

CLEAR LIGHT DAY – SOFT DARK NIGHT

ERIC CRUIKSHANK



SEPTEMBER 7 - OCTOBER 26, 2017

CONVERSATION WITH ERIC CRUIKSHANK

SF: Your solo show *Clear Light Day – Soft Dark Night* at **DAS ESSZIMMER** with new works from this year, 2017, feels very familiar to me, like something one knows already for a long time – on a first glance. Rothko comes to my mind, though your work is rather distinct and just lately some of your colour gradients reminded me on paintings by Turner I had seen ages ago in London.

Is it only me or do other people react similar to your works in terms of familiarity?

EC: Rarely, as viewers respond and interact with the works in such different ways, but I really like it when it does. For me, familiarity makes me feel comfortable, and I look at things differently when I feel comfortable, especially if this comfort can grow and combine with an excitement with what I'm looking at. Not always an easy combination with the nature of my work, as it takes time, so it feels good when people give it time - even more so when this happens early on.

I am happy you mentioned both Turner and Rothko as I feel this looking at their work so they feature strongly in my artistic influences, especially the former - I lived in London from 1999 to 2000 - with a lot of my time during this period spent at the Tate. His confidence with the brush and his ability to distil nature to just its pure elements (I was always drawn to his works that pushed the boundaries of landscape painting, where the plane seemed almost on the verge transforming) left me with a sense of wonder with the possibilities of paint.

SF: In preparation of your exhibition, reading previous text by others, I came across the notion that a strong base and reference for you are the colours of the Scottish Landscape. How do you mean that in regard to your body of work in general and the new works you exhibit at **DAS**



Untitled, 2017, Oil on Paper, 25 x 19cm (each),



exhibition view: (left wall) *Untitled*, 2017, Oil on Paper, 114 x 90cm (each) and (right wall) *Untitled*, 2017, Oil on Paper, 25 x 19cm (each)

ESSZIMMER? – and further more: how do you relate to landscape painting?

EC: All my work goes back to my family's home - a farm in the Strathspey area of the Highlands - where being raised in this environment brought with it an encouragement to have an awareness of the land and the shifting climatic effects that came with the shifting seasons, as these have such a huge bearing on your working day. Over the years this evolved to a focus on the effects of light and colour as these changes happened - a sense of looking - and it's this sense that stayed with me and filtered through to my art. By using my native landscape as the basis for my work - painting what I know - it became easier to break it down, expanding the works with a free development of movement and direction toward a more abstract art, where the landscape is refined to base colour - a memory of a time and place - opposed to something more concrete in its

representation.

This has become a slightly tricky area of the work to discuss in the context of traditional landscape painting, as some viewers find the connection difficult to see - how this minimal sense of light and colour can substitute for a more formal means of depiction - especially in Scotland where there's such a strong established history in this field. Usually my counter would be about the sky - for example a sunset - and how the same viewers that would have difficulty with my work would not question the simple beauty of a sunset. As these conversations happened a lot, with my same counter; earlier this year I painted a series of 4 works with set colour gradations that related to the sky. I really enjoyed working on the 4, so decided to expand the series for **DAS ESSZIMMER**, which now make up the works in the Back Room. The pieces are not meant to be paintings of the sky, as other factors play a part in their completion - process, pigment, presentation - so instead represent a colour experience that relates to the sky. I like

the way they can be read as at once representational and abstract, so act as a kind of bridge to the diptych panels in the Front Room, which have the same starting point but a very different feel and presentation.

With landscape painting I see it as a difficult proposition for an artist to try and depict nature and have always looked to artists, both classical and contemporary, who chose to refine their interpretation of their environment whilst managing to capture the ephemeral sense of the subject. Often when looking at other artists work, my focus is on small sections or elements of the whole, and it's these fragments that really leave their mark and inspire me.

SF: It is clear – I think – that you are not a landscape painter and that you do not aim to be!

Is it all about colour; it shades and *physical body* that changes depending on the materials applied? – And what do you think is the importance of colour for you?

EC: It is primarily about colour; but process plays a huge part in the construct of each piece.

You mentioned the *physical body*, and this is especially important, as with each medium each colour has a unique character – for example opacity or translucence – that can be used and even subtly manipulated depending on how it is mixed, applied and layered, but the finished picture plane is always judged by the success of the colour; so it starts and ends with this factor:

For me colour is a means of communication, and I see it as a universal means of communication that transcends lan-

exhibition view: *Untitled*, 2017, Oil on Two Boards, 40.5 x 63cm, with split (each)





Untitled, 2017, Oil on Two Boards, 40.5 x 63cm, with split

guage. How specific people relate to any colour is entirely specific to that person and I really like the way this can't always be articulated - how it's an open conversation - as there's no right or wrong.

Colour plays a part in everyone's lives and registers on a base emotional level, potentially having strong personal associations; one of the first questions I remember really considering was what my favourite colour was as it's a defining factor - admittedly when you're 5 years old - but I like the way people still ask the question throughout their lives.

SF: You just mentioned process and construction being also important and though I know that you do not want to emphasize the technique of your work process... I think you should say something about it.

