



GILLIAN JASON GALLERY

MODERN & CONTEMPORARY ART BY WOMEN

Beyond Figuration: Then and Now

4th May - 3rd June 2023

Eileen Agar, Fiona Rae, Bridget Riley,
Berenice Sydney, Paule Vézelay,

Megan Baker, Bokani, Savannah Marie Harris,
Jemima Murphy, A'Driane Nieves,
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The canon of art history often refers to the abandonment of imitative practices as having roots in the Romantic period. This period saw the initial disruptions of representation over imagination. Shortly afterwards, in the dawn of the 20th Century and with the birth of psychoanalysis, a fascination with the study of the subconscious mind began to seize all sectors of intellectual thought, from science to art. Abstraction emerged as a way to represent the subconscious and to purify human emotion and thought.

Non-figurative art thus became one of the driving forces in the evolution of art over the past 150 years; in his 1936 book *Cubism and Abstract Art*, Alfred H. Barr, Jr., MoMA's first Director, described it as 'independent painting, emancipated painting; an end in itself with its own peculiar value.' Abstract art stands the test of time due to its widely appealing visual style and its interpretive subjectivity. The intense individualism of abstraction paradoxically lends a certain universality whereby each viewer finds intimate meaning in each piece.

Women have often been pioneers of abstraction, and yet their contribution has historically been marginalised and overshadowed by their male counterparts. Only recently have their names been fairly recognised within the canon of abstract art. Going beyond the predominantly white, male painters who are synonymous with the genre, the paintings in this exhibition demonstrate how female artists were, and still are, essential in the development of abstraction.

Amongst the female artists at the forefront of the development of non-figurative art throughout the 20th Century are Eileen Agar, Paule Vézelay, Berenice Sydney, Bridget Riley, and Fiona Rae. From early experimental abstraction to Op-Art and geometric abstraction, these artists were striving and succeeding artistically in an overwhelmingly male milieu. These artists exhibit a wide variety of responses to abstraction thereby highlighting the movement's diversity and scope. Furthermore their work is distinctly Modernist: responding to the divisions of abstraction that arose in the 20th century, like the Russian-originated Constructivist movement.

In this exhibition, artists like A'Driane Nieves, Jemima Murphy, Manon Steyaert, and Megan Baker bring a contemporary sensibility to an established art form. They are representative of the current wave of abstraction, forging individually owned paths whilst commemorating the trailblazers of yesterday. Although they build upon the artistic language of their 20th century forebears, their work is inextricable from their present-day context.

'Beyond Figuration: Then and Now' will seek to generate new perspectives on this much debated artistic form, putting established 20th Century abstract artists in conversation with contemporary emerging creatives who work in non-figuration. Abstraction continues to be prevalent within art production, and contemporary artists recall the legacy of their predecessors, adopting their formal strategies while recontextualising and personalising their underlying meanings.

