

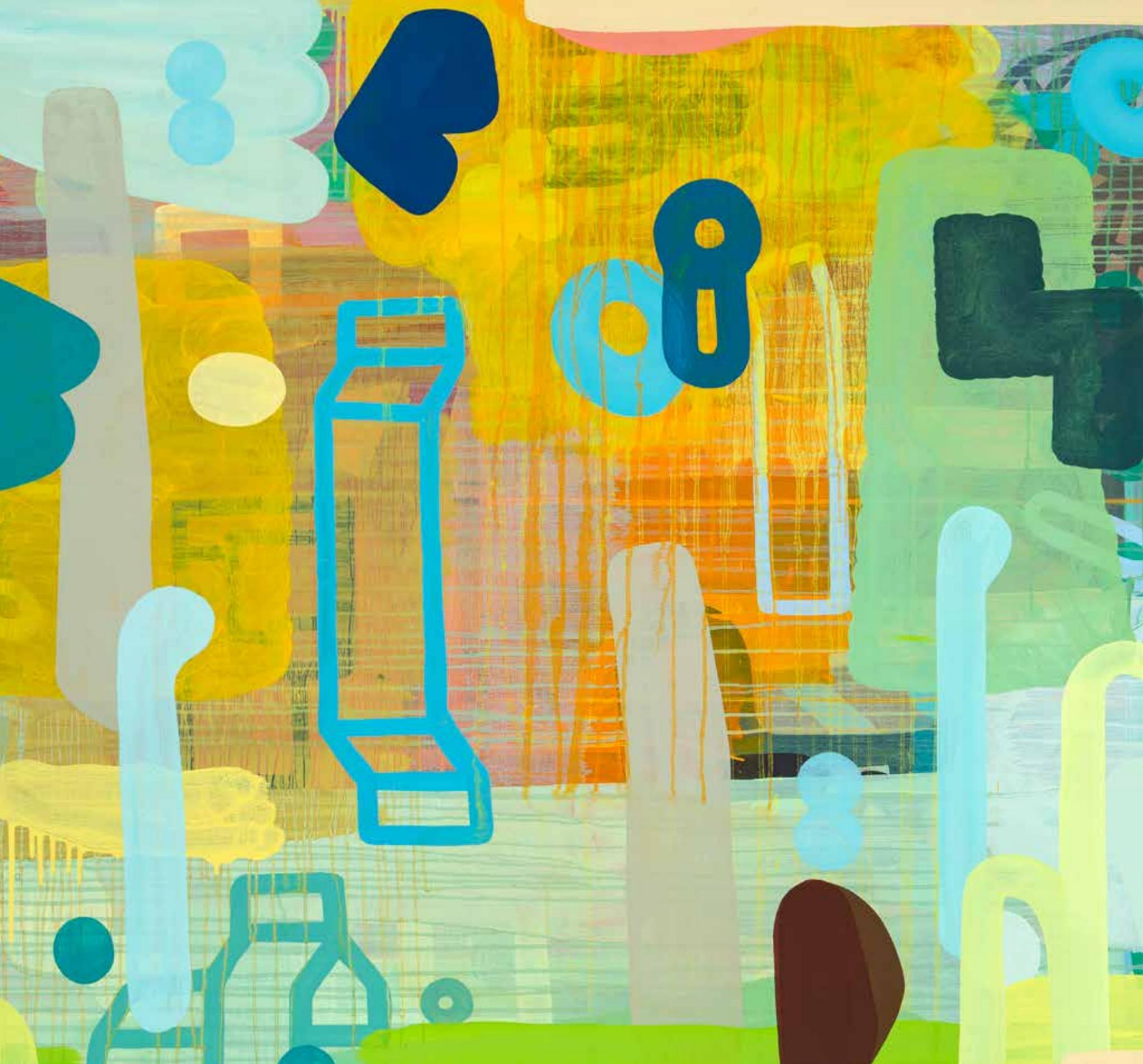


THE PAINTINGS OF MARTIN FINNIN



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## INTRODUCTION

### *A Brush with Chance*

Gathering materials and ideas for this book was like flying an aeroplane over the past twenty years of my life. An aerial view throws new light on things familiar and forgotten and I became aware of themes that course their way through my life and my work. I was struck by the realisation that chance has been such an important aspect of my creative journey. From the discovery of a colour to the chance encounters with people that have changed my life.

