Painting About Painting

Simmons & Simmons
September 2014 – March 2015
Foreword

Through its art collection, Simmons & Simmons is committed to collecting quality work by young artists based in the communities in which we work. This adds an extra dimension to our working lives, knowing that the artists whose work we encounter on a daily basis might share the same urban context.

This exhibition shows work both by established artists and recent graduates, many living and working in London, and many of whom trained here – some very close to our CityPoint home, at the Cass School (formerly the London Guildhall University) – a short walk from us here in Moorgate.

This exhibition is presented by a member of the firm’s Art Network, our art partner David Stone. The Art Network’s committed members ensure that the firm’s art collection presents an opportunity to engage with some of the most interesting aspects of contemporary art and culture, not only for the firm’s clients, partners and staff, but also for those in the wider community.

Our commitment to corporate responsibility is a deeply embedded part of the firm’s ethos. It’s therefore pleasing that throughout this show, access will be provided to university and college groups and community partners, as well as staff and students from Frederick Bremer School in Walthamstow, with whom we also partner on our Young Talent Programme.

The exhibition is an exploration of the attention and opprobrium that painting can attract within contemporary art – I am sure you will find work that piques your interest or otherwise engages your attention.

Colin Passmore
Senior Partner, Simmons & Simmons
October 2014
Painting About Painting
Installation view
Painting About Painting

by David Stone, Art Partner, Simmons & Simmons

Why painting? Why now? The stratospheric prices recent painting has achieved in the global art marketplace confirm that painting has maintained its presence in contemporary production and its interest and complexity for today’s audiences. Painting seems to have survived the oft-repeated historical arguments – from the ‘paragon’ argument of the Renaissance (which of painting or sculpture was the superior art form), through the ‘death of painting’ fears of the nineteenth century after the inception of photography, to the purported ‘post-medium’ condition of our time. This exhibition does not attempt to bolster support for a medium as such, but it does venture to suggest that work that touches on painting as a practice, either confronting it head-on or looking at it awry, has much to offer those interested in contemporary art.

Unlike photography, since the early twentieth century painting has not entertained the need to produce an image with any great resemblance to the observable world. Yet the ubiquity of lens-based images in our digital lives has led not only to an increasingly frenzied pursuit of the visual at large (camera phones, social networks), but lens-based images have become a permanent way of, or even substitute for, seeing. In this sense, seeing itself is less visible – this accounts for part of the pleasure and complexity that painting continues to provide. It is a jolt beyond representation.

The work presented here, although centred on artists mostly trained and practising in London, also reflects a global history of Modernist painting of the last hundred years, distributed as it can be now through new technologies, of transport, communication and museum culture. Here we have works that play with traditional association of paint practice – of the rectangle, of colour, of the use of paint, the object, of other paintings, of the finite world contained within the frame. Many of the works selected pay close attention to that which has gone before, regarding both the weight of that history and the demand of Modernism to ‘make it new’, and of our contemporary condition, to ‘make it now... how?’.

Contemporary art need not be delivered in easily digestible messages – where the artist is positioned as a child-like entertainer, seeking to find ways of delivering social fascinations in entertainment-focused environments. Much contemporary painting practice lies outside this. So it would seem an opportunity for a corporate collection such as ours, to mount an examination that focuses on the subtle relation between works that are linked not just thematically or with a common material thread, but bound by a shared history of where the artists have studied and practised, developing global art whilst regarding other artists working in their local context.

All the works here seem convinced of the state of exception within which painting exists; that painting practice does engaging, sometimes profound things for the artist and for the viewer that other media do not attempt. Contemporary art is invested often in the social or biographical, but whatever else painting attempts to conjure, it also conjures itself.
Hurvin Anderson

Skinny Dipping, 1999

Oil on canvas

160 x 246 cm

The Simmons & Simmons collection
Hurvin Anderson studied at Wimbledon School of Art and graduated MA from the Royal College of Arts. He was recently the subject of solo exhibitions at Ikon Gallery, Tate Britain, and the Studio Museum Harlem. His painting, ‘Skinny Dipping’, 1999 was acquired for the Simmons & Simmons collection in 2002.

In Hurvin Anderson’s painting, *Skinny Dipping*, 1999, the use of the splash – the eruption of spray in the water against the flat colour – recalls that used by Hockney in his Pop painting *A Bigger Splash*, 1967. There is perhaps also the same sense of juxtaposition of worlds for both artists, between a familiar Britain and the appeal of another sunnier clime. In Anderson’s painting there is a sentimental appeal; the bright colours, lush vegetation and leisured scene are redolent of the Caribbean – a site of Anderson’s longing and sense of displacement – while the swimming pool used as a source for this painting is here in Britain. What is characteristic here for Anderson is the view ‘from the outside’, at some distance, rather than actively participating in the events depicted. A painting very similar in composition and from the same period, *Audition II*, 2001, is painted in an entirely different palette – the gunmetal greys and blues of urban Britain, and the swimming pool is entirely enclosed with strong masonry uprights and glazing obscuring the view beyond.

Hurvin Anderson’s work consciously draws on a history of figuration within painting, in its capacity to evoke personal history and sentiment. Growing up as he did in a British Caribbean community, Anderson makes work that figures tensions and associations between the world in which he grew up and the world of the Caribbean with which he has less actual experience (he has since spent some time in Trinidad), but which exerts a powerful presence on him. In figuring this association in his paintings he plays on an identity both experienced by him and projected by others as a British West Indian.

Anderson uses observable reality tweaked towards graphic illustration whilst employing painterly technique – matching dense and colourful paint layers to the lush tropical appeal of many of his settings. He isolates shapes to produce blocks of colour; these are not the visually flat surfaces of the commercial world, but a paint surface built slowly and carefully. The paintings themselves might be regarded as being caught between one place and another, in their use of the observable world, but which is then interrupted by strong geometries – planes of colour or flattened patterning borrowed from photographic or observed sources.
Jacopo Dal Bello

*Corpo su Spazio*, 2014

Acrylic, oil paint, gloss paint, pencil and thread on linen

180 x 120 cm

Courtesy of the artist
Jacopo Dal Bello is a recent graduate of the Cass School, London Metropolitan University (2014) whose triptych ‘Quattro Momenti su Tutto il Mulla’ is included in the Simmons & Simmons collection.

This work, *Corpo su Spazio*, 2014, contains Dal Bello’s signature reflections on painting as language and meaning including his suturing (where perhaps semiology meets materiality) of the canvas, the inclusion of the black/void partition and his usual deft handling of the work of other artists – in this case a nod to the erotic distortion of the body of Hans Bellmer, the architectural framing and paintwork of Francis Bacon, and the notation of Cy Twombly. This is the first work by Dal Bello which employs sized linen, giving the work a rich tone.

The emphasis on materiality in the current painting context owes as great a debt to the Italian Arte Povera or Arte Informale movements as it does to a rise of interest in philosophical materialism within art theory. Growing up in Italy’s Veneto region, the materiality of painting was ever-present for Jacopo Dal Bello in the work of Alberto Burri, whose work is embedded in an exploration of the material.

Combined with this is an interest in the work of linguist Antonio Gramsci and the semiotician Umberto Eco (particularly the openness of possibilities of meaning that a work initiates) so that Dal Bello collapses various painterly styles to produce (in painting terms) a lattice of language and notation, including that of numbers and words (that are themselves imprecise or undetermined in their meaning). By appropriating elements from different contexts – such as popular culture, art iconography, and found materials – Dal Bello poses questions about the nature of visual rhetoric. Contradictions emerge in the relations of the disparate elements; the visual signifiers gain a certain independence from their usual logic whilst retaining something of their status as products of history.
Alice Browne

*Villa of the Mysteries*, 2013

Oil on canvas

110 x 92 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Limoncello Gallery, London
Alice Browne graduated from Wimbledon College of Art in 2009. Recent solo shows include exhibitions at Prosjektrom Normanns, Norway, Limoncello Gallery in London, and Annarumma Gallery in Naples. She is represented by Limoncello Gallery.

This painting, Villa of the Mysteries, 2013, refers to the painted room in a villa in Pompeii plundered by Pablo Picasso one of his Dora Marr portraits. But in Browne’s hand the allusion is more elusive. The mysteries, those of the sacred muses of the arts, are absent in Browne’s painting – what remains is the collapse of the rectilinear space to be found in Roman wall painting. The casualness of Browne’s line and construction here offers no chance of supporting the Roman decoration, and we are left adrift in the pure desire of the vivid flaming colour of (what here cannot now be) the background. The red pigment from the fresco in Pompeii (Pozzuoli Red after the nearby town where it is sourced) is reconfigured here as a post-Pop poster colour rendered with an abandon worthy of the Dionysian mystery cult after which the Pompeian Villa, and this painting, is named.

