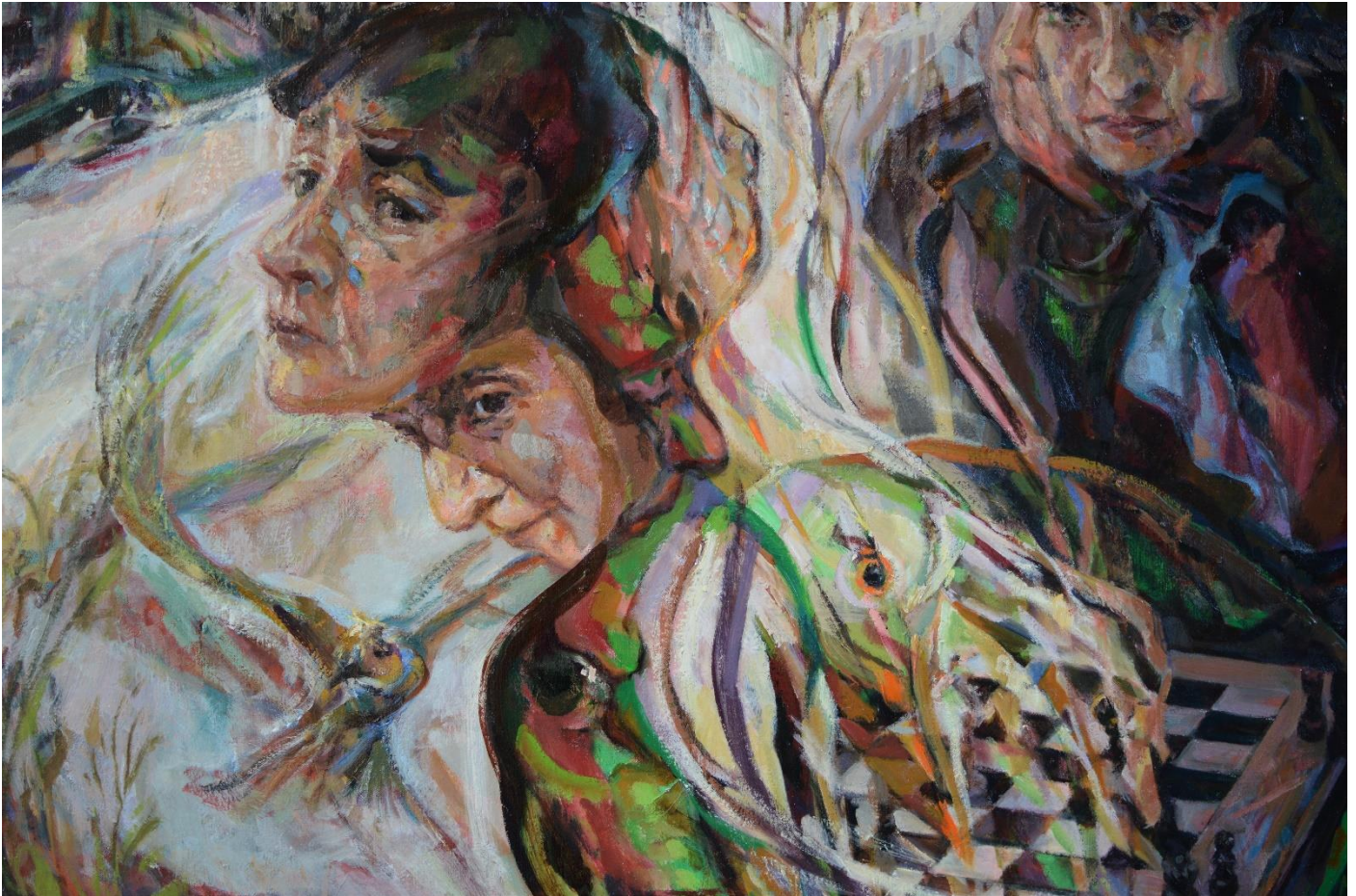


## Painter's Notes

### Clive Head; Towards a Newer Realism



I describe many of my new paintings as being in their “current state” as opposed to being complete. Some may well be finished; in the past I would have not hesitated on describing them as done, moving quickly on to the next canvas, yet in recent times I have found great interest in revisiting and repainting works. Perhaps this desire to develop and to change the elements of a painting is in keeping with my ongoing fascination with metamorphosis, to find out what something could become as I push around the paint. It is in that spirit that they are conceived, invariably finding a subject from an abstract rhythm of lines. I never know what I am going to paint when I put down the first brush-marks. I may begin with a drawing from life, but it will invariably be inverted to remove the subject.

But I think this period of reworking and re-evaluation is founded on something more.

In 2019, I made a large painting called *The Bar Raiser*. Nominally, it was a cubist painting of a café-bar scene full of human life. But the title also referred to my desire to raise the bar set by my own work in the studio, to adhere to what might now seem the rather outmoded modernist notion of *progression*, and to realise what might be possible if one just pushes that bit harder. We may have forgotten in this era of fast art and vast amounts of canvas covered by our art stars that there is a long history of painters applying themselves time and time again to a task of exacting refinement. Whether that is Auerbach repainting the same canvas 100 times or Picasso making 100 paintings dedicated to the same pictorial problem, it is fair to say that painting, good painting, invariably comes from a tenacious discipline. Each time a new painting is begun, the painter must learn to see again. I work to the point that a painting is complete in its formal integrity, then turn the painting to the wall. Only when it is revisited can I see what it has become and what might be done. It's a process that has gone on with these new paintings over a period of years.

The past five years has seen me reinventing my practice. It is odd to see that my painting from 2022 shares a closer similarity to my painting made before 2018 than those made earlier in that experimental period. I have, perhaps, returned to a sharper realism of sorts, but my process is now completely different. These are visionary paintings, made from within, giving greater clarity to that vision. I use very little reference material.

In 2018 I had come to the end of using photographs to inform my work. The critical dialogue in photorealism between painting and photography is fascinating, and remains ever more relevant in our modern world, but within the field of contemporary painting, the photograph is too often used as a convenient prop to make a figurative painting without any real critical understanding of how it affects the outcome. It was always the go to method in the fields of illustration and commercial art; now, tragically, it is the go-to method in our secondary schools and art colleges. As my work moved away from a dialogue with photography, primarily questioning the nature of photographic perspective as in my National Gallery show of 2010, the use of the camera became more problematic.