All the viewers are immediately fascinated by the glow of the colours and the space your works create and think they are some sort of Fine Art print, due to the smooth surface where almost no traces of a hand can be spotted. – Explaining that it is oil painting on paper or wood creates some confusion and the urge to know how you are working...

EC: The defining factor with my work is an addition then subtraction of medium – this connects all the pieces – and it's this push and pull of medium that sets up the *glow* you mentioned. I never mind discussing technique, and will focus on the wooden panels, as these represent the longest running series in the exhibition and best chart how the process has evolved.

The initial paint application is quite fast and rough, where I







Untitled, 2017, Oil on Two Boards, 40.5 x 63cm, with split

apply a uniform layer of colour - once I get an even spread - I measure a smaller central shape and remove as much wet paint from this section as possible, which is blocked in with a lighter tone leaving two distinct areas on the plane. Then scraping and wiping as much of the paint out of the brush as possible, I methodically and systematically work the surface in vertical sweeps with the now almost dry brush - so the paint begins to lift off the surface - blending the tonal areas at the same time. After each sweep of the brush, the panel is turned, the brush is scraped and wiped, and the process begins again.

I stop when the tonal shifts are just on the edge of disappearing into one another; where the surface holds a subtle sense of luminosity and movement, as the colour vibrates with the gentlest visual pulse. This can take many hours of continually working the surface and then wiping the brush, until the plane has a delicate thin skim of paint remaining, a veil of paint that allows light to penetrate - different light

(natural, artificial, also direction) - reveals some of the history of the layering process, hinting at something underneath.

The panel is then left for two weeks so the oil has time to dry, then the entire process is repeated with different hues, building up a uniform surface of many layers of ultra-thin paint. This needs to be done anywhere between 6-10 times, meaning the paintings can take anywhere between 4-6 months to complete, factoring in all the different stages.

There is a push to remove any evidence of my hand or imprint of technique, leaving a completely flat uniform plane, as it's important to me that there's no emotional inclination from the process - there are always traces of my hand if you look very closely - but I like challenging and pushing myself to test the levels of control I can achieve with a brush. An interesting element from this is the trans-

formation in the works, an almost alchemic shift in medium, which I enjoy and use as a device to get the viewer to stop and spend a little more time looking, opening up a different level of engagement with the works. I also enjoy that sometimes questions are left, with the hope that it can lead to repeat viewings, allowing there to be the possibility of different answers.

SF: Layering seems to play an important role with all of your works, not only the oil paints but also using colour pencils or mixing different media.

EC: Layering is a part of the process that operates on many different levels (excuse the pun) but connects through a considered handling to the sensitivity of colour and

medium. I want my works to be viewed as attuned to the simple beauty of nature and not defined by the complex processes involved. These are not portraits of colour or aligned to radical painting, despite their initial appearance, and for me it's the layering that sets them apart and opens up a more intuitive approach; providing a means to test the qualities and the reactions of colour, so as to study new techniques. The works present the results of a long lasting - and continued - development, characterized by permanent reviews and modifications that are captured in the trace elements of the layers, building a plane that hint at a deeper space beyond the veils. Ultimately it offers a connection with the viewer - where the layers act as a device to heighten their engagement with the works - which can be amplified by combining and alternating multiple colours. The works are left open and have the capacity for change, if the viewer takes the time to look, as the surface and edge hold the history of the layers and time of their completion.

exhibition view: *Untitled*, 2017, Oil on Two Boards, 40.5 x 63cm, with split (each)



*1975 born in Inverness (UK), lives and works in Edinburgh (UK) .

Education

1993 – 1997 BA (Hons) Painting and Drawing, Edinburgh College of Art

Awards, Prizes and Residencies

2016 Oppenheim-John Downes Memorial Trust Award

2014 Edinburgh Council Visual Artist Award

2013 Hope Scott Trust (joint award with Michael Craik)

2012 Mustarinda Residency (Finland)

2010 Santa Fe Art Institute Residency (USA)

2009 Pollock-Krasner Award

Hi-Arts Exhibition Grant

2008 Hope Scott Trust

Edinburgh Visual Arts & Crafts Artists Award

1999 art.tm Young Artists Prize

Selected Solo and Joint Exhibitions

2017 *Clear Light Day – Soft Dark Night*, DAS ESSZIMMER, Bonn (GER)
The Relative Medium (with Michael Craik), Galleri Konstepidemin, Gothenburg (Sweden)

Trace, Press, Bleed, Blend (with Laura Campbell), Patriothall Gallery, Edinburgh (UK)

2016 *Continuum* (with Ian Kane), RAUMX, London (UK)

Repetition Takes Form, AIS Gallery, Shibukawa (J)

2015 *Ways of Seeing* (with Michael Craik), Howden Park Centre, Livingston (UK)

Plus | Minus | Repeat, Sleeper Gallery, Edinburgh (UK)

2013 *Malerei* (with Michael Craik), Galerie Albrecht, Berlin (GER)

