

contemporary british painting prize 2022



contemporary british painting prize 2022

Winner - Lesley Bunch

Highly Commended - Helen G Blake

the contemporary british painting prize 2022

Huddersfield Art Gallery: Unit 7

The Piazza Centre, Princess Alexandra Walk, Huddersfield HD1 2RS
17 September - 29 October 2022

Thames-Side Studios Gallery

Thames-Side Studios, Harrington Way, Warspite Road
Royal Borough of Greenwich, London SE18 5NR
11 - 27 November 2022

Daniel H Bell | Sophie Birch | Helen G Blake | Andrew Bryant | Lesley Bunch
Michelle Conway | Seungjo Jeong | Bernadette Kiely | Helen Kincaid
Lindsay Mapes | Sonia Martin | Samuel O'Donnell | Mahali O'Hare
Simon Parish | Jen Roper | Shawn Stipling | Mimei Thompson



The Contemporary British Painting Prize 2022

Huddersfield Art Gallery, Princess Alexandra Walk, Huddersfield HD1 2SU
17 September - 29 October 2022

Thames-Side Studios Gallery, Thames-Side Studios, Harrington Way
Warspite Road, Royal Borough of Greenwich, London SE18 5NR
11 - 27 November 2022

© 2022 Contemporary British Painting
© 2022 The copyright of all images remains with the respective artists

Second edition published by Contemporary British Painting November 2022
Introduction by Casper White
Statements made by the artists in their own words
Catalogue design by Natalie Dowse at IDprojects.org
ISBN: 978-1-7397818-2-8

All rights reserved. No part of the content of this book may be reproduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, without the prior written permission of the copyright holders and the publisher of this book.

www.contemporarybritishpainting.com



Contents

Introduction: Casper White4

Daniel H Bell8

Sophie Birch12

Helen G Blake16

Andrew Bryant.....20

Lesley Bunch24

Michelle Conway28

Seungjo Jeong32

Bernadette Kiely36

Helen Kincaid.....40

Lindsay Mapes44

Sonia Martin.....48

Samuel O'Donnell.....52

Mahali O'Hare.....56

Simon Parish.....60

Jen Roper64

Shawn Stipling.....68

Mimei Thompson72

The Winner's Essay: Hettie Judah.....76

Acknowledgements.....84

Introduction

The Contemporary British Painting Prize 2022

Selectors:

Susan Absolon | Deb Covell

Paul Newman | Casper White

Being a selector for this show has changed what I think contemporary British painting can be. The standard of entries was exceptionally high and having to engage with over 5000 paintings was a mammoth but enlightening task. I wish the judges the best of luck in finding this year's winner. Many of the artists longlisted have been my "winner" at some point.

I came to the selection process with expectations and preconceived ideas of what I was going to see, but the breadth of practices changed this. Whittling down the entrants to a long list of 62 and then to a shortlist of 17 was a ridiculous task and one that only heightened my respect for every artist who entered. The selection was not simply looking and liking. I personally did not shortlist any paintings for being works I "liked". My opinion of what is being made in Britain has been altered, partly because I was introduced to so many new artists, who each explained to me what they think a contemporary British painter is. No singular theme or idea is evident, but recurring questions are being posed.

When I look at these works, I am provoked into asking: what is it like to be a painter today? Why would one make this work? Why choose this way of painting? What are the drivers? Its rationale? How much paint is needed? What is preconceived? How important is the process? What is complicated? Does it need to have any of these things? What are the relationships that have led to this work? And finally, do any of these works have relationships with each other?

Being able to see these works together I have to remind myself that in the studio, we usually make works as an individual. The work appears within the little space between

the head and the canvas. In that space, we find people, news, art, politics, poetry, washing up, gossip, spirituality, other artists' works, anything and everything. All these extraneous things from the political to poetic buzzing along the same synapses from eyes to the brain and then alighting at our fingertips that eventually we use to push and smudge paint upon a surface. In this intimate but open act, we inevitably stumble upon timeless but also contemporary issues. The selection process has shown me that the contemporary sits in this small space where movements and thoughts turn into paintings.

As artists, we often struggle with the dichotomy of a desire to show our works and the anxiety of our work being seen. The competitive nature of a prize or award stirs fear in me as it does with many artists. Painting, for me, is not competitive, but the framework of competition can bring out exciting and engaging works. This show is not the arbiter of what contemporary British painting is. It is one type of barometer of what is happening with painting in the UK, and also a tool to ask questions, a point of engagement.

I do hope that viewers and the entrants alike gain a desire to see more of each other's practices, building frameworks of understanding, allowing us to see every artist's practice as equally worthy and worth engaging with. In doing this, we build empathy, and in this fraught, increasingly combative time, empathy and understating are needed more than ever.

