



March 2021 – March 2022.

A Year in the Studio

Clive Head in conversation with Rosalyn Best

RB. When I last spoke to you, you were working on large paintings from a new series called *The Crossing*, but these works are earlier pieces from *The Parlour Paintings* aren't they?

CH. Yes. I have been reviewing them, and these six paintings have all been reworked in light of what I found out through making *The Crossing*, so they really now belong to the current work. I also repainted *If Not When*, from 2019, so that has become a hybrid of interests.

RB. Given that you always seem to be moving on, it can't be easy to revisit older paintings?

CH. I keep moving on because, for me, painting is a process of exploring how I can invent a visual and material structure in response to my existence in the world. That has always been the big question, and I don't have a definitive answer, only possible frameworks which might allow me to shed some light. There is always value in older works and it can be really fruitful to work across an older picture with a new strategy. There will be a discord which I won't find in a picture where I am working on it over a shorter period of time. Of course, there are certain aspects of my earlier work which I would now regard as moribund in relation to what might be useful now.

RB. I assume that the use of the camera would be one such aspect.

CH. Never say never, but yes, probably. I was really interested in reconfiguring photographic information into an all-encompassing landscape that had dynamic features such as enabling the viewer to see around corners. That was the theme of my National Gallery show. But that was over 10 years ago. Mathematically, they were highly inventive, though I think many people thought of them as straight photoreal paintings. They stand as quite unique pieces in the realist field, but in the end, I have come to reject photography.

RB. Why?

CH. Because it compromises my vision. It belongs to the collective, but in so doing, it belongs to no individual, and I have always believed that art is about the creative potential of the individual. I was always suspicious of the post-modern critical dictates that poured scorn on man as a creative originator, relegating art to just the adoption and rearrangement of pre-given devices. Of course, there is some truth in that, but I regard the challenge of being an artist is to find resistance to the mundanity of the norm. The artist is influenced by society, certainly, but in the space of the studio stands apart. It's the Modernist idea of the *avant-garde*.

You can tell yourself that you are using the photograph for reference, but it will always impose a way of recording the world that is corporate. In being complicit to its universality will only take you further away from your own means of expression, and ultimately, your own existential reality. Being an artist is not about being the voice of the crowd. It's way more idiosyncratic and mysterious than that. How I paint now is certainly a step to becoming more honest, more truthful, and more inclusive of everything that I am.

RB. But the work has to be authoritative. It has to stand apart from the artist? And surely making a figuration is enormously difficult if you are going to reject those learnt devices which painters use to find common ground with the viewer.

CH. Yes, when an artist like Richard Estes says that he can do better by using the camera he is not making a trite point. Nearly all the contemporary figuration that I see has been shaped by the camera lens or a digital algorithm. Even work that looks quite primitive and painterly. I can see that the artist has begun with a found image. The camera eye always comes through and then the work falls away. It loses me.

The problem of painting as communication is, as I say, a problem. It can't be illustration, and the integrity of the artwork can't be jettisoned to make allowance for the viewer. But I think if the artwork is true, true to experience, true to its own internal logic it will communicate, but the process is more like a silent telepathy than a dialogue.

RB. You have joked before that the death of the artist is the birth of the artwork, not the birth of the viewer.

CH. That's right. And every artwork has to have its own DNA. It has to have a life of its own, not just a trace from our world. But how it works must be elusive, and different every time. I can't arrive at a formula and then keep reiterating it. So, the work must continually change. Besides, knowing all this only takes me so far. I don't have the answers to how a painting must be so I keep searching.

RB. Looking at this new work, you have been preoccupied with very intense, vivid landscapes, mythic figures and creatures. Does that now surprise you?

CH. I have to follow where the painting wants to go. These are all invented landscapes and are the consequences of invented pictorial and material arrangements, though each painting probably has its origins in a drawing made in the life room or the garden.

I have spent a good part of this past year drawing. Not that anything that I have drawn from life actually features in a painting. When I draw from nature, I am really drawing an extraordinarily rich web of fractal rhythms which is a manifestation of my relationship with the subject. If I come to use that web to begin a painting, I often invert the drawing to give me a fecund structure to find myself in, rather than loop me back to the subject.

RB. It's a very unconventional way of going about making a painting, but a landscape like *Hummingbird* seems quite conventional.

