

H_A_R_D_P_A_I_N_T_I_N_G_x2

Richard Bell

Katrina Blannin

John Carter

Catherine Ferguson

Della Gooden

Richard Graville

Morrissey & Hancock

Tess Jaray

Jo McGonigal

Lars Wolter

Jessie Yates

Rana Begum

Ian Boutell

Philip Cole

Biggs & Collings

Deb Covell

Stig Evans

Jane Harris

Mali Morris

Jost Münster

Patrick O'Donnell

Carol Robertson

Daniel Sturgis

Published to accompany an exhibition in two parts:

H_A_R_D_P_A_I_N_T_I_N_G_x2

11 January - 1 March 2020

curated by:

Ian Boutell, Philip Cole, Stig Evans, Della Gooden
and Patrick O'Donnell

at Phoenix Art Space, Brighton, UK

PART 1

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PART 2

Rana Begum
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Philip Cole
Biggs & Collings
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Patrick O'Donnell
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Foreword

This exhibition is in its second incarnation. The first in 2018 was curated by Ian Boutell, Philip Cole, Stig Evans and Patrick O'Donnell. Now, they are joined by Della Gooden to present **H_A_R_D_P_A_I_N_T_I_N_G_x2**.

The title of this exhibition does not dictate an aesthetic, nor does it mean to imply a preference for one process or system of making work over another. It instead concerns itself with the elusive and critical nature of Contemporary Painting today; the complexities, the overlooked simplicities and the 'wonder' it can engender.

Painting has a dynamic heritage. It has been defined, redefined, declared dead, proclaimed reborn and designated with 'isms' left right and centre. It seems the ongoing mission to corral Painting into something we can make statements of fact about, is to do nothing more than lay bare its inherently fugitive nature.

Can any conclusions be drawn? That there is something vital about it and worth fighting over is evident, but there are far more questions than answers. How can the simple act of placing a coloured substance onto a fixed, unmoving surface create such intrigue?

- *The Curators*

*'Aware of the intractability of matter, materialist thought promotes a respect for the otherness and integrity of the world, in contrast to the postmodern narcissism that sees nothing but reflections of human culture wherever it looks.'*¹

- *Terry Eagleton, 2016*

'The more materialist painting is, the better.'

- *Matthew Collings, 2019*

¹ *Eagleton, T. 2016 'Materialism' Yale University Press NewHaven and London, p6*

H_A_R_D_P_A_I_N_T_I_N_G_x2

In the early stages of planning **H_A_R_D_P_A_I_N_T_I_N_G_x2** the curators began in a simple way - with their own studio practices and their combined sensibilities and beliefs as artists. This practice-oriented method determined a curatorial direction that was markedly fluid, and which depended on levels of flexibility, deliberation and interaction that gradually, over the course of a year, led to a consensus of choices. The full identity and nature of the exhibition can be said to have unfolded over time.

Prevailing ideas were quickly absorbed and more complex matters of form, materiality and the promotion of painting beyond an optical aesthetic, began to take shape. An example might be curator Stig Evans' pre-occupations with notions of 'edge' which play out in his own paintings, but it gives pause for thought regarding the whole exhibition.

Resourcefully, *edge* can operate simultaneously as both enclosing force and a dividing one; it can be a point of departure **and** one of arrival. The ambiguity continues when it 'co-performs', as it must, with other elements in a painting. For example, when colour meets colour, when shape collides and when it must ensure that object/field boundaries remain functional.

The invention of a painting's surface and the concoction found there can bring about spatial disturbances that are hard to explain because they are not seen, they are felt.

Look at the complex black and red 'slippings' and 'slidings' of *edge* in 'Not Fixed' (page 34) by Daniel Sturgis; they prompt an almost physical response in the belly. By contrast, the raw

canvas edges of Richard Bell's diptych 'Equivalences #16, 17 (2 part painting)' (page 6) sit quietly as markers of a forgotten origin and place of first contact for paint.

There is not just an element of ambiguity in an edge, it can be Janus-like in the way it facilitates transitions. Perhaps the picture-plane itself is the ultimate *edge of transition*; Painting's sacred boundary. Perpendicular to both the horizontal trajectory of our gaze and the ground itself, the picture-plane dangles before us. Notice how Carol Robertson exploits the 'psycho-physicality' of this situation in 'Colour Map - Yellow' (page 33). The base of her triangle is slung low, parallel to her canvas edge, but it is also parallel and near to the floor on which we stand. As we look, our gaze is 'weighted' via the competing demands of pictorial space, the actual space we occupy and the body we inhabit; we 'sense-see' gravity.

'Surface' is a critical, yet enigmatic feature of curator Philip Cole's paintings - it is also explored across this exhibition: see how the weave of the canvas is just visible underneath the paint in 'Sequence #2/4' (page 7) by Katrina Blannin. Note the seemingly inlaid and fragmented surfaces of Catherine Ferguson's work and the material qualities of Jane Harris's paint as it is manipulated and finely textured. All of these artists raise questions about *surface* - what it is, and where it actually lies. It is even 'displaced' in the work of curator Ian Boutell, who incorporates materials such as Perspex and mirror, which have different capacities for 'holding' paint. For example in the case of Perspex, it is held on the reverse or 'underneath' the surface.

The illusory surface that belongs to Painting can sometimes get understood entirely in direct opposition to 'object-ness' - a status designated to the realm of Sculpture. However, such

binary positions have been questioned and it should perhaps be remembered that *object-ness* has belonged to Painting since the Renaissance and the use of oil paint on (transportable) wooden panels (as opposed to the architecture-dependent and enveloping nature and scale of the fresco).

