

Vitalistic Fantasies



contemporary
british
painting

Vitalistic Fantasies



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The Cello Factory,
33-34 Cornwall Road,
Waterloo,
London SE1 8TJ

The
Cello
Factory

Artlyst





Iain Andrews
Amanda Ansell
Karl Bielik
Day Bowman
Julian Brown
Ruth Calland
Deb Covell
Lucy Cox
Gordon Dalton
Pen Dalton
Sam Douglas
Natalie Dowse
Fiona Eastwood
Geraint Evans
Susan Gunn
Alex Hanna
Suzanne Holtom
Barbara Howey
Phil Illingworth
Linda Ingham
Bryan Lavelle
Kirsty O'Leary-Leeson
Paula MacArthur
David Manley
Enzo Marra
Nicholas Middleton
Paul Newman
Stephen Newton
Joe Packer
Stephen Palmer
Mandy Payne
Ruth Philo
Narbi Price
Freya Purdue
James Quin
Katherine Russell
Harvey Taylor
Molly Thomson
Judith Tucker
Joanna Whittle
Sean Williams

A Contemporary British Painting exhibition, bringing a visual conversation to ideas discussed in Isabelle Graw's book, *The Love of Painting*

Curated by Paula MacArthur

Essay by Catrin Webster

Special thanks to Alex Hinks at The Cello Factory

Vitalistic Fantasies

by Catrin Webster

*The essay was written for the first showing of Vitalistic Fantasies
as part of the BEEP biennial in Swansea*

Contemporary painting is in a very exciting place and exhibitions such as the BEEP biennial, in Swansea, have become regular events to reflect and review current painting practice, nationally and internationally. This year's BEEP exhibition is held in ten venues across Swansea and Cardiff and also features a satellite exhibition in the Elysium's College Street galleries. *Vitalistic Fantasies*, inspired by Isabelle Graw's publication, *The Love of Painting: Genealogy of a Success Medium*, 2018, showcases the paintings of thirty artists, who are all part of the Contemporary British Painting society, which Paula MacArthur states is, 'an attempt to bring a visual conversation to Graw's ideas and consider how her argument resonates within their own individual practices.'

Perhaps it can be agreed, when reflecting on the paintings included in this exhibition, that contemporary painting is a fluid space, open and therefore not fixed to a certain type of material, nor to less certain cultural trends: It is malleable, mutable, free. Painting, however, for many years was seen differently, when compared to the culturally dominant, omnipresent lens-mediated images. For some, painting had 'downfalls' which perhaps could be diagnosed through its subjectivity, its expressive

qualities, its sometimes-primal ingredients, of earth-based pigments and oil; its low-tech accessibility. The physical nature of painting; its haptic, tactile, material properties, have arguably worked against it. *Vitalistic Fantasies*, which brings together artists with diverse perspectives and a wide range of methods and intent, proposes an alternative theoretical position; a different way to conceive of and experience painting. This exhibition, which holds a dialogue with the theoretical discourse suggested by *Vitalistic Fantasies*, proposes a different position from which to look at and to encounter painting. This approach connects painting with emergent thinking surrounding subjectivity, materiality, and affect. Graw states, 'it is painting that provides a material basis for our vitalistic projections of subjectivity.' Establishing an alternative theoretical approach to thinking about painting and the connection to an individual's interpretation and life (Graw. 2018, p. 257).

When asked to contribute to this publication, I immediately recalled a 1997 exhibition I was invited to show a painting in, entitled, *Pure Fantasy: Inventive Paintings of the 90s*. The exhibition considers fantasy in a completely different way to Graw, and perhaps helps to create a context for this new contemporary thinking about painting. *Pure Fantasy*, curated by the Mostyn Gallery, show cased eight artists; two women, six men, including, Glenn Brown (b. 1966) and Chris Ofili (b. 1968). 'Fantasy' as a premise for this exhibition, seemed to offer an alternative to 'reality' (a time when painting was perhaps not celebrated). The exhibition, as many painting

exhibitions of this period such as Hayward Gallery *The Painting of Modern Life: 1960s to Now* (2007), positioned painting in relation to photography, as do a good number of celebrated and significant painters of the 20th and 21st Centuries, Gerhart Richter (b. 1932), Peter Doig (b. 1959), Vija Clemens (b. 1938), who challenge, head on, the dialogue between these materialities. The 1997 catalogue for, *Pure Fantasy* begins:

One hundred and sixty years have elapsed since the invention of photography appeared to signal the end of the importance of painting. New ideas and contributions to the activity have quietly continued over the past years and painting survives still as a valid form of expression, whilst the merit of the process has been questioned repeatedly by artists and academics.[...] painters emerge with new energy to vitalise the practical and intellectual processes of painting. (unknown 1997)

Photography and lens-based approaches, together with the conceptual turn in art practice in the 1960s-70s and the dematerialization of the art object (Lippard 1997), had again in the 1990s problematised painting, expelling it to the muddy edges of culture. But still, as painters we are here. Painting did not go away. Indeed, perhaps now, there has never been a more visible place for painting. In the contemporary digital world, photography is in flux; the image as data set forces a rethinking of photography beyond Roland Barthes', *Camera*

Lucida (Elkins 2011) signaling that the visual world is now very different from twenty years ago, and thus necessitates a rethinking of painting, but also a 're-seeing' of experience.

The premise of this show, *Vitalistic Fantasies*, is perhaps to take painting, with its multiple potentials and materialities, out of a binary correspondence to lens-based media, which has been such a central discourse for so long. New alternatives to thinking, looking and feeling a subjective connection to painting are being opened-up; perhaps a space to reconsider painting within the realm of 'dreaming' is being made possible through theoretical approaches such as affect theory and the discourse around new materialities.

Charles Baudelaire, in his writing in response to the Salon of 1851, witnesses the first impact of photography on painting, and not just on painting as a medium, but the impact photography might have on our way of seeing and being in the world:

... each day the painter becomes more and more given to painting not what he dreams but what he sees. Nevertheless it is a happiness to dream, and it used to be a glory to express what one dreamt.[..]

Could you find an honest observer to declare that the invention of photography and the great industrial madness of our times have no part at all in this deplorable result? Are

we to suppose that a people whose eyes are growing used to considering the results of a material science as though they were the products of the beautiful, will not in the course of time have singularly diminished its faculties of judging and feeling what are among the most ethereal and immaterial aspects of creation?'

(Baudelaire 1955, p.231)

Perhaps this is the crux, 'that it is a happiness to dream' and in spite of the impact of seeing the world through a lens of 'material science' (Baudelaire 1955), for one hundred and eighty years, painting still offers, enables, enacts a place for 'dreaming'. Dreaming is not a dead or purely sleeping art, dreaming is alive and present in the waking world. Painting, like dreaming is mutable, plastic (Malubou 2012), open-ended. As the assemblage of paintings brought together in the collection testify, painting does not rely on paint and canvas, nor on the frame of the picture, nor wall of the gallery (O'Doherty 2000), painting as shown in this collection of work for the *Vitalistic Fantasies* exhibition, is not connected by theme, method, or material, but through a propensity to 'dream' as an essential understanding that painting, '...provides a material basis for our vitalistic projections of subjectivity' (Graw.2018, p. 257): This premise is the axis upon which this exhibition pivots.

Vitalism of material, as an abstract theoretical concept, is under much debate as part of the New Materialism turn and there is considerable writing on the subject. Jane Bennet, in

her book *Vibrant Matter*, (2010) develops an understanding of the materialism of things connected back to the self, Bennett writes:

My aim, again, is to theorize a vitality intrinsic to materiality as such, and to detach materiality from the figures of passive, mechanistic, or divinely infused substance. This vibrant matter is not the raw material for the creative activity of humans or God. It is my body ...
(Bennett 2011, p. P11)

Taking this as a premise, and a way of conceptualizing how to approach the paintings brought together here, creates a space in which paintings have a 'vitality intrinsic to [their] materiality'; they have an independent agency and life force. This is the key, whether the material is cloth, canvass, oil paint or object-based, that material acts on us as material beings, in a visceral way: We share a vitality with the world around us.

This questions whether paintings are to be 'viewed', which is essentially a distancing and passive action, or 'encountered', through an acknowledgement of the paintings' independent vitality and in apprehension of 'immanent experience' (O'Sullivan 2001, p.126). To consider the paintings brought together here as being a 'trace of aliveness', through their essential materiality, connects the paintings to the material world of the viewer and renders the paintings re-sung, sensations, in the subjective, experience of the beholder. 'In fact', O'Sullivan writes, 'we might say that the affect is [..]

the matter in us responding and resonating with the matter around us' (p128. O'Sullivan 2001).

Each image in the exhibition vibrates with its own vitality which 'resonates' with us when we encounter them; layers of colour held together in oil, acrylic, or interwoven with other materials, all 'responding and resonating' internally within in the matter of the image/object and out into the world around; threads, timber, found objects, all imbued with individual affective properties. Surfaces articulated through mark, gesture, figuration, colour block, abstraction, symbolism, all need to be encountered as physical objects, images, projections; 'waiting to be reactivated by a spectator or participant'; they cannot be 'read [...] you can only experience them'(O'Sullivan 2001, p.126), or as Wittgenstein in his last work, *Remarks on Colour*, observes 'The colour concepts are to be treated like the concepts of sensations' (Wittgenstein 2007, p. 26c), they need to be felt.

Painting's material vibrancy can be understood in this exhibition as Baudelaire's 'dream', Graw's 'fantasies' or O'Sullivan's 'portals [...] situated on the borderline between actual and the virtual [...] (which) gives art an ethical imperative, because it involves a kind of moving beyond the already familiar (the human), precisely a kind of self-overcoming. (O'Sullivan 2001 p.128.)

Perhaps we need to consider how exhibitions such as BEEP

open up painting to a city like Swansea, using non-traditional venues, together with established art galleries; how painting itself can affect both those who are familiar and unfamiliar with it. In Catherine Lampert's recent book on the artist, Frank Auerbach is recorded to have said,: 'People who are responsive to painting are a particular set of people who respond to painting' (Auerbach in Lampert 2015, p. 207). I hope that the BEEP exhibitions reveal to new as well as established audiences an inner response to painting and its potential to engender *Vitalistic Fantasies*.

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Iain Andrews

My paintings begin as a dialogue, both with a particular Folk Tale and also with an image from art history – often a painting by an Old Master that may then be used as a starting point from which to playfully but reverently deviate. I am interested in how stories are retold and re-imagined, and how the retelling alters and embellishes the original even as it seeks to render it vital and alive once again for a new audience.

My works are linked to the narratives and stories that I encounter during my work as an Art Psychotherapist with teenagers, many of whom have tales of neglect and abuse. These stories have very little trouble attaching themselves to Folk Tales, since the themes of the two; loss and abandonment, the violence of parental figures, oral greed, transformation and renewal, naturally merge into each other.

