A Journal for Contemporary Art

Issue No. 7.0

PLASTER RUNS RIOT ON CORK STREET

GUEST EDITED BY PLASTER MAGAZINE

CATALOGUE

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PUBLISHED BY CORK STREET GALLERIES
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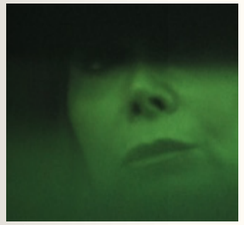

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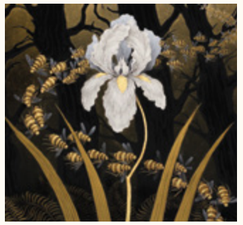

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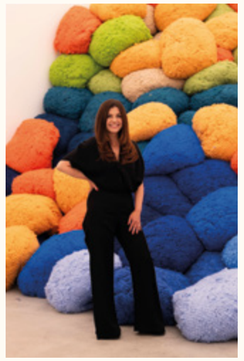

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR
DEAN MAYO DAVIES

Whether a surprise flexi-disc bound inside and waiting to be detached, or augmented reality artworks in your immediate vicinity unlocked by a mysterious QR code, the joy of CATALOGUE is in its freedom. We're bracketed by the term magazine, but our gallery in print is more an exhibition of ideas.

Since its inception by brothers Finn Constantine and Milo Astaire in 2020, the London-based art publication *Plaster* has been increasingly on our radar, as it has many a gallerist's desk, for its forthrightness and wit, personality barely held in place by the confines of its pages. Seated in Soho, with a fondness for doing things in-person, the young title is old-school in the right ways – qualities we like.

So when it came to planning this edition of CATALOGUE, we imagined, 'What if our magazine hosted theirs?' Not just stretching today's climate of cross-brand collaboration, which has become ubiquitous, but instead celebratedly smashing it. We present this issue truly as a firework, a magazine within a magazine, shining brightly for an instant. Cork Street through the eyes (and out the mind) of Plaster.

Recognising their love of loose-leaf, a great joy this issue has been commissioning 14 brilliant artist posters, each representing a Cork Street gallery, randomly placing one inside every copy of the magazine – including a new work by Sir John Akomfrah, whose *The Secret Life of Memorable Things* (2024) exhibited above Cork Street for over five months this year.

We look forward to hearing tales through the grapevine of just how people plan on securing their favourite poster, whether rifling through as many issues as possible, pleading with acquaintances, instigating a grand swap scheme or scrolling through eBay at midnight, hoping one turns up.

Enjoy!

CATALOGUE

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With special thanks to: Jūratė Gačionytė, Aisha Pegley, and all the artists, their studios and their galleries.

PLASTER

RUNS RIOT
RUNS RIOT
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ON CORK
STREET

A LETTER FROM THE (GUEST) EDITOR

“Cork Street is a fascinating place. Its history is rich and its community of art galleries is even richer. We wanted to anchor the magazine on the street, but lift the curtain on those glossy facades.”

PLASTER

When Cork Street Galleries approached us to guest edit their magazine, our first thought was: we hope they know what they’re letting themselves in for. We questioned how it would work: one magazine guest-editing another – a recipe for disaster or God’s gift to a perishing print landscape? CATALOGUE told us to make ourselves at home. Be careful what you wish for! Get into bed with Plaster, but burn the sheets once we’ve left...

Cork Street is a fascinating place. Its history is rich and its community of art galleries is even richer. We wanted to anchor the magazine on the street, but lift the curtain on those glossy facades. For our first story, we track down those who make it all happen, but are not always in the spotlight – from the the art technicians to the cleaners, the gallery assistants to the conservators – all captured in a beautiful photo series by Kyle Crooks.

Elsewhere, relative Cork Street newbie Alison Jacques takes Laurie Barron on her morning commute from Primrose Hill to her gallery at No. 22. Milo Astaire reflects on a formative internship at Flowers Gallery, and we rewind to 1966 by resurfacing a Waddington Custot catalogue essay on Pierre Bonnard penned by Patrick Heron. Meanwhile, painter and punk icon Caroline Coon writes our Rejection Letter – it turns out, even legends have been spurned. We also spotlight two of the most exciting young artists working today: Emma Prempeh (Tiwani Contemporary) interviewed by Izzy Bilkus in London, and Dominique Fung (MASSIMODECARLO), who spoke to Harriet Lloyd-Smith from her studio in New York.

And because we’d hate you to feel excluded, we made a quiz. It’s your chance to beat ChatGPT’s Cork Street knowledge, tackle a Grey Organisation-themed paint-by-numbers (we hope you know your pantones), and work out what kind of gallery goer you are (don’t expect to be flattered).

Our flagship story stars Kim Alexis, a psychic medium and art enthusiast who took Jacob Wilson on a journey to discover the ghosts of Cork Street past. The results are uncanny.

A Plaster intervention wouldn’t be complete without posters, so we invited every gallery to put forward an artwork for a poster, which are distributed throughout the magazine run. Didn’t get your first choice? Well, in some cases, neither did we.

The whole thing has been a riot. Thank you to Dean and Gillian for being such five-star hosts. You couldn’t have been more hospitable to our loopy ideas. Enjoy!

PSYCHIC READING

Words by Jacob Wilson
Photography: Delphino Productions

PSYCHIC SPIRITUAL MEDIUM KIM ALEXIS UNCOVERS THE SPIRIT OF CORK STREET

“That’s why this building is the way it is, they never saw eye to eye. There’s been upheaval here.”

KIM ALEXIS

It’s 7pm on an early September evening and our photographer, Delphino, and I are standing on the corner of Cork Street and Burlington Gardens waiting for Kim Alexis, psychic spiritual medium and healer. Together, the three of us are going to do something that, as far as we know, has never been done before: a psychic reading of Cork Street, to find out what it looks like from the other side.

Maybe there’s something in the unseasonably cold air but we know before she introduces herself that the woman walking towards us in the cream double-breasted suit and wide felt fedora is Alexis. She’s got a resumé to match the look: she spent her youth as a traveller, tour guide and DJ before discovering her psychic gift. She’s trained in hypnotherapy and past life regression, and her private clients have included model Kate Moss and actress Sadie Frost. Back in 2012, she was one of six psychics who took part in Jon Fawcett’s art installation EIR in the Tate Modern Tanks. Add to that the fact she’s the niece of the British abstract painter, Sandra Blow RA (a work of Blow’s hangs in Alexis’s healing studio today) and you’ll see her credentials are impeccable.

Beyond episodes of *Most Haunted* I’m not exactly au fait with the work of psychics and mediums, so Alexis takes me through the basics. She explains that some people are psychic; they can read the auras of others and predict the future. A smaller number of them are spiritual mediums, able to make contact with those who have passed on. She’s kind of like a human radio receiver, she needs to tune into both the vibrations of your subject and the spirits beyond.

Alexis admits that a busy London street is an unusual setting for a reading. Usually she works from home – a quiet, calming environment – face to face with her clients, with the aim of contacting one specific spirit, often that of a close relative, and passing on a message. Here, amongst traffic, roadworks and chatter from pubs and restaurants, she can’t promise anything. She never researches her subjects ahead of readings. She prefers to maintain a blank canvas, “pun intended,” she laughs. Already, she says, she’s tuning into me more than the surroundings. So I shut up and let her work her magic.

We take a turn of the street, south to north, up to the junction of Clifford Street, and across the road to Sam Fogg. All the time, Delphino is circling around us, shooting on his night vision camera.

Occasionally, Alexis pauses to place her hands on windows and takes a good look at the interior of each gallery, getting a sense of the building and the people that may have passed through it. She points out a few details that, despite visiting the street many times, I’d never noticed. I ask her if it’s possible to make contact with individuals via artworks. It is, she says, but it’s difficult. I notice that whenever she does begin to make a connection, her eyes flutter, her hand waves and her head nods.

Right now, the connection is patchy. She’s only getting a general sense of the streets, no specific people have made themselves known. She stands, staring upwards at the buildings, and sets a scene, describing the busy, hurried movement of people through the streets. It might be some time in the late 18th, perhaps the early 19th century, she can’t be sure, but she sees women wearing long dresses, corsets and there are coaches and horses. Most of all, she says confidently, there’s a sense that the people here had something to prove.

We wheel around and begin to head down the other side of the street. It’s getting dark now and Alexis is getting into the flow. Pretty soon, she feels the presence of a young woman: wealthy, yet supportive of others, a person who started small but rose to greatness, and, specifically, someone with a history of mining and industry in their family. Mining? Alexis is certain about that, the woman was connected to mining, and she walked this street, exactly where we’re standing. I’ll be honest, I don’t get where she’s going with this. But I decide not to question it.

Soon, Alexis feels a buzz of strange activity in the street: “I’m thinking about being locked up… closed down, shut down… disrepair. I feel like no one came here for a very long time, because it was in need of refurbishing, because there was something very old here. Before we make it, we renew it… history repeats itself. We go over and over and over… things change and renew and rebuild and restart, and this is now in a new phase of growth here.” My thoughts turn to the International Surrealist Exhibition of 1936. The show, held along and around Cork Street, caused a storm. Just a few years later, the street was almost abandoned when German bombs fell on London. We spot a spatter of repairs on an old stone facade, signs of bomb damage?

Outside Stephen Friedman Gallery, Alexis says that the name “sticks out” for her. “I feel… I don’t know, but I feel like this person’s mother was an art collector and he gained a lot of knowledge through her.” Later, I look up Friedman’s biography and find out that his mother was in fact an antiques dealer. A few doors down, at Frieze’s No. 9 Cork Street, an evil eye hangs above the lift doors, opposite the entrance – it has to be a coincidence.

We pass the entrance to the mews and Delphino asks if he could photograph Alexis in the alleyway – the narrow passageway and tiles would look amazing on his night vision camera. But Alexis is uneasy, the energy there isn’t good, and when you’re trying to contact spirits, you’re vulnerable.

“Normally you’re just kind of closed, grounded. What we’re doing now is I’m opening myself up to anything that comes along. I could be picking up people who’ve been murdered. I could be picking up people who died in traumatic experiences. I could be picking up on robbers. If I feel that, I can actually continue to take that energy home with me, and then I have to work through releasing, clearing that energy, which could take me all night.”