With these thoughts in mind, curator Patrick O'Donnell's hinged planes assume a physical spatiality for Painting beyond the single, flat, front-facing surface; as does Lars Wolter's '*Cut Off [Enzianblau]*' (page 35) which has faceted, smaller surfaces that fall away from its central plane. Another point to consider with regard to *object-ness and Painting*, is to see how O'Donnell's hinged '*10 Planes*' (page 32) is placed on a shelf; a positioning on the horizontal and which is reminiscent of the way an ornament might be displayed. Or, to go further, it echoes how sculpture hits the floor... and yet '*10 Planes*' is wall-dependent, presented on the vertical plane at eye level.

That we can experience paintings as illusory **and/or** physical and that we use our moving bodies to navigate a 'built-in' visual field for a material encounter with Painting beyond the purely optical, is touched on in my essay, '*The Ceremony of Looking*' (page 12). My own painting installation '*As*' (page 19) carries a concern for the relationships between paint and other material carriers of colour and form. Habitat, aspect and the moving, vertical viewer are all in play.

Morrissey and Hancock's '*TPIAR: monochrome panel*' adopts an aspect looking outwards as it leans into the wall, and plants its 'feet' firmly on the floor. In doing so it amplifies its verticality and declares the floor fair game for Painting. The wall is not just a structural necessity, it is a concrete component of the work, part of the visual field - as is the floor

and the boundary between the two.

Comparably, Jo McGonigal's '*Kiss, Kiss, Bang, Bang*' (page 24) presents itself as an architectural feature and part 'mini-stage' for the enactment of a spatially plotted, visual-field. This 'theatre-on-legs' commands your attention from a distance and like meeting a friend in a crowded room, it must be looked up at constantly, 'on approach'.

Della Gooden, 2020

*Conclusions drawn on these pages
are not the only ones; the artists in
H_A_R_D_P_A_I_N_T_I_N_G_x2 tread many
different paths. There is much more to say...*

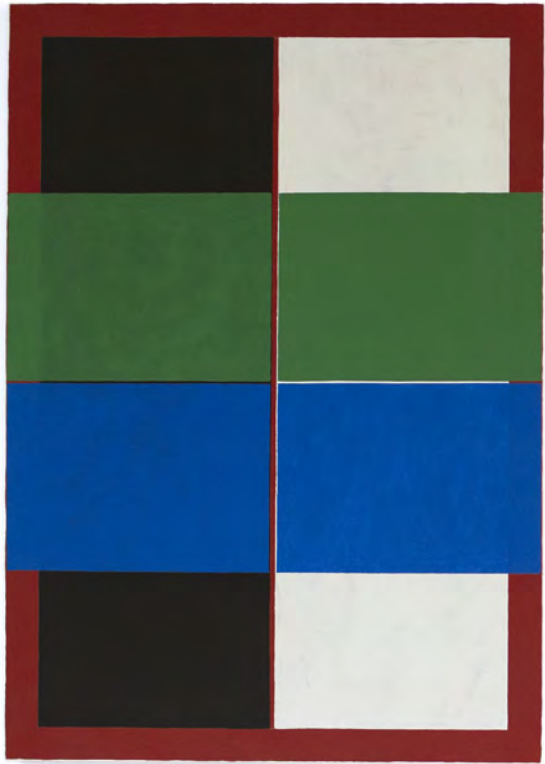
Rana Begum

No. 948 2019

paint on powder-coated aluminum

125 x 95 x 5 cm





Richard Bell
Equivalences #16, 17
(2-part painting) 2019
oil on linen
59.5 cm x 42 cm



Katrina Blannin Sequence #2/4 (P) 2019 acrylic on flax linen 70 cm x 280 cm (comprises 4 panels)

