

Christopher Le Brun
Momentarium



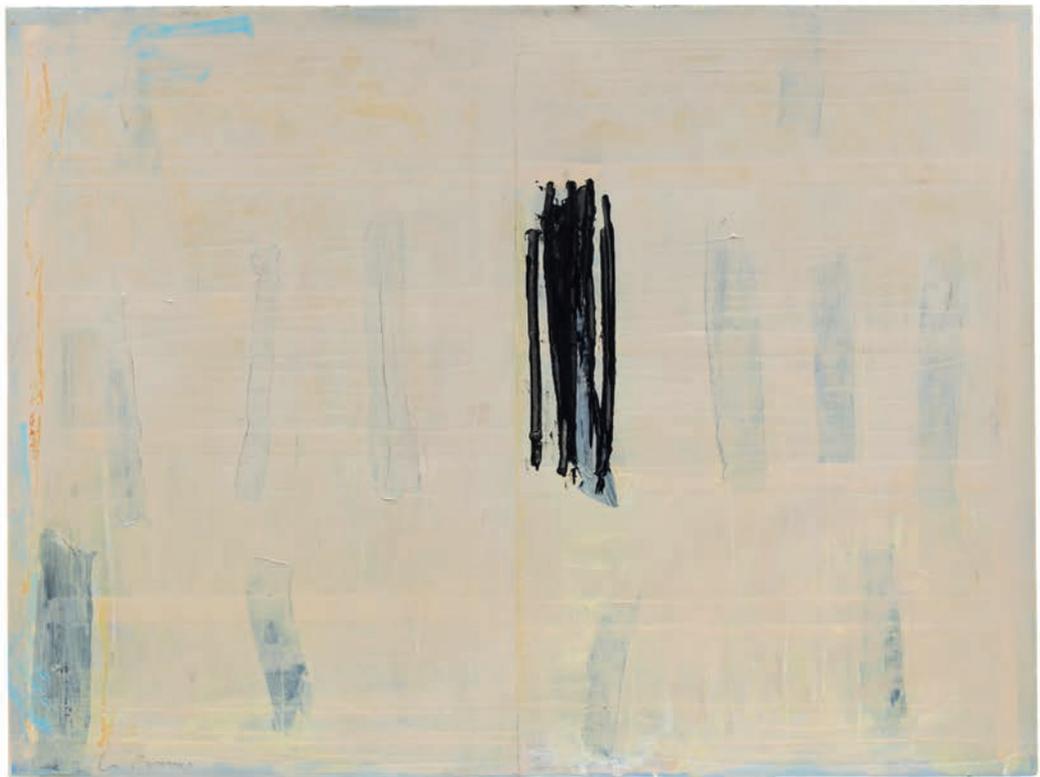
AI 2021, Acrylic on paper, 93 x 76.7 cm (36 ⁵/₈ x 30 ¹/₄ in)



A2 2021, Acrylic on paper, 91.4 x 74.8 cm (36 x 29 ½ in)