Constructivist Composition, 1931
black crayon and pencil on paper
48 x 62 cm

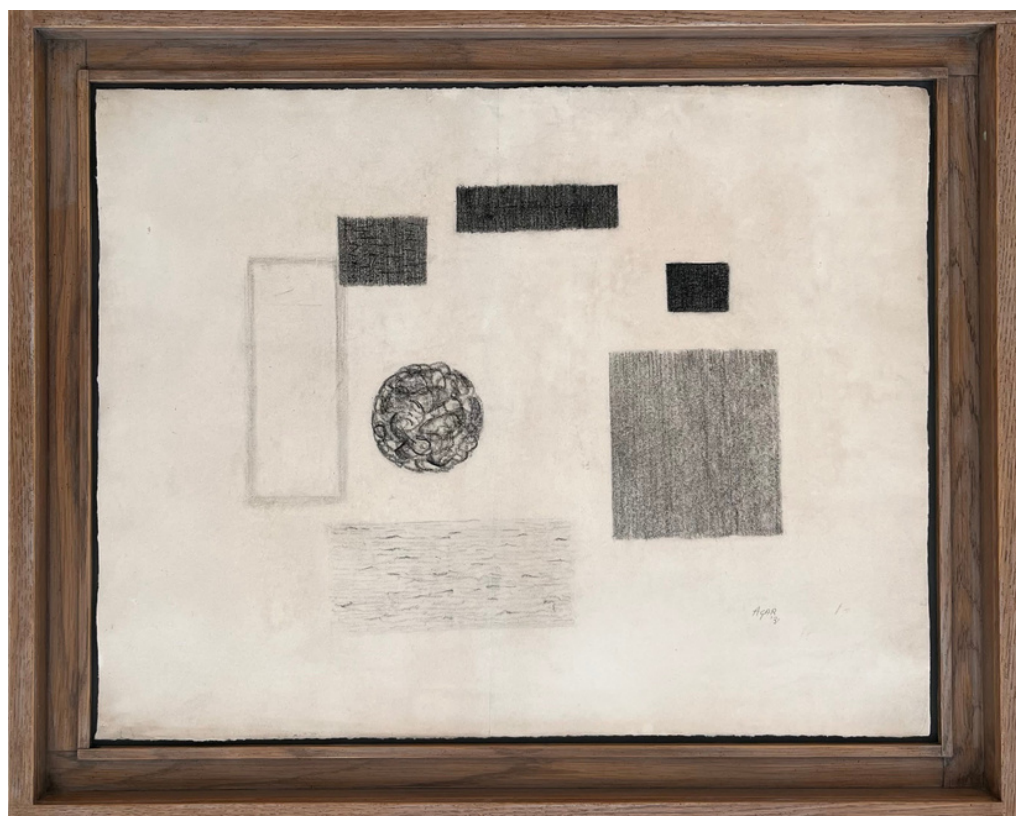
price upon request

Eileen Agar

Born in Argentina (1899-1991), Eileen Agar pursued her fine art studies at the Slade, London, and subsequently moved to Paris in 1929, becoming a prominent figure in the Surrealist Movement. In 1936 Agar was the only British female artist to take part in the 'International Surrealist Exhibition' in London. Agar began training with the Czech Cubist František Foltýn in France in the early 30s, which in turn propelled her to experiment with abstraction.

'Constructivist Composition' was part of Whitechapel Gallery's touring exhibition 'Eileen Agar: Angel of Anarchy.' The exhibition catalogue states: 'Constructivist Composition is perhaps one of Agar's most purely abstract works. The influence of the tutelage that Agar received from Foltýn – who taught her 'about sensitivity to form while trying to cultivate colour, planes and composition' – is particularly clear in the work's palette of blacks, whites and greys, as well as its taut composition. The work also reveals Agar's curiosity for organic shapes and variations of natural textures. 'Constructivist Composition' is a rare and early work that demonstrates Agar's involvement and interest in the British abstract movement in the 1930s.'

'Constructivist Composition' was in the collection of Alexander Postan prior to being acquired by Gillian Jason Gallery. Agar's work is currently in the collections of the Tate in the UK, the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), the Royal Academy of Arts (London), the Arts Council Collection (Southbank Centre, London), the Hepworth Wakefield (Yorkshire), the National Galleries of Scotland (Edinburgh), and the Ingram Collection of Modern British and Contemporary Art (London).



Predator, 1998
oil, acrylic on canvas
153 x 127 cm

price upon request

Fiona Rae

Fiona Rae's practice is characterised by painterly marks and graphic signs executed with a virtuoso range of techniques on block coloured backgrounds of indeterminate depth. 'Predator' is part of a series of 'black' paintings executed by Rae in the late 90s, which was the subject of a recent exhibition at the Buchmann Galerie, Berlin 2022. All eight of the canvases belonging to this series contrast a black ground of rolled acrylic with brightly coloured markings for a sparer, more balanced composition than her earlier works. 'Predator' expresses early signs of what would develop into Rae's freely expressive movement across a canvas.

Playing between geometric shapes and gestural abstraction, Rae skillfully combines variously sized brush work and painterly marks. Rectangles of block colours project horizontally towards the centre of the canvas, partly covered in gestural streaks made using a brush loaded with more than one paint colour. On these geometrical forms, Rae superimposes biomorphic elements executed with a mixture of acrylic and oil paint: air-brushed clouds of black and a series of polychrome squiggles and smudges. Fiona Rae's artworks blur the boundary between abstraction and figuration. For instance, one can almost discern a male face in the top right corner, and the figure of a lion on the left.