Part of the allure of Alice Browne’s painting lies in what can be read as a resistance to the precepts of Art Concret which insisted that painting be free from sentiment and not refer to forms found in the observable world. Browne’s forms utilise geometry, but not as we know it. Here it is rendered personal, in intimate gestures we can follow, but with a muteness of meaning that allows us to enter some way into the painting, but not resolve exactly where it is we might stand.

A consciousness of space, particularly of the space of painting, is ever-present; not just to the rectangle of painting, but to this rectangle, on this painting. The bright colour and transparencies of the gestures reflect not a traditional paint palette, but rather it is as if they had been transcribed from poster-colour marker pen drawings on white paper. This has the effect of displacing the usual authority from which painting has historically spoken, and lends an air of intimacy to the works.
Andrea Büttner
*Untitled, 2013*
Glass
55 x 45 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Hollybush Gardens, London
Andrea Büttner lives and works in London and Berlin, and exhibits internationally, including recently at Documenta in Kassel and Tate Britain’s BP Spotlight: Andrea Büttner. She is represented by Hollybush Gardens.

This work Untitled, 2013, was originally shown as part of a series of five variant colour combinations made in hand blown glass. As with much of Büttner’s work, the installed context is particularly important, and the interdependency of one work with another part of its intended reception. Whilst not possible here, other works in the exhibition might serve to work in sympathy with it. Whilst paint is not employed in this ‘painting’, the use of colour in the rectangular format is an obvious nod to painting, and thus a work of this kind sits in the expanded painting field. One might look to painter Gerhardt Richter’s use of grey glass plates in his work of 1984 for the echo of such work.

Andrea Büttner is an artist whose work ranges across many different media and whose practice contains a ‘post-medium’ quality, with its resistance to a single work’s autonomy – the Modernist idea promoted by Clement Greenberg (following Paul Cézanne’s assertions) that the work succeeds or fails in terms of itself rather than its context or its commitment to genre. So in Büttner’s practice a video work might be shown with specifically designed furniture with an uncertain connection to woodcuts nearby.

This is not just an aesthetic understanding, but is part of an interest in unwinding authority structures in favour of the hidden or quiet – ‘littleness’ is the term she prefers. For painting (and Greenberg was speaking in terms particularly of painting), this asks us to question the boundaries of our experience of the work, something underlined in the seminal work on painting by Jacques Derrida, The Truth in Painting, where the boundary of meaning and delineation of authority of the edge of the painting into its mount or frame is porous, where meaning flows in from the outside as much as from the painting.
Maria Chevska

*From the Diary of a Fly [Parts 3] No (vi), 2013*

Oil on canvas

76 x 61 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Mummery+Schnelle
**Maria Chevska** studied at the Byam Shaw School of Art (now part of Central St Martin’s/University of the Arts) and was awarded the Abbey Scholarship at the British School at Rome. Her recent solo exhibitions include Vane in Newcastle, Mummery+Schnelle in London and Modernism in San Francisco, and recent group shows include at Mo Space, Manila, and Equator Art Projects, Singapore. She is represented by Mummery+Schnelle.

This painting, *From the Diary of a Fly [Parts 3] No (vi)*, 2013, from the series of the same name, takes Béla Bartók’s similarly titled piano work which focuses on a fly’s attempts to escape its predicament. Considering the music alongside the transitions of focus and scale prevalent in Franz Kafka’s stories *Metamorphosis* and *Josephine the Singer*, Chevska manipulates visual fragments, distorting and exaggerating. In this series, visuals are appropriated from Russian icons and propaganda posters.

Maria Chevska’s works are decidedly literary in their associations. This is not dead intellectual reference on her part, but rather an attempt to synthesise in painting a matrix of narrative, experience, space and action that are present in other arts. There is no final image to be achieved, but rather the process of ‘becoming’ in the paintings is important. We trace the action of painting and overpainting as the surface takes form, and in this, a fusion of form and idea.

As with other painters in this exhibition, there is puzzling through of the role of space and our perception of it as it enters the pictorial frame of the work. We are not left with firm ground with which to command the view; the viewer is displaced by the odd angles and perspectives. Similarly we are left uncertain in our apprehension of her sources and visual allusions, calling into question the certainty with which we might encounter the world, and finding in this an equivalence of seeing and experience between abstract geometries and figuration.
Dexter Dalwood

Washington Crossing the Delaware, 2013

Oil on canvas
150 x 207 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, London and Hong Kong
Dexter Dalwood graduated from Central St Martin’s and the MA at the Royal College of Art. He has been the subject of a retrospective at Tate St Ives, 2010, when he was also shortlisted for the Turner Prize, and at the Kunsthaus Centre d’art, Centre PasquArt, Biel, in 2013. He is represented by Simon Lee Gallery, London and Hong Kong.

This painting, Washington Crossing the Delaware, 2013, is named after a painting in the Metropolitan Museum, picturing Washington’s decisive action against opposition forces as he crosses the Delaware River full of ice. In Dalwood’s painting we catch only the reflection of the flag of the USA from the original painting, floating as the boat was amongst a sea of ice. The central band of the painting appears wreckage-like, but the source actually relies on a de Kooning-esque painting – from a bombastic era of American painting. Yet this painting has been cooled in colour terms, matching the frozen quality of the heroic painting of the title. We are left floating too, wondering if the era of heroic painting could ever be revisited. Part critique perhaps, but the multiplicity of associations are also embedded in paint practice, where the meaning does not settle on a single conclusion.

Using collaged image sources, Dexter Dalwood produces work with regards to the practice of ‘history’ paintings – painting in a way the history of our day. With an origin as a Pop practice, Dalwood, with his flat plains of poster colour and visual preservation of the collage ‘cuts’, extends the collage possibilities of artists such as Richard Hamilton or James Rosenquist’s collaged critique of commercial culture. In Dalwood’s hands the topics are drawn from both popular cultural references and beyond to more serious critique; topics have ranged from Kurt Cobain’s bedroom to the death of scientist David Kelly. Partly this can be seen as a painting practice responding to the circulation of images in popular media that don’t provide enough correspondence to actual experience.

There are also meanings to be found that arise from within painting practice itself, and Dalwood’s hybrid constructions not only reference other paintings but also the critical positions of the painters themselves, such as Paul Cézanne, and the historical commentators on them. Whilst there is not the demand on Dalwood’s part for us to decode these paintings ‘correctly’, his process is an informed and involved one that adds complexity to the viewer’s experience.
Peter Davies

Black and White Spirals Painting. 1998

Acrylic on canvas

366 x 229 cm

The Simmons & Simmons collection
Peter Davies graduated from the University of Brighton and from the MA from Goldsmiths’ College. He appeared in ‘Sensation’ at the Royal Academy, and most recently in London in a solo exhibition at The Approach. His painting ‘Black and White Spirals Painting’, 1998, was acquired for the Simmons & Simmons collection in 1999. He is represented by the Approach Gallery.

There is a characteristic playfulness in Davies’ Black and White Spirals Painting, 1998. Massive in scale, it promises to announce itself in the way that the mammoth works of post-war painters attempt, overwhelming the viewer and asserting the autonomy of the work – the painting itself as a world to be reckoned with.

Yet the play in this painting undercuts any pomposity. There is a tension between the hand made of the painting meeting a spiral image borrowed from the word of commercial graphics, which is also a ‘universal’ glyph found in ancient cultures. In collapsing various painting modes – the scale, the use of the Modernist grid, and the visceral effects (in the hypnotic spirals) of Optical artists such as Bridget Riley – Davies instead has created an elusive and critical object with characteristic laconic humour.

There is an irreverence running through Peter Davies’ art that seeks to burst any pretension of art’s most hieratic medium, painting. He has used popular topics of the day and hierarchical lists of celebrity artists in roughly graphed format (The Hot One Hundred, 1997) to parody the referential power that painting is lent through famous association, and the market’s lack of discernment when it comes to artistic value.

There is in his choice of formats an intersection with a history of formalism and Modernism; the grid is a popular format in his work. There is also a skilled execution of the works of Post-Minimalism and Conceptualism, as if Davies is ensuring those historical tropes of value are included in these works that also critique art and painting’s history. Often Davies’ work has been heavy on text, declamatory – promising a truth delivered through an overblown poster format.