The camera can never be just a tool for collecting information. The *language* of photography will always impose itself over the unique identity of the artist. Photography is a universal means to represent the world but, as such, belongs only to the collective, to the corporate and never the individual. In picking up the camera we join the crowd and put away something of ourselves...not what we observe, we will make those decisions, but *how* we observe and *how we envisage* and *how we imagine*. So, when painting ceases to provide a critical examination of our relationship with the camera as a machine, and photography as a fixed algorithm, as mine did, I could no longer see any purpose for the camera beyond making painting *easier*. And it does make painting easier. The photograph gives the artist solutions to visual problems. It is far simpler to imitate these solutions than to invent from scratch. And that stops artists being inventors.

There are no shortcuts. That which makes painting easier is in equal measure to that which is done outside of the self. And to what ends? Shop bought cakes can taste as good as home-made but there is no need for an art of convenience or one that just exploits the lowest common denominator for popular approval. The only art that can have any relevance *as art* is that which redefines existence, and that task belongs to the artist, on their own, in the solitary space of the studio. The artist takes it upon themselves to invent the means to create the world, not to reiterate what is already known. Finding new realities does not mean illustrating dreams but finding new algorithms to construct the world. That means articulating new forms, new anatomies played out in alternative spaces and time frames. Again this is Modernist talk, but a modernism that embraces the best of human endeavours since The Enlightenment and in direct opposition to the post-Marxist notions of absorbing the artist into society and seeing their artifacts as being of and about its collective norms. Art is primarily about the act of creation not commentary.

These are broad swings, and the point here is not to become too embroiled in theoretical debates, but to recognise that my move away from the role of the camera in making paintings, to drawing from nature and developing new methods in the studio, is fuelled by fundamental beliefs as to the nature of art. The need to rework paintings, to paint them out and paint over, to keep them open, come from the same beliefs. That the paintings now deal with multiple and changing realities tells me, at least, that I have moved my work into a sphere of unending possibilities. Many years ago, I collaborated with the writer Michael Paraskos on identifying "The New Certainty" in painting. No matter the grandness of the scheme, a painting that aspires to a finite outcome of certainty will always be limited. It is only by dreaming of the impossible and the ungraspable that we can find out what our true potential might be... even if the struggle in the studio is endless.

The paintings below are in their current state, reworked from earlier states which may have been reproduced elsewhere. Some have a history of gradual refinement, most of being completely reformed. Nothing is lost. In any case, the activity of painting, of continual discovery is far more important than the objects that we call paintings.  
September 2022

## November 2022 Supplement

This document has been updated with replacement images of many of the paintings. Additional paintings have also been included which have been worked on over the past two months. At one end of the studio are several stacks of paintings. At present there are, perhaps forty works, from which a painting is selected to be worked on at the beginning of each day. On any one day, three or four paintings might be developed. Typically, a painting will be worked on for four or five consecutive days until the paint becomes unworkable and needs to dry. As many of the paintings have become extensively worked with lead paint, they have dense and textured surfaces. Layers of thin dammar varnish are applied to resuscitate colours which have sunk and dulled. Many of the current works have an intense colouring and tonal range reminiscent of Pre-Raphaelite painting combined with a surface more akin to Lucian Freud's paintings. Neither of these qualities can be adequately reproduced.



*Will of Oberon* 2021-2022 oil on canvas 30¾ x 50 inches

This painting began from a life drawing turned on its side. An extra strip of paper added to the side of the drawing became a horizon line, separating the sea from the sky, and placing the figures on a rocky outcrop.

Although complex, it is economical to have so many different figures share limbs and torsos, emphasising the reliance of everything on everything else. This is always the case in painting, where the entire configuration is dependent on each brush-mark. The more the painting departs from easy conventions, the more this becomes essential, and the longer the painting will take to find its conclusion.

At some point, a configuration of marks will have suggested a head of a donkey, subsequently connecting the play of events on the canvas with Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Oberon casts a spell so that the queen of the fairies, Titania will fall in love with a common labourer, Bottom who is bewitched with a donkey's head.

Although the painting focuses on Titania's (self) entanglement, to the left, the scale shifts to an insert of Puck, Oberon's fairy, casting the spell on Titania and Bottom, with his naked buttocks and donkey head. The painting is rife with Shakespeare's bawdy and punning humour.

In the bottom right is a pool in which a small boat can be made out. This establishes a surprisingly distant space, way below the foreground figures. Such plays with perspective reintroduce the unusual spatial juxtapositions from my earlier work. I want to carry everything forward into the current work, even if the references are small.



*By a Pilgrims' Way* 2021-2022 oil on canvas 30 x 33 inches

In the yard outside my studio is a laburnum tree. Every year it provides a magnificent show of yellow flowers through the studio window. It is odd to think how something so beautiful can be so poisonous.

Many of my paintings favour a shrill yellow.

In the summer of 2021, I took a small canvas into the yard and painted the laburnum's trunks and lower branches. Later, the canvas was turned on its side and the forms of the tree suggested an amalgam of hares, dogs, deer and elf-like people. These motifs emerge gradually through the painting process, fauna and flora come and go and abstract passages take on more identifiable traits. What remains seems to have some purposeful resonance though I am reluctant to analyse what any of this means. But the dog is hunting the hare, the deer is startled, and the elf spies a fish in the water, so there is tension but also an overwhelming sense of childlike playfulness. The title refers to my childhood memories of playing on The Pilgrim's Way, an ancient pathway that runs close to my home village in Kent. The painting is playful too in its morphological transitions. The deer and elf share the same body, the deer's tail becoming the green pointed ear of the elf.

As with many of my paintings, the top margin approximates a more conventional landscape which helps anchor the more rhythmic and spatially uncertain passages below. To the right, at the top, we see The Pilgrim's Way, encased with trees along which several people are walking towards us. Perhaps, this top margin makes a distinction between the conventional, adult and mundane world above, and a wild world of nature, childlike fantasy and myth below.



*Bonnie White Queen, for Henry James* 2021-2022 oil on canvas 76¾ x 47 inches

I draw regularly from life and run a drawing group in my home village. Family, neighbours and friends will often sit to be drawn on a Saturday afternoon.

This painting began from a drawing of my wife Gaynor and my friend Ali playing chess. I retained a reference to the chess board in the painting. Thinking about chess led to images of horses (knights) and the opposing forces of black and white, light and shade, day and night, and the real and the ethereal. The ghostly white queen dominates the centre.