Something seems to catch her attention. She turns and makes a beeline back to the low, black painted Georgian building that occupies 19 and 20. This is a rare survivor of early Cork Street, dating back to 1816. A former office space, later a silk and wool merchants, now its upper floors are occupied by The Redfern Gallery. Until recently, it was also the location of Mayor Gallery and Browse & Darby. For Alexis, the feeling is much stronger this time: “Argued, argued… people here argued… never saw eye to eye.” She repeats that phrase again and again, becoming more sure of it each time. “That’s why this building is the way it is, they never saw eye to eye. There’s been upheaval here. This gallery has been up and down, up and down, up and down, up and down…”

Alexis can’t pinpoint which of the galleries that occupied the building may be giving off these vibes. She’s interested in Mayor Gallery, which, until its recent move to nearby Bury Street, was the street’s oldest gallery, founded in 1925. But I wonder if it’s The Redfern Gallery, which was set up in 1923 as an artist cooperative, and moved to 20 Cork Street in 1936. It was the first gallery to show the work of both Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth and between 1941–45, housed Matisse’s Red Studio. That’s a story of movement and upheaval, and as any artist who’s worked in a cooperative knows, there can be a lot of disagreement.

Back at the corner of Burlington Gardens, Alexis feels a strong musical connection. The word ‘concert’ keeps coming to her. I suggest it’s the spirit of Robert ‘Groovy Bob’ Fraser: music and art came together in the glam, swinging sixties star dealer, who supported many British pop artists such as Peter Blake, Bridget Riley and Richard Hamilton and who partied with The Beatles and the Rolling Stones. In 1983, Fraser opened a gallery on Cork Street, but it was a brief spark in the history of the street. Just two years later, Fraser, then dying of AIDS, sold the space to Victoria Miro, telling her “you’ll never make contemporary art happen in this country.” There’s also a direct local link to the Beatles; they played their infamous final concert on the roof of their offices at 3 Savile Row, easily within earshot of Cork Street.

Alexis brings the reading to a close, but I still have a few questions for her. I can’t get that young woman she mentioned earlier out of my mind: her journey from small beginnings to great wealth and social status is a tale as old as time, but it seems strikingly similar to one of Cork Street’s most famous residents. I ask Alexis, could it be Peggy Guggenheim, the daughter of Benjamin Guggenheim, the heir to a mining fortune who died in the sinking of the Titanic? In January 1938, Guggenheim opened her first gallery, Guggenheim Jeune, at 30 Cork Street. Its early exhibitions featured the work of Jean Cocteau (curated by Marcel Duchamp), Wassily Kandinsky and Yves Tanguy. It was a cultural, but not commercial, success; Guggenheim Jeune closed just 18 months later, but that brief foray into the art market marked the start of her life of collecting and supporting the arts.

Alexis, meanwhile, is still thinking about Sam Fogg gallery. I offer one explanation: it was a conversation at Plaster HQ about the gallery’s medieval art that first led to the idea of contacting Alexis. Perhaps she was picking up on the trace of that conversation? I can’t see why else it would have seemed so important to her.

Look, I’m a natural sceptic. When I hear one thing I think of the opposite. The books on my shelves are histories not poetry. I want to get to the bottom of something. But I’m not closed-minded. One thing I’ve learned over the years is that if you want to understand art, you have to learn to open your mind and be willing to see the world in a new way. History shows that people – most people – can’t see the future. One day, the impossible may be possible: a diving suit poetry recital in London, contemporary art succeeding in this country, a psychic vision on Cork Street…

Image: Kim Alexis pictured on Cork Street on an evening in September

REJECTION LETTER

BY CAROLINE COON
AS TOLD TO HARRIET LLOYD-SMITH

1

Few icons seem more unrejectable than Caroline Coon. Over a 60-year career – filled with rebellion, creative variety and activism – she has authored one of the first-ever books on punk, managed The Clash, and through photography and writing, documented the sociocultural shifts that turned Britain inside out.

Coon has campaigned for women's rights, social equality and even founded a charity that provides legal support for those impacted by drugs. And it's through her painting – crisp-edged figurative works that quash taboos around sex work, gender and drug use – that these themes are so potently captured. But like any counter culture pioneer, there were detractors, and as she outlines here in this Rejection Letter, it was often those she least expected. It's been a long path, but the world is finally catching up with Caroline Coon.

← Previous page:
Caroline Coon, *Rush Hour: She Strips Them Naked With Her Eyes*, 2004, Oil on canvas, 60 ¼" × 48", © Caroline Coon. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York, Photo by Todd-White Art Photography

1 Photo by Caroline Coon. Courtesy of Caroline Coon and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York.

2 Caroline Coon, *Sheltering*, 1991. Oil on canvas, 48 ⅛" × 48 ⅛", © Caroline Coon. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York. Photo by Todd-White Art Photography.

3 Caroline Coon, *Falling Sunrise*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 59 ½" × 47 ⅜", © Caroline Coon. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and New York. Photo by Todd-White Art Photography

Talking about rejection is difficult for me – the very word makes me nauseous. But, I guess, the only way for a human to avoid rejection is to not be born! Rejection is a condition of life, whatever kind of life we lead. When we choose to work in a creative profession and offer our work to the public – which is a kind of arrogance – learning to accept rejection is essential. Every big success is due to a thousand little rejections.

I was lucky to be trained by great artists to both face rejection and to work hard, the better to avoid it. At ballet school when I was a child, I remember rehearsing before the great retired ballerina Lydia Kyasht. She would whack her walking stick on the floor and shout at us to repeat a step again and again until she judged us good enough to proceed. It was by learning the importance of persistence that I was able to withstand the first rejection that cut so deeply I will never forget it. I was talking to my mother about art, and she dismissed me saying: "Caroline, you'll never be a great artist – great artists have had one-man shows by the time they are your age!"

I was 14. I was vulnerable – with no experience of the world – and I believed my mother. But already there was a strong part of my brain that told me my mother was wrong. If I persisted and worked hard... maybe?

Rejection is particularly nauseating, humiliating and shaming when it is done in public. When I was a first-year fine art student at Central School of Art, Germaine Greer – the feminist writer and critic – would visit me in my studio. We would have engaging conversations long into the night about life, love and sex. I looked up to her (she is six years older than me) as an intellectual and friend. It was the late 1960s and she was writing what would become her international best-seller, *The Female Eunuch*. When the book was published and I read her dedication to me: "Caroline, who danced, but badly, painted but badly..." I felt devastated. I had to scrape together every ounce of confidence and self-belief to carry on.

Yes, I learned to accept people's right to reject me and my work. I would absorb the hurt, spit out a few expletives and move on – determined to do better. If we have the courage to present work to the public, we must also accept rejection with good grace.

Rejection takes an emotional form within me instantaneously, like a knife stabbing into my heart. The question for me has always been how to keep on going – how to repair my damaged and hurt ego. Whilst I struggled for many years to sell my paintings, I still hoped that if I persisted long enough there would eventually be someone who said 'yes'. Possibly? And, as time passed, I learned to deal with rejection more rationally. There is no acceptance without rejection. Repeated rejections mean acceptance is sweeter when it occurs: a nice paradox.

What helped fortify my creative outlook has been reading about the lives of everyone who has carried on regardless – no matter what anyone thought of their work. I cannot think of one artist, writer or musician whose work I love who did not face rejection, strife and struggle in their lifetime. The list is long of the people who have shaped my often faltering creative psyche – artists, writers and photographers like Angelica Kauffman, Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, Colette, Jean Rhys, Camille Claudel, Henry Scott Tuke, Dora Carrington, Georgia O'Keeffe, Glyn Philpot, Faith Ringgold, Carolee Schneemann, Shirin Neshat, Charlotte Salomon... these are exemplary people for me – not necessarily for the style of their art but for how they managed to live in the face of bigotry and exclusion, often not receiving recognition until long after death or very late in life.

Looking back – although it didn't feel like it at the time – being overlooked for projects or commissions and having my paintings rejected over many years has had an altogether positive effect on my art. Rejection was damn inconvenient financially! But working outside the art world enabled me to paint exactly as I wanted – which was right for me. I had no pressure to conform to any art world fashion: there was no need for me to compromise my style or subject matter. I could be passionate and free.

Failure is intrinsic to the creative process. If we do the work to the very best of our ability, then there is no failure – only success on our own terms. Just do the work and Keep Going!

Also, it is a good idea for artists to have a sense of perspective – most of us are critical of other artists' work all the time. I am anyway! I make a judgement but then I remember to keep an open mind because in another mood, on another day, at another time, I will change my mind – what yesterday I rejected, today I adore.

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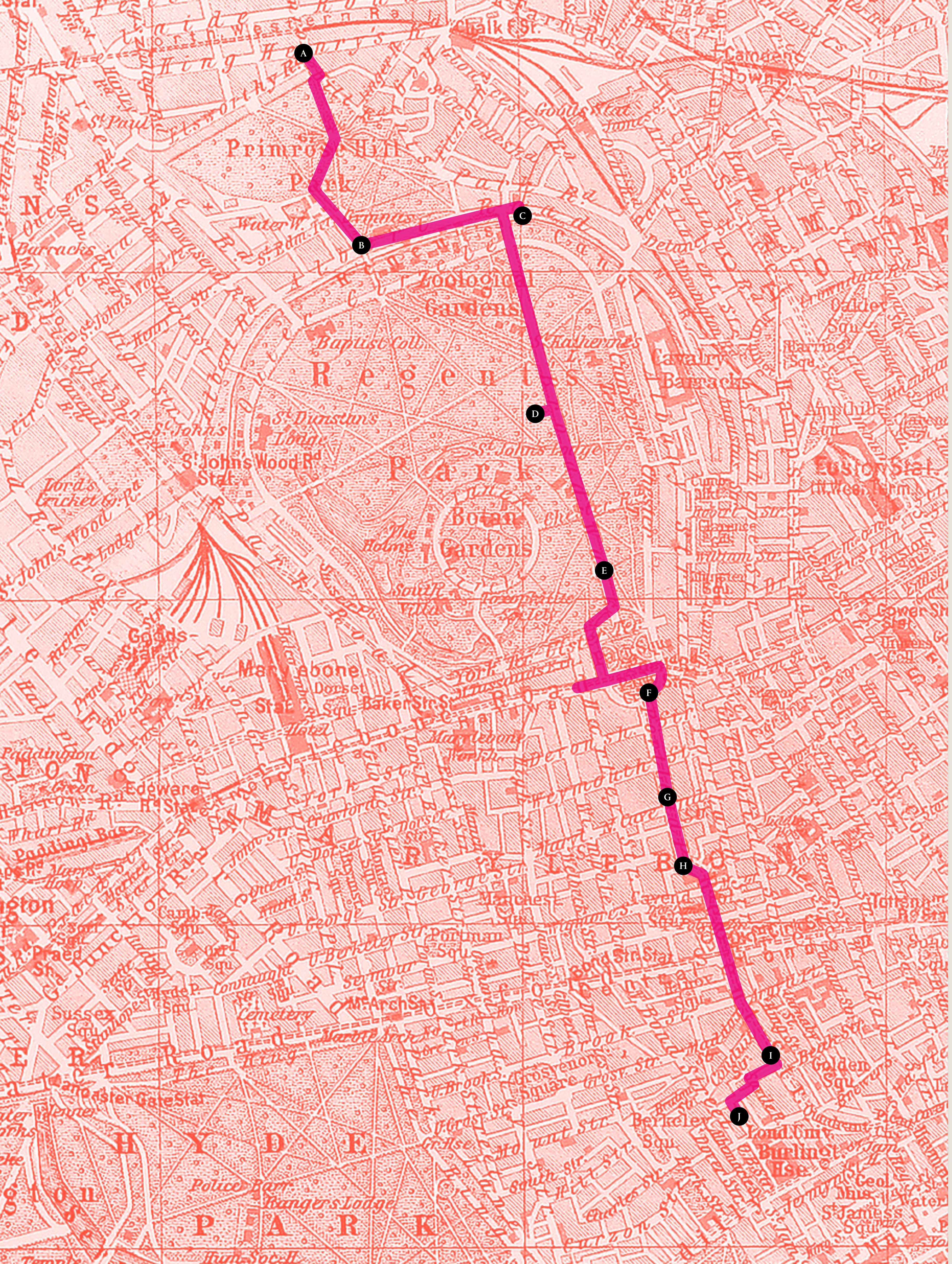