Paint is poured and manipulated to create areas of thick and crusted surfaces, that are allowed to wrinkle and pock mark as the various mediums used dry out. Once this process has reached a certain point, the image is again finely adjusted to create areas of shadow and recession, to a point where a form may begin to emerge, but hopefully not too much. This ability to be in two worlds at once, the past and the present, the abstract and the figurative, the imagined and the real, is what interests me and sustains me as an artist.

IAIN ANDREWS



The tiger's bride
40 x 40 cm, acrylic and oil on canvas, 2020

Vitalistic Fantasies

Amanda Ansell

Each line is portrayed one at a time using a thin layer of oil paint. The colours are applied wet-in-wet and reworked several times. This method of making betrays the haze of memory and nostalgia and eventually the performance leads to dissolution. By reproducing the marks over and over, a new variation of the curved line formation becomes visible. Sooner or later, this unlimited mode of making reaches a natural conclusion as the rhythmical curves move into a new order, or suggest another abstraction.

I am interested in the gestural brush mark as part of a formative process, and what this brings into play; continuous line, free-form arrangement, act of discovery, abstract expression, changeable contour. With the final piece, I want to engage the viewer in the contemplation of gestural abstraction where many coats of paint give structure to a feeling of what lies beneath and beyond. By pursuing a formative harmony, I am seeking to give a new often purely abstract form for the environment around me.

AMANDA ANSELL



Supernova
Oil on canvas. 30x30cm. 2020

Karl Bielik

I am a painter I work on canvas, linen, panels and paper. I work exclusively in oil paint on thirty or so paintings and drawings at once and these vary in scale from intimate to large. The studio is the place where practically everything happens for me occasionally diagrams from medical books or photographs I have taken may inform the work in its formative stages, but essentially my work emerges from the physical process of painting.

Loose oily wounds and thick emulsions offset light glazes and dribbles, I paint, wipe out, paint over, turn the canvasses around, print, blot, mask, pour paint, scrape and scratch. Irregular canvases, panels and paper litter my studio walls and tables. I shift from one piece to another and don't focus on completion, just nudging a painting from one position to another.

Only when I am in the studio standing in front of the work do they begin to take form, I give them room to develop meaning to be here in the world. I am in there almost every day and there is little thought process outside of the studio. The works are sometimes not touched for weeks or months, which offers an incubation time to contemplate where I want them to go, them to take me or if they become complete. In contrast to my sometime emotive imagery, banal solitary words form my titles, tempering and balancing the melancholy character of my work.

KARL BIELIK



Bellow
50x45cms, Oil on linen, 2012

KARL BIELIK



Contest
46x31cms, Oil on Linen, 2017-20

Day Bowman

In my current body of work I find that the large-scale canvases echo the marks, lines and shapes that we made in the wet, grey sand of my home-town beach: thus the canvas becomes the beach that acted as the large- scale canvas of my child-hood.

In these works I have allowed myself to move freely from one work to another with a sense of play and random mark-making. Through the use of colour, of scribbled lines and drip marks, contrasting with the blocks of background painted areas, I have attempted to capture the tides and the occasional gleam of sunshine. In fact the most recent works reference the humble lugworm that we were fascinated by as children. The title of works 'Plashy Place' comes from a line of poetry by W.B.Yeats from his poem: The Man who Dreamt of Fairyland.

Growing up in a small, West-Country seaside town it is not surprising that much of my work has referenced the sea, the beach and littoral and, from an early age, I was acutely aware of the life of the seasons with the tsunami of summer visitors followed by the closed-up, out-of-season, winter months.

Along with scratched childhood messages to the gods, our childhood castles in the sand were built to keep out the marauding tidal waters; today these fortress images represent something more sinister referencing an incoming tide of bigotry and intolerance. And whilst these are not overtly political works I find within them a questioning on the notion of place, identity and belonging.

DAY BOWMAN



Tidepool 5

Oil, charcoal and conte on canvas, 26 x 30 x 4 cm, 2019

Vitalistic Fantasies

Julian Brown

The imagery in my work is very heavily influenced by nostalgic visions of the 1980's and the folk art from my mother Polish heritage. Both of these worlds have a handmade geometric quality that has a playful and primitive relevance to the world we now live in.

I try to explore this 'clunkiness' with tactile images that sit somewhere between order and chaos, structure and collapse, expression and control. While the underpinning of the process is held together by predetermined structures, the freewheeling application is purposely engaging and ambivalent to the expressive urge to dictate the paintings.

JULIAN BROWN

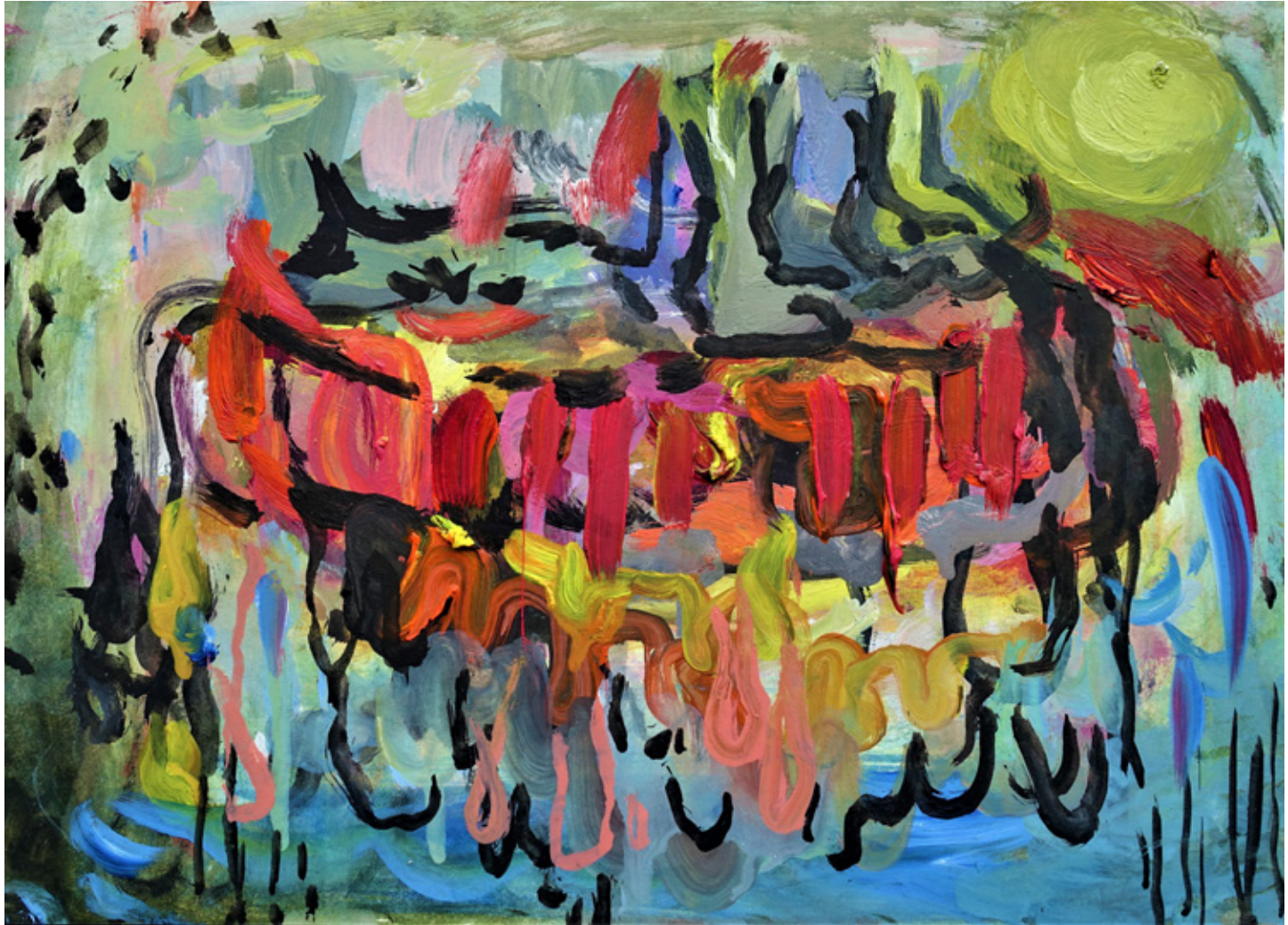


Monofauna
Acrylic on canvas. 50x40cm. 2016

Ruth Calland

I have a long-held belief in or feeling for animism, the idea that every material thing also has spirit. It makes sense to me on a visceral level, it's how I experience the world. Paint, brushes, palette, turps, canvas, all have their own 'lives'. I can remember reading Hans Christian Anderson's *The Fir Tree*, about a Christmas tree that was taken from its home and made to feel part of a joyful family, and then just abandoned. I still can't see a Christmas tree without thinking about it, that uprooting and temporary specialness, and being discarded. Perhaps this is projecting human experience onto things, but the tree really does lose its life, its embedded natural state is not valued. Humans tend to see their own experience as centrally important, in a hierarchical way, and of course this narcissism has led to disasters: social, inter-personal, ecological. When I'm painting, even if I'm thinking about this, I also inhabit that narcissistic space: I expect to bend things to my whim, my desire or need. My search to create something I can tolerate totally overrides my respect for the materials I'm using. I am ruthless, actually. If I waste paint or ruin brushes, I see it as collateral damage. But when a painting gets to that moment where it deserves my respect, I back off, and it becomes suddenly something to be preserved, whereas only a moment earlier I may have been laying into it quite savagely. Once it's born, it belongs to a protected species. For me, this willingness to destroy things in the pursuit of creating something new is a paradox that lies at the heart of painting.

RUTH CALLAND



Deluge
Oil on paper, 21 x 29.5 cm, 2020

Deb Covell

My practice is underpinned by the philosophical notion of bringing a 'form into being' using paint as a material and to explore this idea. I have discarded the traditional supports of a canvas or wooden panel as they are already 'made' objects and can limit my ideas, with too much consideration being given to edge, surface and a predetermined scale. Instead, I make my own supports by building up layers of acrylic paint onto stretched plastic sheets which are peeled off to create an acrylic paint 'skin' which I can either use as a flexible material to create three dimensional forms with or used in a more traditional way, like a canvas support that you apply imagery onto.

I usually start a painting by applying overlapping oblique coloured tapered bands of various widths to the paint supports, setting up exciting spatial depths and dynamic tensions within the compositions. This system continues until the diagonals give way to horizontal and vertical bands of equal widths, shrinking the picture plane and collapsing any illusionary depth set up which belies the internal narrative and pictorial space that resides within it - leaving the paintings suspended somewhere between illusion and the real.