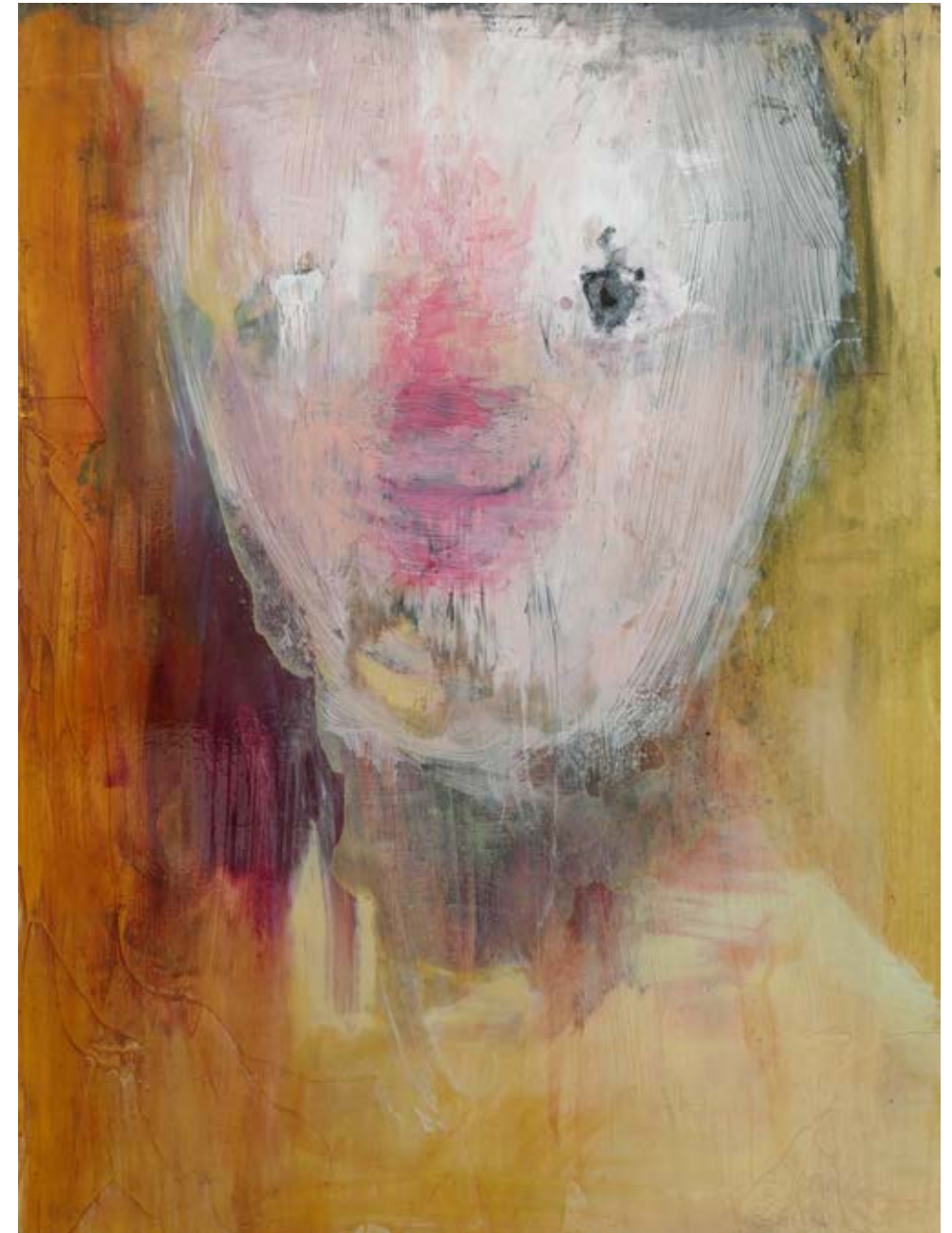
Casper White, August 2022



The artists...

Daniel H Bell

My paintings are of humans and other animals. They reflect my preoccupation with decaying surfaces, stains, blemishes and dark corners. I try to blur the boundaries between the realistic, the cartoon-like and the abstract. I want to show characters and situations that are relatable, whilst remaining disconnected and uncertain. I'm interested in faces and bodies, and how enigmatic these things can be. I see painting as the perfect way to indulge in this ambiguity, to find connections, create worlds and explore emotions. My work is an attempt to show snapshots of lives, moments of unease, and places of comfort.



Shaped Veins
Acrylic, wood stain, varnish and gel on hardboard, 17cm x 23cm, 2021



Quarry
Acrylic, wood stain, filler and gel on MDF, 19cm x 13cm, 2022



Change of Plan
Acrylic, wood stain, filler and gel on hardboard, 29cm x 22cm, 2022

Sophie Birch

My practice acts as a visual diary, a method of documenting and transforming what I see, remember and imagine. I draw regularly from observation to collect marks and ideas, enabling me to create convincing spaces when working in the studio. I use a combination of sources to paint from, mixing drawings, storyboards, screenshots and the imagery from old science textbooks and extracts of novels. These combinations create tensions by juxtaposing ideas and making unexpected relationships. I aim to use painting to search for connection between interior and exterior spaces.

I am excited by sensory experiences and how they predicate thought. The experience of light is especially important to my painting. Using washes, I attempt to experiment with different kinds of luminosity such as X-rays, glowing embers and coloured glass. After building multiple translucent films of colour, I excavate to expose earlier layers of ground. In the works, *We are waiting* and *Reverse Mermaid*, I use the textural language of sun-bleached posters, washed denim and fading felt-tips to describe an understanding of things softened by time. Diffuse colour engulfs my forms, the emotional tenor of these scenes remaining ambivalent. I want my figures to appear as though they are on the cusp of transformation, paused on thresholds, carried by heat and light.



To Press
Oil on canvas, 203cm x 213cm, 2022



Reverse Mermaid
Oil on canvas, 91cm x 117cm, 2022



We are waiting
Oil on canvas, 115cm x 145cm, 2021

Helen G Blake

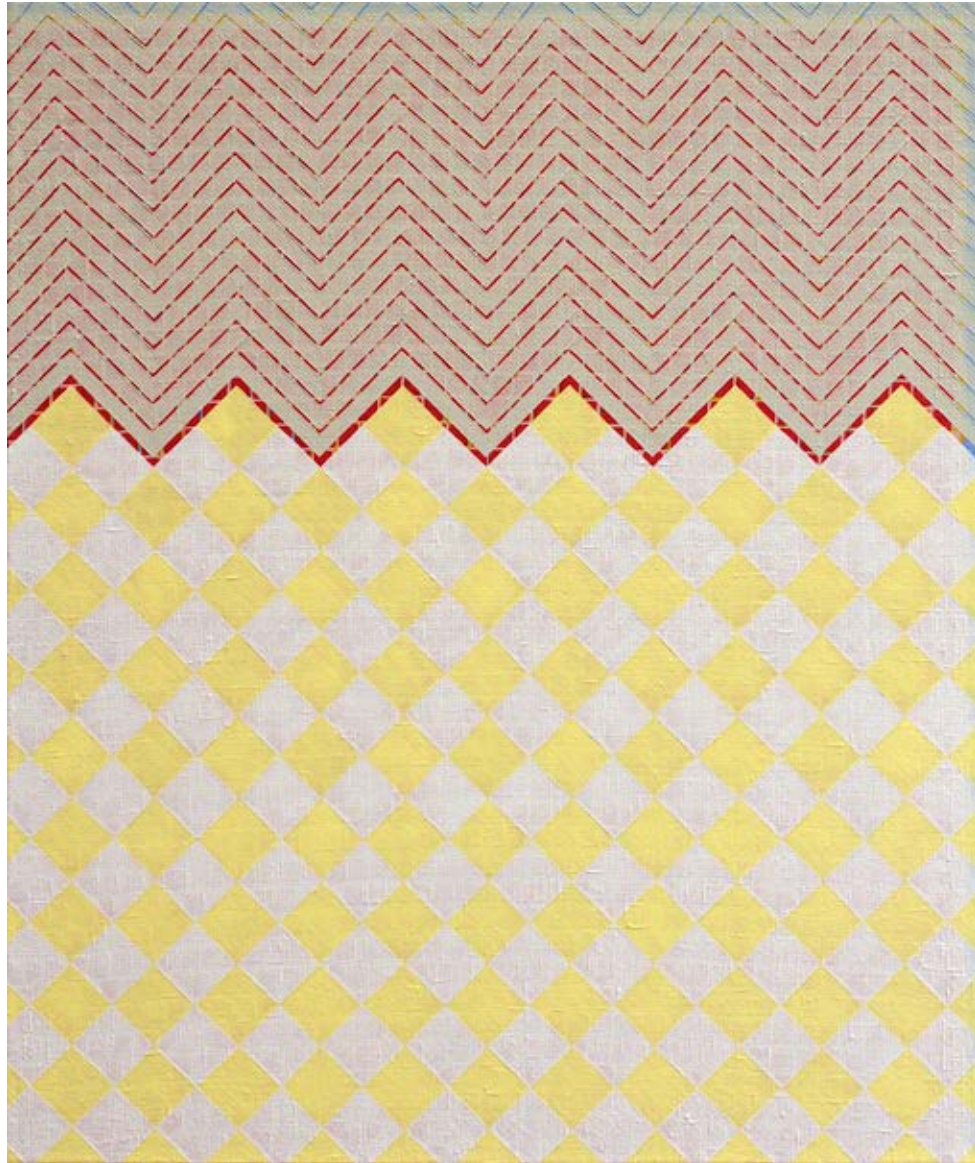
I am a painter whose practice focuses on colour; engaging with rhythm and formalism, chance and deliberation.