CH. Yes, and that's fine. You can't censor what happens, whether that's a highly charged eroticism or a beautiful landscape. And if you look at it more carefully you will see that painting is as much about people as it is the landscape. It's a complex human drama hiding in the reeds. Even when I was drawing in the garden, down by the pond, I was thinking about Syrinx and Pan, so the painting reveals that. Like those urban landscapes that let us see around a corner, these paintings take a tour around my imaginings and thoughts.

RB. So, you begin with a very complex agenda in terms of subject?

CH. No, not at all. I begin with very little. And what I begin with is very abstract. After a few days my paintings only have echoes of subjects. If you have seen the work of Julie Mehretu, they resemble that. It's a complex, largely organic framework. I follow it and the subjects become more and more defined. At the outset, I don't really know what I am painting, and I always have this fear that perhaps, this time round, it will just be a sort of mystic pattern.

RB. Wouldn't that be a legitimate outcome?

CH. Aesthetically of course, but it wouldn't have any substantial meaning to me, so to pass it off as an artwork would be a lie. Like me pretending to talk in tongues. But the amazing thing is that something always emerges, and I end up making these landscapes and figures without ever thinking what does a landscape look like, or what is the correct anatomy of a figure? And if you look at the figures you would see that they wouldn't make any sense in our world, only in the world of the painting.

RB. And everything seems to be defined by everything else in such a dense, woven manner. Simultaneity and metamorphosis have been features of your work for quite some time now.

CH. There is something magical about that in painting. It really separates out prosaic figuration from those extraordinary creations by painters like Rubens and Titian. A whole range of different narratives are hiding in plain sight. Most viewers are completely unaware of how amazing their paintings are. In my work, the morphic quality isn't so hidden. I rarely return the painting back to a classical trope.

RB. And you would see this fusing and morphing of imagery as more truthful than something which was more elusive, like a Pollock drip painting?

CH. I would. Partly because, and again we have to be cautious of being ensnared by illustration, my way of processing the world is through constantly shifting imagery. When I dream, or even daydream, there isn't just some kind of lyrical fug, an abstract cloud, but quite particular motifs that create an irrational narrative played out in a unique time/space dynamic. It isn't abstract, but it is in a state of flux, images come and go, fuse and shift which has nothing to do with the coordination of motifs in conventional realism.

RB. So, you don't see these as clever puzzles to solve?

CH. Not at all. And solved as what? Static images? But I think they do encourage a certain inquisition as to what is going on.

They are not "clever". There is something more fundamental here. The configuration of painted marks allows the formation of more than one subject. That distinguishes painting from all those mechanical dot systems for depicting form. In fact, what is so astonishing about a painting, assuming the painter gets those marks in the right order, is that it has the potential to generate new subjects, and it can go on doing so after the painter is done. There are simultaneous forms in a painting like *Pasiphae's Crib*, such as the line of the landscape also being the back of a bull. I know and have responded to the painting as it has been developing to use these shapes, but I keep seeing new figures, new animals and new landscapes. They are integral to its structure, not simply the perceptions of a Rorschach test.

RB. But do you think the viewer sees this? We live in an age where people just run through gallery shows.

CH. That's not a reason for not making complex art. Yes, if you pick up a novel and flick through its pages you won't get much of an idea about where it could take you, and that's the same for one of my paintings. Actually, this is also the same for a painting by Auerbach, and a De Kooning, and a Stanley Spencer. We find more and more of this density as we go back through Modernism. All these amazing paintings that keep generating meanings.

RB. *Pasiphae's Crib* has returned you to a larger scale. What prompted this after so many smaller paintings.

CH. Not just from these 12 months. I must have made about 30 easel paintings between *If Not When* and *Pasiphae's Crib*. And now I am on with a third big landscape, *Trespass in Lemon*.

For the most part, the small paintings coincided with the pandemic, as did perhaps an escape into a magical landscape. During that time, there weren't the opportunities to exhibit, and a greater sense that I was really painting for myself, in a domestic setting. But I was also trying to process ideas about how to paint. Working on multiple canvases can really open things up. A lot of ground was covered. I can recall back in 2018 having very little idea of what I wanted to do with colour. My explorations at that point were coming from drawing and the idea of colour was a bit of an afterthought. Now it has become so important to me, but, just as with issues like anatomy or perspective, the way I now work with colour has no direct line back to the subject or naturalism. But equally, it's not just a formal issue. A colour has to be truthful, and like taste, it has strong ties to my distant memories. Pure formalism holds no interest for me. All form must be entwined with the human condition. Space must be the space of the land, the space of the body, the space of the mind.