The starting point for this idea was inspired by the disagreement between Theo van Doesburg and Piet Mondrian who parted company because of van Doesburg's use of the dynamic diagonal which Mondrian objected to and favoured the use of horizontal and vertical forms to create a harmonious composition.

DEB COVELL



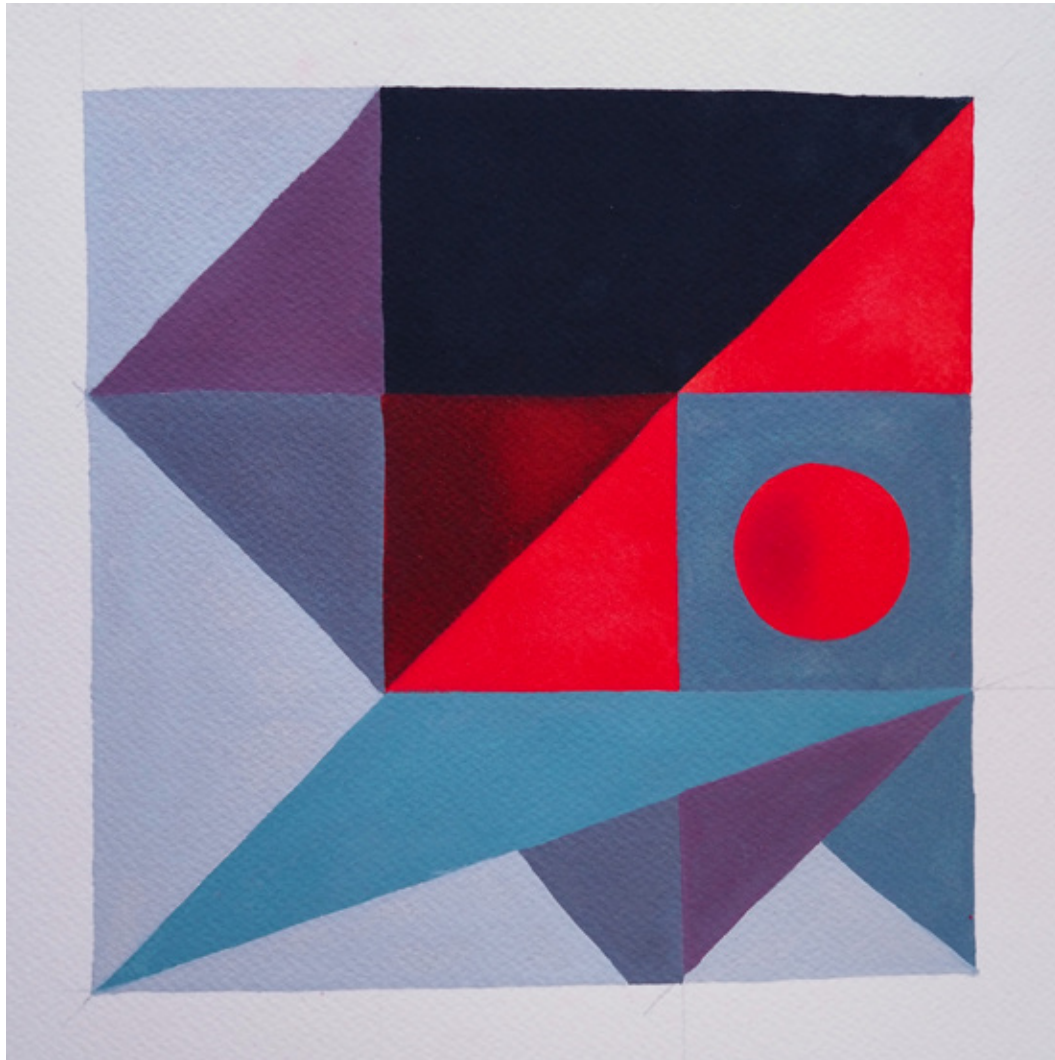
Yellow, Blue and White Constructive Painting 1
22 x 30cm, acrylic paint skin

Vitalistic Fantasies

Lucy Cox

My practice focuses primarily on spatial ambiguity, an interest that I have been engaging with for some time, to construct abstract paintings which toy with interpretation and perception. I am fascinated by relationships between three-dimensional and two dimensional space, colour and rhythm, and figure and ground; as a result, forms, often mined from a variety of sources, including architecture and sculpture, are transformed and distorted. With these principles in mind, I aim to create art that distils both intrigue and visual pleasure.

LUCY COX



Construction (study)

Watercolour on paper, 15 x 15cm unframed, 2020

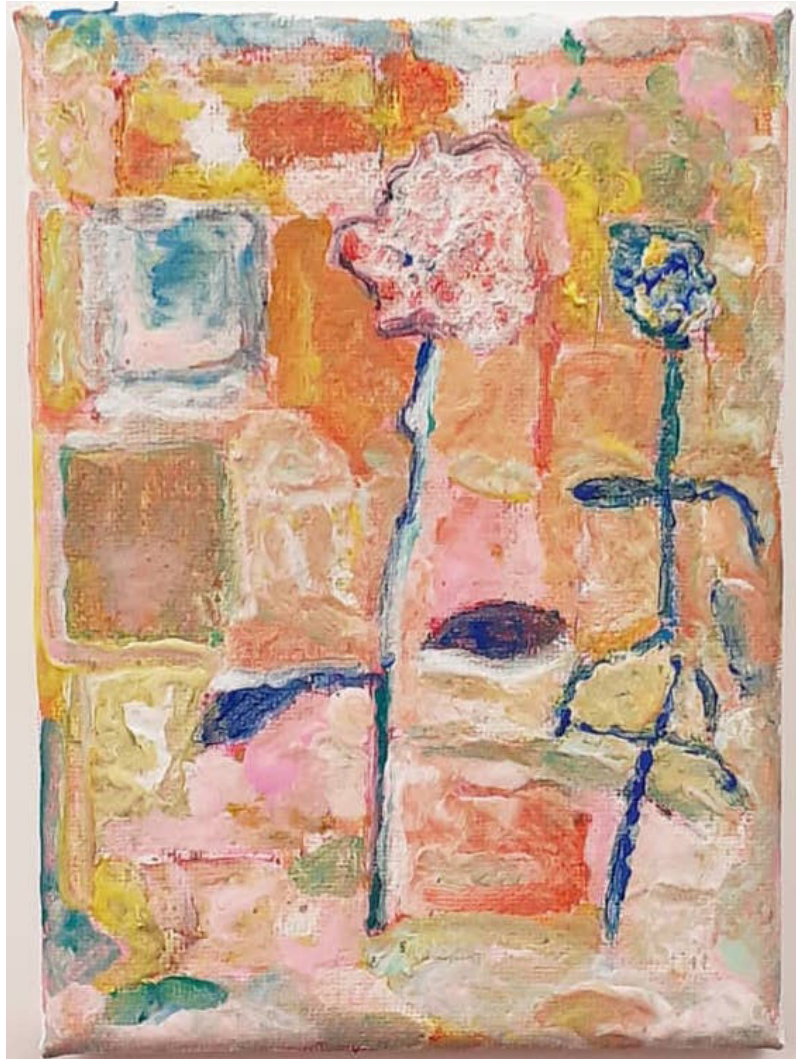
Gordon Dalton

Gordon Dalton's recent paintings have a quiet melancholy that questions their intentions.

An anxious contradiction is on show, with the work being self-conscious of what it is, its possible failings, yet it revels in a new found simplicity and relationships to landscape painting, finding an intimate beauty in both natural and post-industrial landscape.

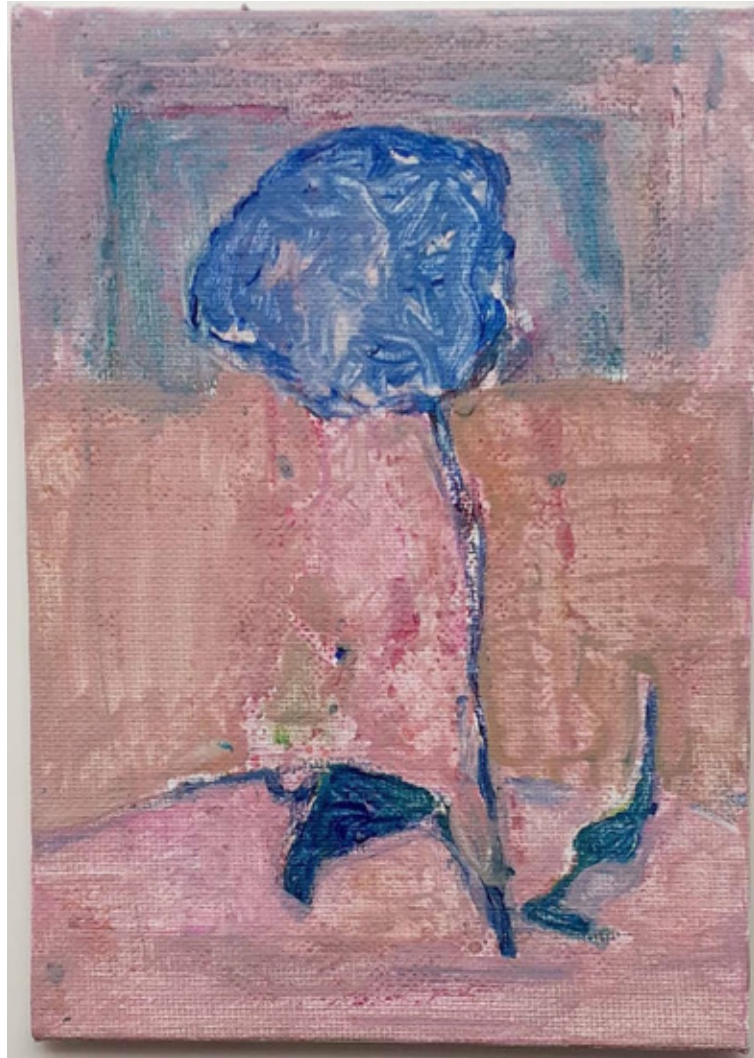
Gordon's work asks the viewer to look longer and harder at what painting is, and why it continues to fascinate.

GORDON DALTON



Unwelcome visitor
Acrylic on canvas panel, 15x10cm

GORDON DALTON



You will be first against the wall
Acrylic on canvas panel, 15x10cm

Pen Dalton

Pen Dalton lives and works in Walthamstow, London. She trained at Goldsmiths and Brighton University. Her Doctoral research, carried out at Plymouth University concerned the family relations theory of art. She has published and lectured internationally, taught studio practice and critical theory to graduate and post graduate students, notably at Dartington College of Arts and Birmingham City University.

