery, UK*

Photo by Wig Worland