Anyway, I wanted to put some of those ideas, some of that learning on to a larger format. I had some very elaborate drawings which could open up a large canvas. I have also made *Bonnie White Queen*, which is, to some extent, a portrait of my daughter Annabel, as an apparition in white. It's quite a large piece.

RB. Did she model for you?

CH. No, at the beginning of this painting there were no figures in the centre, only the two players either side. But I realised I was painting Annabel when I was painting Annabel! The idea of portraiture as the residual memories of people who we know taking shape on the canvas fascinates me. I will of course draw people that I know from life which is a very different practice.

RB. So, what's next?

CH. I am not quite done with *The Crossing*, but I will begin a new series that returns me to the urban landscape. I can't force it in too specific a way, but I think the city wants to surface again. I made a small drawing, much in the way that I would make a studio painting, which took me into the city. So, I want to explore this, and I think it needs to be on a large scale. I have made some larger painted studies on paper. I think I am revisiting in spirit perhaps paintings made four years ago like *Pearly White*, although these urban paintings will have a very different quality.

RB. Took you into the city?

CH. Not physically, but I recognised in the drawing the space around Kings Cross. When I go to London, I pass through that space. It's always challenging, being disabled. The task of going to the city and then returning at the end of the day. I think these new urban landscapes will really be about me, my life, my thoughts and fears. But the work must be extraordinary in its own terms.



Fish Supper 2022 graphite on tracing paper 8 x 8 ¼ inches
Pearly White 2018 oil on canvas 80 x 78 inches



Work in Progress, Trespass in Lemon oil on canvas 64½ x 75 inches



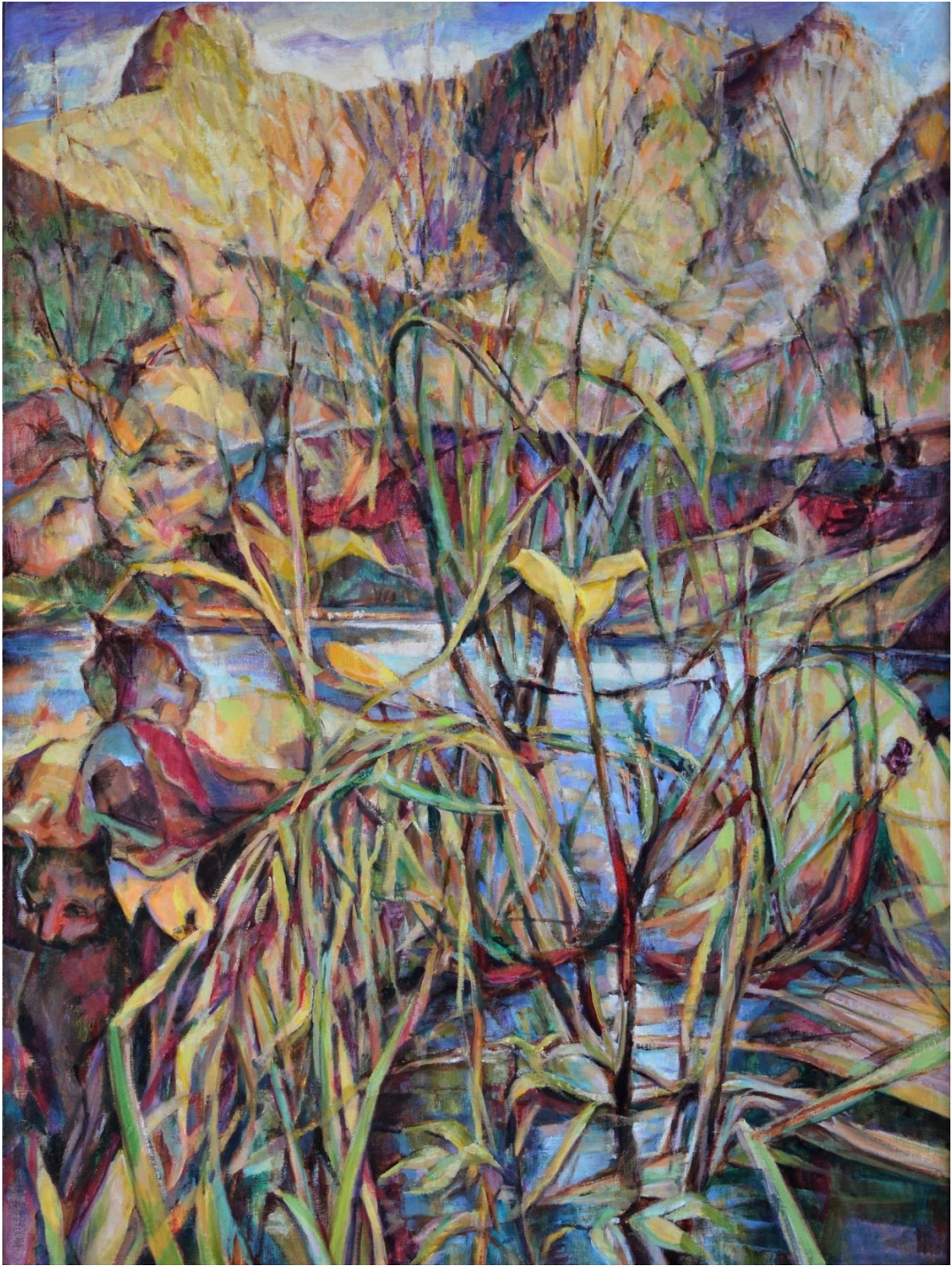
If Not When 2019/2022 oil on canvas 63 x 60 inches