The setting evokes a Celtic landscape. In contrast to many paintings of Classical mythology, most notably its sister picture *Pasiphae's Crib* (now under the knife, see below) this is a vision of Gothic myth and ghost stories.



The white queen, which is also a portrait of my youngest daughter Annabel dissolves into the buildings of the distant hamlet and, as we move down her body, various birds and fishes, and a bank of winter flowers.

The landscape is constructed primarily from interlocking horse motifs. The dark line of the hills at the top of the painting is also the back of a horse that descends to the horse's head on the right. A pale horse sweeps around down the left edge, giving a snowy terrain. The head of this horse is the arm of the foreground figure.

Although not large by comparison with many of the paintings made earlier in my career, this is the only painting of substantial size in this round up. There are others in progress. It was always difficult for me in the past to make smaller works which could encompass all that I want and hold the attention of the viewer. Now each painting is like a concertina of imagery, and, as imagery overlaps and interacts with other images, even more possibilities are generated. So the expansive size of large canvases is less important. Each painting is like a 3-dimensional cabinet of curiosities. Of course, not everything can be seen at first glance; time is needed to find out what is going on and the paintings burn very slowly.

The reference to literature, in this case the writer Henry James, might imply that this is a narrative kind of painting. To some extent, acknowledging literature (and film and artworks) asserts that my experience of reality cannot just be limited to the places and people that I know, but all the books that I have read, all the films I have watched, all the exhibitions I have seen, and beyond this, all that I have imagined and dreamed. So, I am acknowledging that my paintings are drawing upon my entire history and are now more comprehensively *realist*.

Primarily, I don't see these as story-telling paintings in the sense of illustrating a narrative. More important to me is finding a means within the structure of painting that can establish the potential for narrative. The paintings have a formal capacity to create meanings, both formal and psychological relationships, which are invariably displaced with new meanings when we look again. I want to invent the means through which dialogue is formed, rather than presenting a fixed dialogue through existing conventions. It is both challenging to make and challenging to view.





*Perdix and the Pilot* 2021-2022 oil on canvas 48½ x 37 inches

This is one of several paintings that began with a drawing of a gunnera plant in the garden. The shapes and folds of the leaves and extravagant stems have helped me to imagine all kinds of imagery.

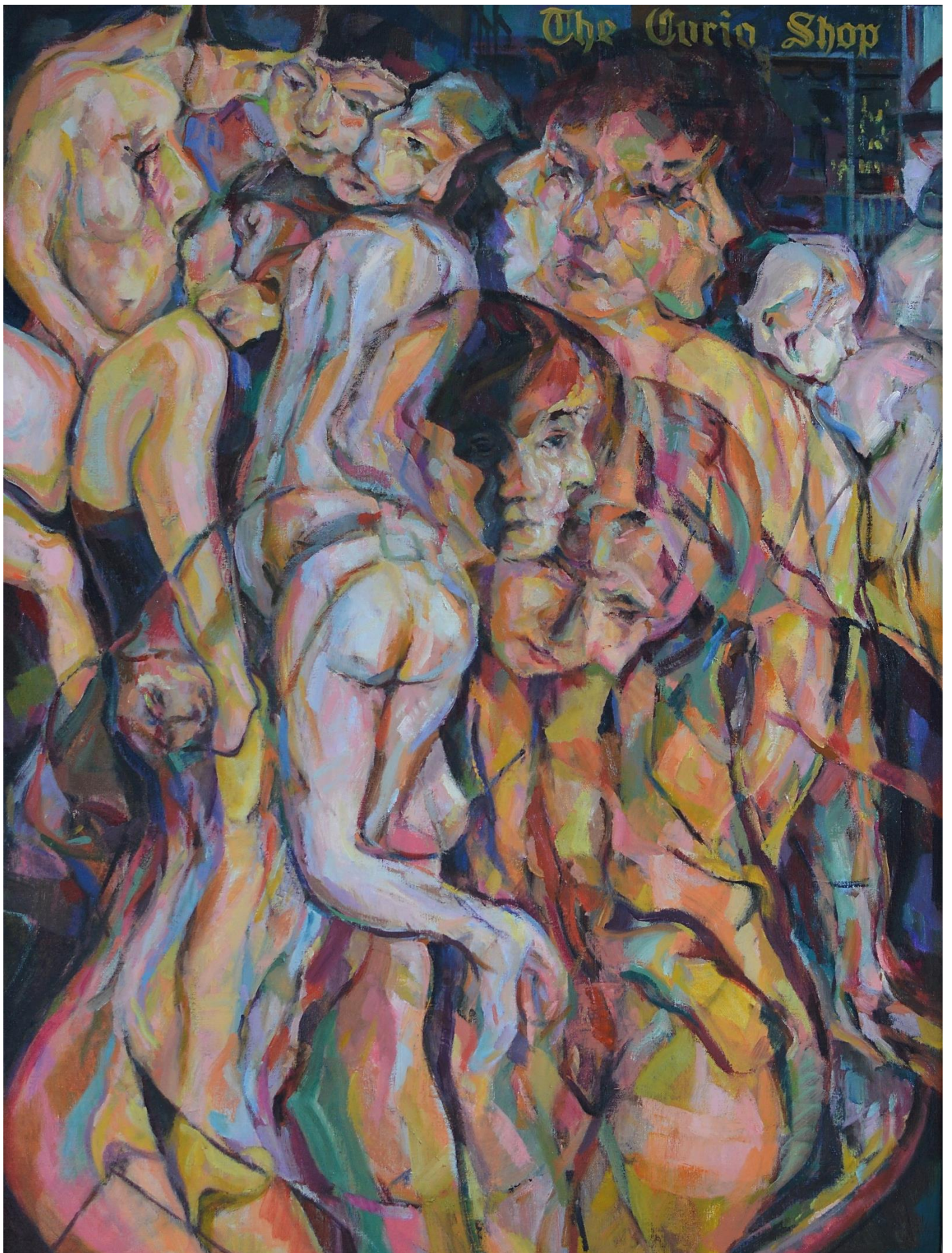
Early in the painting, a dark headland in the centre had emerged with a vast space dropping away to an expanse of sea below. A casual mark to the right easily implied a hang glider, so the idea of human flight was born. This figure can still be seen on the right edge. This led to thoughts about Icarus.