Using a working method where process and contemplation are both allowed to guide the evolution of the work, I construct overtly hand-made paintings which record and examine colour conversations within accumulating pattern structures, embracing accidents, flaws and discrepancies within their rhythms.

Starting from an imprecise grid structure, and rejecting the use of pre-drawn lines or tape, I build up layers of simple hand-painted lines and geometric shapes – square, triangle, rectangle, chevron – to create intricate surfaces where colour fragments can interact, sing together, harmonise, and sometimes jar.

Opposite: Awake in the night
Oil on linen, 100cm x 70cm, 2021





Hestia
Oil on linen, 60cm x 50cm, 2021



Sit in silence and remember
Oil on linen, 45cm x 36cm, 2020

Andrew Bryant

Informed as much by his training as a psychoanalyst as his life-long engagement with art, Andrew Bryant's work circles around questions of fantasy, dependency and lack, subtly blending the narcissism of wishful thinking with the disappointment of experience.

Gathering resources from books and internet searches, Andrew transforms found photographs into detailed and seductive monochrome oil paintings. Whether it is engineless toy planes, shelves bolted to the floor, or empty and static trolleys, Andrew's subjects are in some way disabled or incomplete; flimsy, inadequate, or simply stuck, they long for the completion of their function. His images invariably contain a component of staging and framing, of conscious presentation – a reference to the practice of painting itself which, as a form of address, requires a viewer, and so is equally lacking.

Spending months on a single painting, the lengths to which Andrew goes in pursuit of flawlessness are excessive. However this is no senseless striving for perfection; in its very failure it articulates gesturally the central paradox of his work, namely the potentiality of artistic/human desire and the illusiveness of its fulfilment.



Untitled (glider)
Oil on canvas, 100cm x 120cm, 2022



Untitled (support)
Oil on linen, 60cm x 70cm, 2021



Untitled (UFO)
Oil on canvas, 90cm x 120cm, 2021-2022

Lesley Bunch

CONTEMPORARY BRITISH PAINTING PRIZE 2022 WINNER

For my Shadow Sculpture series I borrow 'casting objects' that are invested with their lenders' emotions, memories, and sense of identity. I interview each lender about their attachment to their object, and then create a shadow with it. Although the shadow's composition is influenced by my interpretation of lenders' stories, ultimately the shadow becomes a detached, autonomous entity, no longer anchored to, or a stand-in for, its casting object.

Reproduced in my paintings, each shadow becomes a manifestation of, or 'remains' of, my exchange with the lender. I build my paintings in many fine, flat, transparent layers, 'sculpting' with colour. I am interested in the moment when the painting takes on a life of its own and seems to guide my hand; when the colour-sculpted presence takes on an expression of 'suchness', and becomes an intricately detailed, solid form.

My paintings are a visual language resisting verbal interpretation, untied to literal meaning, an 'absented presence'. They sit silently in the globalised, unanchored, over-information that we increasingly drift in.



Shadow Sculpture 6
Oil on wooden panel, 40cm x 40cm, 2020



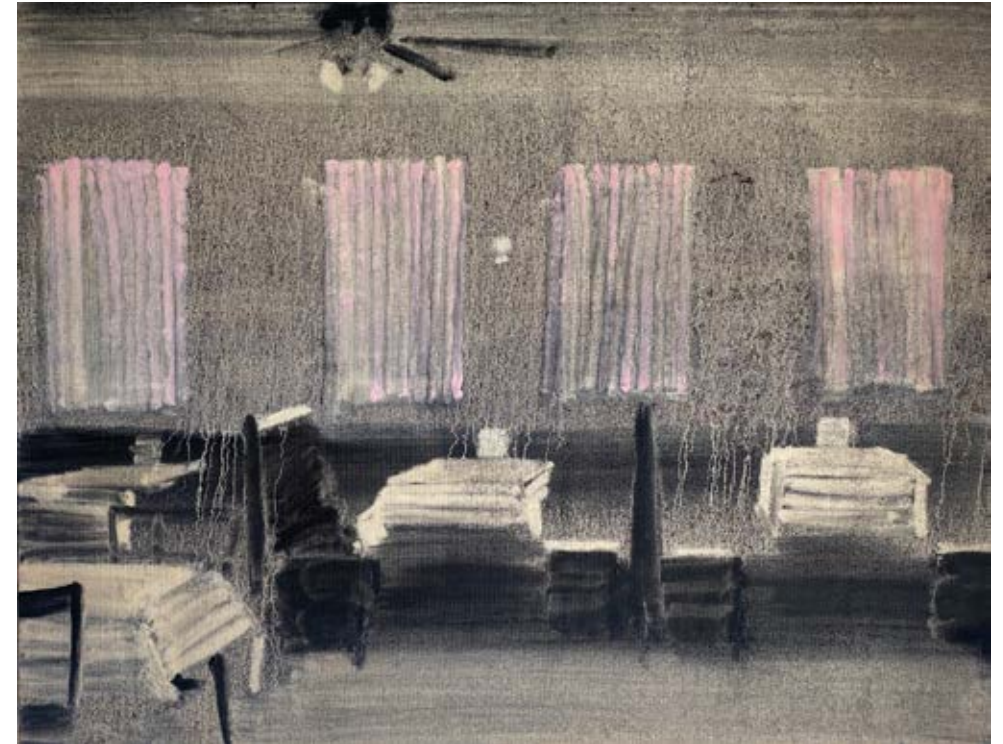
Shadow Sculpture 9
Oil on aluminium panel, 50cm x 50cm, 2021



Shadow Sculpture 12
Oil on aluminium panel, 50cm x 50cm, 2022

Michelle Conway

I am acutely aware of the passing of time. Painting light is my way of expressing this experience.