There is also a ‘hand-written’ quality to his paintings – that these are personal truths, their domestic quality disrupted by the scale and their public presentation.
Katherine Ellis
_Several Licks, 2014_
Oil on gesso panel
36 x 28.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist
Katherine Ellis, a recent graduate of the Cass School, London Metropolitan University, where she received the prize for painting. She works in London, exhibiting most recently in ‘What Came Paint?’ at Plate Space.

Several Licks, 2014, reveals an incongruous activity of creating and obliterating a coherence. With wide brush marks and soft tones, overlapping patterns are frantically applied on an intimate scale that render the world we know afresh. Awkwardly framed, slipping off the surface into another pictorial plane, the subject is positioned as if we view only one half of a diptych. The painting retains the suggestion of original found imagery and things seen or remembered, utilizing the figurative skeletons of 1950s advertising iconography, vintage photography and children’s book illustrations.

Humour, melancholy and disquiet lie at the forefront of Katherine Ellis’ practice, with the suggestion of a ‘behind the scenes’ encounter into another world. The painting’s mysterious lighting, deep receding space, and sense of loneliness recall the ominous, often surreal settings of Giorgio De Chirico and René Magritte, seeking to disrupt the anticipation of narrative raised by keenly observed figuration.

There is often a sense of figures finding themselves within the making of the painting; the same figure will inhabit a dozen costumes, disguises, rooms or landscapes, whereas others remain solitary, existing solely within a single framework. Where much that we find funny, in life or art, is dark, violent or unforgiving, Katherine Ellis’ painting practice uses humour to challenge the potential of art as a critical instrument for the analysis of social, political and cultural issues.

This ambiguity is brought out in the collapse of earlier tropes within painting, of the geometries of Suprematism, of Pop’s photographic sampling and Action Painting’s brush strokes, plucked out of history in a humorous reversal of the claims of earlier painting.
Mark Francis

*Clones*, 1994

Oil on canvas

137 x 109 cm

The Simmons & Simmons collection
Mark Francis studied at Central St Martin’s and Chelsea School of Art. Part of the Simmons & Simmons collection, his work is also in the collections of Tate, the V&A and the Metropolitan Museum. His work featured in the Sensation exhibition at the Royal Academy.

Clones, 1994, acquired for the Simmons & Simmons collection in 1996, demonstrates Mark Francis’ commitment to microphotography and the filmic ‘wipe’ that Gerhard Richter added to the lexicon of post-war painting. These sperm-like forms and the ‘clones’ of the title evoke the anxiety concerning reproductive technology that was prevalent in the 1990s.

Much of his work uses a restricted palette such as this one, preferring white, black and red as signature colours. This, combined with the vertical ‘grid’ formats, suggests a visuality in part adapted from the posters or communications of a totalitarian state. Certainly the way the cropped image ‘totalizes’ the view has the effect of overwhelming the viewer with its demands; a link is established here to questions of reproductive technology, manipulation (at least of/by technology) and control.

Mark Francis’ work attends to a kind of visuality most notably explored by Gerhard Richter, with questions of the relationship of painting to the photograph. Whereas Richter relies on visual tropes of the lens and archival photography to pose difficult questions of history, for Francis the ‘crop’ of the image brings into play a history of the gestural from Jackson Pollock, whose balanced fields of gesture produce tensions between action and the grid.

For Francis, the possibility of following the action of the gesture is obliterated by the ‘filmic wipe’ of his dry brush on a still active (drying) surface. The incidents within the field (sperm or dot) do not arise spontaneously from the moment of action as in abstract expressionism, but rather are found in the photographic source.

Photographic cropping generally produces a stylisation (rather than abstraction) of the observable, but here Francis seeks images that set up the totalizing quality of the Modernist grid. This evokes not only the alienating quality of technology, but also is suggestive of the condition of painting itself. As found in the work of Richter, painting itself is a technology, one that is always ‘post-photography’ – after the invention and dissemination of photographic images – and painting will remake itself accordingly.
Bernard Frize

*Rosetta*, 1997

Acrylic and resin on canvas

80 x 80 cm

The Simmons & Simmons collection
Bernard Frize’s *Rosetta, 1997*, was acquired for the Simmons & Simmons collection in 1999. Frize is represented in many public collections, including Tate, London and the Pompidou, Paris. In London, he is represented by Simon Lee Gallery.

This work, *Rosetta, 1997*, cannot help but cue in its title the Rosetta Stone resting in the British Museum. About the same size, the stone is famous for what it coded — and revealed — of a lost language. This painting similarly, with its divisions of paint (as the Rosetta Stone divides different languages), unlocks for Frize his project: that of the decoding of the mystery of painting. As with this painting, most of Frize’s work is made horizontally on a table, yet the ‘downward’ motion evident here would speak to a sense of gravity.

Yet as we ‘decode’ it, and say to ourselves ‘this is all it is and this is how it is done’, the vividness of the work and the intensity of the colour has us hankering after the sublime gestures of the abstract expressionists.

Bernard Frize is a direct inspiration for some of the other painters in this exhibition. Keen to cut the idea of ‘the artist genius’ down to size, Frize sought instead to focus on the labour of painting and its materials, rather than the expression of personality or the delivery of message through the image. He seeks to strip painting of its pretensions and amplify the qualities of painting as medium following the diktats of Clement Greenberg. As a result, he does not attempt to determine in advance the result; rather he sets up the conditions to begin and allows the conditions of the paint following this to arrive at an outcome.

He resists a signature look to his work, allowing some differentiation in each series. The decisions made in each painting Frize hopes are transparent to the viewer, such that there is no mystification in the process. Yet the mechanical-industrial aspects of the production bely a certain game played in the intense visuality of his paintings — the demanding compositions and intense colour combinations. It is as if he is teasing us to take the sensory overload these represent and load the experience with something hieratic — only to have him bring us back to the painting.
Neil Gall

*Cast*, 2002-2003

Oil on linen

221 x 306 cm

The Simmons & Simmons collection
Neil Gall studied at Gray’s School of Art and the Slade School of Art and was awarded the Abbey Scholarship at the British School at Rome. He is represented by David Nolan in New York.

In this work, *Cast*, 2002-2003, acquired for the Simmons & Simmons collection in 2003, we see Gall’s enduring interest in exploring questions of the subject of painting; if painting relies on observation, then what happens when the observed is that thing created by the artist? So a hermetic circle or internal circuit is established; what is created in the world of the studio is represented in the world by another work of that artist. It poses interesting questions for us – did the sculpture that this painting records actually exist, or is it only a fantasy on canvas?.

The subject itself, a formalist sculpture cobbled together from bits in the studio, is, given photographic focal rendering, small in size, yet scaled large for the painting, parodying the large scale canvases of nineteenth century history paintings or post-war American painting. Yet any pretensions to the epic or sublime are lost in the bathos of the model. The geometric elements in the model remind us of the grand metaphysical gestures of early twentieth century abstraction; yet we are left with the remainders of these in a tumble-down construction.

Neil Gall sets up an interesting relationship between the model, the observable, the photograph, and paint. As Nicholas Poussin did in order to compose his pictures, Gall makes a model that can be copied as paint. In Gall’s case the model is photographed, and then that photograph is copied as a painted surface on to canvas. His models appear as degraded geometries, brought to life, copied out of ideality into the world of our experience, cobbled together by the stuff of the everyday, of pipe cleaners, of sticky tape.

He asks of us: should painting copy reality, and then, which reality – whose reality? He produces a tight circuit of action that occurs in the studio: models made on a small scale which are then blown up to a massive scale. This amplified scale screams at us to pay close attention, but we then must ask ourselves – to what? We must ask ourselves what a model might be, and in whose terms it might be important. There is a conjuncted love of the surface here – between the highly skilled finesse of the paint surface and the sensitivity to the surface of the sticky tape as it wraps around a ball; a dialogue of skin, of binding, and what lies underneath; of the voluptuous Baroque of Hans Bellmer. There is an erotic of the mannered, of selections made from a stationery store – a sly, desirous restoration to the history of bricolage.
Nick Goss

*Green Lanes*, 2014

Oil on hessian backed with sail cloth

170 x 188 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Josh Lilley Gallery
Nick Goss graduated BA from the Slade School of Art and MFA from the Royal Academy Schools. Recent solo exhibitions include shows at Josh Lilley Gallery and Simon Preston, NY and group exhibitions at Kunstraum Innsbruck and Jerwood Contemporary Painters. His paintings were shown as part of ‘Newspeak’ at the Saatchi Gallery and are included in the Saatchi Collection. He is represented by Josh Lilley Gallery.