A brush with chance implies not just an encounter but also the force of a collision, and sometimes that's exactly what it feels like. A seemingly random event forces all my momentum down a different path. I never anticipate this change of direction and so it nearly always feels like an intrusion. It messes up the story I had laid out so neatly in my mind.

By taking a chance, allowing myself to be carried towards the unfamiliar, things start to realign themselves in a way my mind can make sense of once more. Then I might be able to tell the story of how I got there, why I chose to do something. Until that point I am in the no man's land where reason and linear thought are suspended. That space does not always feel comfortable. To me, learning to create from a place where reason does not immediately see a direction is what it means to be an artist.

I am an intuitive painter and conceptual frameworks aren't that important to me. The work included in this book is neither chronological nor a complete catalogue. It's a journey through themes that shape my days and my paintings. I invite you to meander through the landscape of my imagery and bring a meaning of your own.

Previous page

A YELLOW YES AT LARGE, Detail

2013

Oil on canvas

120 x 160 cm

| PINK | RENT | FILTER | BADGER |  
TIN | RELEASE | BAG | SOFT | OIL |  
COFFEE | HUMMING | CHEER | CAR  
| WAITING | PRECIOUS | **SEVEN  
SHADES OF CHANCE** | DANCE |  
CLASH | NEW | SPILL | BRUSH |  
PILFER | POWDER | DIP | FLUKE  
| CHANCER | GROWING | TINGE |  
PIGMENT | DRILL | BIG | START |  
DESTROY | COTTON | SKIN | DRY  
| LAYERS | WOOD DYE | FUMES |  
BELGIUM | SUMMER | STRETCHER |





## SEVEN SHADES OF CHANCE

### *Finding Colours and Taking Chances*

I see shapes but I can only feel colours. My mind can make sense of some obvious combinations such as green and pink. But I have no conscious access to anything beyond that. When I paint I don't set out with a colour scheme that gets distributed across the canvas. Colours appear one by one and I choose them based on the way they resonate.

Having no set framework when it comes to choosing colours means I am quite happy to "chance it" as we say in Ireland. Mostly, that involves embracing colours my head thinks shouldn't go together. Colours I wasn't even looking for have a habit of showing up on my pallet accidentally and I am usually happy to take a chance on them. Many times a whole series of work has been transformed that way.

I always wanted to be the kind of painter who has the whole spectrum of oil colours laid out in a neat row, clean brushes and tins at hand. I have to concede that that is never going to happen. What's more, many of my favourite colours over the years have been born out of the less than organised environment that is my studio. Colours sometimes enter paintings simply because I ran out of a certain shade and I am forced to find an alternative. Being stuck for a clean brush or vessel to mix paint in is another classic.

Trasu de Ciuc is a recent example of a colour that hijacked my work in that way. It happened while I was painting in Italy. I only packed a couple of jars and tins for mixing paint so ended up using one tin for ages. One day I noticed it had

Opposite  
ON A RAFT OF WOVEN SERPENTS  
2012  
Oil on canvas  
100 x 150 cm



accumulated this beautiful build-up of dirty reds. Straight away I put the paint onto several canvases I had on the go. My friend saw it and said it looked like “Trasu de Ciuc”. Apparently that translates as “wino’s puke” and is all the rage in Milan.

The difficulty always comes in trying to replicate those lucky dips and sometimes it’s just not possible. I always work on several canvases at once which allows colours to jump from one painting to another, usually on the back of a shape or a motif.

I have not always painted in colour. Early in my career my pallet was limited to browns. It expanded over the course of twenty years, an evolution driven by chance and carried by a series of materials. I started with washes of bitumen, turpentine and linseed oil, which produced shades of browns that I supplemented with tiny amounts of oil paint whenever I could get them. Oil paint slowly moved to the fore but I continued to use it only in washes. I mixed odd bits and discounted tubes, which kept me firmly on the dark end of the spectrum.