Kay's Pizza
Oil on canvas over board, 47cm x 60cm, 2022



Picnic Tables at the Park
Oil on canvas over board, 35cm x 45cm, 2022



Mary In The Backyard
Oil on canvas over board, 35cm x 45cm, 2021

Seungjo Jeong

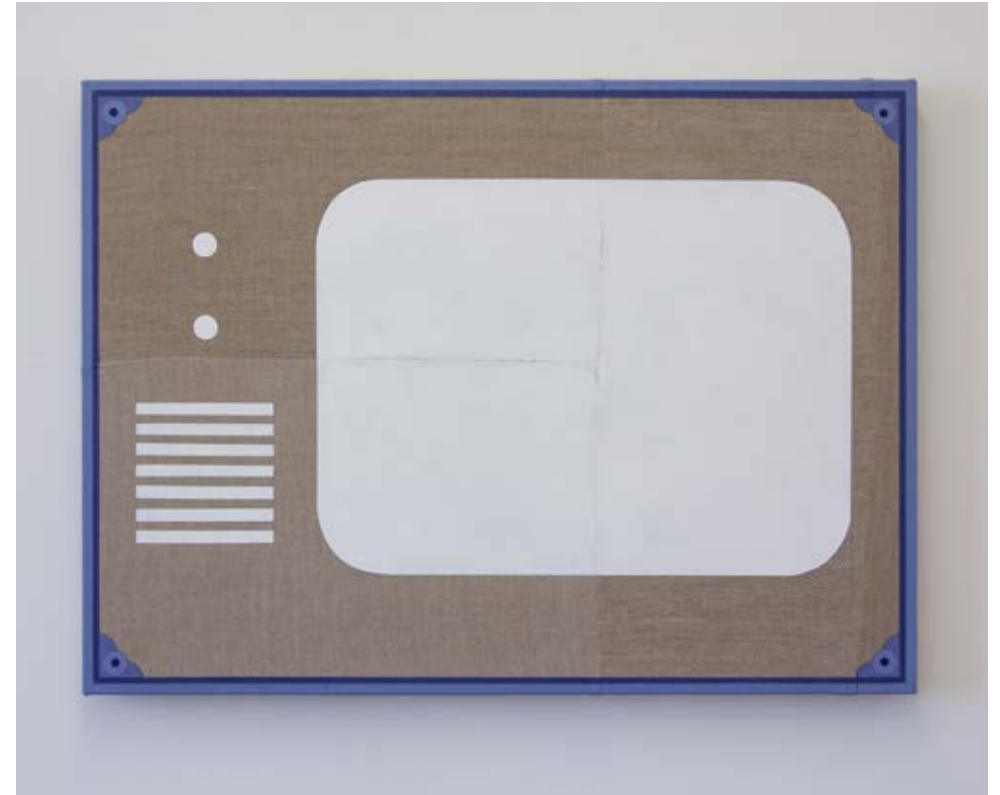
I am a practising artist with a background in software engineering. I combine the two worlds by designing paintings as interface where both the intuitiveness of graphical user interface and the poetry of artwork come together. I look at mundane objects that we encounter every day yet often fail to recognise their unique presences and functions. I distil the essence of an object into a representation that also happens to look like a post-painterly abstract painting. I am interested in the spatial relationship between objects, components of an object, and an object and its users.



Interface V
Acrylic on linen, 91cm x 51cm, 2021



Interface L
Acrylic on linen, 180cm x 120cm (overall, 6 parts), 2020



Preloved
Acrylic on linen, 55cm x 75cm, 2022

Bernadette Kiely

I am a visual artist living and working on the Quayside of the river Nore in Thomastown, County Kilkenny, Ireland and grew up on the Quayside on the river Suir in Carrick on Suir, Co. Tipperary. I have witnessed flooding on rivers since childhood which has left me with a profound connection and feeling for both the beauty and the destructive ability of waterways.

My interests lie in the ability of painting to point to the qualities of slow time, of attention, of focus, to harness qualities of storytelling while simultaneously embodying paint on a surface. I have been making paintings chronicling a personal response to environmental shifts, weather patterns and their effects on land and on human psyches and emotions for over 25 years. I have amassed a large body of drawings, paintings and digital imagery about flooding on the rivers Nore, river Suir and also about related weather and climate events in the wider world.

In an attempt to harness the unpredictability of my subject matter I developed a pouring technique utilising paint solvents and water which subsequently then act as co-creators in my work based on the conditional instability of weather. The paintings possess an internal structure containing both the poetic and melancholy present in a slow collapse of geography as we know it over time.



Imagine Life Without Art
Oil on canvas, 70cm x 100cm, 2020



Somewhere we know
Oil on canvas, 153cm x 213cm, 2019



Going for fuel [I may be some time]
Oil on canvas, 100cm x 150cm, 2020

Helen Kincaid

Central to my work is our relationship to the unstable photographic image, both digital and analogue. I am particularly drawn to the erosion and fragmentation of a photograph either through processes of reproduction, light, or time to explore notions of memory, meaning and identity.

For the last 2 years my work has focused on photographs I've taken of domestic curtains. Curtains seemed to hold particular resonance during lockdown - a symbol of a closeted, psychological space, a demarcation of the boundary between us and the something, or nothing, that lies beyond. I'm interested in the parallels between a painting and the photograph – the arrangement of pigment, paint and pixel construct a reality that forms an unstable veil over the blank and empty surface beneath.

Drawing on the use of drapery in renaissance painting as a form of veiling or concealing, the starting point for this body of work are my photographs of curtains, which have been torn up, the fragments then reassembled or mis-assembled, rephotographed and re-imagined in the painting, a process that echoes the workings of memory. Aiming to convey something partially glimpsed, my work explores the urge to see what is absent and derive meaning from disparate fragments, in our repeated attempts to recover the 'whole'.



Sheer II
Oil on linen, 30cm x 40cm, 2022



Stage
Oil on linen, 39cm x 45cm, 2022



Untitled (Fluorescent)
Oil on linen, 30cm x 40cm, 2021

Lindsay Mapes

Mapes' art explores themes of truth. The truth about painting. The truth about surface. The truth about making and the process that evolves around that. Mistakes are made and left on view. The rawness of the material is just as active as the paint floating or sinking on/into the surface. She is intrigued by repetition of mark making in all its forms, from the contour line of a figure to the patterns of textiles recreated with paint or the sewing of wool through and around the surface. Colour is the focus point of her work, understanding how these combinations melt together or scream in separation. Creating space and openness in the work lets each object be itself. There is evidence of traces by previous mark-marking, revealing the changes made during the painting process. In this way, she examines how a thought process can be realised in paint.



Palm desert
Oil paint and tapestry wool on linen, 40cm x 50cm, 2022



PSYCH
Oil and spray paint with tapestry wool on silk, 40cm x 50cm, 2022



Where we collide
Hessian, linen, silk and oil paint on canvas, 24cm x 30cm, 2022

Sonia Martin

As I go around I make notes of random words and sentences I've read or heard that strike me in some way. They may create a spark of an idea which can trigger the starting point for a painting. After preliminary charcoal sketches I like to paint directly onto the canvas, and work quickly to maintain the connection with the idea. The paintings reflect themes of memory, mortality and the search for freedom. I'm interested in Medieval imagery and I work in oil paint on different size canvases, whatever is available.



Crossroads
Oil on canvas, 76cm x 61cm, 2021



Leap
Oil on canvas, 105cm x 125cm, 2021



Untitled (Mirror)
Oil on canvas, 51cm x 41cm, 2021

Samuel O'Donnell

My paintings deal very directly with an immediate, contemporary environment; aberrations of the everyday that catch our attention. Subjects are disparate yet ubiquitous: chip shops, football stands, views from windows, the landscapes we experience momentarily during travel and the domestic interior. The places are specific to personal experience, but general enough that they are also enigmatic, open and available - their specificity allows a viewer to orientate themselves and accommodate their own experience. The paintings balance the comforts and melancholy of domestic 'hometown-ness' in the post-industrial north of England where I was raised, the generic and the singular, strangeness and familiarity, devotion and puzzlement.



Branches, Gable End
Acrylic on board, 60cm x 45cm, 2022



Workshop
Acrylic on board, 60cm x 35cm, 2021

Opposite: Staircase
Acrylic on canvas, 50cm x 80cm, 2022

Mahali O'Hare

The container a central motif in my work over the last 3 years has become a meditative space and an arena to reflect on mortality, landscape and loss through a painterly rewilding. The vessel's are sown with memories of fields, woods and hedgerows combining thoughts of modern day reverie, shepherds, lovers and the landscape seen via the lens of art. They are imagined landscapes where biography and sensory perception collide. I'm looking for a fragility and interiority to recent landscapes, where the ceramic edges echo the human and where figure and landscape can be seen as being embedded in each other. There is an internal logic and uncertainty that I seek out in the making of these paintings which can mean many retakes within one painting as a way of becoming more specific. As a result I often make paintings in homage to lost or erased works and see this as part of the process and charge behind a finished work.