This painting, Green Lanes, 2014, began as a photo taken in his local street in Dalston. Green Lanes has a number of Turkish and Caribbean businesses located on it that are decorated with exotic palms, bird cages and other unfamiliar artefacts. This work explores a sense of displacement and distance encountered in walking through an area that is part of a domestic routine, but yet simultaneously feels like it is from an entirely different time and place. This image is derived from a photo Goss took on Green Lanes of an ‘engorged’ banana plant pressed up against the window of a Caribbean funeral parlour, the grill pattern comes from a nearby Turkish barber shop that has a birdcage in the window. These were developed into a screen print. Looping the pattern and gradually letting the screen run out of ink recalls a refrain from a musical composition, slowly echoing and decaying (Goss is also a musician).

Here Nick Goss has employed his characteristic concern for information loss, or shift, where he paints the same composition three times, removing information each time and allowing the patterns and paint to take the image away from any sense of what was originally seen, and to amplify a sense of entropy and displacement.

While painting historically has in part been concerned with composition that relays, or communicates, information – particularly that of narrative – an interest of Goss’ is in questioning through painting the stability or otherwise of our conception of information and experience. Thus in the action of painting and the manipulation of the material, information that would otherwise allow us to interpret the content or context of the image drops away. This highlights both unreliable processes in the apprehension of our world and the status of painting as a technique that is subject to flux as a result of machine action (for instance the repetition of image through screen printing or transfer from photographs).
Alex Gough
*Wilderness in paint* 21, 2014
Pigment, acrylic binder, gouache, gesso, polyester and canvas
101 x 161 cm
Courtesy of the artist
Alex Gough studied at Chelsea College of Art and Camberwell College of Art and recently completed his MA at City and Guilds Art School. He has exhibited in London, Finland and the USA, most recently as a solo show at Sinen Syvyyys.

In this painting, Wilderness in paint 21, 2014, Gough has used his characteristic ‘double-scrimmed’ canvas (although he actually works on a new material which allows certain properties to be amplified). As such, he is working on two surfaces, one over the top of the other. Initially in his practice the outer surface functioned as a veil – a nod to the ‘veil of experience’ of phenomenology – which served to alter significantly the work on the lower layer both in colour and drawing terms.

Here we can see a new development in his practice, where he has brought the paint both through the upper layer and painted on top, which creates a strange latticed depth of field. Gough’s interest in photography and the materiality of its production is also evident here in the production of this image. The ‘veil’, with its obfuscating and reflective quality, acts in contrast to the vivid colour and fine detail of smooth glossy paint – giving the illusion of the slow emergence of this active surface through a fine haze or space.

Materiality, visuality, photography and the relation between painting and experience are the cornerstone of Alex Gough’s challenge in painting. His work traces a genealogy from artists such as Jules Olitski and Graham Innes. He works with a limited palette, determined to make his own paint so as to have control over the viscosity and intensity of experience. Working through the limits of the material and its handling is analogous for Gough to the ‘wilderness’ state, where no known foothold on meaning or known pathways can be found and must be worked out in the passage of the painting. The link visually through the limits of visual technology (the lens flare, the chemical burn of film/photopaper) ask interesting questions about how our visuality is informed.

An emphasis on openness, of not determining an outcome for the viewer, is key, and the viewer’s eye is not able to settle from one moment of experience to the next. There is a silence here, a determination to live in the paint that it is not possible to articulate in language. Like his experience in Lappland, Gough is embedded in a tacit knowledge of experience through practice that transmits aspects of that knowledge to the viewer in the language (and reflections on this language) of painting.
Mike Graham

*Dusk Slip Geo*, 2014

Metal paint on board with aluminium support

118 x 84 cm

Courtesy of the artist
Mike Graham is a recent graduate from the Cass School, London Metropolitan University. He works and exhibits in London, most recently in ‘What Came Paint?’ at Plate Space.

When Mike Graham made this painting, Dusk Slip Geo, 2014, he was thinking about restraint, and exploiting the process of making. Scale was of significance, due to the fact this process was being transferred from a much smaller experiment. The process is derived from a ‘what does this do’ experimental attitude. Thus, in his studio-as-laboratory, the many failures serve to eliminate possible options to privilege the successful processes.

This painting is a break-through in material finish for Graham, having been developing this technique (which he is quite secretive about) for some time. This ‘found process’ of his will spark a whole new series of work on a much larger scale. The starting point for this work is in many small drawings from which will emerge a composition which can be brought to the paint stage. We are left with a painting that holds a great deal of the unfamiliar and strange where the material meets the ‘cut’ in the composition.

Mike Graham’s painting sits self-consciously between the material and visual within a contemporary view on objects, especially painted ones. Whilst determined to develop a practice with regards to painting, he doesn’t make the differentiation between objects, be they paintings, the history of painting or, as he says, ‘a freezer bag, or smoke’. He finds painters such as Sachin Kaeley and Ryan Sullivan as inspirational as Zaha Hadid’s architecture. His aesthetic sensibility stems from technology-based experiences, military hardware and high-end product design, and exploits image manipulation software to find an oscillation between the cognitive and the virtual which allows him ‘to think with quasi-filters onto the surface’.

An intense visuality, where the intention is to create objects ‘that drain the battery of your peripheral vision’, is combined with a paint layer that materially defies any viewer’s attempt to reverse engineer the process. This material experimentation is matched by a sensibility that doesn’t try to overdetermine the outcome, but finds a way to ‘think through’ the process with the tools at his disposal – metal, paint, tape, gravity, tipping and drying. This involves a very matter-of-fact mindset, of concentrating on the execution rather than the determination of meaning.
Mouez Hamdi
Untitled, 2012
Acrylic on cherry MDF
46 x 37 cm
Courtesy of the artist
Mouez Hamdi is a recent graduate of the Cass School, London Metropolitan University, and has exhibited recently at Si:Said in Lithuania, in Finland, and in London. He is a member of the OOAG, the Object Oriented Art Group.

In Untitled, 2012, Hamdi’s interest in working with wood meant the grain, colour and texture elicited responses from him that continually question what is necessary and what must necessarily follow in the studio. By using minimal application within the confines that are governed through the surface, he hopes to overcome any obstructive dissonance or over-determination, so as not to obstruct the genuinely sensed forms. By responding to, rather than working on, the wood, it brings to him its own qualities and restrictions that open fresh and challenging formal distinctions and subtle tensions.

Mouez Hamdi is interested in instances where colour and improvised objects can be activated when consideration is given to aesthetic and spatial relations, in order to create a presence through simplified means.

In selecting the surface to work with for the piece exhibited, he is attempting to open an investigation into a relationship between paint and surface. Using weight and density of colour, he isolates and displaces what already exists. In this he might be considered as working in the spirit of Ian Kiaer’s work (with its regard to activating surrounding space) but Hamdi’s work conveys a sensitivity to colour and geometric considerations closer to that of Hélio Oiticica and the tradition of South American formalism.

Recent experiments have seen Hamdi branch out into what might be regarded as free-standing relief paintings – or paint sculptures. The uncertainty of the hybrid form is part of the pleasure of these works. The effect is everything that the wall panel works have, except the activation of the entire space of their situation.
Lewis Hammond
*Time Destroys Everything*, 2014
Oil on canvas
121 x 101 cm
 Courtesy of the artist
Lewis Hammond recently graduated BA Hons from the Cass School, London Metropolitan University, and is currently attending the Royal Academy Schools. He has exhibited in the East London Painting Prize, Lion and Lamb Gallery and ‘What Came Paint?’ at Plate Space.

This painting, Time Destroys Everything, 2014, is a picture built through the appropriation of imagery from Édouard Manet’s painting Bords de la Seine à Argenteuil. The image was then subjected to cropping and shifts in descriptive language, draining it of its original context without losing the suggestion of a particular era and period in painting’s history. The title of the work is an allusion to the cyclical nature of art/fashion/visual culture and how these modes of making are all subject to bastardisation over time, particularly in more recent history with the advent of the Internet.

For Lewis Hammond, painting practice is intrinsically built out of an awareness of the history of painting and the cyclical nature of visual culture. He is interested in exploring the act and context of contemporary painting – particularly the role painting retains in questioning 21st century concerns.