THE COMMUTE

Laurie Barron joins gallerist Alison Jacques on her morning commute from Primrose Hill to Cork Street

1

← Previous page:
Map of Alison Jacques' morning commute from Primrose Hill to Cork Street
A Primrose Hill Road, London
B Prince Albert Road, London
C Feng Shang Princess, Prince Albert Road, London
D Broad Walk Cafe, The Broad Walk, London NW1 4NP
E Griffin Tazza (Lion Vase), London
F 14 Park Cres, London W1B 1PG
G Portland Place, Marylebone, London
H The Langham Hotel, Portland Place, London
I Regent Street, Mayfair, London
J 22 Cork Street, London
1 Alison Jacques photographed by Sophie Davidson, 2023

On a crisp autumn morning, London's Primrose Hill is one of the most picturesque spots to start the day, with panoramic views of London's skyline and, at 8.30am, hundreds of dogs running around. But as gallerist Alison Jacques muses, the area also carries more sinister history: "It used to be called Greenberry Hill, after the names of two men [Robert Green and Henry Berry] who murdered a man at the top of the hill and were later exonerated." Jacques learnt this after researching the name of her regular morning haunt, Greenberry Cafe. "Everyone thinks it's a really beautiful, calm place, but it has an interesting, strange history."

Shaking off jet lag, Jacques has just returned from New York where she presented the late American artist Lenore Tawney's fibre-based woven sculptures at the Independent 20th Century fair. In London this November, she is planning an exhibition exploring the relationship between Tawney and the late Japanese-American ceramicist Toshiko Takasai, who was recently exhibited at the Noguchi Museum.

Pointing at the ground, Jacques directs me to a curious metal plaque, which reads 'The truth against the world'. "A lot of people just walk over this and don't notice it," she explains "It commemorates a Welsh Bard [poet] and was laid down on the summer solstice in 1826. I'm fascinated by this kind of history; we now represent the estate of artist Monica Sjöö and her work is all about solstice worship, Stonehenge and Avebury circle – so it was a nice coincidence." Jacques then leads the way on her daily commute from Primrose Hill to Cork Street, promising to point out some of her favourite sights en route.

We are speaking exactly two decades on from Jacques establishing her namesake gallery, which represents major artists and estates like Jane Dickson, Sheila Hicks and Dorothea Tanning. It's now also a year since her gallery moved from Fitzrovia to a new, larger premises on Cork Street. Jacques has notably worked with the estate of the trailblazing, controversial artist Robert Mapplethorpe for 25 years, over which time she has invited unlikely guest curators such as the Scissor Sisters and Juergen Teller to curate the transgressive photographer's oeuvre. Alongside working with in-demand living artists including Sophie Barber, Graham Little and Erika Verzutti, Jacques has established a reputation for building the curatorial reputation of overlooked artists. Nicola L. and Lygia Clark – two estates in her roster – will receive solo exhibitions in London museums this year, at the Camden Art Centre and Whitechapel Gallery, respectively.

I ask Jacques about her beginnings in art. Dropping out of a home economics degree (due to a bout of appendicitis) Jacques switched to history of art and religion at the University of Leicester. Post-graduation, finding it difficult to secure any relevant work with an arts degree, Jacques worked odd jobs, among them a period as a telephonist at Coca-Cola Schweppes. After completing an intensive Italian short course, she moved to become an au pair in Italy. "I was terrible at it," she laughs. "I had three families in about eight months, and I was fired from one of the jobs!"

It was during an internship at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice that Jacques realised her calling, impressing the director by instigating a multi-language guided-tour programme before ultimately coordinating the internship scheme herself. "It was very nice. Every morning, I'd stand on the terrace overlooking the Grand Canal and, quite frankly, felt like I was Peggy herself. In the evenings, we'd often sit with some students and drink prosecco on her throne."

After a curatorial course at Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea Luigi Pecci in Prato, and a stint at the Kunstverein Dusseldorf, where she interviewed James Turrell for his travelling exhibition catalogue, Jacques wrote freelance articles before landing the role of news editor at Flash Art where she connected with figures such as curator Francesco Bonami and artist Maurizio Cattelan. She recalls teaching English to the latter. "Maurizio said, 'I can pay you or I can pay you in art'. I was so broke and I needed to pay my rent so I accepted the equivalent of five pounds an hour! Obviously that's a major regret, but look what a career he's gone on to have."

"Maurizio said, 'I can pay you or I can pay you in art'. I was so broke and I needed to pay my rent so I accepted the equivalent of five pounds an hour! Obviously that's a major regret, but look what a career he's gone on to have."

ALISON JACQUES

When Jacques returned from Italy to the UK, she was inspired by the contemporary curators and dealers of the time like Laure Genillard, Karsten Schubert and Joshua Compston as inspiring figures on the emerging scene. Keen to gain experience at an established dealership, she then worked for the late Leslie Waddington (whose gallery remains on Cork Street opposite Jacques's new space) before setting up a gallery with collector Charles Asprey in 1998, later setting out on her own in 2004 on Clifford Street – adjacent to Cork Street.

As we cross into Regent's Park, Jacques points out a bench near the Feng Shang Princess, a floating Chinese restaurant on the canal. "It frequently appears in [Apple TV's] Slow Horses. Jackson Lamb and Diana Taverner (played by Gary Oldman and Kristen Scott Thomas) always go and sit on that bench for their secret meetings..." Jacques adds that an LA-based client produces the show, and gives her advance notice about when they're going to be filming so they can catch a glimpse. "My daughter gets very excited!"

We then pass a monumental marble water fountain gifted to the park in 1869 by entrepreneur and philanthropist Cowasjee Jehangir, an industrialist of Bombay, India. Jacques concedes it is an important pit stop for Sassy, her pet chihuahua, to do her business. "I like to look at the history of [such] entrepreneurs because my father was one, and I similarly wanted to do my own thing," she says. "Partly, because I don't like being told what to do, but also because it's very creative to just want to have ideas and realise them."

Walking further south, we head past the site where the large Annabelle Selldorf-designed Frieze Art Fair tents are erected each October. Diggers and art technicians abound, making way for the outdoor sculptures soon to be installed. We glimpse a giant globular work by Ken Price being unwrapped. Jacques has participated in every iteration of the Frieze fair since its launch in 2003. "People forget the fair creates its own ecosystem. So many people are employed to build it and students are given this great opportunity to get experience – be it in the exhibitor office or on the VIP desk."

I ask what she thinks when she observes the preparations begin each year. "Fear and dread," she admits. "I then think: we're not ready." Jacques typically shows a group presentation of artists from her programme at the main fair, alongside a solo presentation of an artist's estate at Frieze Masters. Her Dorothea Tanning presentation in 2012 contributed to a reevaluation of the late Surrealist's practice and led to an acclaimed Tate Modern exhibition in 2019.

We grab drinks from the park's Espresso Bar (sencha tea for Jacques; a builder's brew for me) and Jacques laughs that the cutesy 'gingerbread' building, as it's also known, was once home to a cannibal witch. "I've always been interested in folklore and fairytales," she explains. "Similarly, in art, I'm drawn to this interplay between light and dark."

We leave the park and head towards Mayfair, walking alongside the white stucco-fronted homes around the park, before passing the international embassies clustered along Portland Place. As we pick up the pace, weaving through the hectic morning hubbub around Oxford Circus towards Mayfair, I ask Jacques about the 6,000 sq ft gallery she moved into last October, designed in collaboration with architect Mike Rundell. The multi-room building includes a 23 ft high-ceiling, encouraging artists to realise ambitious installations that might usually only be possible in museum environments. The interior space isn't visible from the street which, according to Jacques, creates "the whole mystery of an exhibition as the experience is revealed." Instead, a wall displaying her artist's publications and monographs is spotlit overnight to entice the curiosity of passersby.

The gallery is closed to the public as we arrive for the installation of her forthcoming solo exhibition with sculptor Alison Wilding, known for abstract sculpture in materials like alabaster, wood, steel, rubber, paper, copper and sand. "Wilding is an artist's artist," says Jacques. "People forget that she once had a solo show at MoMA in New York. But she fell under the radar. At that time she was amongst this group of white male artists known as the 'New British Sculptors'. She wasn't perhaps as domineering or bombastic as some of those characters. It was a white male world. Thank God things have changed."