One time I came upon twenty tubs of grey pigment in a skip outside the Opera House in Cork. I took them back to the studio but didn’t really know how to use them so continued with my bitumen washes. Getting ready to leave the studio some weeks later, I tried to clean a brush by rubbing it on the floor and it must have picked up some of that grey pigment. When I started painting the following day the grey entered the piece and I really liked it. I abandoned the browns and spent the next year or so working in grey, graduating to blue thereafter. Nevertheless using oil paints and colours felt like a grown up thing, something for “a real painter”, not a rag and bone man.

Spending years painting on hardwood panels made me familiar and more confident with the use of oil colours. Then, for no reason at all I began to paint these tiny watercolours. It wasn’t even so much the bright colours that attracted me. I guess I just enjoyed the movement, the flow of colour and the way it bled so I tried to imitate that effect in oil. I pasted some canvas onto one of the wooden panels but the paint simply didn’t bleed the way I wanted it to so I moved on to stretched canvas. Working on wood for all these years made me rough in the way I applied paint. I had to change the way I was working to accommodate the softer surface of the canvas and soon the work began to take a different direction. Colours suddenly came flooding in, intense and clashing at the start, becoming more subtle over the years. It took me eight years to approach my first canvas and even today each new series of work teaches me the depth and complexity of simple oil paint, and slowly I am beginning to understand the pace of painting.

Following page  
OUR HEARTS GREW BRAZEN FROM THE  
FIRE, 2012  
Oil on canvas  
120 x 180 cm



Opposite  
A FIRE IN THE FACTS  
2012  
Oil on canvas  
50 x 70 cm

Below  
FRIENDS OF TALL STRUCTURES  
2012  
Oil on canvas  
50 x 70 cm





| THRILLER | TEA | NOW | DRIPS |  
ELATION | PEACE | BACH | QUIET |  
DISTRACTION | DAN THE VAN MAN  
| POUND | DIGGING GARDENS  
| SPOTS | LAYERS | SHARPIES |  
SYMBOLS | ENVELOPES | PEEK |  
CASPER | COLD | RADIO | LOOKING  
| **LOST DAYS IN PAINTING** | DOUBT  
| KARATE KID | MAKE | PUZO | YES  
| MESSER | ALONE | TOM WAITS |  
TIDYING | SLEEP | MUSHROOM |  
ODD | DIRTY | TURNED | DRYING |





## LOST DAYS IN PAINTING

### *The Anatomy of a Painting and the Creative Process*

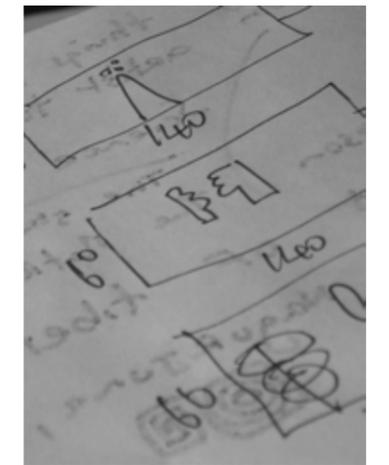
To me the creative process is a perpetual flow of recurring opposites that dance around some elusive core for the duration of your existence. I have to work, then sit still and look. I have to absorb, fill up and then find a way to disperse it all. Putting paint on, wiping it off. Adding and subtracting. Seeing and forgetting. Wondering and knowing. Breathing in and breathing out.

I am an artist because I can't do anything else. I am happy to be working with paint. If someone took the paints away I would draw. If I couldn't draw I would end up playing around with a few chairs, rearranging them or breaking them up. If that wasn't an option I might take a whizz on copper sheets just to watch them turn green.

I paint to make sense of the world. It's a way to get rid of all the information, all the stuff I pick up every day. It's not cerebral. It's just functional the same way it is functional to sneeze. I might go weeks or even months without producing anything but invariably I feel myself filling up. That soon turns into a sense of being less relaxed, a bit irritable. Everything is louder and brighter and I just don't have the space to take in any more information.

