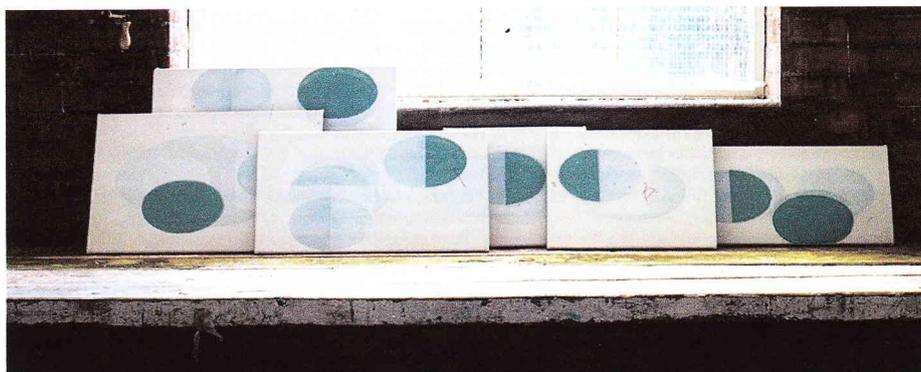


## Still/s - Richard Emsley

The cycle *Still/s* is more usefully thought about in terms of the visual rather than the musical. Indeed it was from a collaboration with a visual artist that the idea for the cycle first emerged: in 2002 the De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill commissioned the British painter Joan Key and myself to devise a project in which a group of six paintings and a piece for solo cello were to be derived from a single, shared process of gestation. It was decided to start with a deliberately rule-driven procedure involving the placing of six "music notation" canvasses into various "still life" arrangements (see photos), the distances between "notes" being recorded and later used as a compositional blueprint, the canvasses also being independently worked into their final incarnation at a later stage. Key's *Six White Paintings for Composition* were ultimately exhibited as part of the 'Colour White' exhibition at the De La Warr Pavilion in July 2002 during which the cellist Anton Lukoszevics gave a solo recital including my part of the collaboration, *Still/s 1*.



Eager to continue a close exploration of the seam of material exposed by the project, I decided that the cello piece would be the first of 24 pieces composed for all the solo, duo and trio combinations of a 5-instrument ensemble, the idea of combinations being particularly germane to the project. *Still/s 22* for clarinet and piano was completed in late 2002 and premiered by Carl Rosman and Mark Knoop, *Still/s 14* for solo violin was commissioned and first performed by Darragh Morgan in June 2003, Kathleen Gallagher and Knoop premiered *Still/s 10* for flute and piano in March 2005 and Anton Lukoszevics has meanwhile given further performances of *Still/s 1*, including one in association with an exhibition by Swiss constructivist artist Richard Lohse at Haus Konstruktiv in Zürich. Performers of future pieces include the New York Miniaturist Ensemble. Tonight's performance is the first concert-length grouping, nos. 4 - 6 having been specially commissioned for the occasion with funds provided by the Britten Pears Foundation.

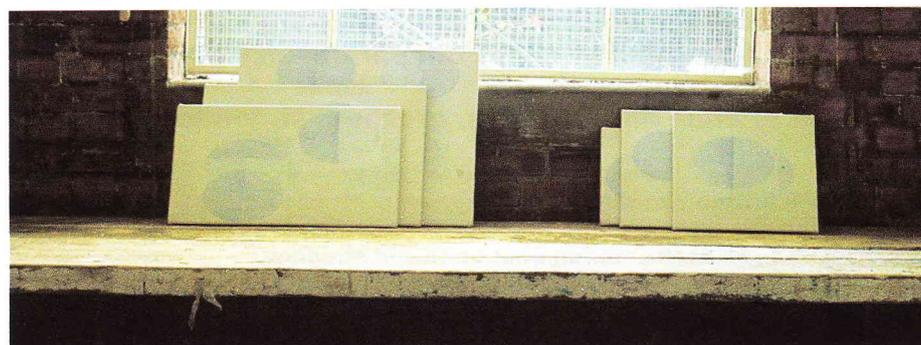
Albrecht Dürer apparently reported that he liked the fact that no two impressions of one of his engravings on copperplate were alike. This idea of the inexhaustible, and often qualitatively different, possibilities ("combinations") derivable from a limited quantum of material is, as suggested above, central to the poetry of the cycle – openness and possibility as opposed to closedness and the definitive.