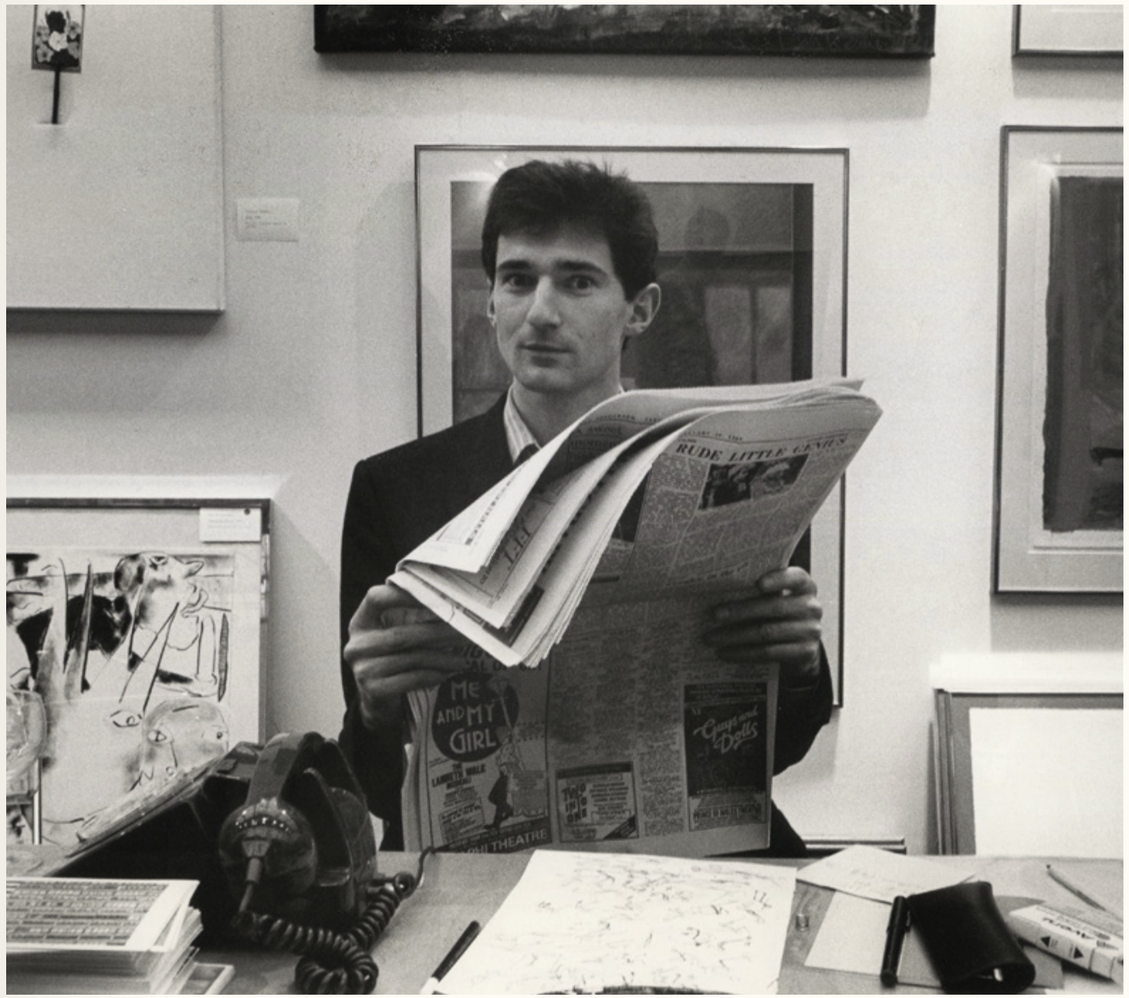
Since the move to Cork Street, Jacques' visitor numbers have sharply risen. Her inaugural show with 90-year-old artist Sheila Hicks included a multicoloured mountain of soft woven fibre forms – which went viral with influencers on Instagram – received seven thousand attending its six-week run. "Sheila loved that," says Jacques. "We welcome this increased footfall because we're here to spread the word about our artists. You could say that nothing will come from 50% of visitors – they're just enjoying what you do. But with the other half, you're sowing seeds, hoping they will grow and become trees."

"We're in a time where newspapers report a decline in then global art market." I mention to Jacques that many larger galleries seem to be safeguarding their businesses by poaching in-demand emerging painters from younger galleries – yet this doesn't appear to be her model at all. Jacques says that she doesn't consider her gallery a supermarket or shop.

"I think that in this economic climate, collectors want to look somewhere more intimate," says Jacques. "I'm a one-man band and own 100% of my gallery. I don't have a trust fund. I've had to make it a business, otherwise it won't survive. I love discovering artists who haven't had their dues. I'm very lucky to then show their work and build their curatorial profile and market, which is absolutely fundamental for success. In my opinion, you can't have one without the other."

THE INTERNSHIP

PLASTER'S CO-FOUNDER MILO ASTAIRE REFLECTS FONDLY ON A FORMATIVE EXPERIENCE AT FLOWERS GALLERY



In 2012, I was generously given a three-month internship by gallerist Matthew Flowers. I was a young layabout, but eager to understand the art world. Damien Hirst's show had just opened at the Tate Modern, and although I couldn't quite understand why a blow-up beach ball suspended in the air by a hairdryer was art, it appealed to my childish sense of humour at the time, and I wanted more.

Matthew is the son of Angela Flowers who founded the eponymous gallery in 1970. One day, while a young Matthew was working part-time at the gallery in 1976, my grandfather, Edgar Astaire walked in and purchased a work by the artist Patrick Hughes on the spot. It was Matthew's first significant sale. Edgar was a stockbroker and one of the few clients they knew in finance. As a struggling gallery, Angela thought it sensible to invite him to sit on the board of directors, thinking my grandfather could offer some sound financial advice. That advice amounted to offering the services of his son, my father, as an 'art consultant'. The advisory position, though somewhat fruitful, didn't last long. But 20 years later, when I was searching for a job, my father reached out to Matthew.

I have since dug out the original email, in which, my father introduces me as a "sophisticated young man." I was not. Ambitious perhaps, but sophisticated? Far from it. Beyond that brief visit to Tate Modern, my understanding of art history started and ended with the Venetian Renaissance, which was the main subject of my Part 1 History of Art A level. I was also aware of Banksy thanks to a mural next to my local Mexican bar hangout on Portobello Road.

When I arrived at the interview, Matthew was towering yet welcoming, wearing a baggy suit and firmly holding a Chelsea FC mug. He had great recollections of my grandfather, but when he asked me about my interest in art, he could spot an imitator. I didn't know what I was talking about, and he knew it. However, he saw a glimmer of something in me and was willing to give me a chance.

Speaking to Matthew recently, it became clear that interns were an essential part of the Flowers business model at the time. As a fledgling gallery with no guarantee of their next sale, Flowers relied on the internship programme to help assist the full-time staff. At the time, interns didn't need to be paid, save for their travel expenses. We were all willing participants – some straight out of uni and others, clueless and misguided youths like myself. We were given far more responsibility than was probably warranted.

My role was to support the then-new sales director of the gallery, Isabel Bingley. Isabel, only a few years older than me, had excelled at the gallery and risen quickly up the ranks. Being lumped with me was her punishment for doing so well. Working so closely with a senior staff member, you begin to understand, by osmosis, the inner workings of a gallery. You get

From: Simon Astaire
Sent: 13 April 2012 16:04
To: Matthew Flowers
Subject: Re: From Matt Flowers

Yes
I would love that
Can I bring my son? Believe me, he is a joy and for am 18 year old, incredibly sophisticated
Simon

Sent from my iPhone

"I knew that whatever happened, at least someone thought I was talented enough for a job. So, thank you, Matthew, Isabel and Flowers."

MILO ASTAIRE

to grips with the strange language of online art databases, learn how to speak to clients when they come into the gallery, and find out what a franking machine is. Isabel was far too generous with her time educating me, but her enthusiasm rubbed off and very quickly I felt emboldened by my new role.

Internships, I believe, are extremely important. They give you an insight into the working world without the commitment of full-time employment. With the internship at Flowers, I felt like an important cog in the system. For the first time in my life, I felt a sense of pride in my work (aside from the occasional Saturday morning that I arrived completely hungover – I was 19, after all). Flowers created a community where full-time staff and interns were united.

When I recently returned to Flowers Cork Street gallery to speak to Matthew for this article, I learned that an intern, Antonio, who started the same week as me, was still working there. This is testament to the attitude Flowers instilled in its interns. You believe in the gallery, especially if they believe in you. I also learned that another intern who came before me is now the head of their Hong Kong gallery.

When I look back on the internship, I am reminded of happy times, like my first attempt at a sale, which I failed with flying colours. My friends would call me up pretending to be clients and I would unwittingly put them through to Matthew. Thankfully, he saw the funny side. But most of all, I remember the education, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

Matthew reminded me that on the final day, he actually offered me a full-time job at Flowers. Unfortunately, my January travel plans somehow felt more important to me at the time. Matthew was – and is – always ready to take a chance on someone, even if they can't see it themselves. The faith he and the team showed in me was invaluable, as I spent the next few years trying to navigate my way through the art world. I knew that whatever happened, at least someone thought I was talented enough for a job. So, thank you, Matthew, Isabel and Flowers.

← Previous page:
Matthew Flowers, London Art Fair, 1989, Courtesy of Flowers Gallery