Hammond’s paintings address elements of humanity’s history; from political and religious ideologies to the creation of painted environments that generate narrative. These importantly often employ ambiguity in both the handling of the paint and the selecting of imagery to encourage multiple readings of the work. In doing so, he hopes this ambiguity dispels any moralising quality, and initiates rather a questioning that allows the pictures to function with their own sense of autonomy and reverberate with the world from which they are drawn.
Alexis Harding
*Monthly*, 2014
Oil and gloss paint on MDF
51 cm (diameter)
Courtesy of the artist and Mummery+Schnelle
Alexis Harding graduated BA (hons) from Goldsmith’s College, and is a winner of the John Moores Painting Prize. His recent solo exhibitions include Mummery+Schnelle and Galerie Holllenbach, Stuttgart and group shows at Nottingham Contemporary, Lion and Lamb, Irish Museum of Modern Art, The Courtauld Institute and the Caen Museum. He has been collected by amongst others the Walker Art Gallery, National Museums Liverpool and is included in the Simmons & Simmons collection. He is represented by Mummery+Schnelle.

This work, Monthly, 2014, is made in a tondo, or round format – a form Harding returns to often. The idea of return is also suggested in the title, of the monthly cycle and of the moon’s calendar. The pink lends it a certain sensuousness, of the body and desire, of skin. Yet Harding’s technique of foregrounding the material of painting – both of the fabric and the paint – stretched to its limit, mitigates against finding any meaning beyond the very fact of the work’s material presence. The tondo is also an architecturally oriented form, often hung high in buildings, and thus the work activates the space around it.

There is in Alexis Harding’s work an obscuring of the gesture of his hand, towards a gesture of openness in the demand to the viewer to welcome the presence of the object itself. His forms not only open up the space in which the works sit – especially in the use of the unconventional tondo format – but the strong material presence of the work forces a comparison with our own material presence; of our body to the body of the painting.

There is action and exertion in these works, but it is also the exertion of the material itself beyond what Harding might ask of it; a reminder that our world is made of substances which might sit beside the ideas we project onto it. Harding remarks of his practice ‘I use the ordinary language of abstraction and aim to fundamentally change it; to harness it and stretch it to breaking point. To do this I have had to change the way paint normally behaves and functions. The way I make the work is a combination of strategy and control and irrationality and abandonment.’ There is also a sense of containment in these forms, enlivening their context, which hunches, mute, inside their own being.
Andrew Hewish

*Untitled (Chrome Yellow)*, 2014

Ink, graphite, acrylic paint

24 x 30 cm

Courtesy of the artist
Andrew Hewish graduated MFA from COFA, MRes from the London Consortium, and is completing his PhD at the Royal College of Arts. He has exhibited at the Wallace and Zabludowicz Collections in London, and the VII Biennale di Soncino, Italy. He is included in the collections of MOMA and the V&A.

*Untitled (Chrome Yellow)*, 2014, evokes the language of the ‘autonomous’ artwork of post-war painting in its use of the minimalist colour block and material/action in the lower half. Yet this work is embedded in a highly specific set of transitive relations within Hewish’s studio production; the yellow block ‘borrowed’, then inverted, from a larger recent work, the graphite and ink from recent experiments on paper.

Despite the chrome yellow pigment of the title laid in ‘concrete’ terms on the canvas, the visual ‘drawing’ intensities in the décalquer/transfer ink and graphite (recalling Dada experiments) and the positioning of the yellow band open up possibilities of a lyrical interpretation/association for the viewer.

For Andrew Hewish, painting is part of a cross-media practice that considers painting, drawing, sculpture and digital media as part of a constellating network, or as he would have it, an expanded drawing. As a painting practice this can be considered transitive painting and includes a history of painting interested in the hermetic cycles of the studio. Implied in this is an interest in what enters as irruption or interjection from the world of experience beyond the studio.

Interested in the life of the object, part of Hewish’s practice is invested in the play of material and the way that it asserts itself against overdetermination by the artist. Whilst materially grounded, there is an exploration in his work at large of the mechanics of ancient Greek lyrics: structured, brief, yet imaginatively expansive. This lyrical association is played out in an interest in the *aleamorphic* – of the human mechanism or desire to generate narrative or interpretable detail from our visual world. In this he seeks objects that never quite resolve themselves as meaning, and retain something of their ‘dignity’ as things: as mute objects that sit alongside, but interdependent with, the world of the human.
Robert Holyhead

*Untitled (Black)*, 2012

Oil on canvas

30.5 x 40.6 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Karsten Schubert
Robert Holyhead studied at Manchester School of Art and graduated MA from Chelsea School of Art. He has recently exhibited as a solo artist at Karsten Schubert and at Max Hetzler, Berlin, and in group shows at the Whitechapel Gallery, Lion and Lamb, Birmingham Art Gallery and the Zabudlowicz collection. His works are found in the Tate, Arts Council and Government Art collections. He is represented by Karsten Schubert.

This painting Untitled (Black), 2012, is a particular favourite of Holyhead’s. It is distinctive for its small scale and its symmetry. What can be seen here are the different modes of what it is possible to call ‘atmosphere’, for want of a better term. This is not the atmosphere of John Constable, but the use of this grain in the paint surface contains a nod to the effects achieved within painting of the past. The employment of the brush and the effect on the eye might be one and the same, but the capacity to represent something other than itself as paint – the pictorial – is wholly ambiguous. Ambiguous too is whether the central rectangle functions as an entry point into the painting, or as a screen on which we might project our own ideas.

Robert Holyhead employs a systematic or discrete approach in his own painterly language. His paintings largely employ a single colour and the use of white. They have the illusion of the colour having had shapes cut out of the composition, but where we see white it is not possible to read as absence in Holyhead’s hands. This is not the white of a canvas straight from the supplier, but rather layers of white built painstakingly over some time. There is a subtlety of time and presence in these parts heavily invested in by the painter.

The compositions also are painstakingly arrived at from Holyhead’s large archive or library of smaller paper reference works, as he tests combinations of forms that don’t allow us to rest in any simplicity of their presentation. The surfaces of his work are so delicately employed we could hardly mistake these for harsh works of High Modernism. These are works with apparent simplicity which rewards much closer inspection of the attention to surface and the development of a highly individuated pictorial language.
Gary Hume

Untitled (Wall Painting), 1992

Dulux high gloss paint applied directly to wall

182 x 198 cm

The Simmons & Simmons collection
Gary Hume’s work is well represented in the Simmons & Simmons collection. Hume is known as a member of the YBA generation and is a Royal Academician. He exhibits internationally and is represented by the White Cube Gallery.

This work, *Untitled (Wall Painting)*, 1992, is part of a series based on a pictorial allusion to hospital doors. It was acquired for the Simmons & Simmons collection in 2000. The allusion might be to the function of such doors – as an entry to life from the maternity ward, to healing, or its failure, death – but of course painted as it is on a wall it functions as a simplified *trompe l'œil*, or painterly illusion.

The lack of canvas might upset us were it not for an established tradition in wall painting. The simplicity of these forms might refer us back to Alice Browne and Roman wall painting, or Robert Holyhead’s present/absent geometries. Given Hume’s general interest in post-war painting’s flatness, it is hard not to recall Barnett Newman’s zip paintings and their capacity to zip and unzip the universe – or for us, the traversing of the hospital door.

Gary Hume has mined a tradition from Pop, extending whilst critiquing the reach of the commercial world with its clean surfaces and stylisation of composition and its seductive world of desire.

As paint practice it also meets the demands of Clement Greenberg’s hailing of the world of the flat as the appropriate world for paint. The critique that is inherent in the Pop object here also critiques the possibility of the painting as an ‘autonomous object’ as Greenberg would have it, with its own aesthetic ecology sufficient to itself, because Pop itself greets the regulation of our desire within the economy of image and commerce; thus the painting of Pop is necessarily part of a dependent circuit within this.

Nonetheless Hume has achieved a distinctive and recognisable language within his work that pulls it back from a hard critique within Pop to an enjoyment of the play of surface, colour and composition which is the realm of painting itself.
Callum Innes

*Untitled, from the Cento series*, 1990

Oil and turpentine on oil paper

200 x 100 cm

The Simmons & Simmons collection
**Callum Innes** studied at Gray’s School of Art and Edinburgh College of Art. He was short-listed for the Turner Prize in 1995, won the NatWest Prize for Painting in 1998, and in 2002 was awarded the Jerwood Prize for Painting. His work is in the collections of the Guggenheim, Tate and Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art amongst others. A retrospective of his work was shown at The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh and toured to Modern Art Oxford. Innes is represented by the Frith St Gallery.