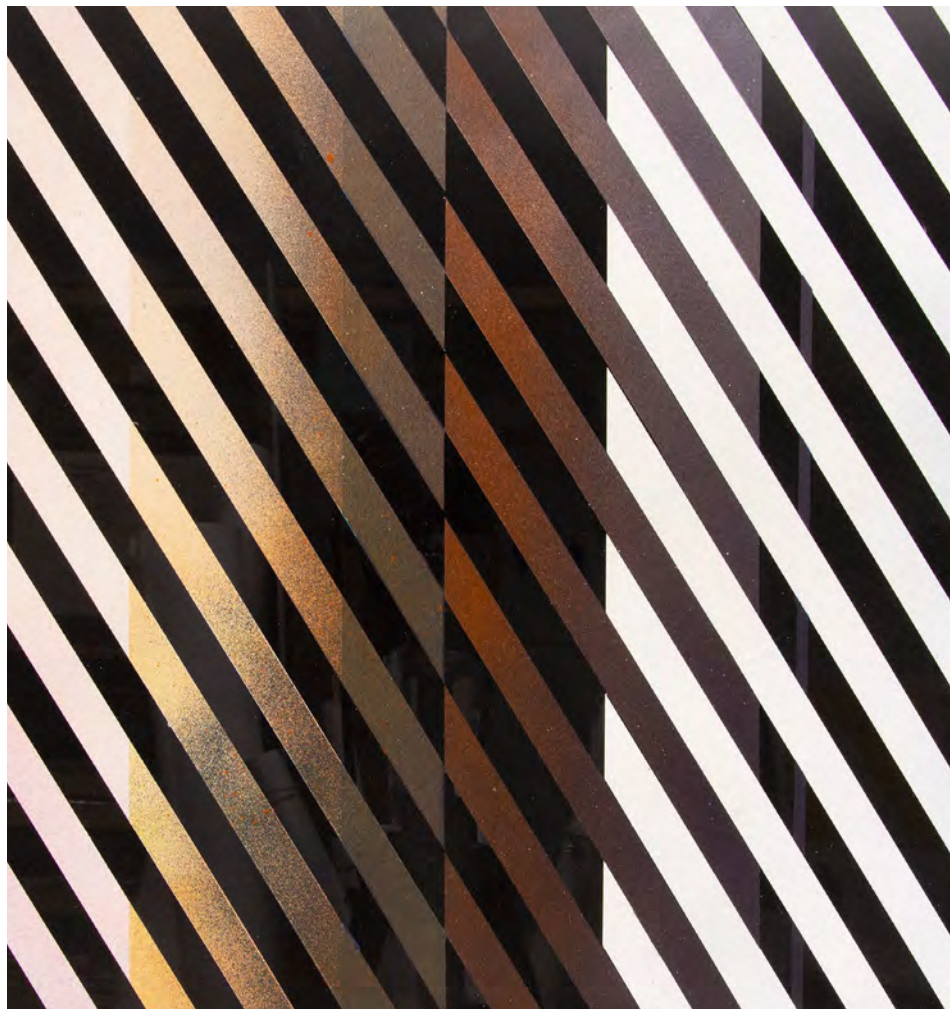
Ian Boutell

Slipslideshow 2019

acrylic on perspex

49 x 49 cm

photo credit: Bernard G Mills



John Carter

Chapiteau: Three Identical Shapes 2017
acrylic on plywood
51 x 40 x 4.5 cm





Philip Cole

Slider 5 2019
coloured polyester resins on
ply
60 x 60 x 3.5 cm
photo credit: Bernard G Mills



Biggs and Collings

Night 2019
oil on canvas
100 x 50 cm

photo credit: Bernard G Mills

The Ceremony of Looking

I am grateful to the mechanical workings of bone, tendon and muscle that enable me to move my head and look up at the world. I am in awe of the way my eyes can process a scene, using all the wonders that biology and physics explain so competently. *Looking up*, however, is more than an accomplishment of moving parts; it is a wonder. My body is not a machine, it is unpredictable, soft and restless. My eyes don't collect data like a camera, for a specified outcome or project; the purpose is mysterious, the process chaotic and messy.

All the disciplined artistry of the most talented filmmakers must filter a vision through a hard lens. The tilting angles, sweeping vistas and collaged perspectives must, in the end, endure the constraints imposed by the fixed view of a static, rectangular screen. This is a second-hand, compromised vision, whereas my eyes get the *virgin view*. I get the live-feed. An uncut, streamed, 360-degree, surround-sound spectacle.

In an essay a few years ago I noted: "*Perception and the imagination attend to the vertical, visual field with hope, anticipation and curiosity. The rewards (and disappointments) can be immense, and consequently, looking down isn't half so exciting as looking up*".¹

I am reminded that when I wrote that, I was musing on the idea that Painting is an inevitable consequence of being alive, of being human. I reasoned that if *looking up* is as functionally inseparable from *being*, as my foot feels functionally inseparable from my leg, then paintings will get made, just as steps will get taken.

I might look up on a whim or because of a need; sometimes there is no reason I can truthfully provide, and once the decision is made, there's a distinct lack of awareness of a plan for how to go about it. A lot is hidden by instinct and the speed at which things occur.

What I do know, is that I am built to *look up... around... in (choose your own adverbial preposition)* and I most willingly absorb the panoramas and the peripherals, the foci and all the haze there is to be had. Human 'on-auto', I suppose, but a dispassionate experience is inconceivable. As long as I have this moving, feeling, thinking body, all my senses will collaborate to explore a material and labyrinthine world. The never-ending task of calculating it, making sense of it, is made more difficult by the inheritances of culture and convention, of habit and personal judgement.

It seems inevitable that looking up will generate yet more reason to look up. New 'objects' for our attention will get made, whether we profit from the bounty or not. Look up and you might speak to a stranger on the bus. Look up and you may have a fight with your boss; or give money to a busker; or make a baby... *Sometimes looking up results in the making of a painting.*

When making anything in the material sense, it is worth remembering that the Earth weighs exactly the same as it always did (*minus* the space-station and all the satellites; *plus* the odd meteorite and the moon rocks collected in the 60's) so our only option is to re-arrange what is already here. It is therefore quite a striking thought that Tess Jaray has re-arranged paint, wood and canvas to make '*One Hundred Years (Purple)*' (page 22) and that Morrissey & Hancock re-arranged

what is already here, to make such a thing as *'Rotational Drawing'* (page 20). These paintings don't cause the Earth to be heavier, but our world is enlarged none-the-less.

Once made, a painting becomes another thing amongst many. It can acquire status, get singled-out as something worthy of our special attention from what is an already crowded, visual field. Whether pinned to the fridge or hung in a museum, the intention is for it to be seen free of distraction, and clear of the cluttered world it was made in, and which it inhabits. Viewing a painting becomes ceremony; a 'Private View' could be called ritual... and the emphasis, even in the language we use to describe it, is on the eyes.

Vision it seems, of all my senses, is the 'super-sense'. It explores the greatest distances, brings me the tops of mountains, the horizon and the stars. It shows me things that are way out of my reach, and places that I will possibly never go. But it is because of the things that **are** in my reach and because of the places that I **have** been, that I am able to make any sense of the far away images my eyes show me. Vision is a dependent. It is an oversight (no pun intended!) to assume that a painting, 'only needs a pair of eyes!'

Take *'Untitled'* (page 16) by Stig Evans. The yellow and green paint is 'form fermenting' - voluminous and cloud-like shapes are materialising and appear to be growing edges. I detect that the right-hand shape floats forward of the other, by just a little bit. I don't believe the spatiality of this painting and the subtleties I experience could be appreciated, if I wasn't obliged to look with more than just my eyes. I look with everything I have available to me. I move, I think, I talk, I remember.

There are ways of looking that have evolved according to what is being looked at and so there are different experiences to be had. With a book I am usually seated or laying down and I wouldn't move much beyond keeping a comfortable position and turning the page - it is solitary, and intimate. At the cinema I sit in the dark with other people and silently look up at a communal screen. I'm predominantly immobile and have to look straight ahead all the time. The moving images presented to me jump from one point of view, to another - a physical impossibility at odds with my stationary position.