1 Email exchange between Simon Astaire and director Matthew Flowers

Angela Flowers, 1993, Courtesy of Angela Flowers and Flowers Gallery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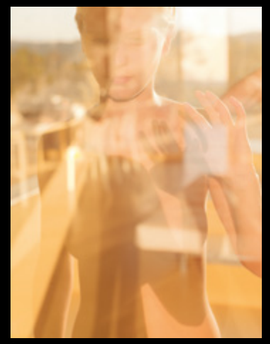
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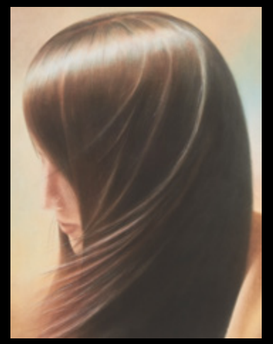
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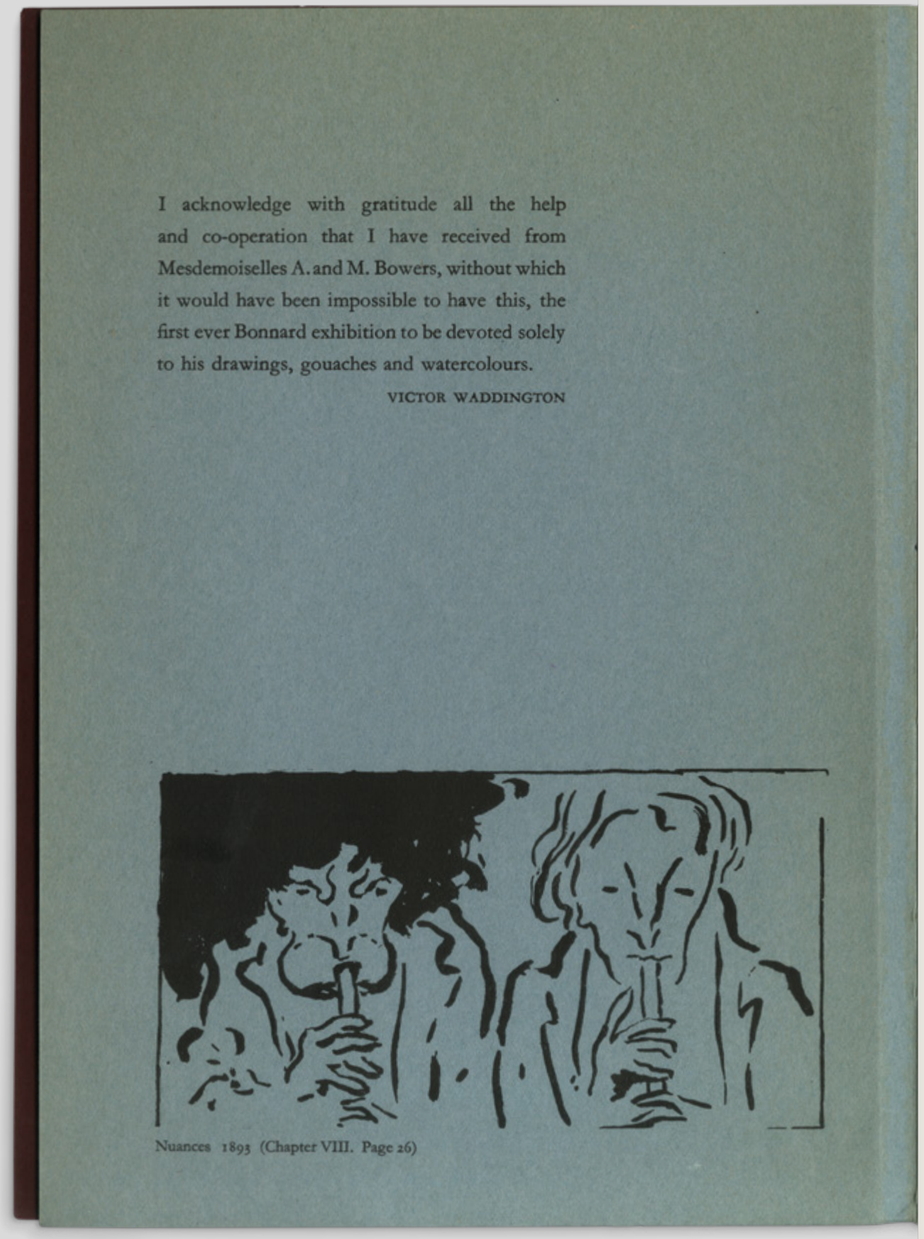
1 Eric Tucker, Alon Zakaim Fine Art
2 Fabienne Verdier, Waddington Custot
3 John Akomfrah, Lisson Gallery
4 Lenz Geerk, MASSIMODECARLO
5 Muyeong Kim, Frieze No.9 Cork Street
6 Murray Clarke, Nahmad Projects
7 *An Angel In Flight Bearing The Arma Christi*, c. 1480, Sam Fogg
8 Mona Kuhn, Flowers Gallery
9 Sam Nhlengethwa, Goodman Gallery
10 Tony Oursler, Holtermann Fine Art
11 Sophie Barber, Alison Jacques
12 Tuesday Riddell, Messums Org
13 Virginia Chihota, Tiwani Contemporary
14 Yooyun Yang, Stephen Friedman Gallery

FOURTEEN ARTISTS

The complete series of limited-edition posters placed at random, one per copy, inside this edition of CATALOGUE

FOURTEEN POSTERS

Original 1966 catalogue for the first show dedicated to 'Bonnard: Drawings, Gouaches, Watercolours' at Victor Waddington's gallery at no. 25 Cork Street, including text by Patrick Heron.



I acknowledge with gratitude all the help and co-operation that I have received from Mesdemoiselles A. and M. Bowers, without which it would have been impossible to have this, the first ever Bonnard exhibition to be devoted solely to his drawings, gouaches and watercolours.

VICTOR WADDINGTON

Nuances 1893 (Chapter VIII. Page 26)

HERON ON BONNARD

We delved into the archives to unearth this 1966 catalogue essay by artist Patrick Heron (written from his home in Zennor, Cornwall) on Pierre Bonnard's first-ever show of drawings and watercolours, held at Victor Waddington's gallery at no. 25 Cork Street.

In offering us the present exhibition Victor Waddington has done a remarkable thing. Not only is this the first one-man show ever to be devoted exclusively to Bonnard's drawings, gouaches and watercolours; but nearly two-thirds of the works included here have never been exhibited before, all but three of them coming from the Bonnard estate. Finally, it makes a point – in this era of gigantic canvases – which is of exceptional interest, namely, that an enormous grandeur of scale can nevertheless be conveyed with an absolute completeness in what are virtually miniature paintings, exhibiting all the richness and complexity normally associated only with the artist's own major canvases – a theme to which I will return in a moment.

Again, Victor Waddington is fortunate in his timing: not only is there at this moment a new awareness, amongst British painters in particular, that Europe has once again more to say than America (in the transatlantic dialogue that has been going on since 1950); but Bonnard and Matisse are alone among the great masters of the first half of the Twentieth Century in that they still operate today upon the avant garde with all the force and relevance of indispensable living influences. In an essay entitled 'Pierre Bonnard and Abstraction', which I published in 1955,* I claimed that it was 'round about 1946 or 1947' that Matisse and Bonnard seemed suddenly to have supplanted Picasso and Braque as the living masters most to the liking of the rising schools of younger, non-figurative painters. But it was in an earlier essay (written immediately after Bonnard's death in 1947) that I first tried to describe the exact nature of the abstract elements in Bonnard – elements which have enormously influenced abstract painting ever since. Because I would not wish, now, significantly to alter that description of what still seems to me the basic formal character of Bonnard's painting, I may perhaps quote from what I wrote nineteen years ago, the following:

"... we may best conceive the underlying abstract rhythm in Bonnard if we think of a piece of large-scale fishnet drawn over the surface of the canvas; it is through an imaginary structure of loose, connected squares – sometimes pulled into oblongs and sometimes into diamond shapes – that Bonnard seems to look at his subject. I'm not suggesting that he makes a conscious mental manoeuvre of this kind – my image of the netting is simply a device for interpreting Bonnard's mode of vision, which was unique. His paintings have a visual alloverness, an evenness of emphasis and handling... He forged a conceptual imagery out of perceptions. His form is very powerful; but it is distinct from the form of Renoir (for instance) in that it is developed entirely in terms of this 'alloverness'. Renoir developed the forms of the various objects in his composition more or less separately: that is, sculpturally. The beauty of form of a head, a breast or an arm, or of tree trunks, of fruit, in a Renoir picture, is something we can contemplate in ignorance of the rest of the canvas: each object has its own self-centred perfection of form – which is a sculptural form. But the form of the objects in a picture by Bonnard hardly exists in isolation from the total configuration... Bonnard's forms have an apparent flatness: the masses of his forms seem fattened so as to display the largest area or plane to the spectator. But this flattening is somehow itself the very agent of spatial realisation: in fact, we come to recognise that the flatter the masses of face or hair, or of the bush outside the window, may seem in themselves, the more profound is the spatial scheme to which, in total concourse, they contribute. In spite of the clearest rapport with the picture surface at every stage, every element makes its contribution to a configuration in space: the imaginary fishnet at the surface, at one extreme, and perspectival depth at the other, between them provide the poles of definition. Thus we find a sort of upending of all receding planes: there is a tendency for them to expand and rear up just where perspective tells them to lie down, diminish and contract. If we think of this invisible skeleton of rectilinear surface design (the fishnet) as being the real formal theme of a picture whose subject is the receding planes of the walls and floor of a room – planes broken up by numerous things, objects of furniture and persons – it can be seen that the far end of a table, which tries to bend up into a position more nearly parallel to the picture surface, is so to speak only trying to fit itself into one of the squarish holes of the fishnet. Bonnard's forms all tend to assume the shape of a cube with rounded corners: a squarish lozenge is the prototype of form with which many of his objects seek identity."

Again, the fishnet emphasises 'the apparently unending, allover nature of Bonnard's design. There is an extraordinarily wide distribution of

accent and pictorial stress. Right into the corners of the canvas we follow a display, a layout, in which interest is as intense half an inch from the picture's edge as it is at the centre. Usually the edge of the canvas slices off half (or even four-fifths!) of some object at which our eyes have arrived with the greatest anticipation. Nevertheless, there is never any sense of arbitrariness; or even of the composition being a mere slice of whatever was to be seen from where the painter was standing; it is just that the fishnet extends its rhythm, unbroken, to the very confines of the picture space.'

And lastly: 'Again and again.... Bonnard ventured out into the fiercely horizontal meadows and orchards of Normandy; out among the vineyards or the pines of the Cote d'Azur; or to the rocky rim (rocks red or blue) of the empty, glittering, eternally changing meadow of the sea. The sea was a twitching Persian carpet, scattered with dark blue jujubes; embroidered with countless fat little yellow zeds; heavy with little purple plums. The wide-open, blank, boatless horizontality of this vibrating sea-meadow suggested to Bonnard a system of abstract forms. He equated all the vast, receding, open-air planes of seascape or landscape with just those abstract bars and lozenge-forms I have described him using in another context.'

Although I could not know it at the time of writing, (because it had not yet happened), the future of 'those abstract bars' and 'lozenge-forms', those carpets of zeds or plums or jujubes, that 'cube with rounded corners', was virtually to provide the most important non-figurative painters in England and America with half their formal vocabulary for the twenty years following Bonnard's death. Dissociated entirely from the figurative connotation to which they were invariably tied by Bonnard, the soft-edged bar or band, the soft-edged irregular lozenge or the round – cornered square or oblong – these purely visual, non-symbolic images have liberated, and dominated, a period of Anglo-American painting which has been one of unprecedented achievement. It is true that where actual purity and brilliance of colour are concerned Matisse is a much more radical innovator: it is from Matisse, not Bonnard, that the sheer flatness and the intense brilliance of our own modern colour-areas originally stems. Bonnard's dappled and striated surfaces seem always atmospheric by comparison. But both the individual forms as well as the overall formal patterns by which so many have been hypnotised during the past fifteen years – these come direct from Bonnard. Consider the lurchingly horizontal divisions of the picture surface in his seascapes: immensely broad and weighty in configuration, yet glitteringly light and gay in their actual execution, glowing and softly irridescent in their actual hue – they are unquestionably the forerunners of the band-and-stripe formats which even now have barely run their full course. Then, in Bonnard's interiors, it is the vertical bands (serving as door or window jambs, door-edges, and the thin sliver of further space seen through a slightly open door, perhaps) which divide more recent canvases from top to bottom, which make their first appearance.