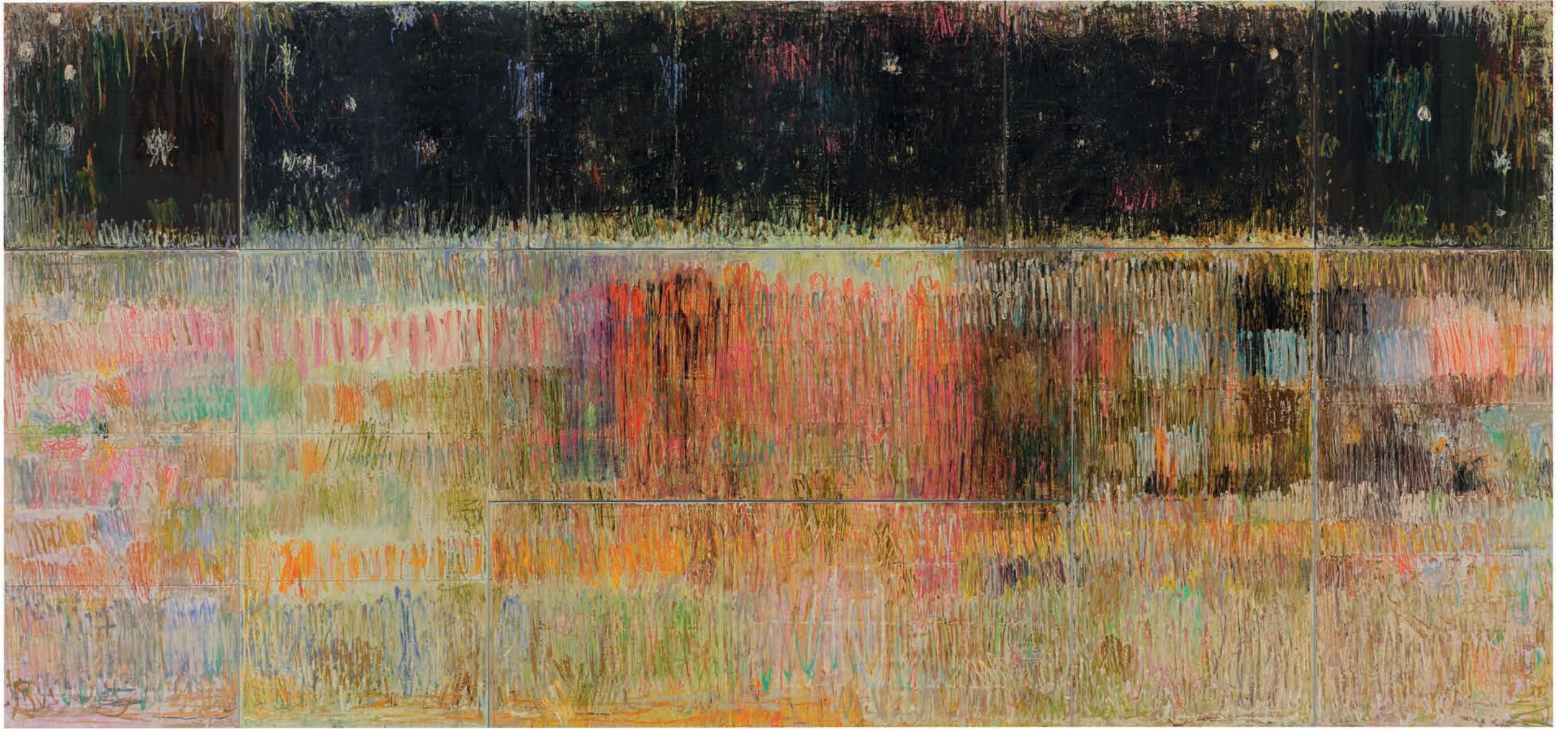
A9 2021, Acrylic on paper, 93 x 76.4 cm (36 5/8 x 30 1/8 in)



A 11 2021, Acrylic on paper, 77.5 x 102.3 cm (30 ½ x 40 ¼ in)



A 7 2021, Acrylic on paper, 92.3 x 76.8 cm (36 ¾ x 30 ¼ in)



The Waves 2022, Oil on paper on canvas, 225.5 x 480 cm (88 ¾ x 189 in)



Christopher Le Brun in conversation
with Andreas Leventis, Lisson Gallery

Jeopardy 2021, Oil on canvas, 120.2 x 85.2 cm (47 3/8 x 33 1/2 in)

AL: Since 2019, you have sought to expand your compositions so that they are increasingly 'panoramic'. First were the diptychs, then the triptychs. What is driving this predominantly horizontal expansion?

CLB: Maybe it's because of the immediate presence of what in painting is called the picture-plane, which is the point where the imaginary inner space of the painting meets the real world. You can envisage it as a flat wall or a window confronting you (it's important to hold in mind that it's somehow both) and that stimulates my imagination. It's like a desire for limitlessness. That feeling has always been there, but never quite so much as recently.

Looking back on my work, I do recognise key or breakthrough or declaratory moments that take up this panoramic format; in particular I remember a wide white painting made in my final year at the Slade using a discarded wooden stage flat hauled back from University College's theatre to make the stretcher. Also the *Forest* paintings from the late '80s and early '90s, *Tristan*, *Forest*, *Aram Nemus Vult*. Technically just now, making paintings from many parts also allows me to grow or edit the composition while I go on, as opposed to committing to a fixed format at the beginning.

There aren't any reasons for painting.
That's what's special about it. It doesn't
need justification. It's essential that it's not
used for other purposes. All of the things
which will, as it were, take away from
what's mysterious about it.

But there are so many things to enjoy and work with in the contemporary situation that I can see – the physical rhythm of movement, new forms of composition, even an expanded view of psychology and the mind’s relationship to the world – so in terms of exploiting the materials and ideas innate to painting there is unending future potential.

AL: You’ve explained how your chosen title for the exhibition, *Momentarium*, means for you a gathering of moments. For me, the word is also suggestive, perhaps antithetically, of a notion of making sense of or summarising these incidents, and ultimately making something permanent.