Compare this with my *'virgin view'*. When I first saw *'No. 948'* (page 6) by Rana Begum I was so conscious of how much I moved: stepping from one side to the other, back and forth, back and forth. Sometimes I stood still, only to lean my upper body or head to the left or the right. The different relationships only occur as a result of moving. Put simply, if you don't move, you don't see the work.

If the curators were to position a video camera overhead to record over time, the movements of all visitors looking at just this one work, a pattern would emerge. Plotted on graph paper it would translate as multiple arcing lines, radiating out from a central point (where the work is situated) and then smaller, zig-zagging lines representing sharp changes of direction back and forth.... a ceremony of looking.

Della Gooden, 2020

¹ 2018 *'Transforming Surfaces'* (Essay: *'Surface-Things'*)
published by Arthouse1 London



Deb Covell

Blue Pleat 2018

acrylic paint

18 x 30 cm

photo credit: Cal Carey

Stig Evans

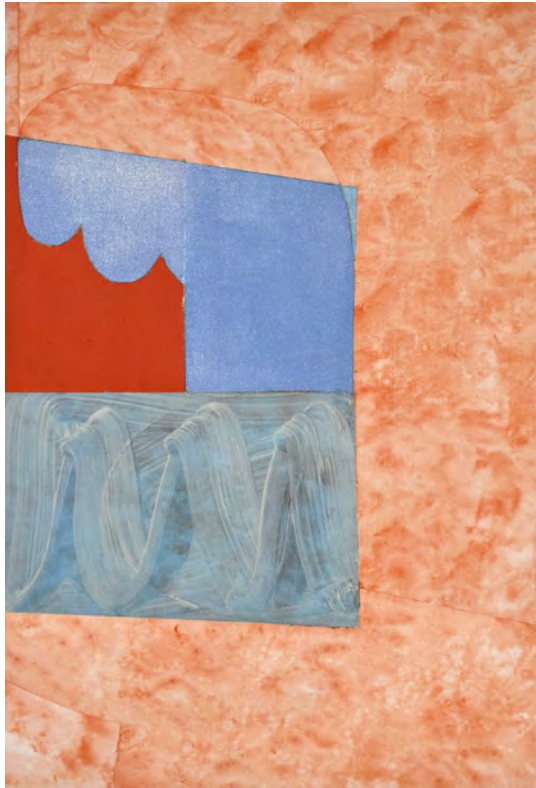
Untitled 2019

acrylic on polyester

110 x 110 cm

photo credit: Bernard G Mills





Catherine Ferguson

Cieco 2019
acrylic on Birch Ply
41.5 x 26.5cm



L'Arresto del Tempo 2019
acrylic on Birch Ply
41.5 x 26.5cm

Della Gooden

As 2020
white gesso, acrylic & graphite
(directly on the wall)
with 3d wooden structure
195 x 85 x 5 cm