Prayer Tree 2021/2022 oil on canvas 30" x 40"



Angling in a Narcissistic Landscape 2021/2022 oil on canvas 34" x 48 ½"



Hummingbird 2020/2022 oil on canvas 40" x 30"



Willow Wives 2020/2022 oil on canvas 40" x 32"



Playing Fields of Actaeon 2020/2022 oil on canvas 50 ½" x 36"



Canute's Flatterers 2020/2022 oil on canvas 39" x 30"



Bonnie White Queen 2022 oil on canvas 76¾ x 47 inches



Pasiphae's Crib 2022 oil on canvas 78¾ x 57½ inches



The Egger of Bethel 2021 oil on canvas 28 x 42 inches



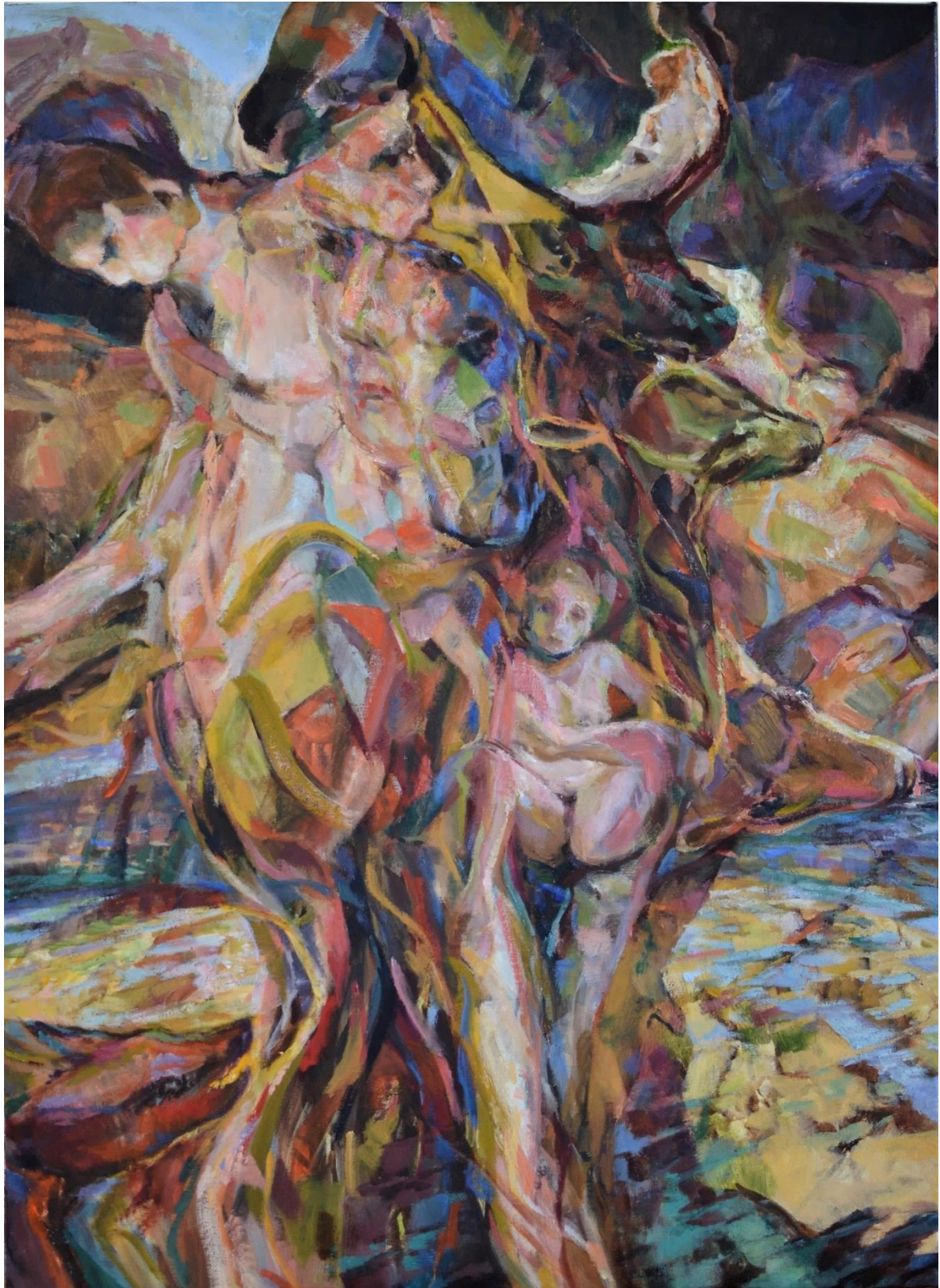
Will of Oberon 2021 oil on canvas 30¾ x 50 inches