I studied classics at school and when I was 17, I spent the summer travelling around Greece and the Greek Islands visiting ancient sites. It was the first time that I had been abroad, and it left an indelible mark. To that trip I attribute becoming a painter of landscapes not just steeped in but shaped by history, myth and all of life. In this painting, my garden has become a Cretan land of animals and people. The headland, with its nest of white birds is as much a portrait head, or many heads.

Icarus's failed attempt to escape from Crete with wings made by his father, Daedalus, is best seen in the figure descending to earth in the top left of the painting, but the painting also refers to the fuller story of Daedalus and his son. In the bottom left, the Minotaur is trapped in a cave of Daedalus' labyrinth, and to the right, are the ships of King Minos in pursuit of Daedalus after his successful flight from Crete to Cyprus.

The green leopards attacking the birds that constitute the foreground landscape are more mysterious and return us to the natural order of things. But then the natural order of the ancient world is always tied to mythology. In an earlier chapter, Daedalus, jealous of the brilliance of his nephew Perdix, pushed him from a great height to his death, at which point Perdix became the partridge. Perhaps Icarus's failed attempt at manmade flight, his arrogance to fly too high was Perdix's revenge.

Just above the white birds in the centre, we can make out the tiny silhouettes of Icarus and Daedalus standing on the edge of the headland.

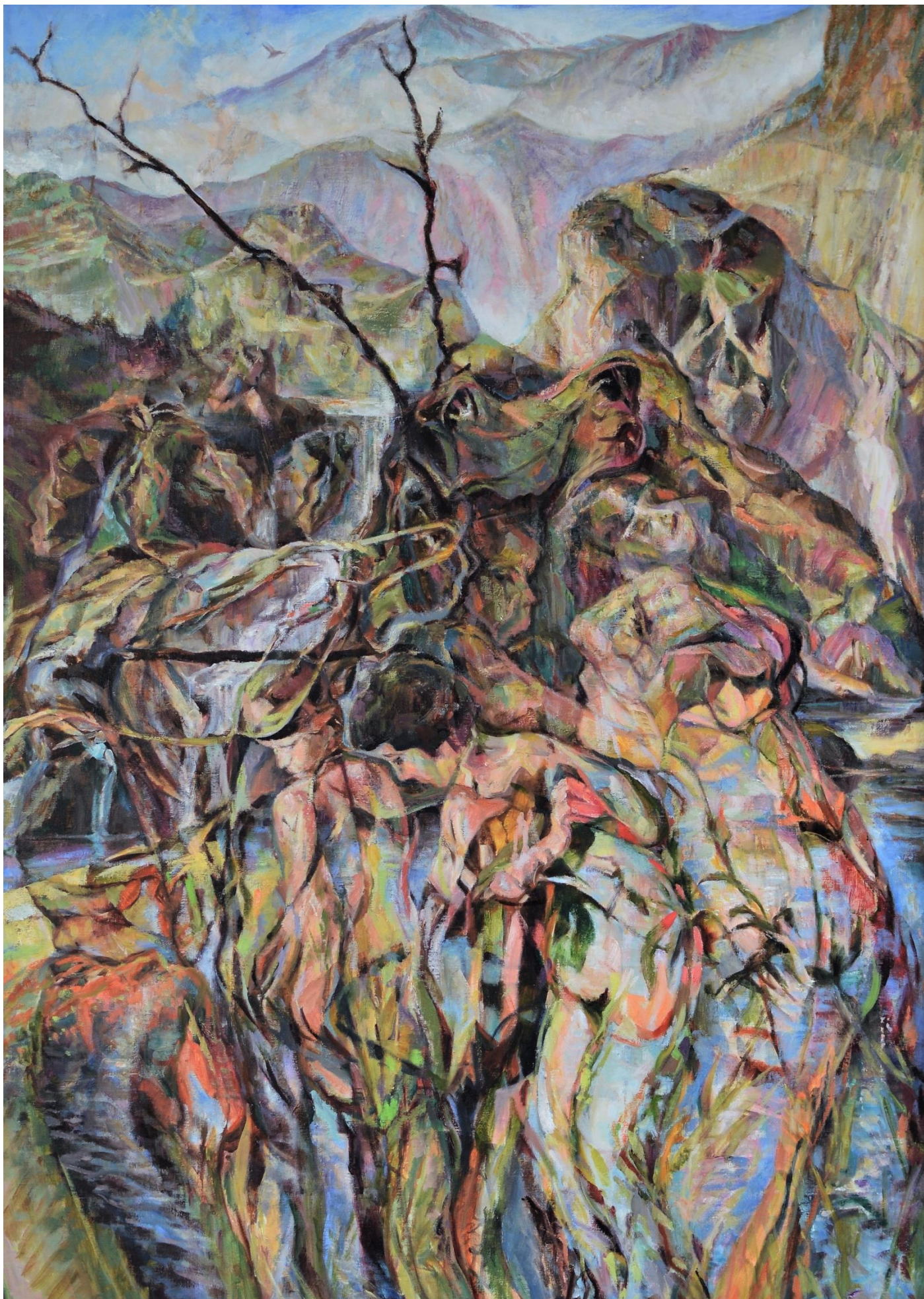


*Shepherd Market (The Yellow Shoes) 2019-2022 oil on canvas 40" x 30"*

This painting, largely made in 2019 has carried over some of the features from a series of much larger paintings (The Indian Summer Paintings) which preceded it. Most notable are the Cubist faceting and a shallow field of floating planes. The lettering at the top, added much later, might continue this reference to Cubist devices but it also establishes a more traditional space. Behind these figures there is a shop, on a street, and the title tells us that this is specifically Shepherd Market in London. This then enables us to locate some of the figures within a perspectival space. Pre-Modernist space then is played against Modern surface and flatness. It is perhaps illuminating that the font of the lettering is so archaic.

I might describe my work as quasi-cubist. I am not particularly interested in imitating a cubist aesthetic. The angularity and reduction to cuboid forms was a character identified by others outside of the creative and philosophical circles of early Twentieth Century Modernism. It was largely a stylistic affectation. More important is the flow of ideas and experimentation between the so-called Cubists and painters like Matisse and then later, the Surrealists which repositions painting away from a single, Euclidian position to a state of openness and flux. If some of my recent works remind us of more distant traditions (Classical painting, Landscape painting) so be it. I do not want to deny a history of painting that has been so fundamental to my being (nor should we assume that all historic art is of a Euclidian nature, it isn't). But equally, I can never deny that my existential being isn't multi-faceted and that painting must, if it is to have any authenticity, be rooted in the new positions that emerged through Modernist play and thought. My painting takes the form that it has to; it isn't a matter of choice.