Who can look, in this exhibition, at four of the gouache seascapes without experiencing the added excitement of recognition–the recognition of the more recent abstract format within the brilliant bands of beach, sea and sky? *La Plage à Arcachon*: 1925, *Le Port de Cannes*: 1930, *Méditerranée*: 1930 and *Le Bassin d' Arcachon*: 1930 are only a matter of inches wide of high: yet each, it seems to me, has the punch, the compact power and, above all, the grandeur of scale of one of the artist's major canvases. Each could dominate a large room. Each contains all the formal ingredients of a major Bonnard composition. In no sense are these tiny gouaches (and I'm referring, now, equally to a number of the smallest gouache interiors and one still life, all of which are masterpieces: *La Porte Fenêtre*: 1930, La Tasse de Thé: 1932 and Nature Morte: 1930) – in no sense are these sketches, or mere shorthand equivalents for full-scale paintings. They are full-scale, major compositions; they just happen to be physically minute. Imagine *La Tasse de Thé*, which is 9¾ inches by 12¾ inches, or La Porte Fenêtre, which is only 6⅛ inches by 4¾ inches, projected in images six or seven feet wide on the wall of a museum: no structural element would be missing, to betray their miniature origin. Bonnard has, in all these tiny, dense and extremely beautiful gouaches, completely succeeded in mastering the mystery of scale. Just as in his largest canvases, so here his touch is infinitely varied; his brush never slips into repetitiveness; on this minutest scale the jabs, slides, stains, or scribbled-sideways smearings, the nervous stringy linear touches, the juicy blobs and the opaque smudges – all are here deployed with exquisite purpose and effect.

Here, too, are several much larger gouaches (but still not two feet wide), such as *La Table de La Salle à Manger*: 1930/35 or the brilliant *Fenêtre owerte sur Jardin*: 1930/35 in which the fascination is not so much in their scale as in the fact that they do not materially differ, in the nature of their execution, from Bonnard's smaller oil paintings. There is an exquisite coolness in the glittering whites and the receptive, furry greens of *Fenêtre overte sur Jardin*: a superbly voluminous aerial space is generated in the upper half of the picture, there where the interior space of the room flows up and out through the window and over and beyond the extremely complex balcony. The warring diagonals of the balcony crosspieces and the angled armchair are miraculously resolved, up above, between the calming but splaying–apart verticals of the open window.

To come to the drawings: it is surely true to say that in the drawings of his mature periods Bonnard never failed to generate, out of a paper surface scribbled and caressed and dashed and dotted with a 6B pencil, two particular sensations, first and foremost: the feeling of aerial space; and the illusion of colour. Of the two, the second was probably the more unique, for who else makes us feel the presence of ceruleum or cobalt simply by strewing an area of paper with multidirectional loops or zigzags or a swarm of ragged dots and dashes of black pencil marks? Again and again you are aware of colour and of a specific space (outdoor: indoor) before you actually apprehend the precise subject of a Bonnard drawing. In one of the finest drawings here – *Paysage*: 1930, in charcoal – the sensation of intense Provençal blues and purples (in the distance) is fantastic: furthermore, the very predominance of black in the dense black scribbles of the charcoal acts on one's eyes like a photographic negative – it convinces one of the almost unbearable brightness of the southern sunlight! (In paintings, after all, Bonnard had done just this often enough – moved into darker and darker tones of blue-purple as he climbed up the canvas into the brightest strata of the sky). Yet it is a mistake to think that all that that scribble is doing is to create the illusion of colour and space as such; information about the solid physical facts present is perpetually offered in every square inch of every drawing. Look at the superb *Vue de l'atelier du Cannet*: 1925. The heavy black scribble of the window-bars creates the light and colour of the landscape outside: pink and apricot walls and roofs of villas embedded in the blue-green olive slopes, a flat band of ultramarine mountains behind. Inside, that circular scribbling opposite seems suddenly to evoke an ornately flowered wallpapered wall, with one of his own seascapes hanging on it: the papers on the bed: the plant at the left – all are there, behind the scribble which unites the surface of the drawing in a haze of light. Indeed, it is the scribble's function to push the wall back, pull the window-bars forward, and so on, until everything is spatially positioned – not by perspectival 'lines of drawing', but by the relative density of the various scribbled areas. By virtue of their tangled texture the areas of varied kinds of scribble create the scene, often entirely without the aid of even a single outline or profile.

I have dwelt mainly on one kind of Bonnard drawing – the sort that is so closely integrated into the processes of his painting that it seems inseparable from it. But there were other aspects of his enormously varied activity as a draughtsman: and there are which also exist mainly in their own right. For instance; the poster-like *Scène de Rue* of 1890; the frankly illustrational *Les Courses*, of 1894, with its unusual hint of Degas; the 'expressionist' Les Patineurs of 1900, rather like a woodcut. And then there is the economically linear *Intérieur, initiales*, of 1938, whose fascination for me lies in the way the spare squarish shape of the chair-back, the triangular segment of carpet, and the L-shaped door-frame are all shoved tight up against the edges of the left-hand side of the picture. Again, there is the overtly decorative (or decorated) *Le Jardin de Vernon*, of 1920, in which one sees such an explicit reminder of the great Vernon garden landscapes of the early Twenties, with that elaborate and detailed treatment which often had the look of tapestry. Finally, there is *Femme dans un Intérieur*, of 1940, (an abstract if you forget the figure stuck down there in the corner – and which, that point apart, has a quality Giacometti might have found intriguing?) and the extremely lovely *Portrait de Jeune Fille*, of 1942, which probably simply shows that, however abstract we may now find the late Bonnard, he could also draw a girl's head, in 1942, in a way one can only compare with Renoir or Rubens. We tend to forget, nowadays, that genius may be as inconsistent as it damn well likes.

Zennor, July 1966

31 Portrait de jeune fille

21 Le déjeuner

Original 1966 catalogue for the first show dedicated to 'Bonnard: Drawings, Gouaches, Watercolours' at Victor Waddington's gallery at no. 25 Cork Street, including text by Patrick Heron.

EMMA PREMPEH

EMMA PREMPEH WANTS YOU TO FEEL WHAT YOU CAN'T TOUCH

Prempeh's paintings are troves of nostalgia, identity and matriarchal strength, as Izzy Bilkus finds when she visits the artist's South East London studio
Words by Izzy Bilkus

← Previous page:
Emma Prempeh, *Meeting the Family*, 2024, Oil, Acrylic and Schlag metal on Canvas, 14" × 11", Courtesy of the artist and Tiwani Contemporary, Photo by Deniz Güzel

"It was tough trying to find my style. At the start I was like, 'what the fuck am I doing!?'"

EMMA PREMPEH

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← Previous page:
Emma Prempeh photographed in her South East London studio by Milly Cope

1 Emma Prempeh, *Study of Marigolds (Uganda)*, 2024, Oil, Acrylic and Schlag metal on Canvas, 29 ⅞" × 24", Courtesy of the artist and Tiwani Contemporary, Photo by Deniz Güzel

"I do feel lonely sometimes being a painter," Emma Prempeh tells me as we sit down to chat in her South East London studio, where she spends many hours in solitude. "But I'm an introvert so I don't mind. I remember back in the 2020 lockdown, everyone wanted to go outside but I just felt like I was in my element." It is these introspective qualities that Prempeh brings to her work. Alone, she finds the space to explore what belonging means to her.

Working mostly in paint, Prempeh grapples with memory and the complexities of connection. In her richly layered paintings – infused with personal and familial narratives – home is an ever-shifting concept; it is hard to fully grasp yet deeply felt. "It's something I'm always going to be fascinated by and will always try to get a hold on," she says.

The 28-year-old artist has achieved a lot in her short career. After graduating from Goldsmiths in 2019, she participated in Bloomberg New Contemporaries, the Ingram Collection Purchase Prize and the annual breakthrough group show for emerging artists. She went on to win the Alumno/Space Studio Bursary in 2020, and the Valerie Beston Artists' Trust Award in 2022, after completing her MA in painting at the Royal College of Art under the Leverhulme Trust Arts Scholarship. When I meet Prempeh, the works for her upcoming show at Tiwani Contemporary have only just been collected from her studio. All that remains are a few smaller canvases and a private portrait commission she's in the midst of. "I wanted to form the show around the subject of home," she explains. "I touch on it sometimes, but I've never delved into it properly until now." This continues Prempeh's exploration of her heritage and diasporic experience. "My mum's from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, she came to the UK when she was 16. My dad's from Ghana and my fiancé lives in Uganda, where he's from, so I'm connected to all these different places."

In this context, the layers of her paintings feel like a visual conversation about displacement. "I've been trying to get to the source of all the stories my mum told me growing up. She always spoke about 'back home'. So many people talk about 'back home', especially people I've met from the diaspora," she continues. This sense of "limbo" takes shape on Prempeh's canvases, where rooms melt into darkness and figures float between places, without roots, undefined by the traditional boundaries of space.

Prempeh's work has a cinematic, ethereal quality. Her figures – often based on friends and family members – interact in dark, dreamlike interiors that seem both familar and imagined. "I like to focus on interior spaces. My figures are usually floating, you don't know exactly where they are," she adds. "I'm interested in what makes me feel familiar within an environment, like a curtain or a fabric or a scent." Her visits over the summer to Kampala and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, shifted her focus slightly. "I picked up painting landscapes and realised how important that's become for me," she recalls. "At the moment, my dad is having this big dispute about land – it's become a heavy part of our relationship over the past two years. Then recently on a trip to Saint Vincent with my mum, we found out someone had built on her land." These experiences led her to consider not just the emotional interiors of her subjects, but physical landscapes, and how they become so deeply entrenched in memory and identity. "Landscape and scenery is so important in reconstructing memories and the stories my mum would tell me about these places," she says. This newfound focus was a revelation for Prempeh. "I didn't think I could paint trees! I remember finishing a landscape painting in three days, I was obsessed with it. I painted it from a photo I took and it felt like I was there in that moment again. It made me realise that it's not just interior spaces that carry this sense of nostalgia, you can recreate that feeling with the outside world too."

Prempeh's use of Schlag metal in her paintings – an imitation of gold leaf that rusts and transforms over time – adds a dimension of temporality to her work. "I first thought about using it when I was studying my BA. I was thinking a lot about creation, why I'm here, genetics, the universe and the subject of time as a whole. I remembered watching videos of this cute lady from somewhere in America make artworks with fake gold leaf." This material fascinated Prempeh with its ability to change, and like

memories and emotions, fade and shift over time. "I wanted to find a material that encapsulates what time actually is." Her application of the metal, often mixed with vinegar to accelerate the rusting process, transforms her canvases into living objects. "I began to manipulate it on purpose. As they age you can really start to see the green, it has a really interesting patina. The works have changed with me as I've moved studio." These days, she's more interested in letting time and exposure shape her works naturally, a quiet surrender to the forces that move beyond her control. "I've stepped back a bit from it now, using it more to represent light or to highlight parts of people's faces."