Rae studied Fine Art at Goldsmiths College London and took part in the seminal exhibition 'Freeze' (1988) organised by Damien Hirst in London's Docklands. The show marked the beginning of the YBAs' rise to prominence. In 1991 Rae was shortlisted for the Turner Prize and in 2011 was appointed a Royal Academician at the Royal Academy of Art. Rae's artwork is in the permanent collections of the Royal Academy of Art (London), the Tate (London), the Albertina Collection (Vienna), the Fondation Louis Vuitton (Paris), the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden (Washington, D.C.), and the US National Museum of Women in the Arts (Washington, D.C.), among others.



Untitled Fragment (5/8), 1965
screenprint on plexiglass
61.4 x 79.8 cm

price upon request

Bridget Riley

The title 'Fragments' refers to the fact that these images were conceived as part of the preparatory work for paintings. At the time of this work's creation, Riley worked almost exclusively in black and white (before turning to colour in 1966). They are 'fragments of a theme', Riley states, 'images which are tangential to the problems posed by a particular painting' (Charlotte Lefland, 'Printmaking with Precision', Yale Center for British Art, 2022). In 'Fragment 5', curved bands alternating black and white become wider and thinner at opposing points, generating a wave-like circular form. The work evokes paintings such as 'Uneasy Centre' (1963), and 'Intake' (1964), in which lines appear to be driven and swept into contraction and expansion.

The fragment series allowed Riley to experiment with a new material, Plexiglas, a form of transparent plastic. The transparent brilliance of the plexiglass deepens the intensity of the colours, heightening the optical effects of her geometric forms. The screenprint on plexiglass is incised with a signature and date ('65). An edition of 75 (and ten Artist's proofs) was published by the Robert Fraser Gallery and printed at the Kelpra Studio. In 1970, the Tate purchased an edition of Fragment 5 for its permanent collection.

Riley has been a fundamental figure in the development of modern painting, notably as one of the main proponents of Op-Art. Her interest in optical effects developed in part through studying Georges Seurat's pointillism technique. In 1965, the same year she executed 'Fragment 5', her work was included in MoMA's landmark exhibition 'The Responsive Eye', which propelled both Riley and Op-art to international recognition. In 1968, she won the International Painting Prize at the Venice Biennale. Riley is in the permanent collections of museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), Tate (London), the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam), National Gallery (London), National Museum of Women in the Arts (Washington, D.C.), Neue Nationalgalerie (Berlin), Peggy Guggenheim Collection (Venice), and MoMA (New York).

The work on show was donated by Riley to Bonhams Auction House to benefit the National Saturday Club, where Gillian Jason Gallery acquired it in 2019.



Untitled No.2, 1966
oil on canvas
168 x 198 cm

price upon request

Berenice Sydney



Berenice Sydney's (1944-1983) oeuvre spans multiple media, including painting, printmaking, and costume design. Sydney studied at the Central School of Art and Design in London but soon left to open her own studio. During her short lifetime, she took part in many international solo and group exhibitions. Following her premature death in 1983, The Royal Academy organised a memorial show of her production called 'Salute to Berenice', followed by solo shows in Italy, Abu Dhabi, Bahrain, Switzerland, and the UK. Her artworks are included in over a hundred important private and public collections around the world, including Tate (London), the British Museum (London), the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford), the Bibliothèque Nationale (Paris), the Bibliothèque Royale (Brussels), the Galleria D'Arte Moderna (Bologna), the Uffizi Gallery (Florence), the Smithsonian Institution (Washington, D.C.), the Museum of Modern Art (Buenos Aires), the Philadelphia Museum, the Brooklyn Museum (New York), and the Victoria and Albert Museum (London).

Abandoning her earlier artistic style, which was influenced heavily by Cubism and Fauvism, Sydney decided to fully dedicate herself to abstraction in the late 1960s. Her 'Untitled' painting dated 1966 is emblematic of a moment of transition between these two phases. While 'Untitled' (1966) still presents the thick expressive brushstrokes and fragmented forms characteristic of her earlier production, it is impossible to distinguish a figurative subject. The lack of title is also evocative of Sydney's move towards self-referentiality.

Untitled No.15, 1969
oil on canvas
183 x 168cm

price upon request



'Untitled' (1969) with its freely composed forms fully embodies Sydney's turn to pure abstraction. The artist's rhythmic and harmonious compositions are influenced by dance, ballet and music, which she studied from an early age. The free flowing, colourful structure of her painting of this period seems to convey the sense of freedom and excitement that characterised Britain in the swinging 60s.