Shepherd Market, on the edge of the gallery district of Mayfair, is a lively place of narrow streets full of pubs and restaurants. Adding further colour is its long history of high-class prostitution which carries on to this day, above the shops on street level. This painting returned me to a memory of attending a fellow artist's opening in a small gallery opposite a brothel. Visitors to the gallery were more entertained by the flow of gentlemen callers across the road. I would have felt sorry for the artist, but he seemed more fascinated in a particular woman with yellow shoes than the success of his own show.



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

From the Parlour Series made during the lockdowns of the Covid pandemic, this painting has been reworked many times, but it has retained much of its form established from the outset. Based on a drawing made in the garden of an ornamental tree, the rapidly drawn lines describing some fleeting clouds first suggested a mountainous landscape.

I jokingly refer to this painting as the lovechild between Picasso and Albert Bierstadt. Of course, it was not unusual of Picasso to explore mythological themes through his post-cubist work, so my reference to Actaeon is not so far removed from the Modernist canon. But the increasing shift in this, and a number of recent paintings towards the spectacle of Nineteenth Century landscape painters of The Hudson River School is a very peculiar hybrid. I have always liked these painters, recently refining these new landscapes with greater concern for atmosphere and the play of light. This counters the spatial inversions and multiple images of Cubism where such concerns have no play. How can I establish a landscape that unfolds before us and into the distance whilst simultaneously scrambling such clarity and bringing everything closer to the surface, with foreground motifs made from more distant planes?

This is one of several paintings that draws upon the story of Actaeon happening across the goddess Diana, naked as she bathes. For his voyeurism, Diana changes him into a deer to be hunted by his own hounds. There is something poignant to me about Actaeon, an ordinary traveller stumbling into the world of the gods, for it is the extraordinary space of the gods that the painter must strive to create whatever the outcome.

The tree and central landscape become the stag of Actaeon, and his hounds can be found overlapping this image and in the shapes of the mountains. The goddess, Diana, whose portrait profile can be seen in large on the right, is also viewed as full-length nudes in the reeds and flowers.



*"Shore Leave", For Otto Dix, With Love 2020-2022 oil on canvas 40" x 30"*

This painting has changed radically since its first inception as a group of bathers on a beach. Initially, it was made in response to the reckless behaviour of people flocking to our local seaside towns during the pandemic.

A painting must keep pace with life. Its role is never just to mirror what is happening around us (that's the role of illustration) but to resolve, in a unique way, all that we are and experience. Perhaps its original politic was too specific and had no longevity. It needed to take on a different agenda; the expanse of water became a river estuary with a distant city, the juxtaposition of sailor and nude bather in the top centre became the prow of a ship towering above the land. Perhaps it is beached or in dry dock. The mariners are on leave and find companionship in the women on the dockside.

I have made the occasional painting which pays tribute to earlier artists. I see them as postcards to artists to whom I feel a close attachment. Of course, this is one-sided and an imagined relationship. The first of these was to Henry Koerner. This is to Otto Dix and for his astonishing paintings of sailors and prostitutes that he made in Weimar Germany. Through reworking this painting, it has become much tighter and moved closer to Neue Sachlichkeit painting of the 1920s. Technically, the detail in the cityscape also connects it to my own earlier urban landscapes but this current shift is towards a more magical realism.

I have named the ship "Polypheme", which, appropriately enough, changes identity into the central titanic woman, rounded and reminiscent of woman from a Dix painting. (The sailor, by contrast is little more than a silhouette). These morphological transitions, or the realisation of a motif in a negative space, rarely come about if they are forced. I must set up a forum for free mark-making in which something could happen, and then listen very carefully to the painting to see what it will offer. The direction of a painting turns on the slightest occurrence. What I find in apparently arbitrary marks will be coming from a place that is unfiltered and uncensored. This is always preferable to imposing my will or politics.





*Sinnerman (Faulkner's Medicament)* 2020-2022 oil on canvas 30" x 40"

For a long time, this painting was titled just *Faulkner's Medicament* in reference to an episode in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* which I read as a teenager. In Faulkner's bleak novel, a farm girl becomes pregnant and seeks a remedy from a local chemist. He prescribes a medicine which smells of turpentine and then to have sex with her. That "hit smells of turpentine", as do all my pictorial remedies, has never left me. The Sinnerman may well refer to the chemist, but I have broadened the net. The figure at the top of the painting has a sinister presence, though his outstretched arms also illuminate the landscape with a shrill yellow sunset. His head, derived from a drawing of an antique lamp, has none of the human expressions of the other characters.

Although originally based on a drawing made in Wales, I have always regarded this painting as being more American in its references, not just Faulkner but Regionalism in general. Sinnerman also refers to Nina Simone's jazz song from 1962. For me, the painting and the song go hand-in-hand.