The evolution of her style is a testament to her persistence, though it wasn't always easy. "It was tough trying to find my style," she remembers. "At the start I was like, 'what the fuck am I doing!?'" The questions driving her practice – memory, existence, time – pushed her to experiment with both her subjects and materials. Her use of earthy tones and rich browns, reflective of her own skin and that of her family, are deliberate, grounding her subjects in both the tangible and cosmic. "When I was finding my style, I was thinking about things that are usually associated with bright colours, like the chakras and space. I wanted to fit myself within that, because obviously I have darker skin and most of my family has even darker skin than me," she explains. "Blackness is such a heavy thing – you think about black holes and stars and how what's within them is so dark. I thought I'd stick with black and other tones I like, like brown – like my skin tone." A connection to memory also informs her colour palette. "I don't know how other people picture memories in their head. For me, the image is always surrounded by a kind of blurry black border. It's not quite a frame, it's almost choppy. That's also why I work with the colours I do – it aligns with how I see memories in my head."

What stands out most about Prempeh's work is its intimacy. One of her favourite pieces, *Go Liming* (2022), offered her a rare moment of fulfillment. "It's so rare to truly feel like a piece is finished. I've only felt that with this piece. And I've never had that feeling again." The more I learn about Prempeh, the clearer it is that painting isn't just about capturing a moment, but about creating one. "When I paint, I'm sharing my perspective of what I'm seeing and experiencing. It belongs to me, but I hope that other people feel some sense of familiarity with it, or have some relationship with it," she says. Painting has become a way for her to assert control over fading memories and experiences, a way to grasp what so often slips through her fingers. "Everything is so fleeting, I sometimes can't grasp it. With painting, I can evoke feelings that I can't do taking a photograph."

For her upcoming show, Prempeh has experimented with moving image. "When my mum and I went to the Caribbean this summer, I knew I had to document it. She hadn't been back to visit in 40 years." She plans to use light projections as a metaphor for memory. "I want people to feel that fleeting point of our lives that we know exists but can't touch."

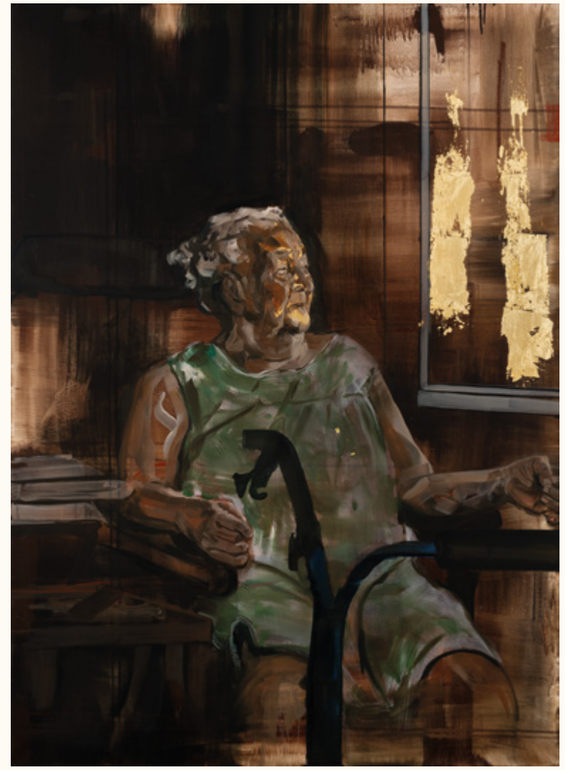
Prempeh's connection to her mother and the matriarchal strength in her family has been a guiding force in her life. "I grew up with my mum more than my dad. She always told me that you can achieve things on your own," she reflects. "My grandma moved to the UK by herself, so I've always had these very strong women in front of me. Exploring womanhood is really important. When I think about the galleries I've worked with, I was usually looking for women. I enjoy the feeling of safety amongst other women." However, her artistic influences have recently expanded to include artists like Andrew Cranston and Mohammed Sami. "An artist at the RCA told me my work reminded them of Noah Davis," she recalls. "I was introduced to his work in the midst of when I was developing my style, so it was amazing to see how someone else was painting such similar subjects to me."

The search for belonging also played a role in her relationship with Tiwani Contemporary. Her story with the gallery started when she was a teenager. "When I was 16 I applied for a curator position they advertised online. I didn't have any experience curating! I applied because I was looking for a gallery that I felt I would fit with – they were working with artists from Africa and the diaspora. When I finished my BA, I was introduced to Adelaide Bannerman, the curator. After my MA, they approached me to work with them – I obviously didn't mention my application from when I was 16! It's weird how things come full circle."

"I want people to feel that fleeting point of our lives that we know exists but can't touch."

EMMA PREMPEH

1



2

1 Emma Prempeh, *What's Left?*, 2024, Oil, Acrylic and Schlag metal on Canvas, 66 ⅞" × 157 ½" (Diptych), Courtesy of the artist and Tiwani Contemporary, Photo by Deniz Güzel

2 Emma Prempeh, *Tante Winnie's sister*, 2024, Oil, Acrylic and Schlag metal on Canvas, 55 ¼" × 39 ⅜", Courtesy of the artist and Tiwani Contemporary, Photo by Deniz Güzel

AND YOU ARE

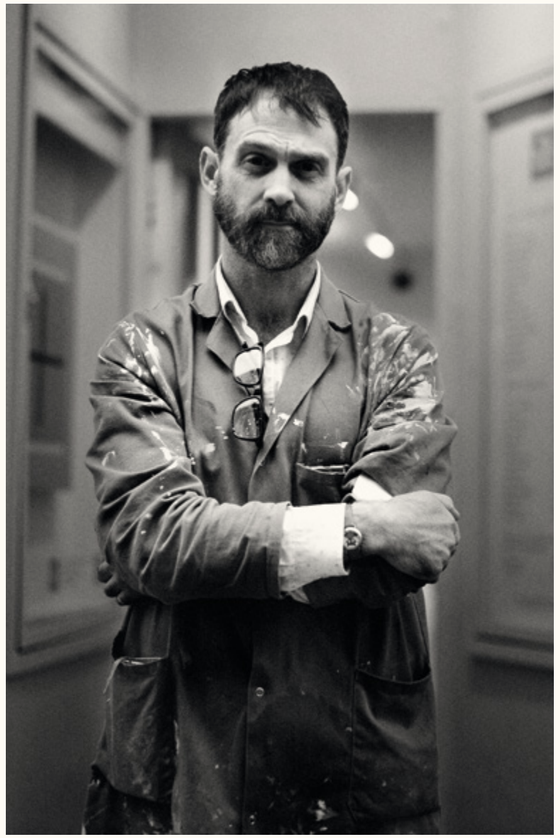
?

TO GET A SENSE OF THE DAILY CYCLE OF LIFE IN LONDON'S GALLERY HEARTLANDS, WE PULL BACK THE CURTAIN AND SPOTLIGHT THE PEOPLE AND JOBS THAT MAKE CORK STREET TICK.

Interviews by *Plaster*
Photography: Kyle Crooks

It takes a lot to run a gallery, much of it unseen. Beyond the curated walls and polished exhibitions lies a world of less seen hustles, passions and skills, from the hanging of canvases to the chaotic comms of client relations and everything in between. But what actually happens behind the scenes? Have you ever wondered who exactly keeps the wheels turning?

REDFERN GALLERY



Paul Bower
Technician

Years you've worked with the Redfern Gallery:
20 years.

"Being a gallery technician can be physically demanding: handling vast, expensive paintings correctly; the logistics of moving heavy stone sculptures; the early hours of art fairs and the late nights of private views where I often man the bar which, for obvious reasons, can be a challenge in its own right."

NAHMAD PROJECTS

Billie Temple
Consultant graphic art director

Years you've worked with Nahmad Projects:
Eight years.

"The diversity and quality of the art you can see on Cork Street is incredible but, for me, it is the people that make it all happen that are the thing I love most. There's tonnes of passion and knowledge crammed into one small street in London. Once, a man tried to sell me a lizard in a Manolo Blahnik box."

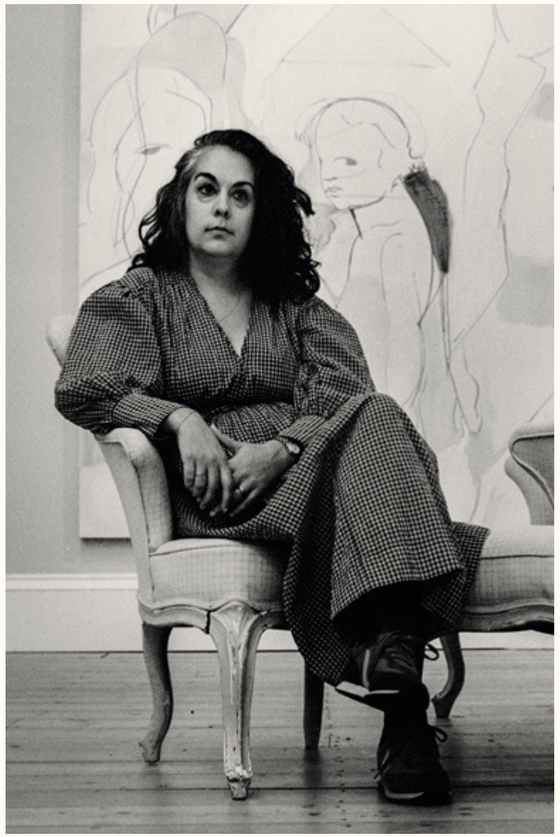
GOODMAN GALLERY

Alisdair Kitchen
Film director and editor

Years you've worked with Goodman Gallery:
One year as a freelancer, nearly two in-house.

"It's a beautiful part of town, and feels like a significant place to me personally. I came to filmmaking almost by chance following a career as a classical musician, and one the earliest jobs that led me down this new path happened on Cork Street, so I'll always look upon it fondly. Just around the corner, I once got chatting to Tilda Swinton about the music of Benjamin Britten while she was Christmas shopping!"

MASSIMODECARLO



Lara Asole
Senior museum liaison

Years you've worked with MASSIMODECARLO:
Almost five years.

"Working with institutions is like piecing together a jigsaw puzzle – there are lots of parts to manage, and it takes time to see the full picture, but the end result is always rewarding. Cork Street can really mess with your sense of reality. You'll spot a familiar-looking face and suddenly question if you met them at a gallery dinner or if they're actually on TV. And yes, I'm definitely showing off, but I've seen Harry Styles at least twice – and I can confidently say I didn't confuse him with an old friend."