Richard Graville

Red Banded 2019
flashe on canvas
80 x 50 cm



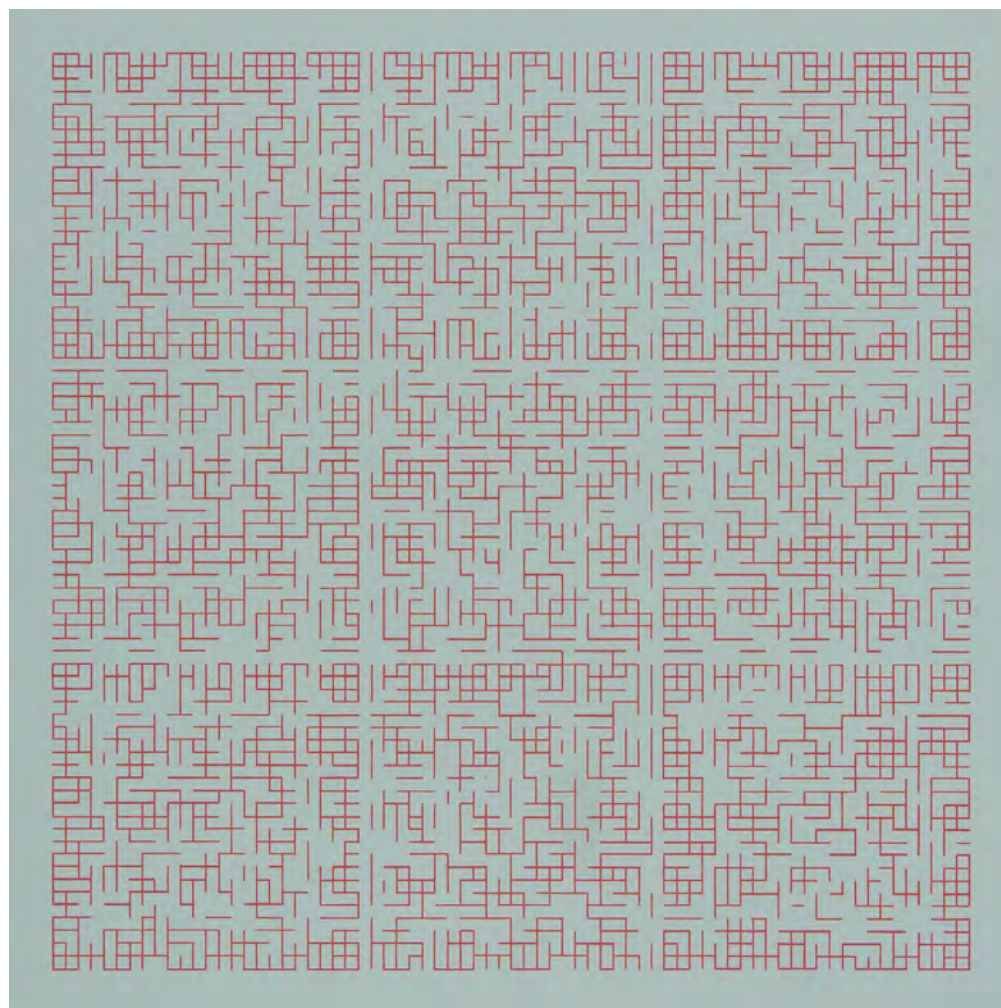
Morrissey & Hancock

Rotational Drawing 2019

pen and ink on panel

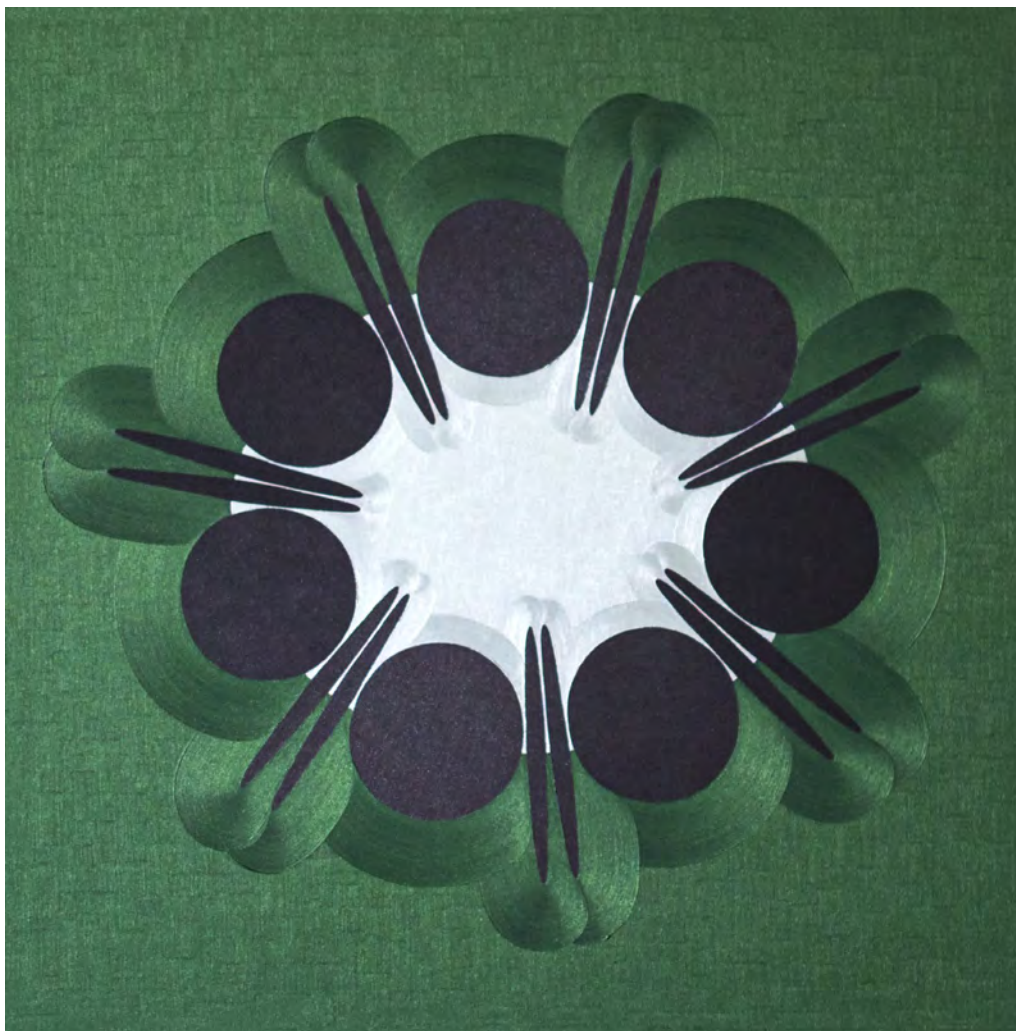
50 x 50 cm

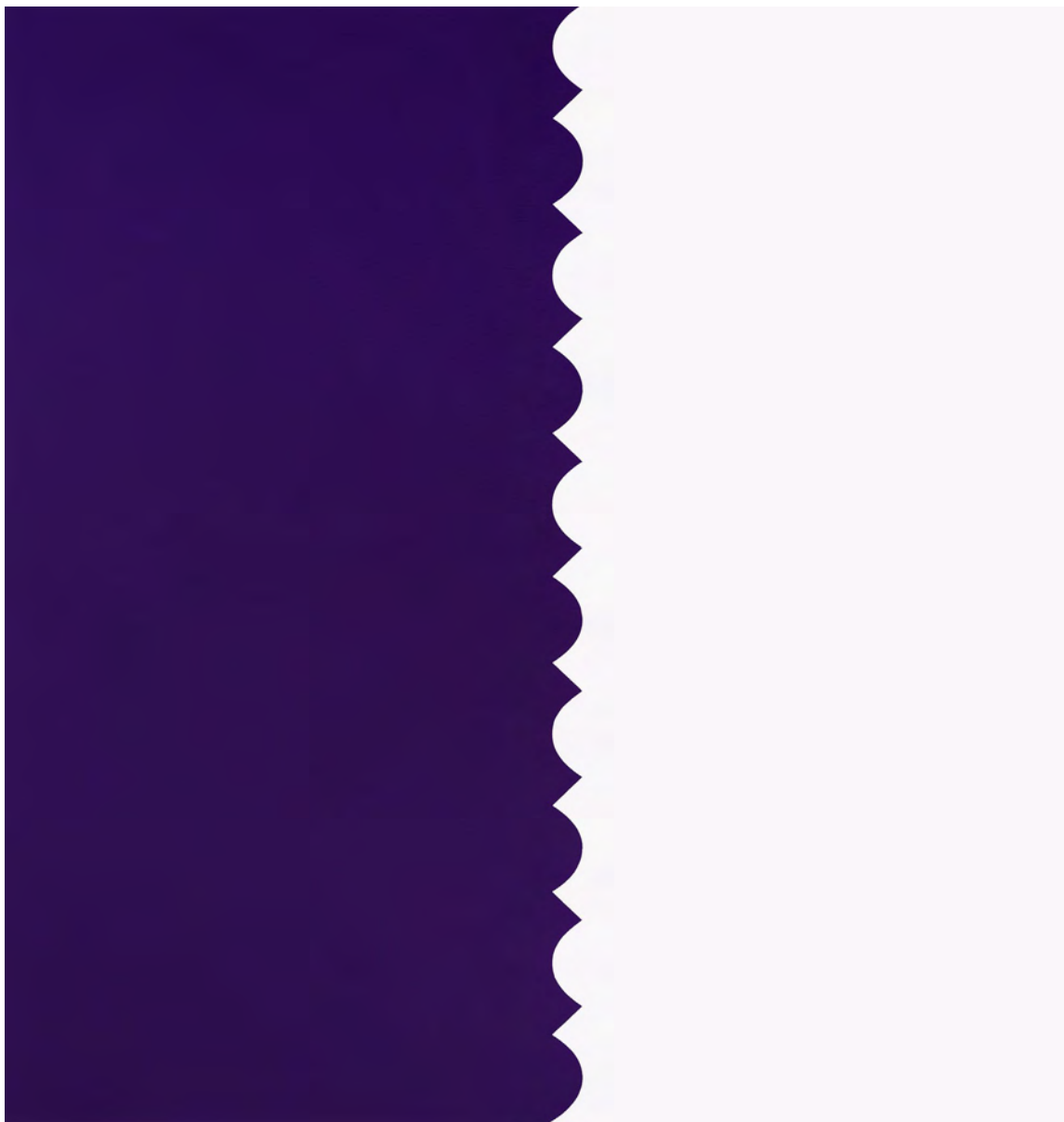
photo credit: Bernard G Mills



Jane Harris

Out of Bounds 2017
oil on wood
40 x 40 cm





Tess Jaray

One Hundred Years [Purple] 2017
acrylic on linen
151 x 142 cm



Jo McGonigal

Kiss Kiss, Bang, Bang 2019

plywood, backing board, steel,
paint

balloon, latex, cord, putty, neon

photo credit: Bernard G Mills



Mali Morris

Touch 2016
acrylic on canvas
40 x 50cm

Inside the Outside: a slice of bright space

It's difficult to envisage our wild, nomadic life before the existence of architecture, perhaps even before the cave, when there was no concept of an *outside* because we had not yet built an *inside*.

When the walls finally went up, we felt safer in our new enclosed spaces but we mourned the loss of some of the things the wild had previously provided. Then, Bingo! The invention of the window. Sunlight and fresh air were let in. We were also, of course, happily delivered of a view - but there is more...

Imagine a late winter sun approaching the horizon. With its diminishing powers it can now only dimly light the room but some of this remaining light is concentrated and channelled to form a bright rectangular, window-shaped 'plane' on the dull interior wall. Think about that vertically hanging slice of bright space. We must have noted it. We must have experienced a 'high' on seeing such an other-worldly presence inside our homes. Whatever we had discovered, it was a new and curious object for our imaginations.

Implying that the early window was responsible for our first concrete experience of something approaching 'the pictorial' is perhaps, not new, I'm not sure. However, I am sure that a material aperture cut into the wall can have impact, meaning and sensuality beyond any practical application - and that is a thought revisited when I was recently flicking through a book and saw a reproduction of Rene Magritte's 'La Condition Humaine' - a painting about Painting; about looking, reality and difference.