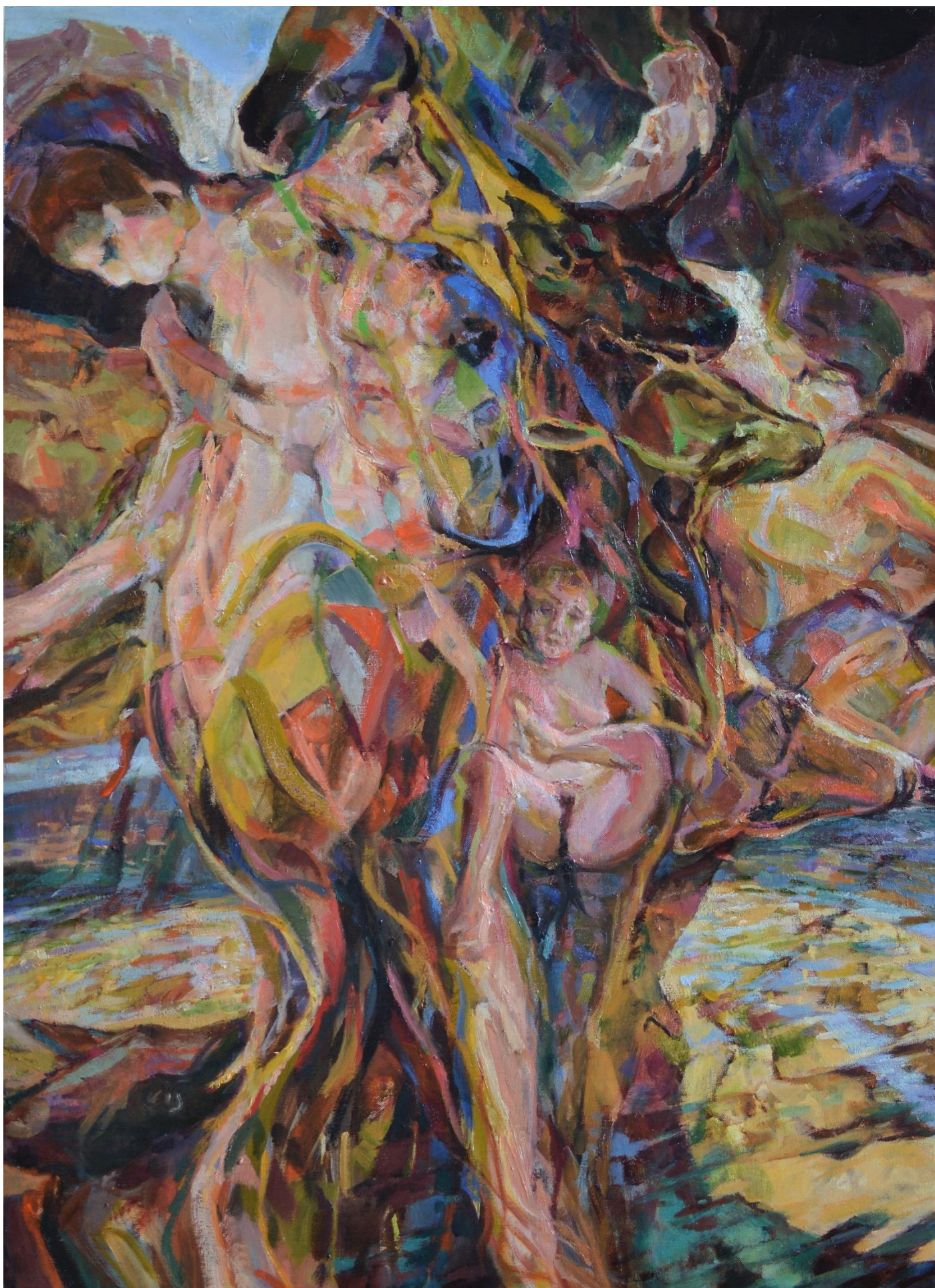


*Sirens of New York* 2020-2022 oil on canvas 40" x 30"

This recollection of the city is from distant memories. Many realist painters have said that if they can see something (more often, if they can photograph something) then they can paint it. I am interested in seeing something in my mind's eye. It should be possible to paint this as it is to have the subject in front of the artist. If the mind can construct a form clear enough in one's dreams, so much so that we believe it to be true, then that should be sufficient knowledge to draw upon when painting. More importantly, the nature of that imaging belongs to the individual, discarding anything that is unessential and placing it in a time-frame continuum which is way more flexible than in the actual world. Inexplicable morphing is a feature of our dreams, and of our reasoning. The visual database from which we construct narratives, and the frameworks in which those narratives are played out are astonishing.

This painting isn't the image of a dream or memory, but the city is built from what I have imagined, as is the train that is entering the siding. This is a train in the city according to how I believe it should be. Of course, these elements also double as figures. Radiating out beyond the red-headed nude, the shapes of the city become a larger head, in profile and looking up towards the moon. And then this profile becomes the bridge and nose of a larger profile looking down. These simultaneous images occur again and again.

The idea of the sirens came from a letter from my friend, the painter Robert Neffson. During the pandemic he wrote of the noise of the ambulance sirens breaking the silence of the city. The sirens in the painting are from Classical mythology, beautiful but dangerous. Perhaps they refer to the dangers of human contact during that time, and beyond that, the thrill and risks of life in the city. I have memories of being in New York City for the first time in 1988 and listening to the sirens at night which I had never heard before.



*Trespass (Der Blaue Reiter)* 2021-2022 oil on canvas 33 x 24 inches

This small painting began as a study of a tree painted in the garden. I know that when I am painting directly from nature, the painting will be used as a catalyst for something unexpected. Nevertheless, I am careful to map the subject with accuracy and find all those fractal rhythms in nature that will catch my thoughts when in the studio. Nature can be so giving and under this painting there is a naturalistic landscape painting.

Inverting the canvas, a small figure was found in the centre which became Diana, bathing, over which an amalgam of deer and horses established the foreground structure.

Diana is seen looking directly at us, the viewer, as if we are trespassing into her world, though moments before it seems that she was lying back to the right and looking away, carelessly kicking her legs in the air and oblivious to the silhouette of Actaeon just behind her.

These new paintings increasingly play with details on this small scale whilst maintaining passages that are painted with a forthright painterliness. In addition to this range of marks and shifts in scale, this painting, along with others has both encrusted impasto and glazes, reinforced with dammar varnish to make the colours sing. They are, in every way, maximalist paintings.

The title refers to Der Blaue Reiter. The blue rider, or at least a blue horse can be traced in the middle, but of course this is also a reference to the early years of German Expressionism which is acknowledge both in the way in which this painting is made and its celebration of nature, the nude at one with this wild landscape and animals.



*Eyes of Ladon (The Hesperides)* 2021-2022 oil on canvas 37" x 43 ½"

The garden of the Hesperides was home to a special tree whose fruit gave eternal life. The Hesperides were nymphs of the evening light charged with guarding the tree, along with a hundred-eyed dragon named Ladon. As my painting touches on a sequence of events, seen from different angles, titling the painting *The Eyes of Ladon* acknowledges its multiple perspectives, viewed through many eyes.

I had an inkling when drawing an apple tree in our little orchard at the end of the garden, that I might end up making a painting of The Hesperides. It is one of those themes that has led to some particularly distinctive paintings from English art history such as Turner's absurd rendition of Ladon as a crocodile the length of a mountain top, to Leighton's slumbering Hesperides and Ladon as a snake curled around an orange tree.