CLB: On my first visit to Paris, I was immensely impressed by seeing the great masterpieces of painting – known as ‘*les grandes machines*’ – all together in the ‘red room’ gallery of the Louvre – Gericault, Delacroix, Courbet, David. It’s a type of painting – gigantic, loaded, masterful, absolutely permanent – that carries with it an entire tradition. They are like great palaces of accumulated vision and wisdom. They form the thesis of which 20th century modernism’s (necessary) fresh start is the antithesis. The roots of modernism and the drive of its energy spring from the reaction of Picasso, Matisse and Kandinsky to these very works.

My own response to what I saw, like any artist, is of course particular to me. I think it’s worth setting this out because it lies behind the complexity or inclusive attempt (maybe these are just euphemisms for ‘ambition’) of certain larger works of mine. It’s as if I feel that I’ve learned something and want to apply it. But there are so many things to enjoy and work with in the contemporary situation that I can see – the physical rhythm of movement, new forms of composition, even an expanded view of psychology and the mind’s relationship to the world – so in terms of exploiting the materials and ideas innate to painting there is unending future potential.

AL: The titles of your works often have literary references, for example your multipart work on paper *The Waves*, after the Virginia Woolf novel. At what point in the making of that particular work did this book become relevant or imply itself to you?

CLB: The painting grew from the middle out, but when I added the top section I was reminded strongly of *The Waves*, particularly the episodes describing a coastal scene through all times of the day from dawn until sunset. Woolf's method is often described as 'stream of consciousness'. I first discovered the book before art school and I thought it the most purely visual thing I had ever read – it was like an epiphany – colour especially is described and emphasised in a way that feels unprecedented. So I've always had it in mind, but as a painter I couldn't think how to come anywhere near it. It was written in 1931, but as an approach to imagery when applied to painting it feels to me still relatively unexplored. I feel as if I've got closer to this idea than ever before in this group of paintings, including *Momentarium* and *Momentarium II* - hence the title of the show.

AL: You give equal status to working on paper as you do to using oils on canvas. This exhibition came about as a result of a discussion around a body of recent acrylic works on paper. Unlike most painters, the marks you make when printmaking or working directly on paper are very similar to your gestures on canvas. Has this always been the case to some degree?

CLB: This came directly from painting over the stage proofs from the print-making I've been doing here in the studio. As for the look of the marks, it's true there are very few hard edges, although the recent *Lustrations* prints were an exception. I have always appreciated the way a brush is made in such a way as to incorporate chance or accidents, like the apparent haphazardness of nature. It amplifies style in the autographic sense, which comes from the hand and body. We know very well how this reaches an exceptional state of sensibility in the eastern calligraphic traditions, but it has been equally highly valued in western painting.

The question for me is where is the most beauty or meaning or depth? This atmosphere of visual philosophising or wondering or questioning is integral to painting's nature. That's alongside its use as a way of communicating – although there are plenty of more efficient ways to communicate if you think that is art's primary purpose. The metaphysical side of painting isn't fragile, you can't break it, but it is subtle – you need to listen for it. I associate it with the phenomenon of glowing – where colours and tones appear to 'sing'. Message-ridden paintings are so heavy they make it impossible to hear painting's unique still music – the suggestibility. They smother it. It's not a matter of obfuscation it's just trying to give an honest account of what this art form feels like and how little we still understand it. I'm happy to quote Chardin here when he said – "Painting is an island whose shore I have skirted".

Painting is a process of making. And the process of making is iterative. You put something down. You put something else down. It's a structuring behaviour with beautiful materials...



Untwinned 2021, Oil on canvas, 120.4 x 85.4 cm (47 ³/₈ x 33 ⁵/₈ in)



White Diptych 2022, Oil on canvas (diptych), 130 x 371 cm (51 1/8 x 146 1/8 in)



Momentarium II 2021, Oil on canvas (triptych), 160.4 x 421.8 cm (63 1/8 x 166 1/8 in)



A 4 2021, Acrylic on paper, 92.1 x 76.5 cm (36 ¼ x 30 ⅛ in)



A 13 2021, Acrylic on paper, 90 x 76.7 cm (35 ⅜ x 30 ¼ in)



Stook 2021, Oil on canvas, 171.5 x 221 cm (67 ½ x 87 in)

List of illustrated works

A 1 2021
Acrylic on paper
93 x 76.7 cm
36 ⅝ x 30 ¼ in

A 2 2021
Acrylic on paper
91.4 x 74.8 cm
36 x 29 ½ in

A 9 2021
Acrylic on paper
93 x 76.4 cm
36 ⅝ x 30 ⅛ in

A 11 2021
Acrylic on paper
77.5 x 102.3 cm
30 ½ x 40 ¼ in

A 7 2021
Acrylic on paper
92.3 x 76.8 cm
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Oil on paper on canvas
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Lisson Gallery, London
6 July – 20 August 2022

LISSON GALLERY