Opposite: For A Moment I Lost Myself
Oil on canvas, 183cm x 127cm, 2022





Night Gaze
Oil on canvas, 18cm x 13cm, 2022

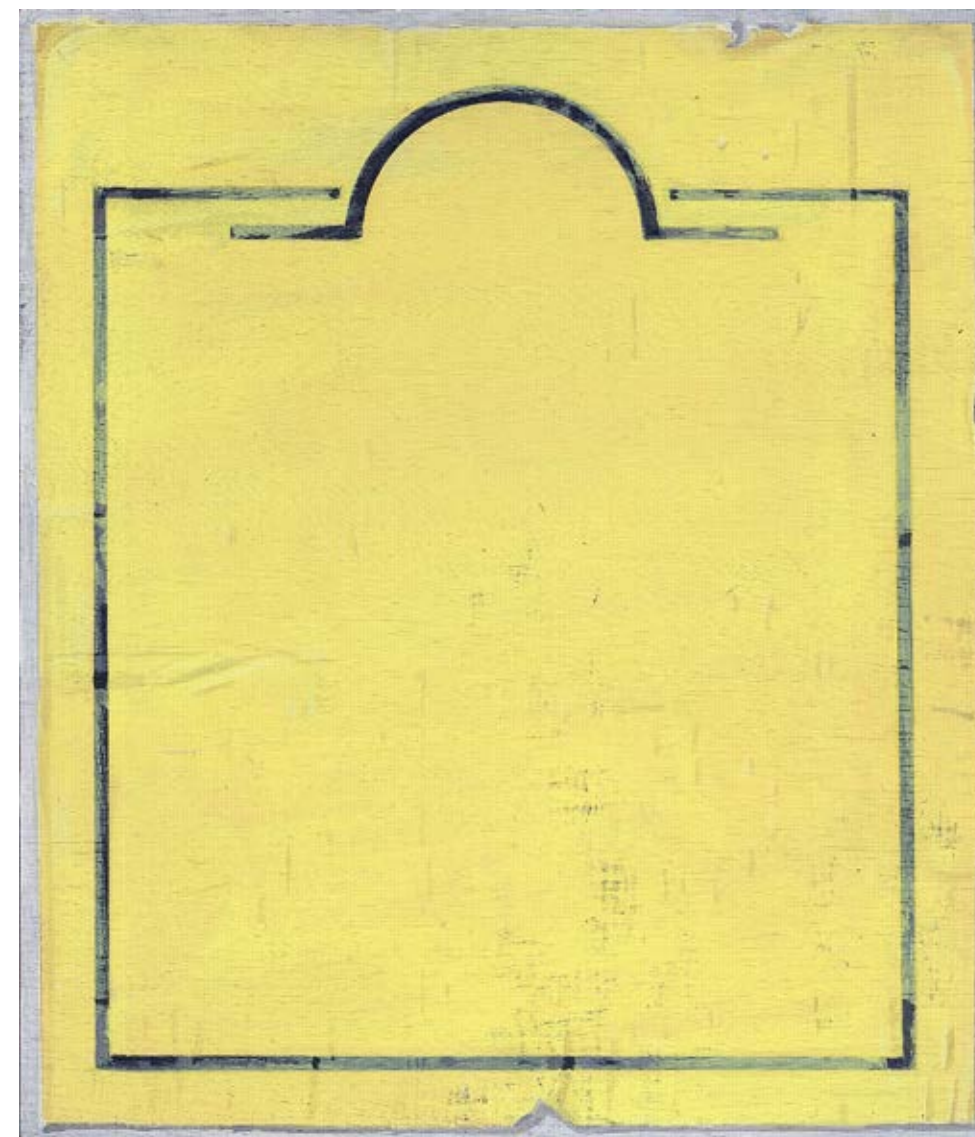


Walk Me Into Summer
Oil on canvas, 91cm x 71cm, 2022

Simon Parish

My recent work has focused on close observations of objects, images and scraps of ephemera that have surrounded me over the recent lockdowns of the Covid pandemic. I try to develop work with an unbiased non hierarchical pursuit of subject matter in which the objects might be seen as 'throw away' subjects but are explored for their potential and capacity to become still life works.

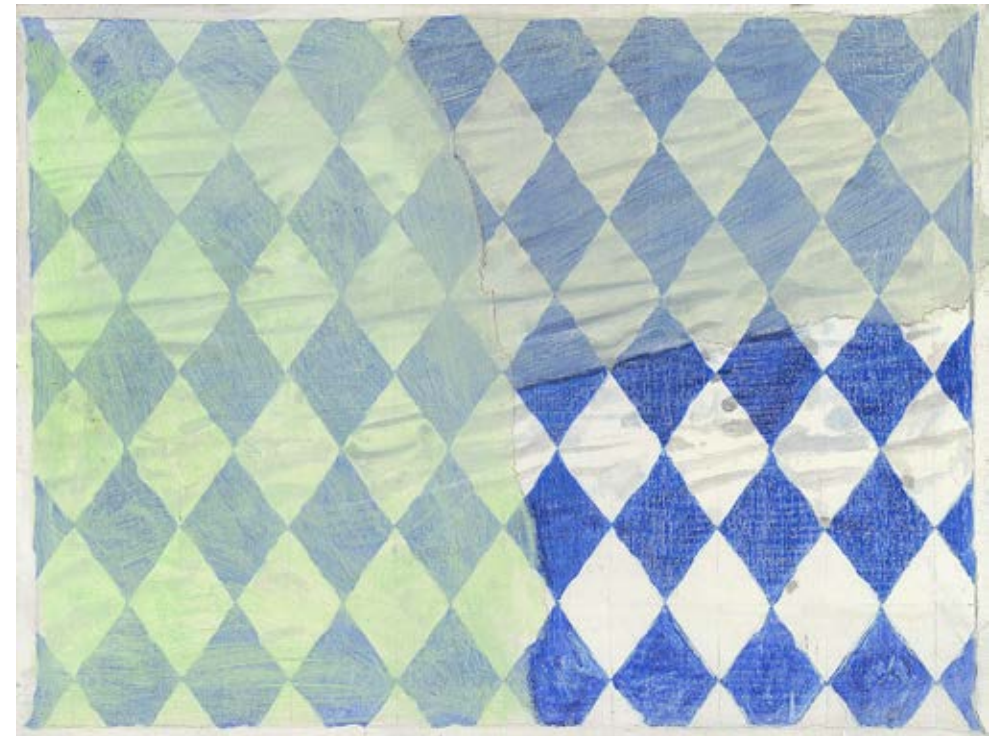
My paintings are influenced to some degree by the language of hard edged geometric abstraction of the 1960s as filtered and seen through the quotidian: a fragment of contemporary design, found packaging, take away menu leaflets, newspaper graphics such as graphs and symbols and domestic materials such as tea towels. These found fragments and objects are collected and float around my studio becoming more worn or painted on and become unexpectedly placed on or collaged next to others. The paintings retain an unfinished almost scruffy look, in keeping with and showing the life these objects have had.