In the past, Pen was involved in socially contextualised arts and feminist art practice in issues of identity, sexuality and subjectivity. Her work has been collected by the Victoria and Albert Museum, The Musee D’Affiches in Paris, The Priseman Seabrook Collection, Swindon Art Gallery, The Komechak Art Gallery, Chicago as well as Soho Works Royalty House Collection in London.

Today she is re-engaging with the self-critical project of Modernist painting; revisiting Greenberg’s notion of painting as a ‘holding operation’ against prevailing challenges to art. continuing with the notion that modernist painting refers to its own inherent concerns. Much of her work is about paint and how it is applied. However neo modernist art criticism and curation widen paintings interests to include its histories, its social and economic contexts and its technical advancements. Whilst maintaining a critical approach to explicit literary narrative, modernist painting today embraces memories linguistic associations - mimesis, analogy and poetics - it engages with gendered and parallax viewing positions recognising that painting is more than a visual practice it is work of the intuitive, emotional body. So, whilst being formally ‘abstract’ Pen’s work reminds us of other things

PEN DALTON



Egregious painting
30 x 30 x 1.5cm, 2019

Sam Douglas

I painted this view from Sumburgh Head Lighthouse, Shetland, in February 2017. Low intensity land use there has meant that a range of interesting remains can be found within walking distance, from cold war era radar stations to the prehistoric site of Jarlshof, which was in use for 4000 years before being abandoned and preserved under encroaching sand dunes. Like many of the sites I have visited, the paintings go through a range of states- built up, reconfigured, fallen into disuse and broken up or buried- what remains is often fragmentary and offers limited clues to its original purpose. The painting surface is built up and sanded down over long periods akin to processes of sedimentation and erosion with earlier layers often emerging like an archaeological remnant.

SAM DOUGLAS



Fitful Head
Oil on board, 10x16cm, 2018

Natalie Dowse

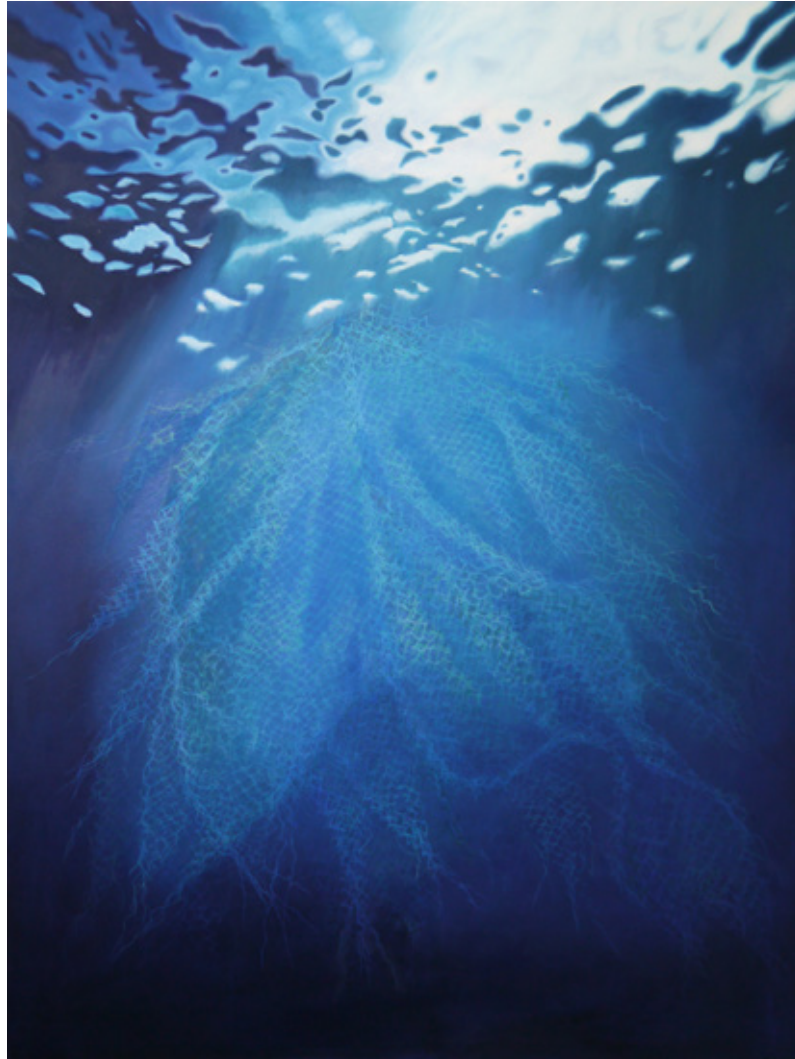
'Siren Ghost Net 1' is a painting from an ongoing series called 'Song of the Siren' based, in part, on the notion of the Siren from Ancient Greek mythology. The Sirens use their exquisite song to lure sailors to wreck their ships on the rocks after falling in love with their beauty and song, and are consequently taken to their death.

Many of the paintings from this series are from the viewpoint of someone immersed in the sea (but still above the water) rather than from the safety of the shore. However, the 'Siren Ghost Nets' are underwater worlds.

Ghost nets are fishing nets that have been discarded or lost in the ocean and are a form of pollution that has a direct impact on sea life. These nets become almost invisible as they drift around the open seas and entangle marine creatures such as dolphins, turtles and sharks, entrapping them and ultimately causing lacerations, starvation, suffocation, and death: thus becoming a metaphor for the Siren.

These paintings are both enticing and beautiful, yet laced, perhaps, with an unsettling menace that reminds us of the unpredictability and force of nature, and man's destruction of the environment.

NATALIE DOWSE



Siren Ghost Net 1
Oil on canvas, 120cm x 90cm, 2020

Fiona Eastwood

There is an engagement with proximity in the work. Proximity in the addressing of space within the paintings and the remove of the painting from the photographic source. This remove provides the 'small space of slippage ...where our minds can see to freely-wonder but not obsess' (Rodney Harder).

Paint becomes its own preclusion not confined to revealing a represented image but its own presence on the surface 'the painted mark is the thing in itself and the thing it describes' (Altfest), the pursuit of eschewing a complete adherence to either being important to the work. 'To remain unsure about when a representation points to a reality outside of itself and when it points back to itself. It is in this place of uncertainty that a painting finds its greatest leverage.' (Schwabsky)

The paintings are made in one sitting with oil on board. The motif is compressed into a series of gestures. The recent collage and embroidery pieces use shapes from a series of oil paintings made on paper. The colours and shapes are based on subject matter from postcards and photographs from my father's time on Christmas Island in the 1950s. The painting references recorded moments. Through the photographs, memories of colours and shapes are appropriated. These shapes, like extracts, are cut out and stitched to the canvas. The act of embroidery creates a slowing down of the process and an intimacy in the proximity with the work.

FIONA EASTWOOD



Drift
Oil on Paper with Embroidery on Canvas, 20 x 20cm, 2020

Geraint Evans

Geraint Evans is interested in the ways in which we perceive, encounter and experience the natural world and read it as landscape. His figurative paintings employ a stylized pictorial language to explore the idea that landscape is largely a social and cultural construct, responding to the writer W J T Mitchell's observation that: 'Landscape is a natural scene mediated by culture.'

His work depicts manicured or fabricated gardens and parks, shopping malls and suburban green belts, national parks and theme parks. The fictional protagonists that populate these landscapes include heavy metal campers, nudist hikers and ornamental hermits.

Geraint is interested in both the hybridized space in which the built and natural environments meet and in our complex perception of the wilderness. The effect of ever evolving technologies and mass tourism on our relationship with the natural world is another important aspect of his practice.

GERAINT EVANS



Hotel
Oil on canvas, 20 x 15cm, 2018

GERAINT EVANS



Ramblin'
Oil on canvas, 57 x 61cm, 2020



Rampage
Oil on canvas, 20 x 15cm, 2018

Susan Gunn

*"... the dark gauze of the varnish the lines
of the craquelure she wears as centuries of tiny
wounds that do not heal but only cut more deeply..."*

'Mona Lisa' by Raoul Schrott

The Triptych was inspired by Raul Schrott's, 'Mona Lisa' poem. The paintings explore a personal pre-occupation with the psychological wounds effected by trauma, held buried in the subconscious.

Cracks and fissures are provoked in the gesso surface that art authoritarians such as Mayer consider to be 'highly undesirable'. Prior to gilding the works are washed in a Lapis Lazuli pigment that for centuries has been used to paint the robes of the Madonna in Christian iconography.

In an abstract spiritual sense; the intention is to reference the trinity; the idea of separation, loss, ritual, and the bond between Mother and Child.

The loose threads from the warp and weft of the frayed canvas convey a tangled vulnerability. Like memory, experience, and connection, they overlap and are intertwined.

The gilded reflective quality of the gesso surface mirror the idea of 'the gaze' and both a solitary and shared experience.

SUSAN GUNN



Mona Lisa
Triptych 3 panels (19 x 13 cm per panel) 2019

Vitalistic Fantasies

Alex Hanna

Painting's objectivity and illusionistic properties are to some extent in conflict. The plasticity and substance of paint itself is at odds with the illusionistic notions traditionally linked with painted images. My work frequently finds itself alternating between these two poles.

ALEX HANNA



Fabric structure
Oil on linen, 25x30x3cm, 2020

ALEX HANNA



Undulation
Oil on linen, 25x30x3cm, 2020

Vitalistic Fantasies

Suzanne Holtom

There is an overriding interest in the creative tension between content and structure in my work. I do think in terms of narratives and themes to each series of paintings, but the actual process of making is also the key idea. There are as much obliterations and erasures in the development of the paintings as construction. There is a lot of improvisation and structures are tested as much as composed. The stories in Ovid's metamorphosis are a recurrent source and sometimes just incidental moments from my memory can get reworked into narratives. Scale is important, epic themes collide with the trivial or commonplace.

Phaethon and festivals of Venus (Veneralia) are important themes in more recent work. In Ovid's story of Phaethon, the impetuous son of Pheobus loses control of the horses and chariot of the sun creating chaos in the scorched and burning heavens and earth. Paintings by Rubens and the landscapes of Chuck Jones (Wiley Cayote and Roadrunner) have been instrumental for ideas of imagery, movement and theatricality.

SUZANNE HOLTOM



Phaethon (Scorch)
Oil on wood, 40x50cm

Barbara Howey

The painting Honeysuckle is one of a new series based on plants found growing wild around my home in Norfolk. For source material I used photographs taken whilst trespassing in a local wood due to be “developed” into luxury housing. There has been longstanding protest from the local council, residents and environmentalist about preserving the woodland for its rich biodiversity. It is a designated County Wildlife Site, but central government overruled all arguments and approved planning permission.

I wanted to document some of this biodiversity before it disappeared and set about painting the plants I found there.