For me the sole purpose of a painting is to satisfy the need for its creation. I might well start with an idea in mind, or rather a single motif or colour, but I never know where a piece will go, not even where I would want it to go. Whatever conceptual blueprint there might be at the start gets dispersed during the painting process. It becomes one of the countless layers of the painting. What is important to me is the overall effect or feeling of the finished piece.

Opposite  
THE WOLF, THE WOODPECKER AND THE  
WANNABE, 2014  
Oil on canvas  
100 x 150 cm



| TIME OUT | CARS | PLASTER | SKIPS |  
METAL | SPACE | IN BETWEEN |  
PAVEMENT | NOW | CLOUD | DOOR  
| **SEEING THE ORDINARY** | NIGHT |  
LIGHT | MEMORIES | KITSCH | LINO  
| DUMP | RAIN | LONG | QUICK |  
STOPPING | TRAFFIC | CRANES  
| WATER | RISK | HUMAN TRACES  
| USE | SHIP | ROUND | HOLD | DOG |  
SIGNS | LEFT | FUNNY | WABI SABI |  
NEVER | NEW | TUMBLR | PACMAN  
| THERE | FIX | KEEP | DRY | CUT |





## SEEING THE ORDINARY

### *Forms, Shapes and Surfaces*

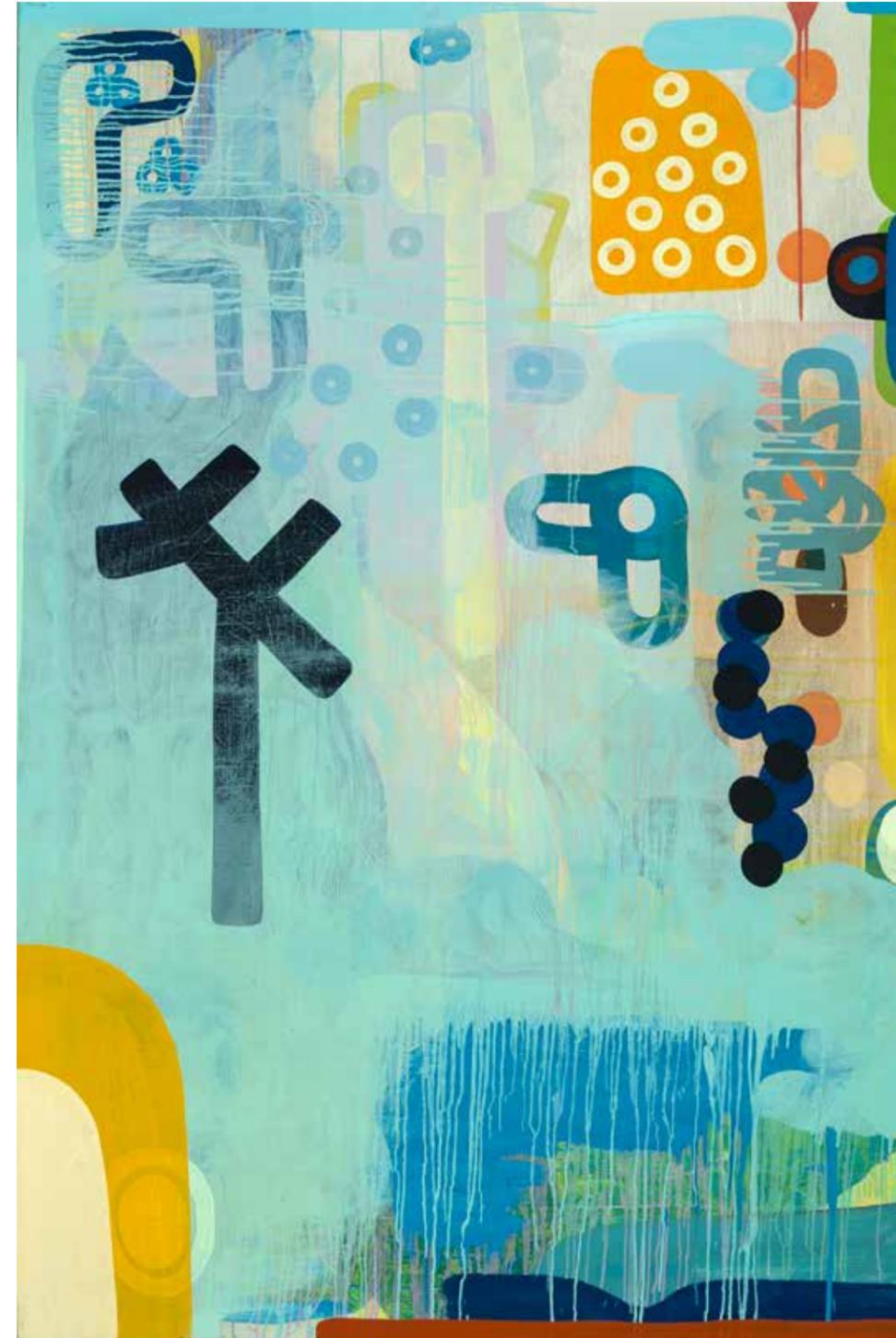
Form is the structure that colour resides in, it's the bone to colour's meat. It is possible to have one without the other but the combination of the two is boundless, like a mathematical dance. Abstraction in my work is not total and, more importantly, its extent varies. Heads, figures or elements of landscapes decide to appear for a while and then depart again on a whim.