The De La Warr Pavilion itself is a famous emblem of Modernism, and the materials of my cycle have something of the bare, almost "white cell" feel of much Modernist architecture. They are extremely pared down, in an attempt to draw the listener in to a quiet focussing on minutiae of detail, to "still" in the contemplative sense. This material is often presented between extended silences, as if in quotation marks – it is there not to participate in some ongoing rhetoric, but in the spirit of non-action, a concept found in many Eastern philosophical traditions.

One such tradition is Daoism, one of whose many aphorisms refers to the ability of the enlightened individual to sense the innate life-span of every living thing. This is relevant to what is perhaps the cycle's central concern: to endow each sound with its own innate span, or, it might be said, its own duration, or tread, its own breadth, or breath. There is also an attempt to arrive at a kind of naturalness, or "rightness", for the pulsations, which frequently coalesce in two's, oscillating with delicate randomness.

Central to the original concept of the collaboration with Joan Key was that the six canvasses used in the process of gestation were to be steadily whitened out with each new "still life" arrangement. The canvasses' notations became "absent" - agents no longer present, but perhaps subtly detectable as a trace. To return to the subject of Modernists, the work of Samuel Beckett was once described as embodying a process which moved steadily towards "whiteness, absence, stillness and silence".



Richard Emsley was born in Goole, Yorkshire in December 1951. His first musical interests, starting at about the age of 10, revolved around the pop music of the early to mid-1960's and this period saw the composition of about 100 pop songs. By his mid-teens Emsley had been introduced by a friend to the classical music of the early twentieth century in the shape of works such as Schoenberg's Five Orchestral Pieces Op.16 and Stravinsky's "Le Sacre du Printemps."

During his formal musical education at University College Cardiff Emsley tended to specialise in analytical rather than compositional options, his first year dissertation being on the subject of musical stasis and later ones exploring movement and time in twentieth century music and the work of Pierre Boulez. During this period Emsley frequently attended the composition classes of Peter Maxwell Davies at Dartington Summer School of Music, and composed his earliest acknowledged work "The lunar silences, the silent tide lapping..."

On moving to London in 1976 Emsley took on work as a music engraver, which continues to be his principal form of livelihood. A central activity at this time was the London new music ensemble Suoraan, co-founded and directed with the composer James Clarke. Consisting of a small band of outstanding specialist performers, the ensemble dedicatedly promoted the music of, centrally, Iannis Xenakis, but also younger British and European composers such as Michael Finnissy and James Dillon. Six ensemble works were composed by Emsley for the group, including in 1981 the music theatre piece The Juniper Tree.

After leaving Suoraan Emsley fulfilled a number of commissions including a children's music theatre work for the Inner London Education Authority and "...from swerve of shore to bend of bay..." for The Fires of London. In 1988 an article on Emsley's work by composer Richard Barrett appeared in Tempo magazine, leading to an invitation to participate in the Composers' Forum at Darmstadt Ferienkurse für Neue Musik. However, following the composition of the piano solo work "Flow Form" there ensued a lengthy period of reappraisal and experimentation.

The creative silence of this period was finally broken with "finnissys fifty", "Little Sunderings" and the first of the for piano series, these works representing the discovery of a new pared-down piano idiom which has proved a fruitful seam.

"finnissys fifty" was commissioned and first performed by the pianist Ian Pace, who has continued to be a major exponent of Emsley's work, performing it, as well as in Britain, at festivals including 'Evenings of New Music' Bratislava, 'Music Summit' Cologne, '...antasten... Internationales Pianoforum' Heilbronn and 'Mostly Modern' Dublin. Additionally, works in the "for piano series" have twice been selected for performance at ISCM World Music Days - in Bucharest (1999) and Yokohama (2001) - and have been taken up by other pianists including Isabel Ettenauer, Robert Keeley, Jonathan Powell, Kate Ryder, Scott Tinney and Mary Dullea.

The first twelve pieces of the for piano series received their first complete performance as a cycle in December 2003 when the young Japanese pianist Kentaro Noda played them at the inaugural concert of a new music venue in Kobe. "for piano 13" is a substantial work of 42 minutes composed in response to a commission from the pianist Philip Thomas, while the latest in the series, "for piano 14" and "for piano 15", were commissioned and first performed by Jonathan Powell.