This painting, *Untitled*, 1990, acquired for the Simmons & Simmons collection in 1993, is part of the Cento series. The series used paint processes on paper to record the distinctive action of paint that has been poured or brushed out on paper and then has been degraded by turpentine by gradually washing out using solvent. This taking away of the paint reverses the medium’s traditional application and resists the temptation to look for gestures of the hand in the work. This use of thinned-out wash and the pull of gravity might remind the viewer of the work of Bernard Frize or of post-War American painter Morris Louis. The atmospheric shimmer of the thinned paint provides an apt companion to the work of Robert Holyhead.

Much of Callum Innes’ work contains strong geometries that remind us of Piet Mondrian’s grids, but without the bold de Stijl paint layers which have been passed over for something much thinner and atmospheric. ‘Glaze’ layers, with the obvious connection to glass, is the term used to describe transparent paint layers which were much in use in Renaissance Venetian work (of Giorgione and the Bellinis) where the use of illuminating colour was considered of paramount importance.

In Innes’ work glazing is not achieved by the careful adding of paint, but rather by its destruction in breaking down the binder (usually oil) that holds the pigment together. The action of gravity is important also in this, so the solvent that breaks down the paint bleeds off the canvas or ground. This brings the process closer to heavily material practices and chance aesthetics (Niki de Sainte Phalle, for instance) where the outcome of the paint layer is less certain; yet this all sits within a strongly defined gridded composition. The effect is one of tension between the determined and the accidental and material. We are left pondering the mystery of these transparencies: is this a mystical sublime or just broken down paint?
Nicholas John Jones

*Is that a crack in the crockery*, 2011-2014

Oil on canvas

140 x 120 cm

Courtesy of the artist
Nicholas John Jones studied at Chelsea, the Wimbledon School of Art and is a recent graduate (MFA) from the Slade School of Fine Art. Recent group exhibitions include those at Lion and Lamb Gallery, Standpoint Gallery and Gowen Contemporary, Geneva.

Titles for Nicholas John Jones form part of the action of the painting. Is that a crack in the crockery?, 2011-14, is an allusion to a deeper question of whether there is a ‘crack’ or problem with painting now, or rather how a painter might paint within this problematic. This work also has lots of spaces between things, thin coloured edges or ‘cracks’. Might the ‘pattern’ be loosely derived from some design somewhere? We are left with a feeling of a sense of liquid flowing, swirling, dripping through.

Jones relates how a thin colour wash ‘called out’ for swathes of blue and orange injected into patches of directional brush strokes. Neutral greys and creams, assisted by contrasting darks, subdue the colour, allowing it only the slightest of glimpses out around their edges. The dynamic central swirl reinstates colour, simultaneously dragging darks rapidly from above, and suppressing the colour to the depths. The piece remains in deadlock between this colour and the darker insertions.

Nicholas John Jones is a painter of some sympathy who pays detailed attention to the materiality and process of the progression of the painting. Traditionally in painting, the image’s capacity to represent was the foremost conduit for the employment of sympathy, but here, post-Action Painting, the struggle of the painter to engage and translate this sensibility is paramount.

Jones seeks poignant instances, reinstating their importance in contemporary life. Various artistic media are employed to capture or create points of resonant experience. Varying atmospheres are explored, often tending toward the contemplative or fragile. These may be set in isolation, or in tension against an alternative moment.

The titles are absolutely integral to the work – subtle suggestions that open questions not intended for resolution. They are like the paintings, things in themselves that open connections without confirming them, injecting instead a dash of wonder. The titles often allude to questions on painting and the nature of being – of purpose, doubt, or journey.
Ian Kiaer

Black tulip, squares, 2012
Fluorescent plastic
55.9 x 71.1 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Alison Jacques Gallery
Ian Kiaer studied at the Slade School of Art and graduated MA and PhD from the Royal College of Art. His recent solo exhibitions include Henry Moore Institute, Aspen Art Museum, Kunstverein Munich, Galleria d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin and group shows at the Hammer Museum, Hayward Gallery, and Tate Modern, 10th Lyon Biennale, 4th Berlin Biennial, and the 50th Venice Biennale. He is represented by Alison Jacques Gallery London and Marcelle Alix, Paris.

Ian Kiaer’s practice is particularly exercised by questions of painting as a ‘minor form’ and the different possibilities of its death. The black tulip of the title of this work Black tulip, squares, 2012, seems appropriately funereal, but is in fact an allusion to a story by Alexandre Dumas. Dumas’ story tells of a competition to breed a black tulip; like art, an artificial, yet perfect creation. The competition is fierce; the irrational desire that circulates around the tulip so contrary to notions of stable value or of an organic ecology. Perhaps, like the protagonist gardener in Dumas’ novel, Kiaer’s works are intent on ‘stealing light’ from their surroundings to the detriment of others. Kiaer’s is a practice that regards painting in all its complexity, and in this work we can see a playful rendering of the coloured rectangle that is a singular mark of painting. Here are the squares of painting’s Suprematism, a movement and period of painting of interest to Kiaer; there just isn’t any paint.

A key to the work of Ian Kiaer might lie in his remarks on the model: ‘it travels between an idea and the concretization of that idea... It is physically light, transportable and schematic. It need not be finely crafted – in fact, speed is often a prerequisite of its construction. In some instances the model is impossibly optimistic, presenting an idealized image with all imperfections smoothed out’. So in regarding his work as a painting practice that relies little on paint, there is perhaps a link to be made here with an idea of gesture which ‘the model’ serves. Here is a pointing to, an opening out, a passage of movement; but Kiaer’s actions are glancing and tangential.

His material is found, rather than the stuff of the art supplier, and so Walter Benjamin’s material history of discovery and mapping looms large in his work; his technique relies as much on the negotiation of space and its co-option as any of his singular works inside the space. There is historical dialogue also with early twentieth century Modernism, of a utopian world of the synthesis of art and architecture, of idea and form. Within this is the recognition of the passing world; his constructions are only ever just present – flimsy, ephemeral, demountable. The abyss between ideal projection and the stuff of the world gapes, the gap filled by the presence and interruption of his work.
Wendy McLean

Air Conditioning/a closed feeling, 2014
Oil on wooden panel
70 x 54.1 cm
Courtesy of the artist
Wendy McLean studied at the Cass School, London Metropolitan University, and recently graduated MA from the Royal College of Art. Recent group exhibitions in London include at Winter Projects, Bermondsey Project, Lion and Lamb and Idea Store. She won the Gilchrist Fisher painting prize in 2010.

The painting, *Air Conditioning/a closed feeling*, 2014, is one of a group of works based around a repeated shape which resembles a turn in a staircase. The impression left is of a series of angles. Some form points, or even arrows; others hold other spaces in position. Some hold denser colours in place. Yellow exerts itself here as the most significant colour, yet it is thin and is sometimes tinted by other colours, mixed or overlaid. McLean imagines the angles ‘squeeze’ some of the volumes of yellow, evoking the pressure of mass, of a body leaving. The title, *Air Conditioning/a closed feeling*, is from a song by the band Rachel’s.

The painting recalls Marcel Duchamp’s historic work *Nude Descending a Staircase*, yet Duchamp’s photo-mechanical imagination is left aside in favour of something more subtle, more appropriate to Gaston Bachelard’s *Intuition of the Instant*; of a phenomenology of the fleeting moment.

Wendy McLean is another painter in this exhibition who explores the uneasy relationship between space and painting, in this case experienced space. Stripping out information from the observable world, hers is an art of attention that focuses intensely on fragments of that world. In this she finds an equivalence to our experience of consciousness and attention. Recent paintings have reflected upon the oblique experience of an event or object such as the immediate space of a figure-when-reading, by paring down motifs echoing paper, windows and other objects close at hand.

McLean is interested in exploring ideas around visibility, and how the nature of painting can make flexible and problematic that which is recognizable. She is interested in what it is to be submerged within a space whist materially, remaining in another – that of paint.
Andrea Medjesi-Jones

*Demo 02, 2014*

Acrylic and aluminium powder on linen
65 x 55 cm

Courtesy of the artist
Andrea Medjesi-Jones studied both BA and MA at Goldsmiths’ College, and PhD from Cambridge School of Art, Anglia Ruskin University. She was awarded the Abbey Scholarship at the British School at Rome and has recently exhibited at Laurent Delaye in London and in group exhibitions in the current ‘Bloomberg New Contemporaries’, at Bäckerstrasse4, Vienna, Jerwood Contemporary Painters, and the John Moores Painting Prize at the Walker Art Gallery.