Yellow bag
Acrylic on board, 24cm x 29cm, 2022



Semicircles
Acrylic on board, 24cm x 29cm, 2021



Blue diamonds
Acrylic on board, 24cm x 32cm, 2022

Jen Roper

Revisiting moments of embarrassment in everyday life, my paintings explore a narrative of misadventures. The pictures take occupancy in reality, drawn from specific moments in familiar environments. I aim to make a spectacle of the uncomfortable, exploiting the awkwardness endured. Unpolished moments interest me; I draw from the personal in a self-deprecating manner, observing the unease of the world around me.

I am interested in exposure: an encounter goes awry and the subject finds herself in the dreaded spotlight. The paintings find humour in eye contact, bodily stature and missed opportunities. When I consider a scene that relates to situational humour, I imbue the paintings with a cartoonish quality, using quick brushstrokes to reflect the subjects' naivety. I work from the subjectivity of memories to capture intrusive thoughts and embarrassments of physicality.



The Window Cleaner
Oil on canvas, 150cm x 200cm, 2022



KISS ME!
Oil on canvas, 150cm x 200cm, 2022



The Fist Bump
Oil on board, 85cm x 70cm, 2022

Shawn Stipling

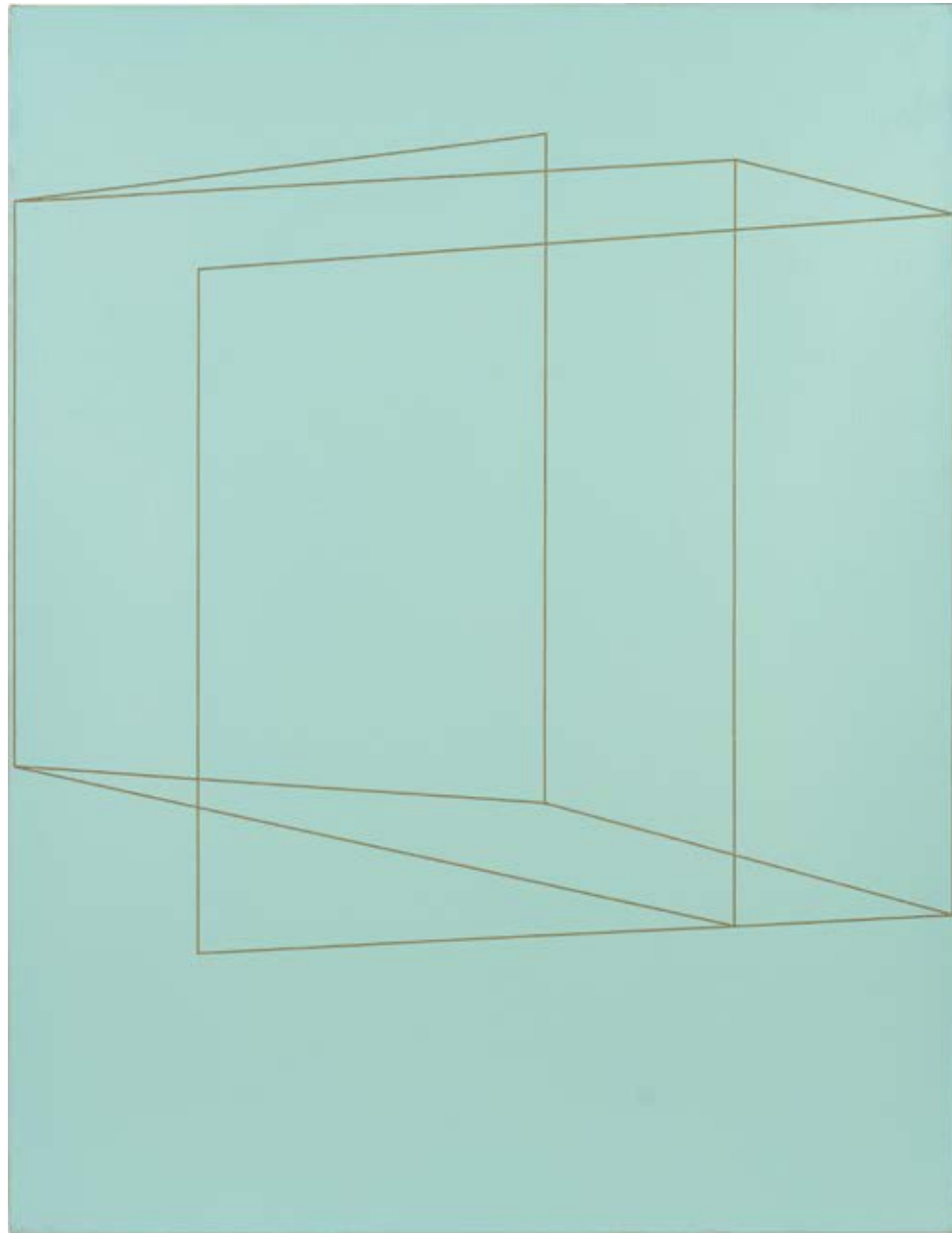
In 2013 I took part in a small group exhibition in Grenoble, France. 'Une Question de Fait' (A Matter of Fact) presented four artists from Poland, Germany, France, and the UK, all working in reductive abstract painting and sculpture. Over a period of a few days, we carefully set up our show and, I have to say, felt pretty good about the results. However, shortly before it was due to open, a small group arrived for a 'sneak peek'. To our dismay, our lovingly crafted exhibition was greeted by a general bewilderment and even anger, one person in particular being so upset that they were unable to control themselves, exclaiming, "You are all dead! There is no life in this work! Where is the expression? The gesture? The texture? You have no passion! No souls!"

This criticism played on my mind for some time afterwards. Not because I was disturbed by it, but because I felt that there was something to this encounter which was intrinsically important to my work. It seemed to me that it may be possible to argue that an opposing viewpoint could also be true. Perhaps the person who really lacked passion was the one who required a large amount of stimulation in order to feel at all moved. In turn, perhaps another person may only need a minimum of stimulus to have an equally intense emotional response – for them, more would be too overpowering.