Her daring colour combination invokes movement and drama and a large part of her production is dedicated to exploration of colour with movement, which was the focus of her 2018 retrospective at the Saatchi Gallery. The exhibition catalogue states: 'When working on canvas Berenice limited herself to a palette of six colours, describing it as her "magic number".' Sydney became absorbed with the properties of colour and ascribed a personality to each. Commenting on their respective traits, she said: 'some colours are nasty, some friendly and some have little character'. She started the painting at the centre of the canvas, building a journey of 'contained colour' in every direction and radiating outwards.

White and Cream Form with Three Circles, 1952
grey ground pastel on paper
43 x 57 cm

price upon request

Paule Vézelay

Paule Vézelay (née Marjorie Watson-Williams, 1892-1984) studied at Bristol School of Art, London School of Art and Chelsea Polytechnic. In 1926, she adopted the name Paule Vézelay and moved to Paris, becoming an active member of the Parisian avant-garde and associating with Sophie Tauber-Arp, Jean Arp and André Masson.

Vézelay was one of the first British artists to turn fully to abstraction in the late 1920s, when it was still out of favour in Britain. In 1934, Vézelay was invited to join Abstraction-Création - a collective of abstract artists founded in Paris in 1931 with the aim of promoting and legitimising non-representational art. In 1953 Vézelay joined Le Groupe Espace, an association of geometric abstract artists and architects founded in Paris in 1951. Le Groupe artists were concerned with space in art and were influenced by the pre-war movements of Constructivism and Neo-Plasticism. Vézelay exhibited with them multiple times and presided over the British branch.

'White and Cream Form with Three Circles', dating to 1953, belongs to her Group Espace period. A bicolour polygon form stands out against a neutral ground, its geometric plane standing in contrast with the blurry organic circular forms overlaid. The painting subtly expressed the influence of Neo-Plasticism as adopted by Le Groupe. This is clear from its use of geometric form to create an asymmetrical but balanced composition, informed by a purity of line and colour typical of Vézelay's work from that period.

In 1983, 'White and Cream Form with Three Circles' was exhibited in a retrospective of Vézelay's production at the Tate Gallery, bringing her work into the public eye and giving the artist due recognition. In 2000, this work was once more exhibited as part of a second retrospective show at England & Co. Gallery, London. Vézelay's artworks are at the National Portrait Gallery (London), the Ashmolean Museum (Oxford), the Tate (London), the Victoria & Albert Museum (London), the Art Institute of Chicago, the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts (Norfolk), the Jerwood Collection, Towner Eastbourne (London), Leeds Art Gallery, and the Arts Council Collection (Southbank Centre, London)



From Dawn til Midnight, 2023
oil on canvas
140 x 130 cm

£ 8,000



Megan Baker

Megan Baker's works explore moments of stillness within nature, capturing a feeling of comfort in solitude where the vastness of landscape makes us conscious of our contained state as human beings. Unfolding through layers of impasto, Baker's painting suggest an ever-changing state of being, where fragmented and gestural figures are interrupted by the immediacy of paint. Focusing on the physicality of the medium itself, Baker's practice is centred on the way time can be experienced through painting. Baker uses paint as a way to expand and extend time in a world where everyday encounters feel instant and condensed. In turn, the perception of time shifts and evolves and we are absorbed by the search and discovery of the next hidden detail. Baker works with a wide array of references, from the films of Tarkovsky to the writings of Didion and the Burkean Sublime, the musical compositions of Elgar to the masterpieces of Tiepolo and Natoire.

Based on Titian's 'The Three Ages of Man', which looks at the cycle of life from birth to death, 'From Dawn til Midnight' explores the impermanence of being. Whilst 'The Three Ages of Man' has a clear beginning, middle and end, the painterly marks in 'From Dawn til Midnight' come together and seemingly fall apart again. Baker abstracts the phases of life into rhythmic brushstrokes that conjure the constant repetition and rejuvenation of the life cycle. Informed by Titian's depiction of landscape that both flourishes and decays at the same time, Baker's use of colour embodies a sense of time passing, becoming both representative of wonder and decline, of what was once present but will ultimately fade. The circular sweep of the palette lends refinement to the concepts of Baker's work and segues into her style of abstraction.