'La Condition Humaine' shows a landscape painting propped on its easel, in front of a window. The 'landscape' on the easel partially overlaps and lines-up with the 'landscape' it depicts, - a scene through a window. All of this of course, is framed by the actual edge of the painting. 'La Condition Humaine' neatly diagrams concepts of 'frame' and the phrase 'a painting within a painting' is often used to describe a 'theme' of Magritte's at this time. More importantly here, it is a reminder of the open window as a metaphor for Painting itself (a connection not lost on Leon Battista Alberti as long ago as 1436, in his influential treatise 'On Painting').

Paintings in this exhibition, such as 'Slipslideshift' and 'Blushing Phantom' by Ian Boutell and Richard Graville respectively, offer a direct engagement with Painting as sensual, material 'object'. Extricated of any obligation to narrative and representation, they embrace a 'psycho-physical' realm. 'Touch' by Mali Morris is a contemporary 'slice of bright space' - and in curating this exhibition, it was a painting that first prompted these thoughts. It exists not within an optical (and distancing) aesthetic, but one more governed by the forces of living and dreaming.

Della Gooden, 2020



Jost Münster

left: **muN4ro** 2019

right: **5yS*nt** 2019

both: acrylic, card, canvas 42 x 30cm

Inside the Outside: *saving up for the future*

When Michael Caine looked up, noticed the camera and walked towards it saying: "...Well, are you all settled in? Right, we can begin...." I remember thinking, 'Hang on a minute, you've just had sex in that car. You aren't supposed to know I'm here.' The film that 'gazed back', was 'Alfie' and its makers made me a silent witness to events they knew I wouldn't like. They anticipated a relationship with me, and yet 'Alfie' was made before I was born.

That same odd feeling that something is reaching out from an impossible place, is also had with Mantegna's 'Lamentation of Christ'. This is a painting of Christ laid out, after the crucifixion; the soles of his feet face the viewer and his body recedes away. Some say it disappoints because 'technically' the feet should be bigger and the head smaller, but whether an artist has, or hasn't employed the mathematical rules of perspective doesn't matter.

