

# Robert Holyhead



Peer Galleries North

Two distinct but related bodies of work are having a conversation across the adjacent rooms of Peer. First you encounter watercolours. Robert Holyhead refers to these as 'drawings' and, arranged on narrow shelves, they appear as a lexicon of sorts. Rectangle, rhombus, chevron, letterbox, archway, horizon... these are the building blocks of his art. The works on paper look introspective yet playful, their small delights often derived from nothing more than a few cursory divisions of the picture plane. Holyhead works on them quickly; around a hundred are on display here.

Next come the paintings proper. They're bigger, on canvas, and far fewer in number; just six were made for this show. These too are worked on at speed but only after much deliberation. To walk from the first space to the second, then, is to be fast-tracked through a lengthy editing process. It's easy to see why some of the paintings made it through the elimination rounds. A pink number, for example, is a ravishing arrangement of brushed and free-flowing paint organised around a trapezoid shape, which was created by erasing pigment to reveal the white canvas beneath. It shimmies between foreground and background, geometry and gesture, positive and negative.

Raoul de Keyser, Mary Heilmann and Callum Innes are obvious antecedents. It's probably enough that Holyhead has created his own aesthetic from a familiar strain of abstraction but what really elevates the show is the intelligence of the installation, since neither the drawings nor the paintings seem like final answers. Rather this is a quiet series of propositions about composition, tone and texture and how they relate to the space, but with enough variation to give eye and mind plenty of pleasing work to do.

**Martin Coomer**