It was important to the meaning of the painting that it should try to depict the aliveness of the plant through the gestures made in the process of painting. I wished to capture the unruly growth of the plant. I painted it quickly wet into wet in an attempt to give energy and a sense of the independent life of the plant which had not been subject to human interference. The plant is presented as living and not as a decorative cut flower as in many still life paintings. My painting does however reference historical still life painting traditions specifically 17th and 18th century flower painting in which women excelled, for example in the use of the black ground on which the painting of the plants is depicted.

I wish in this painting to bring together this painterly “feminine” tradition with the threatened biodiversity of our current times.

BARBARA HOWEY



Honeysuckle
Oil on board, 30x40cm, 2020

Phil Illingworth

"The Pygmalion myth proved to be another variant of the idea of aliveness, and a particularly tenacious one. ...not only did the painter render and the viewer perceive the subject of the painting as brimming with life, but the painting itself mutated into a quasi-human (always female) entity..." Isabelle Graw

My work is often said to be imbued with some kind of life force, maybe benign, maybe not. It's not an objective in itself, but perhaps it is subconsciously built in. Even so it has to be the viewer who makes that leap (I can't force it), and in doing so becomes Pygmalion. Not in love, I think, but disquieted. The figures are neither masculine nor feminine, and nor are they necessarily asexual.

Psychophant II has more than a little pareidolia about it, as, it seems, do many of my works, and Psychophant IV seems to be frozen, mid-movement, waiting for the viewer to turn his or her back, before continuing to lurch about the room.

The work is, of course, outside of the picture plane - it occupies the same space as the viewer. On its own, though, that isn't enough to generate that response. But I don't know what the other thing is.

PHIL ILLINGWORTH



Psychophant II

Acrylic, acrylic varnish, PVA, turned beech, MDF, 18 x 18 x 8cm (2020)



Psychophant IV (detail)

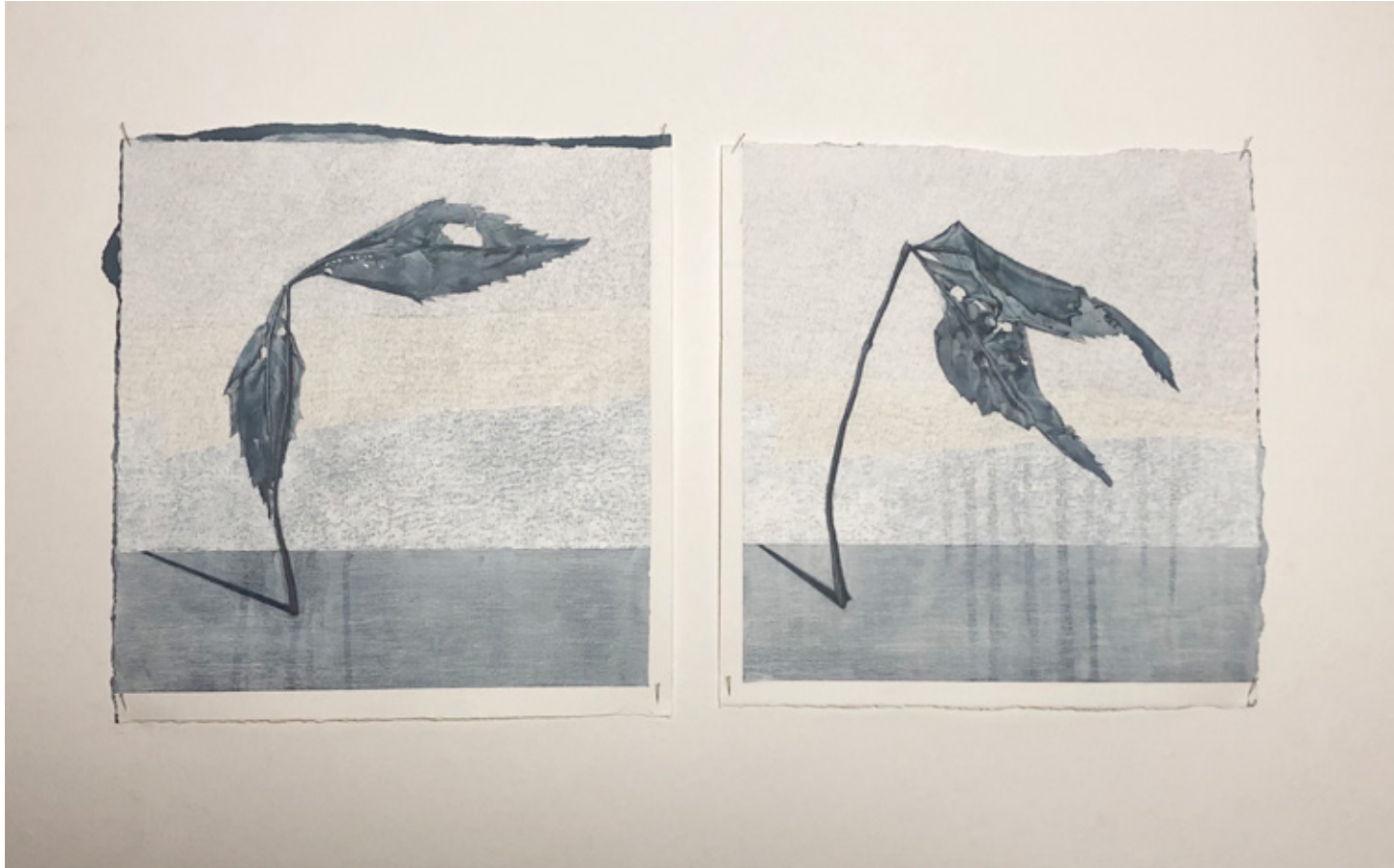
Acrylic, acrylic varnish, PVA, turned beech, steam bent birch, MDF, 100 x 50 x 50cm (2020)

Linda Ingham

My process-led practice is based on personal engagement with landscape and place. Increasingly involved with botany and folk-histories of plants observed on location, the ASH (leaf fragment) series is concerned with 12 trees that edge a meadow in the East Riding of Yorkshire.

How the ash trees are growing in a line (though rarely used in this manner according to Oliver Rackham's definitive text, *The Ash Tree*) and 'edge' meadow/public footpath/arable field/drain, plays into the making process; line and edge feature in both literal and ambiguous ways. Each piece begins with a very painterly ground, out of which the image emerges through the application of layers and media. I aim to allow each application to be seen as traces, to create an image which appears precise from a distance, but in which jeopardy and modification are in evidence close-up and the tactile surface (in watercolour? Yes.) comes into view.

LINDA INGHAM



Ash (leaf fragments) April-May

Watercolour, Gouache, Silverpoint and Conte on paper, 39 x 37cm (left) 38 x 37cm (right), 2020

Bryan Lavelle

Bryan's work is an investigation into the properties of his chosen materials and the process of painting.

Bryan's work has no layers of hidden meaning or narrative waiting to be uncovered, nor does it elude to be anything that it isn't; through making external references outside of the work itself. Bryan sees his role as an artist; as a facilitator, that is he brings together, materials and process (MDF, paint and gravity) and allows a dialogue to take place.

Through his choice of materials and the use of gravity to ultimately make the mark, he is able to make abstract paintings that become self referential, questioning only themselves as artworks. Through subverting the viewer's attention in this way, from seeking narrative that may not necessarily be there; the only conceivable narrative within his work becomes the materials and the process itself.

BRYAN LAVELLE



Tipping Point - Light Blue Permanent - Ivory Black 4
Acrylic on MDF, 30 x 30cm, 2020

BRYAN LAVELLE



Tipping Point - Medium Magenta - Brilliant Purple 2
Acrylic on MDF, 30 x 30cm, 2020

Vitalistic Fantasies

Kirsty O'Leary-Leeson

I explore the spaces we exist in, both physical and psychological. I use the landscape which surrounds me as a metaphor for my inner life of imagination and emotion. The material and immaterial are not separate but are reliant on each other to create meaning in our lived reality.

Drawing dominates my practice at present as the media most compliments and mirrors my subject matter, which is expressing facets of our existence. In drawing there is a relation with the provisional and unfinished, it exists in a state of suspense so connecting it with the lived life experience.

Drawing records the unfolding of an event, not the fixed reality of an object. It is a dialogue between our thoughts and our experience of the real; drawing has always been aligned with thinking and ideas, it has as much to do with reflection as with observation.

KIRSTY O'LEARY-LEESON



Where When Lingers

Pencil on gesso primed wood, protective acrylic lacquer, 36 x 45cm, 2016

Paula MacArthur

I see my work as a contemporary interpretation of traditional memento mori & vanitas painting.

I hunt in historical buildings, museums & churches for still life objects which resonate with me in some way, selecting things which are powerfully evocative and elicit a physical response; a tingle, a gasp, a gut feeling.

I photograph my discoveries from multiple viewpoints in an attempt to capture the entire object, afraid to miss a vital detail & back in the studio, selecting from my vast accumulated archive, I digitally manipulate the photos to maximise each image's unique qualities, intensifying the drama I experienced on discovering the object.

I focus on the essential details, scaling up onto canvas, working with oils; bold colour in thin glazes which stay wet for long enough for me to draw and redraw until something of the original experience is found. The liquid paint drips down the canvas creating a sense of impermanence, a sense of time passing, of lives lived. Through continual refining and adjustments the resulting work is evocative of my original experience; stripped back to the essentials the image partially disassociates from the original object and opens up to allow new interpretations.

PAULA MACARTHUR



And blazed through the sky
Oil on canvas. 100x100cm. 2020

PAULA MACARTHUR



All these silent moments
Oil on canvas. 100x100cm. 2020

Vitalistic Fantasies

David Manley

One of a series of paintings that reflect an interest in the coast and draw upon a fragment of a poem for their formal content. In this case the poem by Robin Robertson.