Born in the UK (1996), Baker graduated from the prominent school Central Saint Martins, London, in 2018, when she received the Kate Barton Painting Award and the Cass Art Prize. Baker has been shortlisted for the Clyde and Co Art Award and also came runner up at the Hix Art Award, 2019. The artist is in private collections across the UK, the Middle East and Europe.

We're the ones we've been waiting for VI, 2023
mirrored glass, enamel paint, metal frame
120 x 61 cm

£ 3,500



*The artwork is made of mirrored glass, in this photograph the artist appears in the reflection

Bokani

Bokani's stained glass paintings are meticulously crafted layers of enamel paint on mirrored glass. The works draw the viewer contemplatively into the piece through a distorted reflection of the self and the surrounding environment. The immersive quality of the paintings creates a liminal space in which new realities seem tantalisingly within reach. Vibrant colours imbue the works with a talismanic aesthetic, while the reflective surface acts as a portal, transporting the viewer to a new idealised place. The paintings are in a constant state of flux, adapting to the changes in light that occur throughout the day and the seasons.

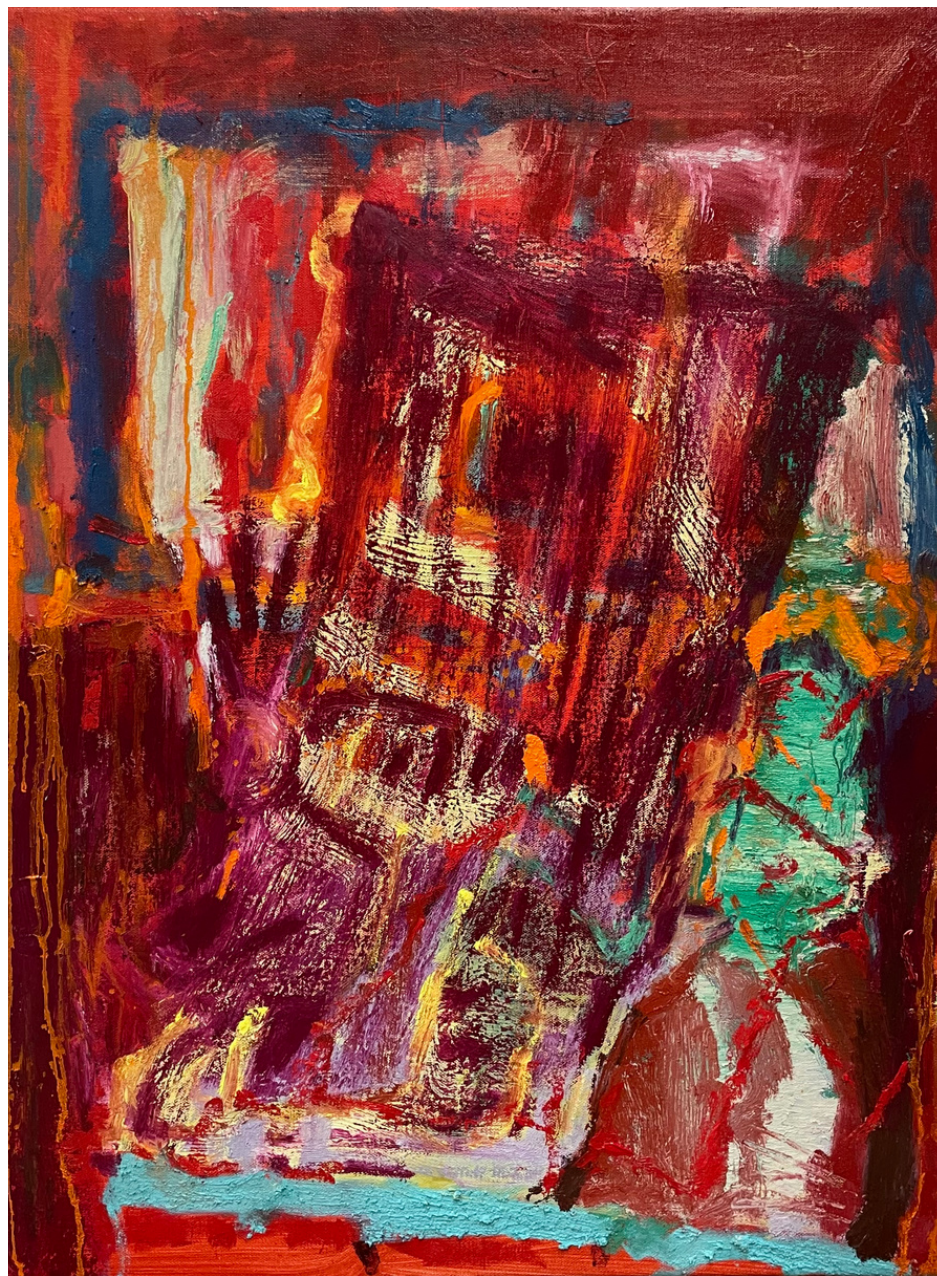
Inspired by her personal experience and religious belief, Bokani's glass works reference the stained-glass windows, both Gothic and Contemporary, of the church she goes to in London. The artist uses this parallelism to investigate how divine light travels and is diffused through each individual to the rest of the world. Through her art, Bokani invites the audience to critically engage with pressing social and ecological issues. By including the viewer in the reflection of her glass works, Bokani invites us to reflect on the idea that we are all part of the same picture, complicit in how we treat each other and the environment. Bokani's resilient, triumphant and optimistic attitude is conveyed by the powerful and vivid use of colour, structure and texture.