Currently, in contrast to this exclusive focus on the solo piano, Emsley has begun "Still/s", a series of 24 solos, duos and trios exploring all the possible combinations of a five-instrument reservoir. Involving even more drastically pared-down material than the piano works, this series sprang from a collaboration with the visual artist Joan Key whose "Six White Paintings for Composition" were shown in the 2002 Colour White exhibition at the De La Warr Pavilion Bexhill concurrently with the first performance by Anton Lukoszevics of Emsley's solo cello piece "Still/s 1". Eight further works in the series have appeared so far - commissioned by the Libra Ensemble, the violinist Darragh Morgan and the London concert series Music We'd Like To Hear.

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Apartment House was created by the cellist Anton Lukoszevics in 1995. Since then it has established itself as the leading British exponent of avant-garde and experimental music from around the world. Apartment House performances embrace radical elements of avant-garde and experimental music creating a wide range of acoustical and theatrical situations within which volatile and stimulating performances occur. The seeds of the Apartment House repertoire stem from the hard-core European avant-garde, the joyful anarchy of The Scratch Orchestra, and the exploratory nature of experimental music.

Apartment House's performances have included many UK and World premieres of music by a wide variety of composers. Notable portrait events have featured composers Christian Wolff, Luc Ferrari, Dieter Schnebel, Christopher Fox, Laurence Crane, Michael Parsons, Helmut Oehring, Clarence Barlow, Philip Corner, and Richard Ayres. The Apartment House ensemble is of flexible instrumentation, allowing for a vast range of performance possibilities. Apartment House has made many radio broadcasts for BBC Radio 3, Danish Radio, Swedish Radio 2, WDR Cologne, ORTF Austria and Deutschlandfunk, Berlin. They have also released a CD of music from 1956-1971 by Cornelius Cardew for Matchless Records.

Past events have included - a Clarence Barlow Portrait at the Hoxton New Music Days, Cornelius Cardew and Christian Wolff Retrospectives at the Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, a residency at the GAS Festival, Sweden. In 2002 they presented performances of new British Music at the Wittener Tage für Neue Kammermusik, a Sylvano Bussotti/Luc Ferrari event at the Almeida Opera Festival, Kings Cross. In 2003 they appeared at the Wien Modern Festival, Austria, Dresden Zeitgenössische Musik Tage, MaerzMusik, Berliner Festspiel, MDR Festival, Leipzig, HCM Festival and performances in Belgium. In 2004 they presented concerts in Stuttgart, Huddersfield, Cambridge, London (BBC and BMIC Cutting Edge). In 2005 they appeared at Ultraschall, Berlin, Wien Modern (Cage concerts), Belgium with XXX Live\_Nude\_Girls and Cut 'n Splice Festival, London with Kagel's Acustica and Peter Ablinger.

Apartment House's recent large scale project was "Die Schachtel", an environment for musicians, performers, space, video installation, lighting and electronics based on the music by Franco Evangelisti and the scenario by Franco Nonnis. In collaboration with "labor für musik:theater", Berlin, Apartment House performed this work at the Sophiensaele in Berlin as part of the Ultraschall Festival from 19 to 22 January 2006. In May 2006 they gave the premiere of a new string quartet with electronics by Zbigniew Karkowski at the Sonic Arts Network Cut 'n Splice Festival at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, in association with BBC Radio 3. 2007 events include a BBC Invitation concert featuring new music from Berlin, performances in Oslo, Rome, Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival and at the Wien Modern Festival.

In 2008 they perform at the Soundwaves Festival, Brighton, ISCM world Music Days in Vilnius and take part in a full performance of Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Aus den Sieben Tagen* for Sonic Arts Network/ BBC Cut 'n Splice Festival at Wilton's Music Hall. They also present a concert focusing on music by John Cage at this year's Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival.

Apartment House is represented by Haferkorn Associates.

**music we'd like to hear**  
**2nd july 2008**

**richard emsley**

still/s 1-3

- interval -

still/s 4-6

(commissioned by MWLTH with funds from the Britten Pears Foundation)

**apartment house**

**(nancy ruffer - flutes; andrew sparling - clarinets; angharad davies - violin;  
anton lukoszevics - cello; tim parkinson - piano)**

**church of st anne and st agnes, gresham st, london ec2v**

**people we'd like to thank**

**the britten pears foundation ([www.brittenpears.org](http://www.brittenpears.org))  
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and all those who have helped with publicity.**