In the series from which Demo 02, 2014, is taken, Medjesi-Jones explores a model of painterly language defined by specific material processes that appear in the work as marks, gestures, and textures. Rollers, masking tape, and cut-outs serve to elide painterly seductiveness by adopting banal and repetitive ways of mark-making. The marks are applied through plastic sheeting or with the use of paint rollers that are further scraped and washed out to display the residue of material traces in place of the image itself. The work is reduced to monochromatic schemes of aluminium powder and black pigments, economising the use of form and replicating the pre-existing variables and systems of image production towards less representational painterly vocabulary.

Andrea Medjesi-Jones works in various modes of painting, but in this particular series she is interested in an emptying out of content, where the subject of painting becomes the image itself, which appears as a temporal, apparition-like facsimile of its origin. The practice is framed by limitations of painterly procedures and defined by the lack of colour or painterly tools in the work’s execution.

She alludes to negative and positive spaces which reference mechanically produced images (early cinema and photography for instance), testing out in the process a link to movement within two-dimensional work. The painterly choices are marked by the simplicity of gestures that are repetitive and often transferred or traced from one painting or drawing to another, becoming a template for the serialised and often mechanical production of marks.

Such process informs a commitment towards a trajectory of movement within the work that is beyond painterly ‘authenticity’. Such actions aim to replace the well-established tradition of painterly formalism and instead work towards a more radical gesture informed by information technology and the production values of the mediated image.
Matthew Musgrave

*In Grass*, 2014

Oil and acrylic on canvas

48 x 30 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Supplement Gallery, London
Matthew Musgrave recently graduated MA from the Royal College of Art and exhibited in a solo presentation at Supplement Gallery, and as part of group exhibitions at the Zabludowicz Collection and Jerwood Contemporary Painters. He is represented by Supplement Gallery, London.

In Grass, 2014, continues Musgrave’s extensions of practice from his time at the RCA; this continuity is a hallmark of his practice. Earlier series explored monochromes (skies), brush work (foliage) and compositions (a tight crop of a view from a chair he has in his studio).

It is possible to understand the composition here as having an immediate observable analogue; the upper and lower thirds are ‘grass’, while the middle third is a tight crop of a leg, laying in grass. The calligraphic brush strokes linking these spaces are the blades of grass obscuring the leg. As In Grass is a later work in its series, this work is at a remove from the more representational works produced earlier in the series. This occurs through a process that allows exploration of composition through the use of coloured grounds, and varying intensities or hues of colours for mark-making and scale. In this experimentation and exploration he seeks the development of a specific language of depiction.

Matthew Musgrave will often make many studies in watercolour en plein air or in his studio which get re-worked, replicated, and pulled apart, before informing his works on canvas. He works on a series intensely for six months to a year, during which time he’ll be in his studio looking, thinking, and experimenting. They can appear quick and easy, but there are always a lot of decisions going on in any one work.

These feature objects - chairs, sky, foliage, landscapes; all of which have a strong place within art history. As such, his practice encompasses a history of figuration, languages of depiction, representation, and similarities or relationships with abstraction. Particularly Musgrave is interested in how painting relates to looking, and how looking at painting informs looking.
Aimée Parrott

Bomb weed, 2014

Watercolour screen print on bleach treated canvas

120 x 160 cm

Courtesy of the artist
Aimée Parrott recently graduated from the Royal Academy Schools, and has exhibited in group exhibitions at the Royal Academy of Arts and Tintype Gallery in London.

This work, Bomb Weed, 2014, uses a silk screen technique to produce a single piece rather than the usual multiple, uniform output associated with its usage. Parrott uses process and material at odds with one another and in a way contrary to their traditional applications. Watercolour is traditionally a discreet and delicate medium, used mostly on a small scale; it also has the directness of a drawing. The transfer of the watercolour pigment from screen to canvas creates a disjunction, a stutter between the original gesture and the surface on which it sits. Using bleach to break the homogeneity of the surface disrupts the canvas’ natural pigment, Parrott creates an uneven backdrop for the printing and maximises the luminosity of watercolour. The watercolour is applied horizontally and the transfer vertically against a wall. The directness and the speed of the gestural mark is disrupted by the hallmarks of printing (the uneven pressure of the squeegee forcing the original mark onto another surface) as well as the disruption caused by the way the pigments separate and pool as they dry on the surface of the polyester screen. A hair dryer is used to move the pigment around the screen and direct the drying, undermining the linear marks and interrupting the flatness of shapes.

Aimée Parrott’s recent body of work comprises paintings and prints. By layering and repeating colour and form she attempts to create a sense of off-kilter rhythm where solid and amorphous substances collide. Parrott’s work brings to mind the work of Helen Frankenthaler and Jackson Pollock, with a view to vertical Chinese or Japanese scroll painting. Very mindful of the action the work might have on the viewer, she creates various spaces and layers of process within the work, determined that the marks remain fragmentary; thus eye and mind never settle on something definite and the process of looking remains active.

The material presence of the painting is also important in this; the use of raw or stained canvas holds the viewer on the surface of the piece, considering the texture and the weave, whilst gestural marks might push beyond the physical object into an illusory or imaginary space. The traces of folds and creases remind the viewer of the properties of the material; something that is soft and malleable almost as though existing in a state somewhere between a solid object and a fluid. Parrott’s work unfolds gradually, seeking to call to mind the way in which the exterior world impresses itself upon us – not simply as a series of static solid objects but as shifting perceptual fragments, of semi-recalled sensory memories or of touch, tone and pace.
Neal Rock
*Delft Peripeteia (Prosopon Series)*, 2014
Silicone pigment on polystyrene and MDF
66 x 66 x 40 cm
Courtesy of the artist
Neal Rock graduated MFA from Central St Martin’s and is completing his PhD at the Royal College. Selected exhibitions include shows at the Royal Academy of Arts, the Albright Knox, Orange County Museum, the John Moores Painting Prize and a solo presentation at the New Art Gallery Walsall.

This piece, *Delft Peripeteia*, 2014, sits as part of Rock’s *Prosopon* series which addresses histories of painting that have engaged with process as constitutive of what an art work can mean or propose. In this tradition the artist cites a diverse lineage from Francois Boucher and Robert Ryman, to more recent dialogues from painters such as Bernard Frize, Amy Sillman, Mark Bradford and Oscar Murillo.

*Prosopon* – a Greek word that conflates face and mask – provides a narrative for Rock’s concern with painting and its relationship to cosmetics. He has developed processes that reflect his interest in transparency and fixity, whilst touching upon make-up, opacity and mutability. These qualities provide a vocabulary which articulates an indirect address to a body, one that is veiled and transformed through cosmetic implants, filmic special effects and medical prosthetics, industries in which silicone is a material agent. These concerns are orchestrated through performative processes that create depth within ideas of surface, cosmetics and bodily mutability.

A constant in Neal Rock’s work over the past fourteen years has been his use of silicone as a paint material, in a practice that the artist views primarily through a lens of painting and its histories. Rock’s work has been significantly transformed through an engagement with a particular type of classical sculpture: the herm. Rock addresses the herm as a cultural, spatial, apotropaic object that simultaneously entertains adornment, translation and masking.

For the artist, the herm sheds its physical, vertically totemic form, in order to perform decisions in the production of work and the organisation and dissipation of meaning. Rock uses skins of silicone paint and screenprinted images alongside found, manipulated and fabricated objects, all of which are composed together in the gallery space, as a negotiation – a form of meaningful flight – from the studio.

Ideas of the body as queered, made-up, defaced, contorted, atrophied and decaying are conveyed – via the herm – through an idea of the prosthetic and the mask or *prosopon*. These qualities and interests are not so much directly implicit as indirect, fetishized and displaced between relations of objects, surfaces and images.
Danny Rolph
*Dragster-1*, 2014
Acrylic on canvas, two separate panels
120 x 242.5 cm
Courtesy of the artist
Danny Rolph graduated MA in painting from the Royal College of Art and was awarded the Rome Scholarship at the British School at Rome. Rolph’s recent solo-exhibitions include ‘Atelier’ at E.S.A.D., Valence, Koraalberg Gallery, Antwerp, and group exhibitions at Lion and Lamb Gallery and Royal Academy of Arts. His work is included amongst others in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Tate, and the Simmons & Simmons collection. He is represented by Barbara Davis Gallery, Houston.