DAVID MANLEY

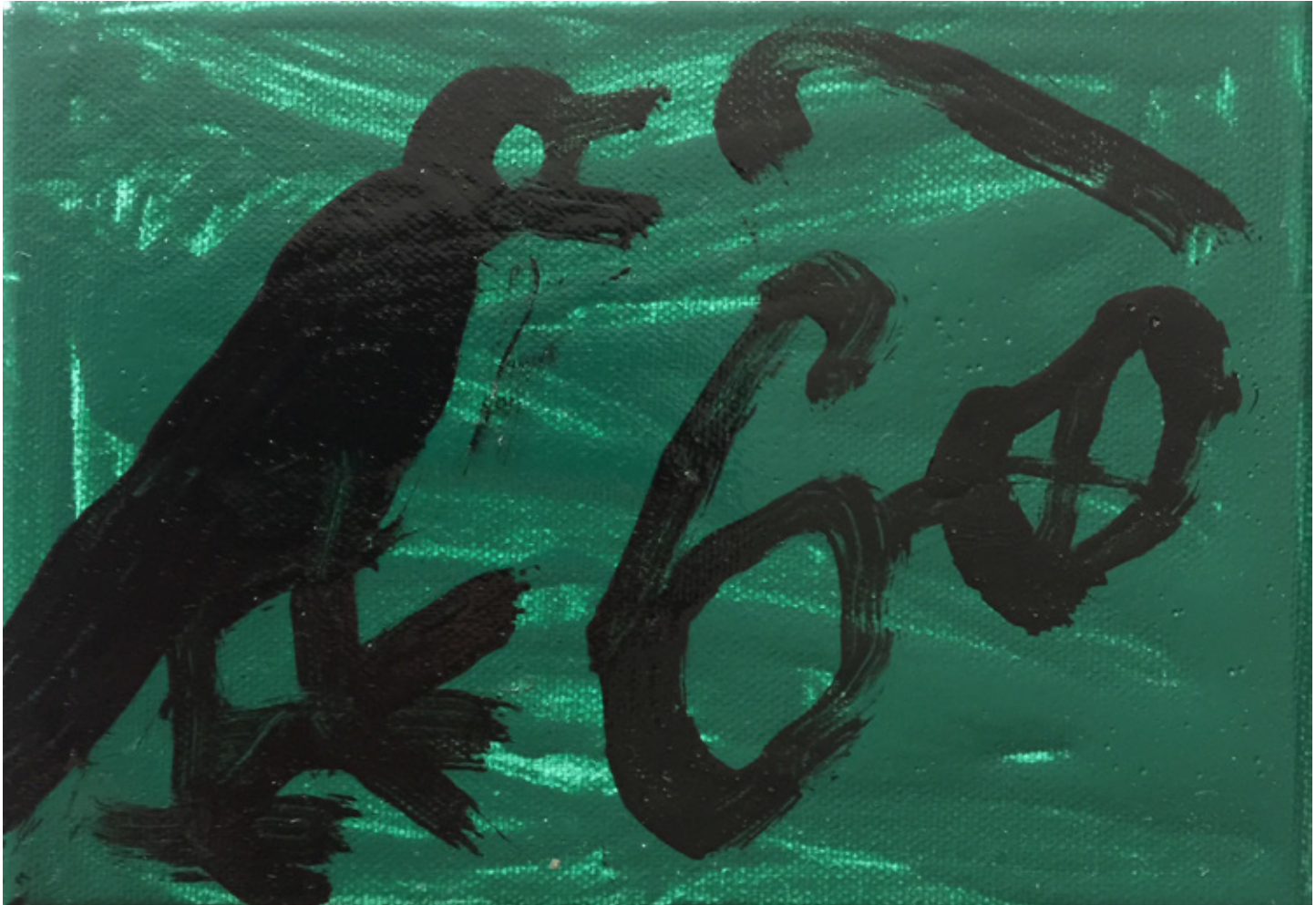


Waves
Acrylic on canvas, 55 x 45cm, 2019

Vitalistic Fantasies

Enzo Marra

Enzo Marra's imagery is marked by a distinct immediacy and a figuratively derived world that lives through his painted, drawn and sculpted works. The themes expressed made visible via instinctively applied linear and blocked out passages. The figures and symbols utilised relating to the human condition, their emotional impact emphasised by the directness of their application, without extraneous information to muddle the message they are willing to deliver. Their intimate scale allowing the viewer to build a relationship with their cast, as they are stood in-front of the hung painted surfaces. The purposely limited palette, allowing the depicted scenes to not be obscured or overtaken by unnecessary frivolous flourishes.



Bird with Broken Glasses
Enamel on Canvas, 15x21cm, 2020

ENZO MARRA



Bird with Ring
Enamel on Canvas, 15x21cm, 2020

Vitalistic Fantasies

Nicholas Middleton

Fundamental to my practice is the image. In a world of proliferating images, examination of how the image, tethered to reality, is constructed, processed, displayed, has underpinned my approaches as a maker of images, through painting and its histories.

NICHOLAS MIDDLETON



Improvised props
Oil on paper, 24x30.5cm, 2020

Paul Newman

Devil's Island and After the Storm are collaged landscapes incorporating references from 18th-19thc landscape painting; in the case of After the Storm, its Constable's Salisbury Cathedral from the Meadows. Residues and trimmings from the painting process merge into the work. Shells collected from the beach from seaside visits are also embedded; a nod to plein-air painting in the Romantic era when shells were used for paint mixing.

Devil's Island was a purely experimental, improvised work, an overworked lump of a painting cut apart and a more graphic depiction of a lightning bolt inserted as a form of pictorial release. These are part of a series of box framed works could be perceived as maquettes or studies for potential larger works, though they are self-contained entities of concentrated turbulence exploring a range of gestural and stylistic motifs. They are like mini apocalypses during and after the storm...

PAUL NEWMAN



Devils island
Mixed media, 34x28x4 cm, 2018

PAUL NEWMAN



After the storm

Acrylic, fabric, shells on canvas board and wood , 34x28x4 cm, 2020

Stephen Newton

When I was 17years I learned to play blues guitar, which was very popular back then. I often think about those authentic bluesmen from the 1920s, 30s and 40s, self-taught, who bent the strings and the notes in a personal way to them which can't be copied. Sometimes in folk clubs I have heard a guitarist play a complex instrumental piece note for note perfect – but absolutely devoid of soul. The same is true of painting – a scene can be represented meticulously, a narrative can be complicated and meaningful – as can a propagandist or political statement in a painting. But in the end they risk being utterly soulless – and for me personally, like the old blues guitarist, only soul really matters.

STEPHEN NEWTON



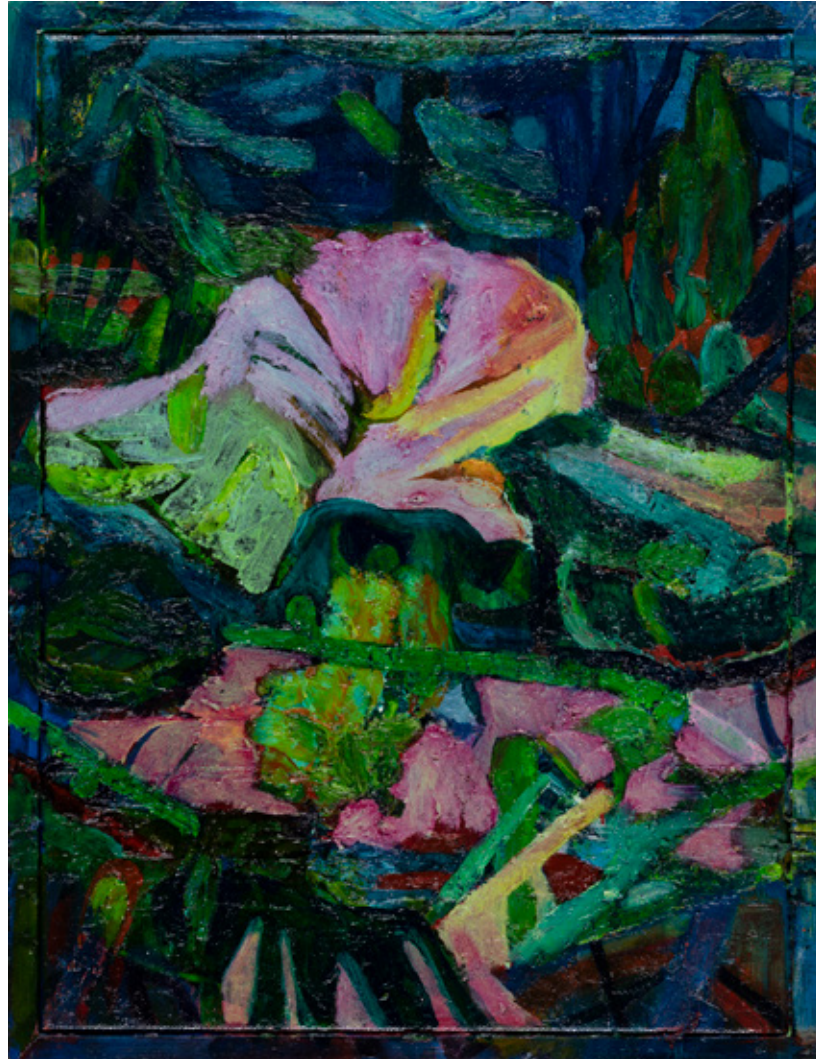
Watching TV
Oil on canvas, (66x76cm), 2018

Vitalistic Fantasies

Joe Packer

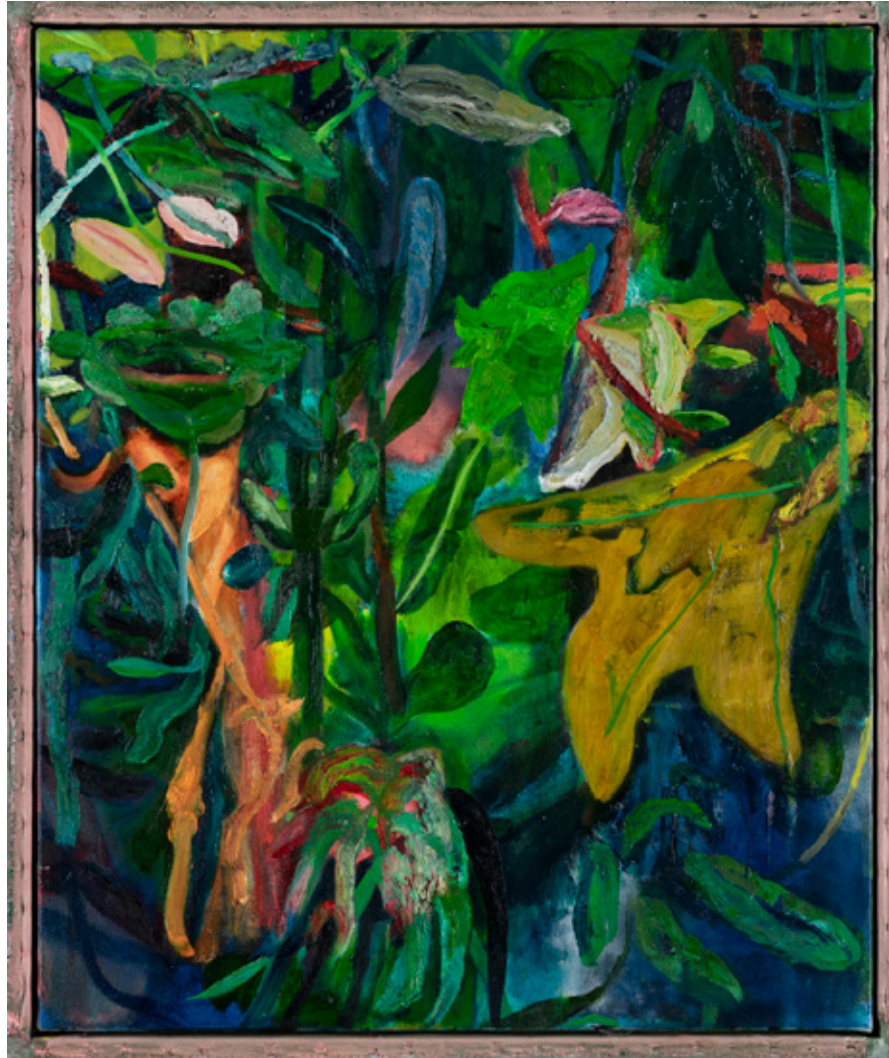
Joe Packer's recent paintings could be described as invented landscapes with a psychological element. These paintings try to evoke memories of places, but at the same time, they have evolved through making processes that are not preplanned or prescriptive, creating paintings that aim to function as self-contained worlds, constructed objects with a kind of inner life of their own. Not reflecting the landscape, but recreating it. The paintings occupy a kind of hinterland between abstraction, where the brushstrokes are non-referential, and figuration, where the forms and spaces depicted allude to landscape, without being overtly descriptive.