Bokani is a Zimbabwean-born, UK-based multidisciplinary artist whose practice is situated at the intersection of art and technology, by including abstract glass painting and computational installations. Recently, she collaborated with the internationally renowned designer Oswald Boeteng, creating a selection of works in response to his collection that focused on the concept of authenticity of being; this series was exhibited both at Selfridges and at Oswald Boeteng's Savile Row Boutique, London. Bokani holds a BA in Politics with Economics, and a MA in Computational Art. Her work is grounded in the ethics and liberatory capacities of Black feminist thought. Bokani has exhibited her paintings and installations throughout the UK and Europe and has recently been awarded a public art commission by the London Mayor's Office. The artist has been featured in international publications such as Al-Jazeera, The Independent and the Art Newspaper. Bokani chooses not to use her surname in art as an objection to patriarchal naming practices.

Under your Spell, 2023
oil paint, oil stick, sand on canvas
70 x 55 cm

£ 4.000

Savannah Marie Harris



Savannah Marie Harris is currently studying at the Royal College of Art, London. The artist's layered canvases create complex environments of nuanced colours, light and textures. Through her abstract canvases, Harris unravels space and time, in an intuitive exploration of the inner world of memory, fantasy and the spiritual.

Her urgent need to deconstruct personal experiences emerges into remnants of collapsing surfaces described as paintings. A material that Harris often uses and holds significant value is sand. The cultural and geographical meaning of sand touches upon Harris' appreciation for her Caribbean and Cuban heritage. This is visible with the vibrant colours and intuitively entangled gestural brushstrokes.