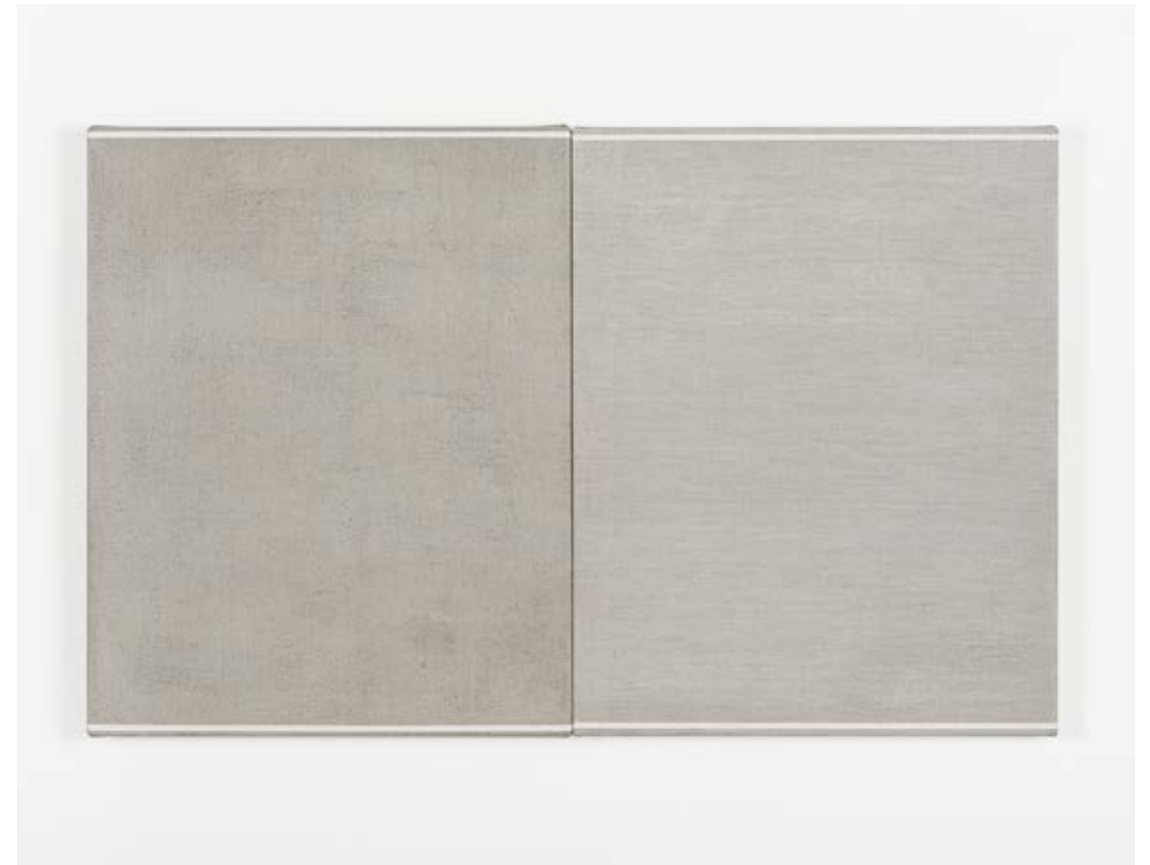
In my work I am finding that the things I need to say are best communicated simply and with an element of control, not because I am dead or lack passion, but because, by further addition, the original meaning becomes increasingly unclear.



Blowing Leaves (I quit my job)
Oil on canvas, 160cm x 150cm, 2020



Structure painting
Enamel on primed linen, 110cm x 85cm, 2022



Between Word and Deed (diptych)
Acrylic on flax and linen, 50cm x 80cm, 2022

Mimei Thompson

I make paintings that feature the natural world, often working with images chosen for their symbolic or metaphoric qualities. My paintings are both process based and representational. Paint marks function descriptively, but their physicality, as pure paint and as trace of gesture, remains dominant.

The world in the paintings has a sense of fluidity, and a suggestion that matter is temporarily taking on certain forms, but these can be slippery, transient and mutable. There is an association with animism, where everything is alive and sentient.

Contained in the work is a search for origins and beginnings. There is a longing for rootedness, but fundamentally this connection remains elusive, and we are thrown back on our distance from comfortable belonging. Here we are in the realm of the synthetic, playing with the idea of nature, as it is transformed into a luminous, floating, suspended world.



Weeds at the End of the World (Magenta, Yellow)
Oil on canvas, 60cm x 70cm, 2020



Drowned Forest
Oil on canvas, 60cm x 80cm, 2020



Green Fly (Sleeping)
Oil on canvas, 40cm x 50cm, 2022

Emotional Spectres: Lesley Bunch's Abstracted Objects

by Hettie Judah

"...it is usually not an object's presence but far more often its absence that clears the way for social intercourse."

from Jean Baudrillard, 'A Marginal System: Collecting' (1968)¹

Lesley Bunch's paintings have an uncanny vibrancy and dimensionality. The colours shimmer, apparently alive with light. They are, superficially, abstract – there is no easy to discern 'thing' here, nothing evidently represented. Yet the language of light Bunch employs, with its glimmers, reflections, and shadows, gives the impression of a physical object – something nebulous, translucent, globular, perhaps even iridescent, but a *thing*, nevertheless. And indeed, there are physical objects linked to each of Bunch's paintings, but they have endured multiple levels of translation and transformation. What we encounter on the canvas is something like an emotional spectre.

In 2014, during a year-long residency at Wimbledon College of Arts, Bunch put a call out for what she describes as "persistent" objects – things the owners had "invested emotion in". After a long conversation with each lender, she composed a shadow thrown by the object that in some way interpreted its emotional resonance: images resulting from human encounters, made from the interplay of object and light. Transparent or translucent objects were favoured, particularly those that carried colour, allowing the light to penetrate and dapple, and for the artist to play with colour and pattern. Each shadow was photographed separately from the object that cast it, becoming an abstracted composition in colour, light and shade.

Fascination with sheen and translucency have a long art history. The Dutch Golden Age brought luscious studies of liquid in glass vessels by Pieter Claesz

and Clara Peeters: these paintings were a show of dazzling skill, demonstrating the artists' ability to capture the insubstantial interplay of reflections, light and shade. In 1844 William Henry Fox Talbot photographed three shelves of crystal goblets and decanters against a dark background. With *Articles of Glass* the pioneering photographer demonstrated the ease with which this emerging medium communicated the form of these transparent objects through the reflected light on their cut surfaces.

The seductive power of patterned shadow was harnessed in a rather literal way in the homoerotic photography of Bob Mizer, many of whose post-war 'physique' photos of bodybuilders were composed against light patterns achieved by shining spots through pieces of cut crystal collected by his mother. Mizer's work in turn influenced artists including Robert Mapplethorpe.

In *Through a Glass Darkly* (2019) Cornelia Parker used ultra-violet light to cast shadows onto chemically coated plates, turning them into photographic positives, a photogravure process developed by two early pioneers of photography: Fox Talbot and Nicéphore Niépce. Although Parker's series records only their angled shadows, the nature of the casting objects – glasses, plants and vessels – remain evident. Bunch's vocabulary of shadow images, by contrast, leaves the nature of the source object obscure.



Cornelia Parker;
*Through Glass
Darkly*, 2019
Polymer gravure
etching
Paper and Image
58.2 x 82.2 cm
Edition of 18

Courtesy Cornelia Parker and Cristea Roberts Gallery, London © Cornelia Parker.

Over the last eight years Bunch has worked with this shadow archive in various ways, using it as a vocabulary of abstract forms that have come unmoored from their specific meaning to all but her. In the *Shadow Language* photo series, Bunch Photoshopped the forms into blank spaces in ancient manuscripts photographed at a library in Rome. These were esoteric tomes, some in scripts and languages for which no readers remained alive, but with blanks left by each author in the hope that some future reader might build on their work or solve a perplexing problem. Among the texts is an opera by Aristotle, open at a page of diagrams in which the philosopher is attempting to concoct mathematical formulae for emotions. Bunch's *Shadow Language* looks quite at home on these pages, but as with the lines and loops and marginalia that surround them, the significance of the shadow objects is, to us, obscure.