As with other paintings, the landscape itself is formed from large figures. Some fill the entire the canvas. These are indicated by the more easily recognised heads in the top half but the size of the painting, and the distance from which it is viewed will affect what ultimately is seen. So much is lost in reproduction to the extent that paintings like this must be seen in the flesh to make much sense. It is not simply a matter of witnessing the artist's hand and the varied textures of the paint surface, but to begin to see and understand the complexity of its realities.

In my frustration with art in reproduction, I am also reminded of the fundamental reason why painting should still exist. A painting has the potential to be an autonomous creation, original in its form and resistant to deconstruction into recognised linguistic and formal norms. It can still be an outsider, truly avant-garde, existing beyond digital media. A true work of art cannot function as a reproducible consumable.

But I do not want my painting to be so idiosyncratic that it speaks only to itself. In this painting I use Classical tropes to provide an anchor and a point of entry. The small bathers in the centre define the scale and nature of this central section. It's a pool in the wilderness, from which we can find other features like the waterfall and distant mountains. The bather to the left of the painting is more complex, partly cubist, and, as we look to the amalgam of figures in the bottom right corner, the layering and shifts have become so entwined as to generate an undefined number of figures of differing scales.

From the original drawing I retained the description of apples, leaves and branches, but the tree also doubles as images of Heracles, breezing in to steal the fruit. The trunk of the tree also becomes one of the nymphs, arm outstretched. Note how the entire foreground is also a reclining nymph.



*Lifeguard for the Fountainheads* 2019-2022 oil on canvas 44" x 27"



Begun at the end of 2019, this painting has been reworked more than any other in recent years. It took the mantle of being a manifesto work at an early stage, from the point that I first titled it with a reference to Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*.

I began showing with the New York dealer Louis Meisel around 2000. Lou has always been outspoken about the state of the art world. To visitors to his gallery, he would hand out copies of Ayn Rand's novel *The Fountainhead* in which she describes a modern society enshrining mediocrity over creative excellence. Her hero is a modernist architect who struggles against this backdrop but ultimately triumphs. Lou draws parallels with the current art scene and the society painted in Rand's novel. His personal dedication to the art in his gallery, exhibitions, books and collections pays tribute to what he regards as excellent in an art world of too susceptible to the whims of fashion, celebrity and commerce.

Much of Lou's emphasis has been on the most demanding photorealism. My challenge, as I have described earlier, was to find a direction beyond a painting centred on problems raised by camera (and Renaissance) perspective. To some extent, my need to move on was through fear of repeating myself. Appropriation, even if one is just appropriating from oneself, flies in the face of invention and renewal. Whatever had been achieved by painters like Richard Estes (and to an extent my own urban landscapes), I felt that there was no room for me to maintain a critical investigation within a mode that had become established, known and certain.

So, this painting became both an exploration ground and manifesto of what might constitute an art that stands apart from an easy mediocrity but doesn't just reiterate the values once associated with excellence. Rand's hero, after all, was not the vision of a timeless perfectionist championed by a conservative like Roger Scruton, he was a cutting-edge modernist. And that fits with my belief that newness and originality is essential to the creation of an astonishing art. Of course, novelty for its own sake without the layers of learning is vapid. The challenge is more profound: Can I make a painting that re-presents the human body without recourse to classical conventions that is also authoritative? Can I paint the human body within and part of the world in which it functions? Can I paint in the knowledge of Einstein's theories of relativity which have defined modern learning? Can I paint my world without distinction between the reality I perceive and that which I imagine? Can I paint and be true to the physical nature of paint and the immaterial space that laying paint on canvas inevitably creates? Can I paint the continuum of ideas and experiences that fill my mind as I paint?

The principal figure with the large head at the top of the painting introduced the challenge of a new kind of portrait, in this case my wife Gaynor. Although the painting is based on a drawing with some figures, there was no head in this part of the canvas. As I recall, there were some railway buildings. I don't know if the head emerged because of, or despite, that which was originally put down. It sprung forth from what was physically on the canvas and from my activity in the studio.

Of equal enormity was the problem set by the head in the lower left of the canvas and the smaller head on the right edge. There is a psychological tension (and physical space) between these two heads and their corresponding bodies, but they are also conjoined with a torso which is anatomically reversible. It is important that such features are not *illustrated* in the manner of a graphic artist's trick but seem to be an inevitable consequence in this painted world. After all, this is a world that has different spatial and time frames to our world and merges realities. So these morphic transitions and peculiar anatomies must be natural, if somewhat demonic. To use Greenberg's terms on Classicism, this kind of pictorial invention invariably leads to a Dionysian state. Still, it must be ordered and perfectly balanced.

As the painting neared completion, the principal fountain-headed figure became more firmly seated and entered a state of spatial flux, being both in front of and behind the standing figure on the right. When behind, she grows, towering over the other figures like an enlarged Madonna in a medieval painting. In this state, she struck me as a protective lifeguard for the other characters.