What does matter, is that when I viewed 'Lamentation of Christ' it cared where I was, and it knew it was being regarded. The kneeling mourners depicted on the left, knew nothing. Busy with their grief, they will never know anything. Christ?... well in the frozen moment of the narrative, he is dead - so, he didn't know anything either. The painting, on the other hand, was working me. In fact, it worked the room. Anyone there with me, on my side of the picture-plane, would have been susceptible to its efforts, could become part of this mournful scene; feel hollowed out and hopeless. I am not saying the painting has consciousness, but that 'Lamentation of Christ' contains latent energy which is released when the viewer

flicks the switch. This energy was installed circa 1480 when the painting was made, and by the invention and labours of its maker, Mantegna.

There is a lot to enjoy about the blue, gloopy surface of 'Blue Pleat' (page 15) by Deb Covell. The paint, now dry, mimics its previously fluid state which is incongruous to its upright positioning on the wall... but there is something else; I think there is something encased within it, something *literally* inside. Probably, I imagine, it is just an old, folded strip of canvas but like the quiet beating heart of a hibernating dormouse, I won't know for sure. The seeds of my curiosity were sown the day 'Blue Pleat' was made - the day I think Covell placed something inside her work that she knew no one would ever see.

With a surface so smooth, so fine and free of blemish, no more can be asked of 'Slider 5' (page 11) by Philip Cole. It is becalmed perfection. On first looking, there is no trace of labour - it looks to have arrived effortlessly in the world, whole and perfectly formed. However, the disparity between the fine surface of the front and the sides that have drips and spills down them, is climactic.

The front of the painting is a flawless performance and the sides are like a backstage door to its inner workings, *Are the drips the remnants of a process? Did something overflow?* Like the word 'Brighton' in a stick of Brighton Rock, *does colour and shape go all the way through, right to the back?* The switch has been flicked. In the studio, Cole charged the painting up with contradiction and that decision triggers intrigue in the viewer about his surfaces and studio processes.

Mantegna's 'Lamentation of Christ' was purposed in its

provocation of a sense of sadness and loss, but the sensations, thoughts and feelings that are triggered when we engage with a painting, the energy that is released, is sometimes to do with harmony, balance and well-being.

Katrina Blannin's *'Sequence #2/4 (P)'* (page 8) and John Carter's *'Chapiteau: Three Identical Shapes'* (page 10) both provoke gentle realisation, a slow, delicious dawning of thought - and the feeling that you don't want to achieve a concrete understanding, because if you do, it will be about loss, it will be over.

When Stig Evans and I saw *'Chapiteau'* in John Carter's studio, I could see that the three geometrical shapes of which it is formed, have differences. They are each a different colour, each a different size. However, the power and buzz of experiencing this work lay in what I couldn't see, and probably wouldn't have ever seen, if the artist hadn't later revealed it; all three shapes are geometrically identical.

This was an invitation to flick a second switch. What was previously in operation below my consciousness, was now out in the open. I spent the rest of the visit checking that the information I had been given was actually true.

Similarly, I would never have identified the circles in Katrina Blannin's work as being the same size as beer mats, side plates, pizza bases and such. I suspect she might argue that actually, it wouldn't matter too much if no one did. None-the-less, in the background, somewhere, on some level, this fact is working me. It is sourced in the half-noticed, incidentals of life and powered by a shared knowledge of the world.