STEPHEN FRIEDMAN GALLERY

Daniela Lancellotti
Registrar

Years you've worked at Stephen Friedman Gallery:
One year and seven months.

"Working on Cork Street feels like stepping into a piece of history. In the early 20th century, numerous galleries opened here, launching many artists into the spotlight. The area is also infused with a special energy due to its proximity to the Royal Academy and Savile Row, where The Beatles held their iconic final performance on a rooftop. I remember last year's Frieze week, when all the galleries on Cork Street stayed open late. The street buzzed with people chatting and enjoying drinks as they moved from one gallery to the next. It was truly magical. I can only imagine how vibrant Cork Street must have been back in the 30s."

FLOWERS GALLERY

Vienna Shelley
Gallery assistant

Years you've worked at Flowers Gallery:
11 months.

"The best thing about my job is meeting a diverse range of people who have brilliant stories to tell - artists and visitors alike! When all the galleries have their opening nights on the same day, it creates a real buzz and sense of community on Cork Street, which is something you wouldn't find often in Mayfair."

HOLTERMANN FINE ART

Archie Bell
Freelance installation technician

Years you've worked with Holtermann Fine Art:
Around one year.

"Cork Street is a thin road of wealth and power, and provides an eccentric and mixed group of people. Recently I saw a trike driving down the road and I glimpsed at the driver – with one arm he was steering and on the other, he had two snakes."

TIWANI CONTEMPORARY

Magali Andonov
Registrar

Years you've worked at Tiwani Contemporary:
A year and a half.

"The art industry is a very fast pace industry and we often have to works on 5 projects at the same time (especially around the fall). There is always a problem to deal with for every project so it requires me to be multi taking and problem solver at all times - but I would say this is the most exciting part!"

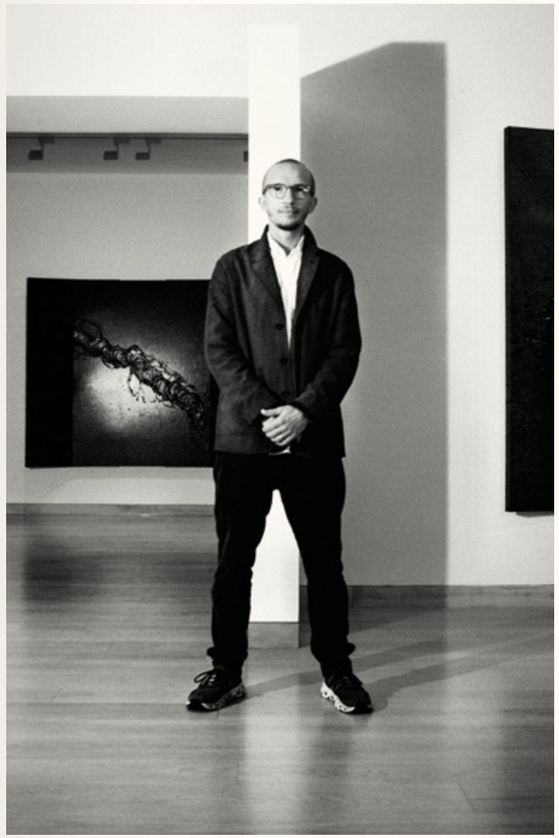
WADDINGTON CUSTOT

Jazmin Bolanos and Norma Cajas
Cleaners

Years you've worked with Waddington Custot:
Five years.

"The most challenging part of our job is clearing around the art pieces so we don't damage them, especially the sculptures on the floor. We arrive really early in the morning on Cork Street and sometimes see big trucks and people running around while they film a movie."

WADDINGTON CUSTOT



Dominic Chesterman
Conservator and restorer

Years you've worked with Waddington Custot:
Seven years.

"I love the history and creativity of Cork Street. Generations of artists have been inspired to do what they do because it exists. I was once restoring a piece in the gallery as the show was opening, I had my magnifiers and gloves on, a member of the public asked if they could try them on and have a go, I guess they thought it was participatory."

THE POLLEN ESTATE

Reece Ireland
Cork Street asset manager

Years you've worked with The Pollen Estate:
Five years.

"When I started on the Estate I had little knowledge about contemporary art. It has been great to be introduced to this world and I learn something new every week! All you need to do is walk through the galleries on Cork Street for your love of art to grow and grow. The best thing is seeing the street so alive during Frieze week. If I am honest, having this photograph taken is probably the weirdest thing that's happened to me here! Saying that, I am really delighted to be part of the feature."

DOMINIQUE FUNG

BLENDS SURREALISM, OPULENCE AND OBJECTIFICATION

In the painted world of Dominique Fung, not all is as it seems
Words by Harriet Lloyd-Smith

1

The Nepenthes is a majestic plant. Its leaves look like smooth, bulbous ceramic vessels with a sensual, feminine shape. Its colours are variegated and painterly – pastel pinks and oranges. Insects flock for a taste, weak to its charms. But this is Nepenthes' trick; it uses its beauty to lure its prey, then swallows them whole in one clean snap.

I was reminded of this plant when I first saw Dominque Fung's paintings. Their glossy, smooth surfaces are warm and inviting, sometimes cute and comedic. Just beneath their veneer is something more critical, more uneasy – much harder to swallow.

I speak to Fung via video call. She's at home in Brooklyn, New York, fresh from the Armory Show, where she exhibited a 100-piece sculpture called *Marketplace* – a mobile wooden market stand carrying antique objects from China and the artist's own ceramic sculptures – as part of the fair's Platform section, curated by Eugenie Tsai. The Armory lasted four days; Fung spent four months making the work. "If it wasn't for [Eugenie], I wouldn't have done the exhibition.

"I think I'm using the idea of opulence, this glossiness in order to draw the viewer in. But also questioning why they are painting a female figure in this way, and all the inaccuracies."

DOMINIQUE FUNG

You put in so much love, time and effort into something, and it's up and then down."

It's been four months since Fung last painted, but she's itching to get back to it. "I feel a little insecure, you know, I'm like, 'do I remember how to paint?' I'm sure it'll be fine once I start. But I feel strange right now."

Fung didn't study fine art; her visual education was gathered during museum visits. "Like the Met, for example, you walk in and you're presented specifically with European paintings, and then everything else is in the periphery," she reflects. "So I just spent thousands of hours, you know, looking at these paintings. I was like, 'but this is what a good painting is, right?'"

The 19th-century artists Fung was drawn to – the likes of European painters Rousseau, Ingres, Delacroix – depicted the opulence of North Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Beautiful and finely executed, yes, but deeply problematic.

Aspects of her animation training feed into her painting. "There are rules about what is a good picture, good lighting and good colour," she says. "I think a lot of animation mimics work by Sargent, Vermeer and Rembrandt, which have this specific type of light."

Before we spoke, I scrolled through Fung's Instagram page. Until around 2020, her use of colour was vibrant, pastelled and shiny. Since then, it's been a gradual shift into umbers and ocres, as if they've been passed through the guts of history. "When I was painting in the brighter colours, I think I was looking at more contemporary art and objects from the Ming dynasty", she says. "In the past maybe four or five years, I started looking at much older works and objects from the Tang and Shang dynasty, where the colours have faded. Generally, they're a little bit more muted. What's left are these bronze objects that have been dug up because everything else has disintegrated. They have these green-ish, umbery tones."

Fung sees her paintings as a sequence, and works strictly on a one-at-a-time basis. Because of this, she didn't even notice the colour shift. "It was so incremental, this very slow transition. And now, looking back, I'm like, woah!"

Fung's process involves trawling auction catalogues, online archives and books to find objects. This becomes an archive, a treasure trove of visual references on which to base works. But there are other key reference points, too: Surrealists like Dorothea Tanning, Leonora Carrington and Eleonor Fini, even contemporary stand-up comedy for its ability to layer ideas and create the illusion of dialogue, and more specifically, Anne Anlin Cheng's book, *Ornamentalism*. "She's literally putting what I'm doing into words,'" Fung recalls. "I just knew that I felt this sense of objectification through object. The fan is a big symbol of this, because it's usually used as a trope in film or even in fashion, for the demure Asian woman about to come onto the scene, or like the wrathful, vengeful evil Chinese woman."

This is what Fung does best: probes her own personal history while reclaiming a legacy of histories in the process. "I want the paintings to have this layered feeling," she adds.

One recent work in particular speaks to this: *Cake*, 2024, shown in a group show earlier this year at James Fuentes gallery. On the face of it, cake seems celebratory. But sandwiched between the candles is a more sinister tone. Severed arms grab onto lit candles, which transform into paddles. It's surreal and ambiguous but touches on the homogeneity of labour. "I was thinking about these objects being created and how many hands are needed to make things or the economy of creating objects. My viewpoint is feminist, as an Asian woman operating in this world."

Fung's sculpture exist in the same realm as paintings, notably in their approach to light, but it's not as if her painted objects have climbed off their canvases and embodied 3D form. "When I'm making those sculptures, I'm not necessarily pulling from the painting," says Fung. "They're separate, but also the same. I don't know if that makes any sense!"

The word 'ornament' is particularly important in Fung's work. It feels hollow, but it's heavy with notions of superficiality, ownership and identity, assumed or imposed. The subjects, objects and East Asian artifacts in her paintings and sculptures are once more protagonists, liberated from their fate as cultural tropes. "I'm not sure who coined the term ornamentalism, but that hit me really hard – the ornamentalisation of the clothes and the exterior things that are put onto our personhood."

Archetypal beauty is rarely as it seems. Within, it can contain objectification, sexualisation, reinforced tropes, and in the case of Orientalist painting, all of the above, plus cold hard inaccuracy. Fung's paintings might look like still life, but their objects have lives of their own.

Dominique Fung in her Brooklyn studio photographed by David Spence

← Previous page:
Dominique Fung, *Sans Les Mains*, 2022, Oil on linen, 81.9" × 104.1", Courtesy of the artist, Photo by Charles White

1 Dominique Fung, *Tang Dynasty Horses as Offering*, 2024, Oil on Canvas, 72" × 100", Courtesy of the artist and MASSIMODECARLO, Photo by Shark Sanesac

Dominique Fung, *Will you keep singing?*, 2021,
Oil on linen, Courtesy of the artist and
MASSIMODECARLO

CAROLINE COON'S REJECTION LETTER
A PSYCHIC READING OF CORK STREET
ALISON JACQUES' MORNING COMMUTE
GALLERY LIFE: BEHIND THE SCENES
PATRICK HERON ON PIERRE BONNARD
INTERVIEWS: DOMINIQUE FUNG AND EMMA PREMPEH
+ 14 POSTERS BY 14 ARTISTS