Of Stone and Hollow Earth 2021 oil on canvas 35 x 29½ inches



Perdix and the Pilot 2021 oil on canvas 48½ x 37 inches



Trespass (Der Blaue Reiter) 2021 oil on canvas 33 x 24 inches



By a Pilgrims' Way 2021 oil on canvas 30 x 33 inches

A Selection of Drawings



The Crossing 2021 graphite on paper 23 ½ x 33 inches

The Forest 2021 graphite on paper 23 ½ x 33 inches

Zoomorphic Landscape with Hemlock 2021 graphite on paper 23 ½ x 33 inches

Zoomorphic Landscape 2021 graphite on paper 23 ½ x 33 inches



Daedalus Scarp 2021 graphite on paper 33 x 23 ½ inches



The Marys of Long Friday 2021 graphite on paper 33 ¼ x 23 ½ inches



And a Child's Voice Breaks the Silence 2021 graphite on paper 28 x 18 ¼ inches



Medway Galatea 2021 graphite on paper 32 ½ x 24 ½ inches



When The Boat Comes In 2022 graphite on paper 22 x 29 ½ inches

CLIVE HEAD Bn 1965 Maidstone, Kent, England
Currently lives and Works in Gristhorpe, North Yorkshire, England

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1991 Monuments to the Moment; Paintings of the Urban Landscape, Woodlands Art Gallery, London
1995 Silent Happenings, Elizabethan Gallery, Wakefield
1999 Clive Head, Blains Fine Art, London
2001 Clive Head, Recent Paintings, Blains Fine Art, London
2002 International Cityscapes, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, New York
2005 Clive Head, New Paintings, Louis K. Meisel Gallery, New York
View of London from Buckingham Palace. Commission to commemorate the Golden Jubilee of HM The Queen, Museum of London
2007 Clive Head: New Paintings, Marlborough Fine Art, London
2010 Clive Head, Modern Perspectives, National Gallery, London
2012 From Victoria to Arcadia, Dulwich Picture Gallery and Marlborough Fine Art
2017 Zoetic-Realism, Hollis Taggart Galleries, New York
2019 Clive Head, From an Indian Summer and Other Seasons, Waterhouse and Dodd, London
2020 Constellations, Pellas Gallery, Boston, Mass.
2021 The Parlour Paintings, Landau Fine Art, Montreal
-Pontone Gallery, London