JOE PACKER



Duskflower Echo
Oil on canvas, 43x33cm, 2020

JOE PACKER



Roseskein Clearing
Oil on canvas, 81x69 cm, 2020

Vitalistic Fantasies

Stephen Palmer

The starting point for Stephen Palmer's recent paintings and drawings is a model made from a sheet of white or black A4 paper that has been defaced through a series of actions. The paper may be first scribbled on with blue or red biro, and sometimes more defined geometric shapes are added also in biro. It is then folded, screwed up, ripped and finally unfolded as if an attempt has been made to once again make the paper good. Many of these models get discarded before one of them seems right to be the subject of a painting or drawing, rendered in gouache or pencil on another sheet of A4. The resulting works reflect both an undoing of formal geometry, grid systems and mark making, and a celebration of negation as a positive, creative act.

STEPHEN PALMER



Will it end?

Gouache on paper on board, 35.5x28cm, 2020

Mandy Payne

My work is inspired by urban landscape and I am drawn to marginalised, overlooked spaces, Brutalist architecture and the tensions between ideas of utopias and dystopias.

Materiality, surface textures and facture are important concerns to me. With this in mind, I try to work with materials that have a direct connection to the sites I depict, frequently using spray paints, referencing the media of street artists, hand casting concrete into canvases or working on found objects which are often skip derived.

The work is time consuming and meticulous, employing micro-masking tapes which act like scaffolding for the paint, building up flat zones of colour and then using oil paint for fine detail finishing. Many of the sites I depict are under threat of gentrification and so the paintings may also serve to record what is there before it is lost.

MANDY PAYNE



Beauty in the Banal

Liquid graphite, spray paint, oil paint and varnish on reclaimed floorboard in white wooden frame, 32.5cm x 35.3cm (NFS)

MANDY PAYNE



Shoreditch

Spray paint and oil on gesso panel in white wooden frame 31cm x 31cm. (NFS)

Vitalistic Fantasies

Ruth Philo

My paintings combine experiences of inner and outer worlds, essentially landscapes of thought, feeling and intuition. Toughly material, the surface and the qualities of the paint play a major role and I often work with pigments and binders that feel close to the earth. The paintings fix a fleeting moment combined with a record of the time spent with them; a sense of the painting's archaeology seems to come to the surface in order for it to feel finished. They are often an intimate scale, giving just enough to reveal an intensity of feeling, coming from that point where Minimalism and Abstract Expressionism meet.

RUTH PHILO



Soft Touch

Acrylic graphite & wax on linen 25 x 30cm 2017

Narbi Price

“This is the first finished painting following on from a series of 40 watercolour studies that culminated in a book called ‘Narbi Price: The Lockdown Paintings’. Over the period of the COVID-19 lockdown in Spring 2020 I noticed friends posting pictures online of public benches enrobed with red and white, candy-striped barrier tape, preventing them being used for that for which they were intended. The usually invisible street furniture became awkwardly prominent with the highlighting effect of the incongruous wrapping.

It resulted in a striking kind of three-dimensional calligraphy, how the tape was wrapped around and through the bars and planks of the benches, in a casual quotidian rhythm, making marks in space, different on each bench. Crude but strangely lyrical interventions, each responding to the construction like a Poundshop Christo.

I gave instructions on how to compose source photographs for me, and began a happenstance lockdown collaboration, between the unsuspecting worker who wrapped the benches, my friends who photographed them, and myself who painted them, all working in isolation.

Time’s passage distorted, weeks lasted days, months were as years. As it continued, for better or worse, the tape’s taut bindweed grip relaxed, in parallel with the apparently arbitrary stages of the governmental lifting of lockdown. They began to be removed, or torn away, sun bleached scraps left fluttering in the summer breeze, as a gymnast’s lost ribbon.”



Untitled Bench Painting (CV19)
Acrylic on board, 30x40cm, 2020

Freya Purdue

Freya Purdue's paintings inhabit the border between abstraction and figuration and have their basis in exploration through seeing, experience and research around the ideas she is working with.

She draws upon a wide range of sources from the most obvious classical themes in painting to the subtlety of philosophical and mystical thought. In making paintings she is absorbed in the endeavour to discover an energised sense of connection and consciousness both between people, historical traditions and the borders of perception.

The use of colour in her paintings is vital to the sense of presence, energy and subtly that is discovered or revealed through the process of working. It provides a source of atmosphere and links each work with its origin that is sometimes visual, sometimes historical, philosophical, poetic, musical, intuitive, perceptual or experimental, or combinations of these. She works on paintings in groups which provides an energising and dynamic process whereby there is a constant discovery of new visual aspects of each painting. This expands the relationships and engagement with the tactility of the process of painting itself.

She approaches each group of work as a new journey and each painting a new kind of sensitivity and living energy to be explored and realised. Through the process of constant reviewing, reflection and research, the paintings are worked towards the realisation of a sense of connectedness that links them with contemporary life, cultural histories, artists, practices and symbologies.

FREYA PURDUE



Red Sulphur 2
Oil on canvas, 50 x 40cm, 2020

FREYA PURDUE



Yellow Sulphur 4
Oil on canvas, 50 x 40cm, 2020

Vitalistic Fantasies

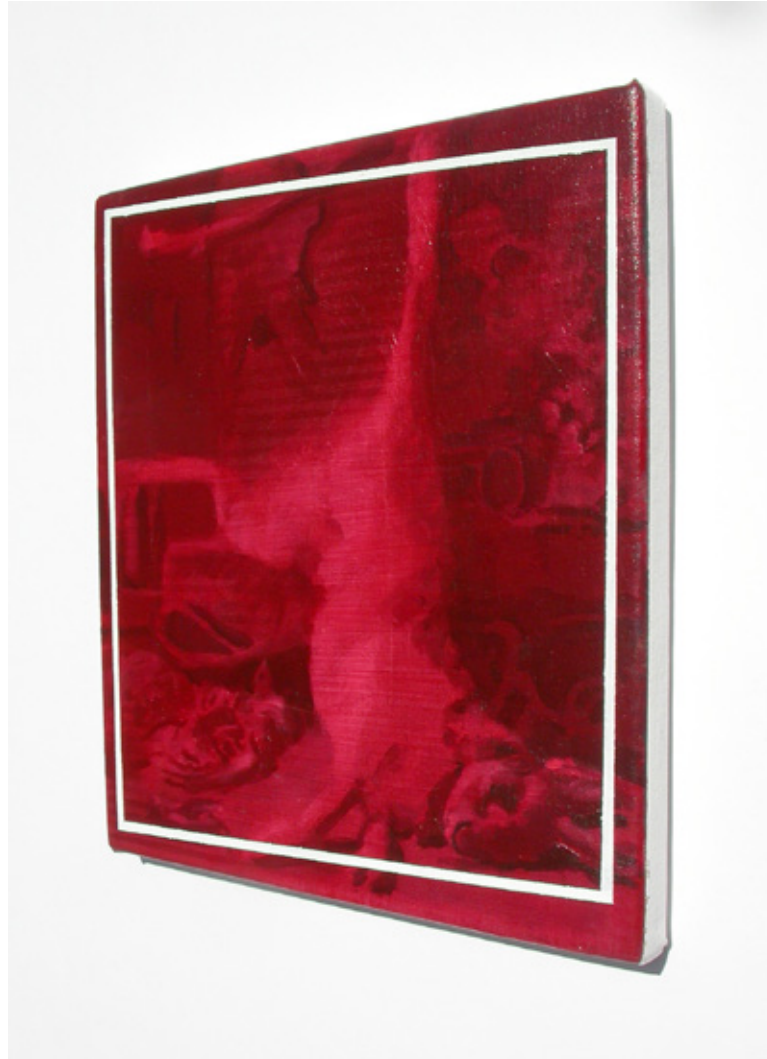
James Quin

These paintings address what might be considered a reasonably straightforward question: what, if anything, can be achieved in painting from what is often perceived to be a most unpromising strategy for the visual artist – that of repetition? The emergence of repetitive strategies in my own painting practice generated a body of ongoing work that questions the temporal conditions of painting.

I define painting's temporal conditions as the ways in which painting depicts and represents time, the phenomenological encounter with painting as it unfolds in time, and painting's ability to temporalise the space of its encounter.

This body of work, begun in 2014, and now comprising sixty five paintings, has been constructed to be encountered within a labyrinthine installation space that tests the temporal conditions of painting, a space that allows us the latitude to explore an expanded notion of time-based painting. We may, therefore, consider not only time-based painting, but painting-based time. I have defined painting-based time as an apperception of time, a heightened awareness of past, present and future, made visible through repetitive strategies.

JAMES QUIN



Orthogonal Object and Rectilinear Plane (red)
Oil on canvas over board, 30.5 x 28cm

JAMES QUIN



Orthogonal Object and Rectilinear Plane (green)
Oil on canvas over board, 30.5 x 28cm

Vitalistic Fantasies

Katherine Russell

Moving away from previous body of work which focused on mass media and was primarily figurative. This body of work oscillates between the figurative and the abstract in dissolving the constraints of the concrete with an exploration of colour and form and movement not previously approached in this fashion by the artist. Simple and free expression through colour, form and movement.