Shapes exist to highlight the stillness around them. Walking down the road, various shapes jump out at me. Their molecules seem to be moving at a different pace so I end up noticing them. Cranes in the dock, the pattern of dirt on the back of a lorry, the composition of a shop window, light on the side of a chimney, a doorway, the patina of decay on an old car – I pick them all up and store them for future use. I can't predict what forms or shapes will become relevant to my paintings.

Opposite  
AMONGST YELLOWHAMMERS  
2012  
Oil on canvas  
150 x 120 cm



Opposite  
THE PARADISE GENE AND THE LEMON LINE  
2013  
Oil on canvas  
180 x 120 cm





| JOO JOO | CONNECTION | FOLKS  
| TATE | SPIRIT | SAFE | FIRES |  
HOME | HOLD | AGAIN | BUILDINGS  
| START | CHRISTMAS PARTY |  
CORE | WONDERING | BROTHER |  
TRIBE | THE GUY WHO WORKS ON  
THE FOREHEAD | **SEEING THE  
EXTRAORDINARY** | AMSTERDAM  
| CRAFT | CIRCLE | OLD | FEW |  
BRAVE | FOR | STUPID | HOW |  
WELL | OFFICE | STONE | SMELL  
| NEVER | CHAT | MAGENTA | ALL |





## SEEING THE EXTRAORDINARY

### *Inspiration Through the Ages*

Whatever influences I am absorbing from my environment, they inevitably mix with all that has been assimilated and made extraordinary by others. Countless artists have influenced me over the course of my life. It was Van Gogh that made me want to create and be an artist. It was Rothko that made me want to be a painter. I was in my early twenties and on my way to Amsterdam by bus. I missed my connection in London and ended up with half a day to kill so I went to the Tate. It was the first time I had seen Rothko and his work radiated this unyielding power and knowing strength.

Various heroes have drifted in and out of my life but some have remained a constant inspiration: Turner, Bacon, Goya, Velázquez, Kahlo, Picasso, O’Keeffe, Hilma af Klint and of course Rothko and Van Gogh. If I were thrust into a world cruel enough to give me access to only one artist’s work for the rest of my life I would choose Rembrandt. One of my favourite paintings of all time is “A Woman bathing in a Stream” which hangs in the National Gallery in London. It’s incredible that a painting so small could store so much energy. It’s a real clash of atoms. I have been to see Rembrandt’s house and studio in Amsterdam several times. It has become an important ritual over the years. I love getting a sense of him working away in that studio. A sense of how life fed into his beautiful self-portraits and a sense of the magic that surrounded him when he created those tiny drawings and prints.