Into the Light, 2023
oil on canvas
160 x 120 cm

£ 5,750



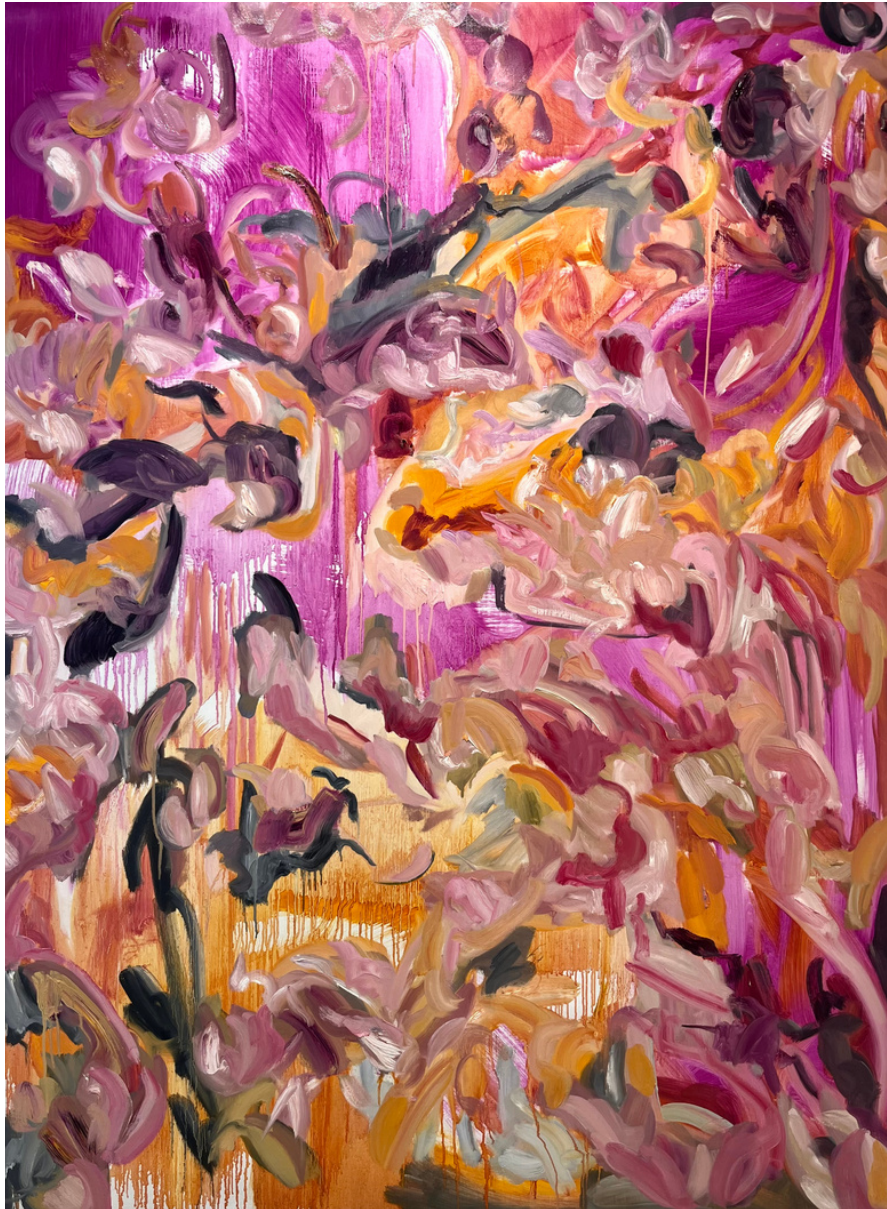
Jemima Murphy

Jemima Murphy's paintings explore a world beyond human perception. While evocative of nature and landscape, her canvases transcend representation so as to become abstract. Murphy's arresting colour combinations characterised by deep reds, pinks and blacks and her expressive brush strokes bring her artworks into the realm of the fantastical. Rather than representing a purely natural world, Murphy conveys nature's beauty and intensity, ultimately transcending figuration. In this way, the artist always maintains elements of mystery, excitement and apprehension in her work.

In many ways, Murphy's practice is a constant search for the unknown or the sublime. Her fascination with the writings of German theologian Rudolf Otto can be seen throughout the work: Otto discusses in his 1917 book 'The Idea of the Holy' the difficulty of defining the sublime since 'it cannot be anticipated or represented which gives it a mysterious dimension.' The concept of 'ineffability' sits at the core of Murphy's practice; impossible to pin down, or to be categorised, in between abstraction and figuration, and ultimately surrendering to a search to convey the unrepresentable. As seen with the work 'Ineffable Blooms' (2023), the fascination with the undefinable, with what is too great to be comprehended and expressed, is clear.

Ineffable Blooms, 2023
oil on canvas
160 x 120 cm

£ 5,750



Jemima Murphy (b.1992) is from a large artistic family and grew up between London and New Forest. Once she had achieved a BA in Russian language, Murphy spent a year training to be an actor in New York. Throughout these changes in direction, Murphy painted consistently. Finally settling on her love of painting, Murphy is undertaking an MFA at London's City and Guild's Art School. Already Murphy's work is collected by prominent collections including the Scalpel Building Collection (London).

The Chariot, 2023
acrylic and house paint on canvas
152 x 152 cm

£ 20,500

A'Driane Nieves



A'Driane Nieves experiments with Abstract Expressionist painting as a way to engage with trauma, notably emotional suppression. Her practice is influenced by Joan Mitchell, Cy Twombly, Bernice Bing, and Black abstractionist painters ranging from Alma Thomas to Mary Lovelace O'Neal. Nieves explores various facets of trauma and how they affect individual identity, and at the same time investigates the joy that can occur even in the presence of pain. Abstraction is perfectly suited for this, as its inherent rawness captures the essence of the complex emotions Nieves experiences. The artist sees abstraction as the artistic method most suited to process experience, and her vivid brushwork reflects a deeply personal relationship with the canvas. Her gestural strokes of paint start an intimate conversation with the viewer, encouraging us to honestly probe the events and experiences that have shaped our own identities throughout our lives.