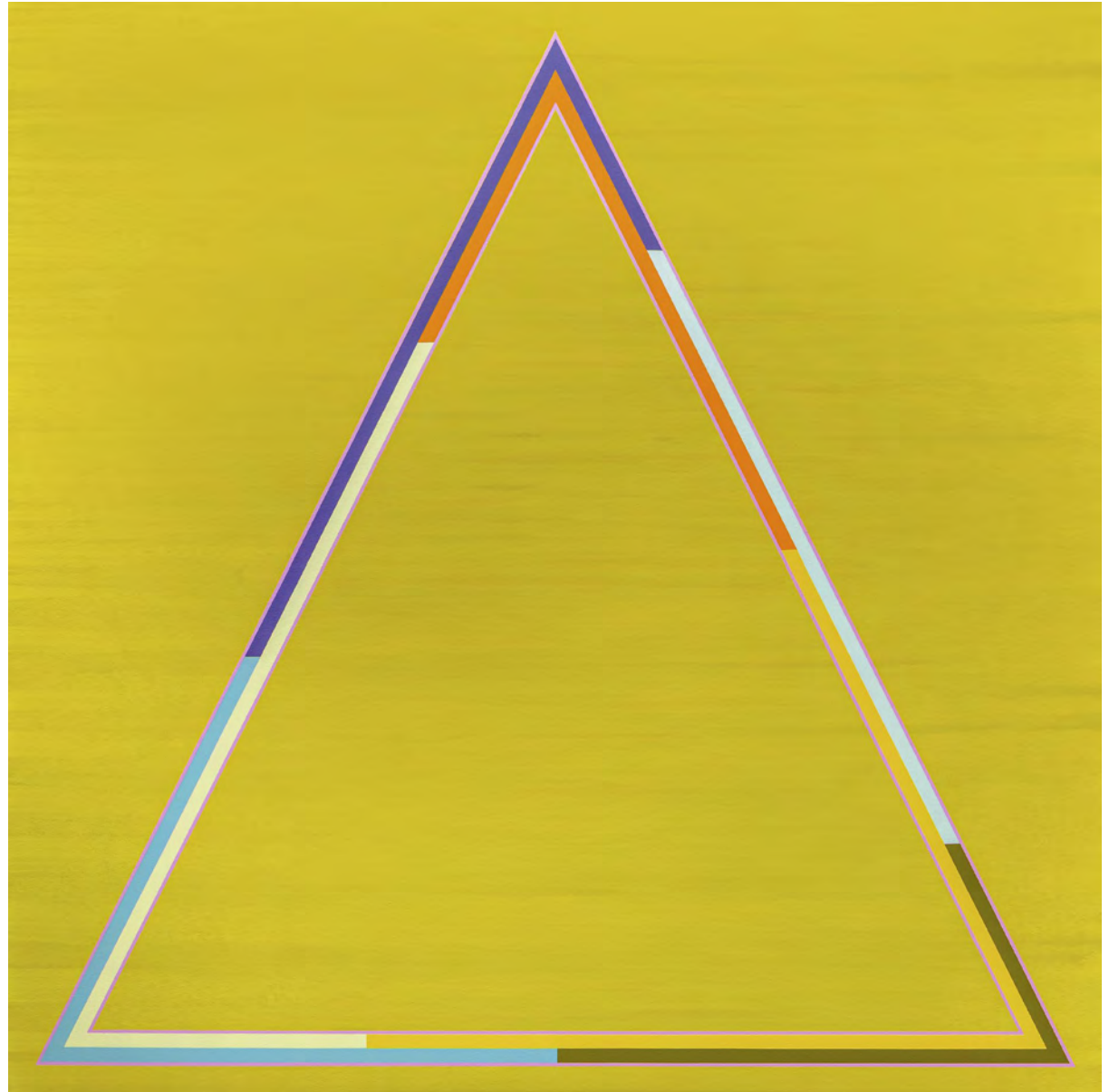
Della Gooden, 2020

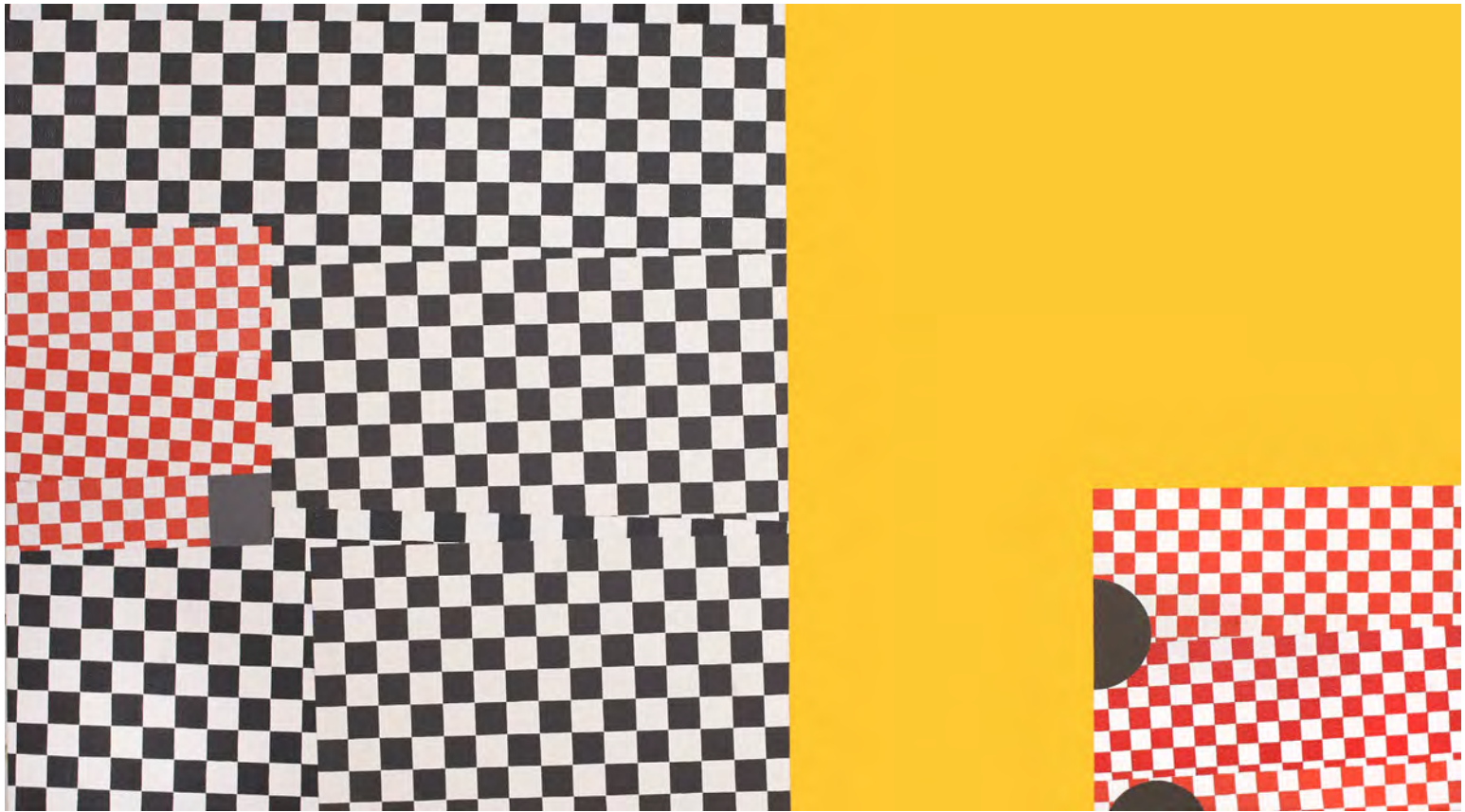


Patrick O'Donnell

10 planes 2019
acrylic and gesso on plywood,
hinges, dimensions variable
approx 35 x 70 x 2 - 17cm
photo credit: Bernard G Mills

Carol Robertson
Colour Map - Yellow 2019
oil on canvas
175 x 175cm





Daniel Sturgis Not Fixed 2019 acrylic on canvas 76.3 x 137.2 cm

Lars Wolter

Cut-Off [Enzianblau] 2019
polyurethane paint on mdf
92 x 62.5 x 6.5 cm





Jessie Yates

Untitled 1 2018
oil on stitched canvas
90 x 120cm

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at Phoenix Art Space, Brighton

11 January - 1 March 2020

An exhibition in two parts

Part 1: 11 January – 2 February

Part 2: 8 February – 1 March

Exhibition curators:

Ian Boutell, Philip Cole,

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