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1991 Contemporary Realism, Maidstone Museum and Art Gallery (touring)
1991-92 Treadwell Gallery at Marcus and Marcus Gallery, Amsterdam
1991-94 Treadwell Gallery at Galerie Goetz, Basel
1996 Making a Mark, The Discerning Eye, Mall Galleries, London
Trojan, Paton Gallery, London
1997 Talent, Allan Stone Gallery, New York
2000 Urban Realism, Blains Fine Art, London
2001 Near and Far, Louis K. Meisel Gallery, New York
Great Britain! UK in NY, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, New York
2002 Art Chicago, Louis K. Meisel Gallery
Photorealism at the Millennium, Louis K. Meisel Gallery, NY
Exactitude, Plus One Plus Two Gallery, London (curated by Clive Head)
Iperrealisti, Chiostrò del Bramante, Rome
Realism, Flowers East Gallery, London
2004 The New Photorealists, Louis K. Meisel Gallery, New York
Nine Real Painters, Flowers Central, London
Blow Up, New Painting and Photoreality, St. Paul's Gallery, Birmingham
Some Photorealism, Louis K. Meisel Gallery, New York
The Prague Project, Roberson Museum and Science Centre, NY
The Big Picture, Bernarducci Meisel Gallery, New York
2005 Art Basel, Marlborough Stand
Moscow Fine Art Fair, Marlborough Stand
2006 TEFAF Maastricht, Marlborough Stand
Large Urban Landscapes, Louis K. Meisel Gallery, NY
Summer Exhibition, Marlborough Fine Art, London
Vienna Fair, Vienna, Marlborough Fine Art, London
The Reality Show, Peninsular Fine Arts Centre, Virginia
2007 TEFAF Maastricht, Marlborough Stand
Art Basel, Marlborough Stand
2008 TEFAF Maastricht, Marlborough Stand
Art Basel, Marlborough Stand
Scarborough Realists Now, Scarborough Art Gallery, UK
2009 New Photo-Realism Painting in the Digital Age, Arthur M. Berger Gallery-Manhattanville College, Purchase, NY
TEFAF Maastricht, Marlborough Stand

NOTABLE PUBLIC/PRIVATE COLLECTIONS

Imperial College London
Victoria and Albert Museum
Museum of London
Maria Lucia and Ingo Klöcker Collection
Sylvester Stallone
Steve Martin

David Ross Collection
William Pears Group
Barclays PLC
Minneapolis Art Museum
Parrish Art Museum
Duke of Beaufort
Jools Holland
Pellas Family Collection

- Art Basel, Marlborough Stand
Summer Exhibition, Marlborough Fine Art, London
Art International Zurich, Persterer Contemporary Fine Art
2010 Winter Exhibition, Marlborough Fine Art, London
TEFAF Maastricht, Marlborough Stand
Art Basel, Marlborough Stand.
Realism: from Courbet to Duane Hanson, Kunsthal Rotterdam
Art Brussels, Marlborough Stand
2011 Art Singapore, Marlborough Stand
Accrochage, Marlborough Fine Art, London
2012 TEFAF Maastricht, Marlborough Stand
Masterpiece London, Marlborough Stand
Beyond Photorealism, Galerie de Bellefeuille, Montreal
2013 Women- Love and Life. Collection Klocker, Wilhelm Lehbruck Museum, Duisburg, Germany
Photorealism: 50 Years of Hyperrealistic Painting, Kunsthalle Tubingen, Germany
-Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid
-Moderne Galerie-Saarlandmuseum, Saarbrücken, Germany
-Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, UK
TEFAF Maastricht, Marlborough Stand
Summer Exhibition Royal Academy of Arts, London
2014 Reality: Modern and Contemporary British Painting, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Art, Norwich, UK
TEFAF Maastricht, Marlborough Stand
Photorealism: 50 Years of Hyperrealistic Painting, Museo de Bellas Artes, Bilbao
2015 Reality: Modern and Contemporary British Painting, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool
Art Basel, Landau Stand
Art Basel Miami Beach, Landau Stand
Art Toronto, Landau Stand
2016 Photorealism: 50 Years of Hyperrealistic Painting, Art Museum of Estonia, Tallinn
-Musée d'Ixelles, Brussels
-Osthaus-Museum Hagen, Germany
TEFAF Maastricht, Landau Stand
Art Basel, Landau Stand
FIAC, Landau Stand, Paris
Art Basel Miami Beach, Landau Stand
2017 Photorealism: 50 Years of Hyperrealistic Painting, Kunsthal Rotterdam
-Tampa Museum of Art, Florida
The Europeans, Louis K. Meisel Gallery, New York
TEFAF Maastricht, Landau Stand
Art Basel, Landau Stand
FIAC, Landau Stand, Paris
Art Basel Miami Beach, Landau Stand
Art Miami, Hollis Taggart Stand
2019 Spring Show - Contemporary Artists, Waterhouse and Dodd, NY
Masterpiece London, Waterhouse and Dodd Stand
Art Miami, Waterhouse and Dodd Stand
2020 Art London, Waterhouse and Dodd Stand
2020 Figure as Form, Hollis Taggart, New York

Skip and Linda Law Collection
Louis K Meisel
Linden Nelson
Marcus Tellenbach Collection
Robert and Alice Landau
Siman Povarenkin

