



Dr Robert Clarke

Robert trained as a navigating officer in the merchant navy (1973-1976) and then studied Fine Art at Gloucestershire College of Art and the Royal College of Art (1980-1983). He was a curator in the Department of Paintings, Prints, Drawings and Photographs of the National Maritime Museum. From 1985-1992, Robert was a peripatetic teacher of art to five rural Gaelic schools on the Isle of Lewis, Outer Hebrides; since which, he has taught fine art, art education and art theory in Higher Education. Some of his short stories were broadcast on BBC Radio 4 (1996/7 & 2002) and he is currently turning them into a book: *Stories from Exhibition Road*, an autobiographical account of making, learning and teaching art. He completed his doctorate *A Phenomenology of Ships: Time, Memory and Appearance* at Birmingham Institute of Art and Design (BIAD) in 2003. Robert has exhibited drawing notebooks throughout the UK and was a Jerwood Drawing Prize winner

in 2006. In 2007 he was artist-in-residence at the Dock Museum, Barrow-in-Furness. He is invited regularly to teach drawing on the National Society for Education in Art and Design (NSEAD) artist-teachers' postgraduate scheme. Since 1997, he has published academic papers on tradition, art education, aesthetics and phenomenology. Robert describes himself as an artist and teacher who believes that, 'in making art and teaching it, we are always drawing things out of ourselves and into the experiences of each other. Levinas would have recognised this as belonging to the ethical nature of what he called the "the wisdom of love" and questions about learning to see what is otherwise invisible'.



Robert is interested in the ontological nature of art where, in making art or looking at it, there occurs a special sense of being or existence which comes from an absorption or immersion in the world that art opens up. This is indeterminate for its ontology is neither aligned to any process or practice nor is it passive; and although its presence is persuasive it is not predictable and does not arise exclusively in art. That some experiences exceed our ability to describe them does not mean they do not exist, and this is reason enough to attempt to give them appearances. Thus, in moments of immersion we are close to what Jacques Maritain calls in his aesthetics "a more than".

Robert's research interests are concentrated in three areas: drawing, philosophy and teaching which together inform his approach to art practice and theory. This approach is connected by an ontological strand traced from Aristotle's *Metaphysics* to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and the concept of *Dasein*.

Currently Robert is exploring Heidegger's notions of *Zuhandenheit* (ready-to-hand) and *Vorhandenheit* (present-to-hand) and how both come together as an ontology of theory and practice. Not only can this ontology be applied to methods used to teach art students to question aesthetic assumptions, but it also suggests ways in which, theory and practice are fundamentally indivisible. To this end, Robert is recording interviews with students as a study into the cultural and ontological nature of the creative process; this is a pilot study for more extensive pedagogic research with colleagues from the Universities of Athens and Oslo. He aims to present a provisional outline of this research at the next international conference of the Heidegger Circle, at Messkirch, in May 2011.

Robert's recent paper *Mnemosyne: Heidegger, Poiesis and Technē* – a study of the poetic influence of Aristotle and Hölderlin on Heidegger's later aesthetics – was presented to the 21st International Conference of Greek Philosophy, in Cyprus, in July 2009. It will be published in 2010 in K. Boudouris [ed.] *Greek Aesthetics: Art and Technology* Athens: IAGP. Robert's other interests involve the

connections between the Buddhist philosopher DT Suzuki and the Japanese phenomenologist Kitaro Nishida both of whom reinvigorated ideas of aesthetic consciousness found in Aristotle and in medieval philosophy. He is interested in the notion of losing the self; an approach which uses phenomenological analysis to infer the subjective nature of consciousness in aesthetic experience and in this way to understand the relationships between the practice, imagination and ontology. Robert proposes the notion of suspension and erasure operates at the very heart of creative activity.