Bunch's subsequent numbered *Shadow Sculpture* works are constructed using source imagery that is photographic and Photoshop-manipulated, but come into being during the long process of painting. Bunch describes the joy of moment when she "lets-go" of the source material: "there are many, many layers. How do you know when it's right? It is to do with the observation of how light works and the way things reflect off each other: making the elements relate and interact."



Lesley Bunch, *Part* series installed in 'Transition', Bargehouse, London 2009

Studying at Goldsmiths in the 1990s, Bunch was discouraged from painting (the medium was out of vogue). She spent three years instead in the photographic darkroom and immersed herself in theoretical texts. As a painter, she is still informed by a conceptual methodology: there is philosophical as well as emotional foundation to her work. In 2008 she made an early (monochrome, 2D) series of shadow paintings after a close reading of Jean Baudrillard's essay 'A Marginal System: Collecting' (1968). "It was in that bubble when everyone was obsessed with collecting things," she says. "I was interested in presenting something as a collection that wasn't collectible."

The interest in shadows, the language of codes, engineering, and the digital realm all date back to Bunch's student work. Her subsequent evolution as an artist has been the slow and thoughtful journey back to painting. The residency at Wimbledon in 2014 was transformative. In that same period, as she worked on *Shadow Language*, Bunch continued her experimentation with the placement of painted bodies in pictorial space. In the *Part* series, unspecific fleshy portions of a human body are painted at scale, crammed tightly into the confines of each large painting to the point where they become abstracted. Is this skin or rock? Glorious or gross? Unlike Bill Brandt's abstracted photographs of nudes and rocks from the 1960s, Bunch's abstracted bodies are not sexy, nor are they necessarily feminine.

The *Exchange* paintings likewise play with scale and the sense of weight. Here, otherwise hidden engineering components – coiled heat exchangers – float in coloured space, like sci fi props. Studies in reflective light and intricate curved surfaces, Bunch chases their looped coils of copper and ceramic, building up the surface in thin layers until the tubes seem to glow. As with the *Exchange* paintings,



Lesley Bunch, *Exchange 2*, 2019, oil on canvas, 75cm x 210cm



Lesley Bunch, *Shadow, Other 1*, 2014, oil on canvas, 150cm x 210cm

the *Shadow, Other* paintings – notably *Shadow, Other 1* (2014) and *Shadow, Other 3* (2016) – see the painted form float freely in space, like ectoplasm, or life forms of the deep sea caught in the light of a submarine photographer.

In the subsequent *Shadow Sculpture* series, the forms are grounded, painted by Bunch as three-dimensional forms that themselves cast shadows on the supporting surface. There is an electrical light and heat to these painted objects. They appear to radiate energy from within, obscure forms animated with internal light. The cool precision of Bunch's brushwork, and the carefully evoked suggestion of directional (as well as internal) light impresses us with the idea that she is indeed painting a physical object from life, but she offers us nothing that we can easily grasp onto or recognise: her paintings are confounding, unmooring.

Bunch is one of a generation of painters who use digital tools in playful ways. Speaking of a recent series in which he combined painting with 3D computer



Seth Price; *Gold PamphID*, 2022
acrylic polymers, bronze powder, and UV-print on aluminum composite
199.2 x 243.8 x 2.5 cm / 78 3/8 x 96 x 1 in

Credit: © Seth Price, courtesy Sadie Coles HQ, London. Photo: Robert Glowacki.

software, the New York-based artist Seth Price described the difficulty of making good art with computer graphics packages: “The machine can produce anything you can imagine, but this just restates the problem of contemporary art. It’s even harder if you want to take it off the screen, because materializing it usually drains the energy. What makes it worthwhile to turn an image into an object?”² This question of energy is central, too, to Bunch's paintings – and one of the pressing issues for artists to engage with in our contemporary visual culture. Images viewed on screens have the innate radiance of a backlit display. They can seem to die when printed (or painted) as was all too evident in the exhibition of David Hockney's 2020 iPad paintings *The Arrival of Spring*.

Bunch uses Photoshop to play with her shadow archive. For some of her *Shadow Sculpture* series she digitally laid the images over physical objects, giving them



Lesley Bunch, *Shadow, Other 3*, 2016, oil on canvas, 100cm x 100cm

a fiery gem-like quality. Most important of the receiving forms are rounded concretions found on the shores of Lake Superior. Formed millions of years ago within sedimentary rock formations, these concretions are revealed as the softer surrounding stone eroded away. Fitting snugly into the palm of a hand, they can be carried as good luck totems (indeed Bunch herself often travels with stones from her collection, and has taken a series of photographs in which they appear nestled into the foreign rock of carved monuments in Rome.) To the Ojibwe and other First Nations people, these sculptural concretions are considered *manitou* – they are thought of as ‘spirit stones’ – objects possessed of a potent animating force within a landscape

that is itself sacred. We might thus see Bunch's *Shadow Sculpture* paintings as engaging both with an ancient animist tradition, and the complementary philosophical worldview described by Jane Bennet in *Vibrant Matter* (2009) according to which all objects, even stones, are considered to have active qualities.

Bunch describes the painterly process of departure from the source objects as one of “giving it back to the viewer, presenting it as meticulously as I can as an object in itself.” Rather than bringing together symbols or elements that might point to a narrative or deeper meaning, she likens her paintings to Haiku poems or Buddhist *koans* – paradoxical statements or questions posed to perplex and encourage thought. This is not painting that delivers an easy punchline, but art that might invoke a certain feeling, or provoke contemplation.

1 Jean Baudrillard, *The System of Objects* (first published as *Le système des objets*, 1968) Translated by James Benedict ©Verso, London, 1996.

2 Seth Price in conversation with Mark Godfrey during the exhibition ‘Art Is Not Human’ at Sadie Coles, Kingly Street London, May 2022.



Lesley Bunch, *Remains 2*, 2022, photograph

Acknowledgements

'Contemporary British Painting' sincerely thank our artist selectors Susan Absolon, Deb Covell, Paul Newman and Casper White for choosing such a striking shortlist with so much integrity. We also thank our judges Hettie Judah, Geraldine Swayne, and Grant Scanlan for lending a serious critical eye to the exhibition. Thanks of course to Huddersfield Art Gallery and Phil Ashcroft at Thames-Side Studios Gallery for hosting us, Natalie Dowse for producing the stunning posters and catalogue and for all her and Phil Illingworth's work on the 'Contemporary British Painting' website, Phil for his work on the hidden technical side, the team at CuratorSpace, and also Lucy Cox and Narbi Price for promoting the prize and Painting of the Day on social media. We also thank Cornelia Parker and Cristea Roberts Gallery, and Seth Price and Sadie Coles HQ for their kind permission to use photographs. We also extend our thanks to Paula MacArthur and Judith Tucker who have done a good deal of organising and negotiating behind the scenes, and of course to John Talbot, who has generously donated the prize money this year.

Most importantly we wish to thank all the painters who submitted their work to this year's prize. Many of these works will be appearing as 'Painting of the Day'.



Highly Commended painter Helen G Blake (left) and the winner Lesley Bunch (right)

Previous winners of the **contemporary british painting prize**

2016 - Cathy Lomax

2017 - Narbi Price

2018 - Joe Packer

2019 - Joanna Whittle

2021 - Susan Absolon