Opposite  
THE FRUITS OF FAIR GAME  
2014  
Oil on canvas  
120 x 180 cm



Above  
METAL SHAPE ON SKY BLUE  
2014  
Oil on linen on board  
30 x 20 cm



**Opposite**  
IN VIEW OF WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN  
2014  
Oil on canvas  
100 x 100 cm





Opposite  
THE FLIGHT OF THE FLORENTINE CUBE  
2014  
Oil on canvas  
120 x 180 cm



| MARKET | BOTTLES | RICKSHAW  
| ROOM | COFFEE | NET | BEAUTY |  
**ADVENTURES IN PIGMENT AND  
DUST** | MONEY | SLOW | 4 AM |  
ROLL | FISH HEAD | CHAI | STRING  
| POINT | WARM STONE | BREATH |  
FULL | CHICKENS | RETURN | SAND  
| BREEZE | CHESS | MOSQUITOES |  
BUCKET BATHS | SUN | QUESTIONS  
| MADNESS | GAZOLE | POT HOLES  
| MARKET | READING | HOPING  
| INCENSE | WATCHING PEOPLE |





## ADVENTURES IN PIGMENT AND DUST

### *Travel*

Without travel I would have had a very different life. The best thing about it is that you always come home being more yourself than when you left. I took my first trip when I was about eighteen years old. I sold my Vespa and took off. I went to Greece, supposedly for two weeks, but then cashed in my return ticket and travelled with a group of people overland to Venice where we collected a battered Ford van at a campsite which we drove back to London. From then on I've been travelling whenever I could.

I have spent ten months in Mexico, about two years on and off between the UK and the Netherlands, have driven around Europe many times and spent many months in India and Africa. In the end I even got to visit the US several times (legally!). My favourite places are India and Italy. Both are stunningly beautiful. I love Italy for the art, the old cars, the routine of going for coffee and the people. I love India because it is mad. Parts of it remind me of what Ireland was like many years ago when people used to hang out together much more and were more inclined to interact with strangers. The noise, the smells and most of all the colours are overwhelming and glorious at the same time. There is no personal space which forces you to open up much more than you would at home.

Travelling has influenced my work in a way that is immediate and tangible but also in what feels like a long, slow undercurrent. The paper pieces I brought back from India have a very Indian feel because the environment has physically shaped

Opposite  
THE EDGE REPLIES  
2010, India  
Acrylic and pigment on paper  
60 x 80 cm



Above  
VIEW FROM STUDIO, ITALY, EARLY MORNING  
2014  
Oil on canvas  
30 x 40 cm



Above  
VIEW FROM STUDIO, ITALY, NIGHT TIME  
2014  
Oil on canvas  
30 x 40 cm



## THE HAIRY HEARTS OF HEROES

### *Titles and Where They Come From*

I enjoy titles. Maybe it's my nod to the Irish tradition of storytelling. I would not insist that they are absolutely essential but they are a great opportunity to introduce another element to the work, an element that might help the viewer engage with it. Titles can facilitate the transition into the abstract by containing word constructs that are illogical but somehow symbiotic with a piece.

Titles are an amalgamation of so many different influences. I keep a list of words and phrase fragments that I use to create titles when it comes to finishing a piece. That list gets populated with lines I read in a book or words I hear on the radio or in a conversation with a friend. In fact, friends have started to supply me with snippets, knowing I collect them for titles. A lot of titles originate in mondegreens, they are misheard bits of randomness.

Sometimes a painting has a working title to make it easier to refer to while it's still in progress. These working titles don't usually stay once the piece is finished but they leave a flavour in that soup of words that all my titles are taken from.

Titles have become more important as my work has evolved and I now see them as if they were another layer of paint. I don't know how but the titles seem to capture influences that hovered around the piece while it was being created. Books I was reading in the studio while waiting for paintings to simmer might have influenced some. Titles contain that entire non-visual studio DNA and are a celebration of the unexpected, just like the paintings themselves.

**Opposite**  
HUNT FOR THE MODERN MOMENT  
2014  
Oil on canvas  
100 x 120 cm

**Following page**  
TWO AERIALS RESPONDING TO A  
RUMOUR, 2010  
Oil on canvas  
100 x 120 cm





Above  
THE OWL LOCKED THE FOREST WITH A  
BIG KEY, 2014  
Oil on canvas  
100 x 120 cm



Above  
STUDY OF A FAST CHICKEN  
2014  
Oil on linen on board  
20 x 30 cm