This piece, Dragster-1, 2014, is particularly interesting in the context of Rolph’s work in that it is a diptych; Rolph normally works on single panels, some of which use a physical lattice, and objects sit at various depths within this. As a diptych, this work incorporates a very physical and pronounced cut between the panels, placed apart at a prescribed distance of the depth of the stretchers. The effect of this is to give importance to the quality of the object in real space versus the play of objects in the depths created optically within the painting. As such this work sits between his physically latticed works (which use a ribbed transparent acrylic material) and the canvas works whose sculptural treatment of the painted surface nears a ‘super-flat’ aesthetic. The geometric forms and colours here are reflected in parts seen in the Neil Gall work that sits opposite in the exhibition installation.

Of the work in this exhibition, Danny Rolph’s pictorial language is the one that sits most squarely alongside Abstraction within painting’s history. It might be possible to look to his contemporary James Hyde, or earlier artists Frank Stella or Ellsworth Kelly, for cues to the investigation of the tension between space and the pictorial, but Rolph is equally at home with Fra Angelico’s wall frescoes as he is with Robert Ryman’s ‘hinges’. What is at issue here is painting’s site, or topology, with respect to the experience and understanding of space.

In wanting to create a new type of modern painting that references painting’s ‘topology’ or discourse within space, the question then arises – where is painting? It is easy to locate in Rolph’s confident use of paint and the tropes of painting, but by opening up questions of where to locate the site of painting we come close to disappearing down the rabbit-hole of Platonic form, absolute geometry and de-materialisation. Rolph remarks ‘I’m not searching for a Deleuzian “infinite painting” – I plan to locate an “infinite” question or questions’. As in the work of Maria Chevska, this is a world of space in flux, but in Rolph’s hand there is also an accelerated quality, a future-forward aesthetic that collapses Modernist with Post-Modern destabilised territory and the world of multiple worlds.
Joel Wyllie
Counter, 2014
Acrylic and pencil on board
182 x 382 cm
Courtesy of the artist
Joel Wyllie is currently studying at the Royal Academy of Arts in London. Recent exhibitions include ‘New Contemporaries’ ICA 2010, ‘Cave Art Fair’ Liverpool Biennial 2012, ‘Premiums’ Royal Academy, London 2014 and ‘Tropical Lab’ ICAS, Singapore 2014. His paintings are included in the Saatchi Collection.

‘Counter’, 2014, is one of three large paintings which were informed by a multitude of tests with etching process. When etched onto a plate, delicate, intricate marks became a lot less precious, and consequent tests involved working directly onto the printed paper as a result. Quick, large gestural marks soon began to operate alongside the more time-consuming intricate forms, giving way to a new territory where the micro and the macro became fused.

The ‘micro’ world here is one of small motifs redolent of fantasy illustration. Rendered in fragile material, these little worlds are set against the epic scale of the rest of the canvas with its recall of heroic post-war American abstraction such as Barnett Newman’s *Uriel*, 1955, with which it shares elements of palette and scale.

Joel Wyllie creates otherworldly objects, terrains and characters which are generated through the collaging and playing with multiple previous works of his own. In this, his is another example in this exhibition of ‘transitive’ painting, where the transitions from one work to the next forms part of the interest and inspiration in the work. His work comes in groups and cycles, each period and tangent branching off from previous ones.

The intermingling of organic and mechanical forms, as well as the patterns and formulae embedded within the imagery, reflect a cause and effect philosophy, where order rules and free will is an illusion.

This form of working in contemporary practice is informed by questions of what the appropriate subject for painting might be, as much as the larger interest in the critical and popular zeitgeist of ecology – where not only each work is considered in terms of the actors in its environment, but how the studio practice, over time and in the world of the studio, might be considered an ecology.
Toby Ziegler

Untitled, 2012
Oil on aluminium
180 x 227.5 cm

Courtesy of the artist and Simon Lee Gallery, London and Hong Kong
**Toby Ziegler** graduated BFA (hons) Central St Martin’s. Selected solo exhibitions include those at the Chisenhale Gallery, Yorkshire Sculpture Park, and the Zabludowicz Collection. He is included in the collections of New Art Gallery Walsall, Saatchi Collection, Arts Council England, François Pinault Collection, MONA and Tate. He is represented by Simon Lee Gallery, London and Hong Kong.

Toby Ziegler’s painting *Untitled*, 2012, uses Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s painting *Hunters in the Snow*, 1565, as its source. Here Ziegler amplifies the ‘obliterating’ quality that snow effects generate pictorially (Bruegel’s own interest had to wait until a particularly snowy season) with the reduction of contrast between the snow and the aluminium. There is a quality of flatness that is exploited in this picture by Ziegler; Bruegel achieved both advances in the use of perspective but also a play between the distance provided by perspective and the flattened distance provided by the trees of the foreground. Ziegler renders this quality to a machined ‘superflatness’ which propels the image forward in time to our own. The experience for the viewer can be linked with Alex Gough’s rendering of the obliterating light of the wilderness state, yet with the density of pictorial space that is part of Ziegler’s signature.

Toby Ziegler’s recent work involves mining well-known historical paintings and working with the image until it achieves a certain estrangement from the familiar. He does this by running an image of the work through imaging software until it has shifted sufficiently from its origin to move to the next stage, which involves the production of the image in paint onto aluminium as it is here. Sometimes this is then spray painted with bold abstract gestures or scraped back using a variety of sanding tools to reveal the aluminium underneath.

The play between figuration and abstraction that abounds in Ziegler’s work is part of a larger exploration of information and its transfer; reproduction of an image always creates a new incidence, and as in Nick Goss’ work, some information drops away whilst a new permutation of image and object is achieved. The ready availability of imagery and our need for visual stimulation is here gratified by a way of seeing where the appropriated image is made strange in the adaptation to a new material ground and the studio process. What is achieved is a reclamation of a materiality that has been lost in the digital circulation of images.
Painting About Painting
Installation view
Suggested Reading


Acknowledgements

The artists and their galleries
Charlotte Lindsay
Colin Passmore
David Micheaud
Helen Cheesman
Jacob Venn
Jodi Young
Jon Sharples
Justin Hammond
Louise Rains
Muir MacKean
Peter Cohen
Stuart and John Evans
The Graphic Design team
The Facilities team
The Simmons & Simmons Art Network

Different studies have placed the average time people spend looking at individual art works in galleries and museums at anywhere from 17 seconds to as little as 3 seconds.

Looking at art in the corporate environment is a bit different. A work can resonate in a new way after 2 or 3 hours shut in a meeting room with it. A piece’s meaning can evolve for someone who passes it in a corridor every day for months or even years. Love it or hate it, spending that much time in front of an artwork means there will often be dialogue with it. It can make us listen to it, and think something in response, and look again: it’s an intriguing phenomenon to have an ongoing, evolving relationship with something that is unchanging.

That said, artwork hung in any living environment, be it domestic or working, can become wallpaper and simply fade into the background. This can even happen when the work is by Tracey Emin, or Chris Ofili, or Jake and Dinos Chapman, and so in 2012 the Art Network was born to raise the profile of the firm’s collection of contemporary art and to provide more opportunities for partners and staff to engage both with it and the wider contemporary art world.

Since then, the Art Network has gone from strength to strength to the point where we now have over 100 members receiving regular updates of activities around the collection, such as new acquisitions, re-hangs and exhibitions, as well as invitations to tours and events both within and outside the firm, and information about pro bono opportunities within the visual arts such as the ‘Lawyers Volunteering for the Arts’ and ‘Law for the Arts’ programmes.

This year we have achieved several notable ‘firsts’, including the first staff-curated exhibition “Are you sitting comfortably?” and the first selling-show by an external gallerist for partners and staff. Network members are writing about the collection in greater numbers than ever before, both for exhibition catalogues and for ‘art cards’ to be displayed alongside the works throughout our offices, many of which contain touching, personal responses to those works.

Our ‘private’ art collection is more accessible than ever due to the dedication, enthusiasm and knowledge of members of the Art Network who have trained to become tour guides. In 2014 we have greatly increased the number of tours given to groups from outside the firm, including popular client entertaining events, sold-out allocations for Open House London and the City of London Festival, and several groups from art institutions and colleges. Our friends outside of the firm can read about these events and all our other activities by visiting our dedicated art website, by following us on Twitter, or by signing up to our external mailing list – all of which are maintained by members of the Network.

Lou Rains and Jon Sharplees
Co-chairs of the Simmons & Simmons Art Network