KATHERINE RUSSELL



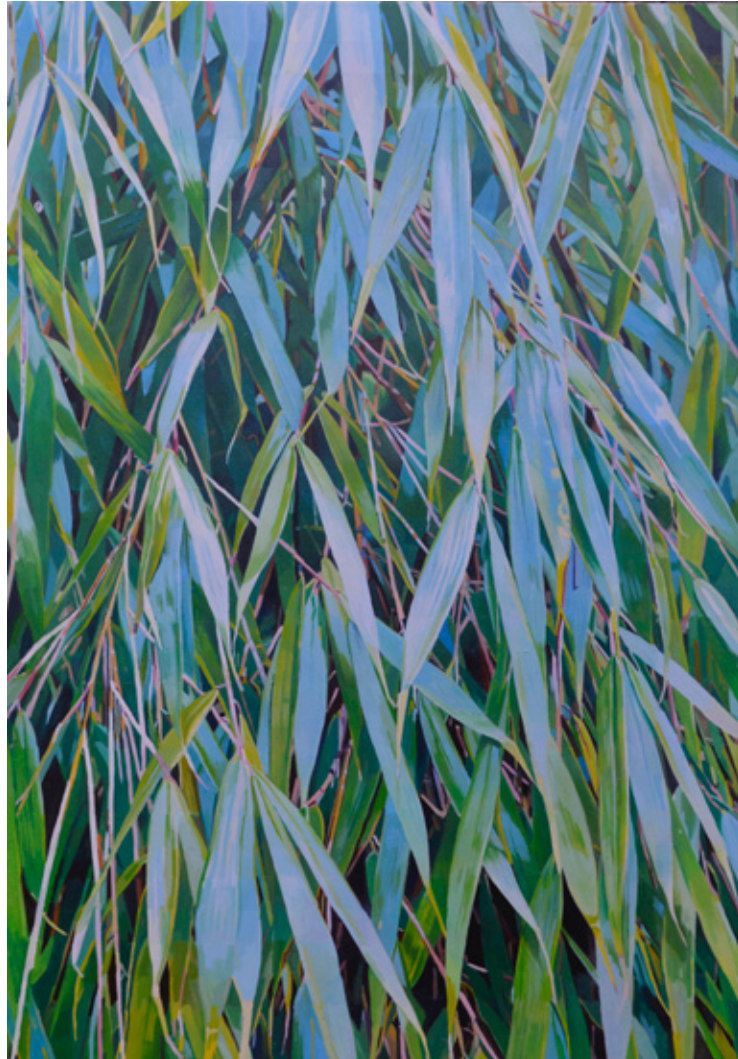
Early Morning
Oil on Canvas, 60.5 x 45.5cm, 2019

Harvey Taylor

Painting is something I feel I have to do, and I use the places I visit and people that I know well as my subject matter. I don't do preparatory sketches or any under drawing but instead I use a grid to carefully transpose the colours, shapes and lines of an image to canvas. During my degree at Winchester School and Art, and for ten years after, I developed a body of abstract paintings where I was letting the imagery emerge as I worked. However, I grew dissatisfied with this way of working. Seeking a way of making figurative images and wanting to have a way of working that was more controlled I looked towards using a photographic image as my source material. Although I am not a weaver the painting process feels like creating a tapestry. The image now emerges through the slow process and on closer inspection the painting resembles an abstract painting where the materiality of the paint is very evident. Combining my practice with my teaching means that regularity and diligence are very important to me. There should be no day without at least a couple of hours visit to the easel working on a painting.

The seascapes and landscapes are often liminal spaces that are empty of people. They reflect a solitary place where you can reflect on life's journey. The recent paintings have that all over way of painting inspired by Abstract Expressionism but also refer to contemporary artists such as Franz Gertsch who scale up the ordinary. Patterns created by overlapping leaves brings to mind my earlier fascination with Georgia O'Keeffe's work and her belief that we should find the universe in a natural form.

HARVEY TAYLOR



Alongside the River Colne
Oil on canvas, 100cm x 70cm, 2020

Molly Thomson

Molly Thomson's work concerns the performance of the painting as an object, using the conventional painting panel as a springboard for action and a vehicle for thought. She is interested in conditions that confine, resist and limit, and in what happens when those given conditions are subject to question and boundaries are breached.

The process begins with de-stabilising the traditional rectangular format through acts of cutting that destroy the panel's symmetry and begin to animate the object; this interrupts any suggestion of a spatial "window" and can bring the normally invisible sub-structure into play. Conventionally, paintings present only their facades but these paintings may own up to their edges and internal spaces. Like attitudes or desires, their re-shapings have consequences. Mistakes must be accommodated, new relationships established.

Operating between such acts of damage and reparation, she looks for a kind of concentration that can be reached through the excisions, shifts and accumulations. She sees the objects as adopting a kind of stance or behaviour, sometimes in relation to other elements. They are newly ordered, but not without uncertainty, some depending on their partners, others sitting in precarious balance with one another.

Modest in scale and means, the painting-objects insist on their material presence and the process that shaped them. In their altered behaviour and imperfect geometries some may not be without allusion to other objects, facades or enclosures. Ultimately, though, they are just themselves.

MOLLY THOMSON



Perhaps after all
Acrylic on panel, 35x29cm, 2020

Vitalistic Fantasies

Judith Tucker

When I paint it's always a question of a negotiation between the medium, the place and myself. It is the time taken to make these images that forges a memory allowing not only a strong sense of the place on my return but also might offer one way to accommodate ghosts. Not only the subject matter but also the processes involved in making these paintings and drawings can be considered as residue. These are residues of various encounters in the landscape and residues of past lives. Though this work I exploit both how we might be inhabited by our histories, memories, and experiences, our own and those of others, and the ways in which that places too bear traces of others, both visible and invisible. The paintings and drawing become a place between these psychic traces and the actual traces in the landscape.

JUDITH TUCKER



They'd have a party and everyone could go, Night Fitties series
Oil on canvas, 60 x 80 cm, 2018

Joanna Whittle

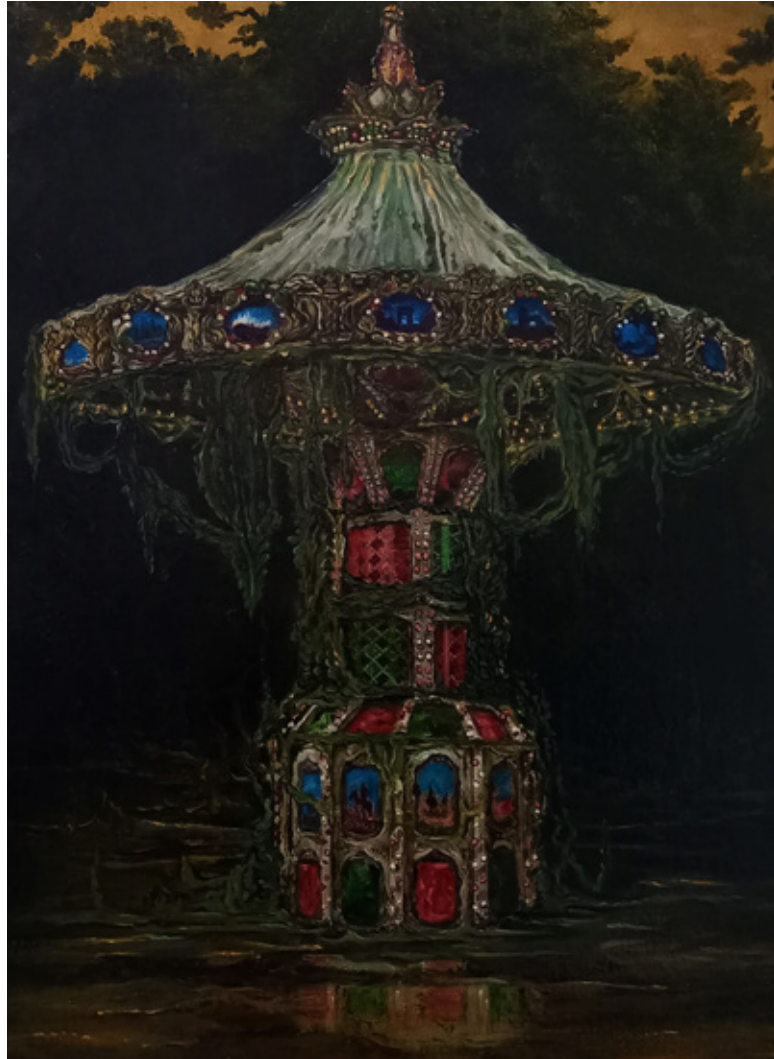
Joanna Whittle creates seductive, miniature landscape paintings which depict temporary and fragile structures such as fairground equipment, facades and tents. These act as temporal ruins with overgrown and faded surfaces, like timeless markers. Yet paradoxically these transient forms seem to hover on the edge of disintegration or collapse.

The scenes are constructed from different sources which are combined to enfold these structures in empty and ambiguous landscapes. Time seems to stand still, yet there is a feeling of imperceptible movement; tents sink slowly into mud or water and skies reflect an uncertain hour; wavering between darkness and dusk or heavy with gathering rain. The structures seem to have been abandoned and yet lights flicker and entrances are pulled shut as if to deliberately conceal.

Whilst the paintings are meticulously constructed, with forensic levels of detail, there are also moments where the viewer is pulled back to the physicality of the painting with tiny coarse gestures punctuating its surface. A glimmering light is described with a minute daub of colour whilst viscous, almost still moving paint becomes pooling mud. The swimming contradiction both in the construction of the scenes and in the oscillation between surface and illusion, erodes certainty so that the paintings become like flickering hallucinations, opening up arenas for wandering thought and anxious foreboding.

These landscapes, which at first glance seem accurately described, gradually unravel under scrutiny. The viewer feels alone but with a creeping awareness of a departed or impending presence. It is as though these places have been stumbled upon and the viewer feels as though they have become a silent intruder.

JOANNE WHITTLE



The Machine
Oil on canvas, 24 x 18cm, 2020

Sean Williams

I use an adapted pointillist technique which enables me to combine pure and local colour, as well as complementary colour. In addition to presenting an image that is relatively realistic, my aim is to create a surface that shimmers due to the effect of optical mixing from a viewing distance, one that changes in different light. The paint might not be impasto but still creates an uneven surface.

I also hope it is worthy of closer inspection. This reveals the painstaking, needlepoint application of paint – a controlled, ludicrously meticulous method that reveals as much about the author as bravura brushwork.

With 'Private Kingdom' my intention was to increase the saturation of colour to make it look slightly fantastical, not overtly so, but hinting at unnatural. The colouring might be seen as at odds with the sense of melancholy of the main motif which, I suspect, is a railway signal box repurposed as a treehouse. Yet as it rises over the high, strangely-coloured wall it has the look of a watchtower and it could be us, the viewers, who are under surveillance.

SEAN WILLIAMS



Private Kingdom
Acrylic on paper, 32 x 21cm (unframed), 2020



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