Nieves' internal world is embedded in her canvases, as she reflects on personal experiences beginning with her childhood. The artist also draws upon the intersectionality of her identity as a Black, queer, chronically ill woman and mother, which exists under oppressive norms. Nieves states 'if my external is political, so then is my artistic voice.' Nieves' artistic voice is an extension of herself, a way to discover the processes of her mind and to exert agency over the perceptions of her body and worth. Nieves' artwork creates space for her to simply exist, free from any preconceived expectations.

The Tower and Temperance, 2023
acrylic and house paint on canvas
122 x 90 cm

£ 14,250



'The Chariot' and 'The Tower and Temperance' are both inspired by cards from the major arcana in tarot. These are divinations that have enabled the artist to access truths about herself and her life serving as anchors and guides during a season of life-altering endings and beginnings, death and rebirth, ruin and repair. They exemplify Nieves' signature style of expression and gesture.

A'Driane Nieves is a U.S. Air Force veteran and the founder of Tessera Arts Collective, a not-for-profit that serves women and non-binary abstract artists of colour. A self-taught artist, Nieves began painting as therapeutic practice while recovering from postpartum depression and following a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. Nieves' paintings are in private collections across the United States, Canada, Europe, Asia & Australia. Her work was recently acquired by Dangxia Art Space in Beijing and Rennie Museum, Vancouver, Canada. Nieves' work has been featured in numerous international exhibitions and art fairs: 'Arto21 Shanghai Contemporary Art Fair' in 2022 and 'Notes From the Laughing Barrel', and 'Art Paris' in 2023 with Galerie Marguo, 'Frieze London' and 'Art Basel' in 2022 with Simon Lee Gallery and in the United States with Susan Eley Fine Art.

Curious Drapes II, 2021
silicone and pigment
80 x 60 cm

£ 3,000

Manon Steyaert

Manon Steyaert's practice is located between painting and sculpture, defying definition by any one label. Steyaert hand-pours silicone over constitutional supports, creating delicate forms with the portability of a canvas and the three-dimensionality of a sculpture. Her artistic production is deeply intuitive and driven by the intrinsic character of her materials. Specifically, the artist focuses on the aesthetic qualities of silicone and forges a unique visual language that emphasises its material singularity. Silicone requires immense time, attention, and control, as its curing process can often take days. Steyaert treats it like fabric, draping and folding it over its supports.

In each piece, the viewer is guided naturally by the undulations of the silicone, which bear a meditative aspect in their repetition. The folds of the artworks also evoke movement, abstraction, and action, revealing the motions Steyaert makes throughout her process. Colour is also integral to Steyaert's oeuvre. It works seamlessly with form to create kaleidoscopic or geometric patterns across each surface. Steyaert's instinctive pouring turns into lustrous and sleek works that elude the influence of her hand.



Untitled, 2023
silicone and pigment
120 x 80 cm

£ 5,950



Steyaert's background is in fashion as well as art. She draws upon the frameworks of both, incorporating architectural characteristics into her work. The silicone simultaneously appears loose, like cloth, and structurally planned, almost like marble. Manon's particular style embodies several contradictions: creating both wall-based works and free-standing abstract sculptures, further blurring the boundaries between different media. Each work appears concurrently heavy and light, soft and hard, demonstrating the sense of balance she achieves in her art. The artist embraces alternative interpretations and viewpoints within her practice, eschewing traditional (artistic) boundaries in favour of an innovative, transgressive, and continually evolving body of work. She challenges the very meanings of painting and sculpture, highlighting the subjectivity of artistic categories and encouraging interdisciplinary creativity.

Manon is currently based in London and comes from a French-British background. She received her MA in Fine Art from Central St. Martins, Chelsea College of Arts in 2019. Her work has been featured in international publications, notably including interior design publications like that of Australian furniture designer Jordan, Elle Decoration's October 2022 issue, and Interior Design Mag. Steyaert's work continues to be sought after by private collections internationally.

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