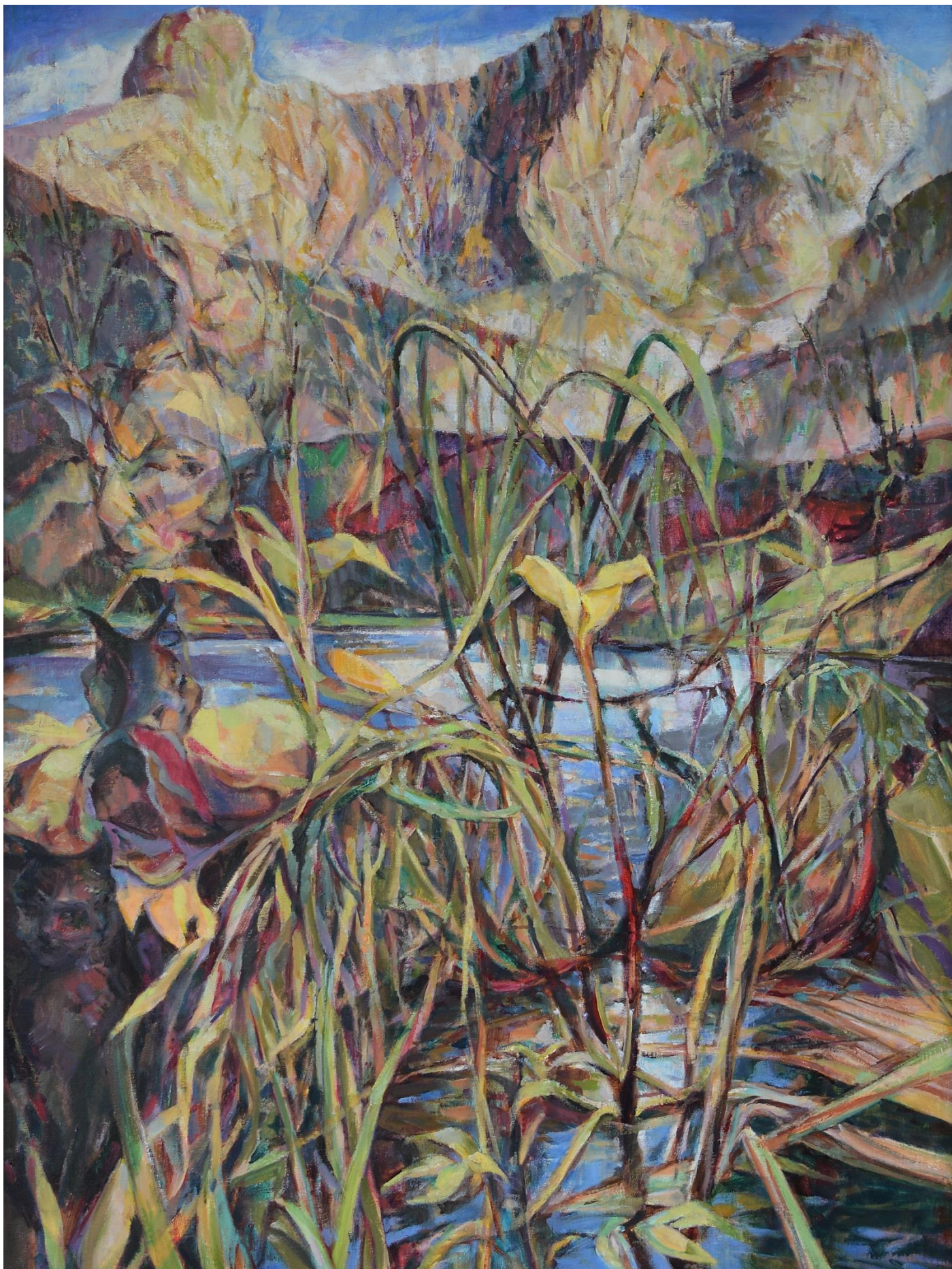


*Of Stone and Hollow Earth* 2021-2022 oil on canvas 35 x 29½ inches

Another painting based initially on a drawing of gunnera leaves. Turned on its side I found myself looking at a gorilla against a mountainscape.

Although many of the paintings touch on grand themes from ancient mythology, this painting developed multiple references to the popular films of King Kong and the Monkey King. It also became an Arcadian landscape with three principal bathers, the large nude in the foreground connecting it to Matisse and The Fauves.

It is well known that King Kong was from Hollow Earth. Less known is that the Monkey King, in more distant Chinese culture was born from stone. So it is apt that my primates are also mountain outcrops, and the terrain that extends into the foreground becomes limbs and an outstretched hand in which the main bather sits. More enigmatic are the distant yellow mountains which double as numerous creatures and people such as the balletic figure who strikes different poses on the left.



*Song of Syrinx* 2020-2022 oil on canvas 40" x 30"

This painting began from a drawing made of our garden pond. We live in the Vale of York, and in the distance are the rolling hills of the Yorkshire Wolds, best known in the art world through Hockney's more recent outings as a landscape painter.

I have always been a landscape painter though this has taken many guises. As a child I made many paintings that inclined towards the sublime, often built up from plein air studies. Although from Kent, I would often paint and draw in the Lake District or Scotland in the summer holidays.

The mountains and lake in this painting recall those paintings from my childhood. The landscape is invented from those memories, displacing the actuality of my garden and fields beyond. But the landscape is also a pictorial veneer, beneath which there are countless figures. When I was making the drawing, my cat, Leo, who often dozes at my feet when I am working, stirred when the wind rustled the reeds in the pond. Having assured him that there was no one there to concern him, I thought about Syrinx, disappearing into the reeds to escape Pan. The more we look, the more this landscape is evidently teeming with life, people, birds and references to Classical and Romantic literature.



*And the Riders of Oz* 2020-2022 oil on canvas 40" x 30"

The state of this painting still in progress, but begun back in 2020, indicates a shift in emphasis over the past couple of years from a figuration which was fragmented and dissonant in its anatomical and spatial characteristics to one which is allowing a selective and measured return to naturalism. In its early state, the central figure was right on the edge of coherence, taking its lead more from the figures of early De Kooning than the Neue Sachlichkeit. Now we are more confident of her parameters and her position in front of the man, but such certainty only exacerbates the oddity of the scale of the female figure down the right edge.

In 2017, I made a large painting, *Crossing The Medlock*, which fused the nude female form with a plethora of horses, and made reference to Hylonome, the female centaur. Horses, and specifically the shifting of human into equine anatomy has become a recurrent feature in my work since that painting. The man with the broad-rimmed hat could be on horseback, but equally the foreground nude also sustains and becomes the shape of several horse motifs. Furthermore, the rider's torso also becomes the lower part of a circus performer (or nude female warrior), which in turn establishes the face of a large squatting figure that fills the whole canvas. Such transitions push the painting into a dream state, reinforced by the title which places us in Oz.



*Prayer Tree (with Spencer Angels)* 2020-2022 oil on canvas 30" x 40"

This painting began with the same drawing that informed *Song of Syrinx*, but in this instance, the drawing was turned on its side. The drawing was made directly from nature in the garden. Studying nature's fractal patterns and rhythms gives me an intricate web in which I can find myself, so this new wilderness comes from within. I stumbled into thoughts of a prayer tree, like those from Indigenous American culture, sacred sites which connected man to the spiritual world. The tree, and the landscape, map numerous figures and animals. As the painting developed it found greater depth and an eerie light which reinforced a sense of otherness. A late addition, painted at the time of the Queen's passing were the figures on the far left which reminded me of the angels in a Stanley Spencer painting.

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*Willow Wives* 2020-2022 oil on canvas 40" x 32"



*And in Green Acres* 2021-2022 oil on canvas 40" x 37"



*Angler's Catch* 2021-2022 oil on canvas 34" x 48"