Colour as Subject, Patriothall Gallery, Edinburgh (UK)

2012 *The Solo Project* – Basel with Galerie Albrecht (CH)

2010 *When I Was Small I Didn't Work Big*, Galerie Albrecht, Berlin (GER)

Dalcross Project Space (with Ian Kane), Dalcross, Inverness shire (UK)

The Colour of Home, Gebert Contemporary, Santa Fe (USA)

Moments of Absence, Limousine Bull, Aberdeen (UK)

En Forme (with Cecilia Vissers), ParisCONCRET, Paris (F)

2009 *Colour | Light | Space*, Highland Institute for Contemporary Art, Inverness-shire (UK)

2006 Pembroke Mews, London (UK)

2003 *Paintings for Green Walls*, Marie Currie House, Edinburgh (UK)

2001 *Five*, Deutsche Bank, Edinburgh (UK)

2000 *Colourfields*, Iona Gallery, Kingussie

Selected Group Exhibitions

2017 *Fault Lines*, EIF exhibition curated by The Drawing Works, Patriothall Gallery, Edinburgh (UK)

FAR OFF Cologne with DAS ESSZIMMER, Cologne (GER)

Extended Process, Saturation Point Projects, London (UK)

2016 *DAS ESSZIMMER goes Weltraum*, Weltraum, Basel (CH)

2015 *Anonymous Drawings*, Kunstverein Tiergarten|Galerie Nord, Berlin - (then travelling to Galerie ARTQ13, Rome; Galerie GEYSO20, Braunschweig & Kunstverein Russelsheim)

Artbox Postcard Exhibition, Fold Gallery, London (UK)

2013 *Kunst Zurich* with Galerie Albrecht, Zurich (CH)

Poste Concret2, ParisCONCRET, Paris (F)

Anonymous Drawings, Kunstverein Tiergarten | Galerie Nord, Berlin (GER)

- (then travelling to Galerie Delikatessenhaus, Leipzig & Temporary Art Centre, Eindhoven)

2012 *Three Gallery Artists*, Galerie Albrecht, Berlin (GER)

2011 *Anonymous Drawing Archive*, Sihlquais Offspace, Zurich (CH)

Poste Concret, ParisCONCRET, Paris (F)

Dallas Art Fair with Gebert Contemporary, Dallas (USA)

2010 *Anonymous Drawing Archive*, Uferhallen, Berlin (GER)

Art Chicago with Galerie Albrecht, Chicago (USA)

2009 *Anonymous Drawings*, Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanian, Berlin (GER)

Kunst Zurich with Galerie Albrecht, Zurich (CH)

CGP Open, Cafe Gallery Projects, London (UK)

AAS, Aberdeen Art Gallery, Aberdeen (UK)

2008 *Aspect Prize*, Paisley Art Gallery and Museum, Paisley (UK)

2005 *Tercet Space*, Intermedia Gallery, Glasgow (UK)

Beauty and Order, Marie Currie House, Edinburgh (UK)

Art for Life, Christies, London (UK)

2004 *Gallery Artists*, Amber Roome Contemporary Art, Edinburgh (UK)

Proximity, Patriothall Gallery, Edinburgh (UK)

2003 *12 x 12*, University Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne (UK)

2002 *Obscured*, Patriothall Gallery, Edinburgh (UK)

Aphelion, art.tm, Inverness (UK)

2001 *14 x 14*, Mafuji Gallery, London (UK)

Art House Studios, Musselburgh (UK)

Highland Open, Travelling Exhibition (UK)

2000 *New Highland Graduates*, Kilmorack Gallery, Beaulieu (UK)

1999 art.tm Biannual Open, Inverness (UK)

Public and Private Collections

Art in Healthcare, Scotland | Santa Fe Art Institute, Santa Fe | Private Collections in UK, Europe, North and South America, Asia and Australia

Selected Publications and Reviews

- 2017 The Scotsman – review of *Fault Lines* at Patriothall Gallery
Catalogue to accompany *Fault Lines* at Patriothall Gallery
- 2015 Interviewed by Eileen Budd for Redbird Review
- 2014 Catalogue covering all exhibitions and projects at ParisCONCRET
- 2013 Catalogue to accompany *Malerei* at Galerie Albrecht
- 2012 Catalogue to accompany *The Solo Project* - Basel
Catalogue from exhibition at Dalcross Project Space
- 2010 Herald – preview of exhibition at Dalcross Project Space
Pamphlet to accompany *When I Was Small I Didn't Work Big* at Galerie Albrecht
Santa Fe Art in Review - review of *Colour of Home* at Gebert Contemporary
Interviewed by Bob Ross for KSFR Radio Santa Fe
- 2009 Catalogue to accompany *Anonymous Drawings* at Kunstraum Kreuzberg/
Bethanian
Catalogue to accompany *Colour Light Space* at Highland Institute for Contemporary Art

front page

Untitled, 2017, Oil on Two Boards, 40.5 x 63cm, with split (each)

back page

Untitled, 2017, Oil on Paper, 25 x 19cm

Thanks to:

British Council for support of the exhibition and
the Oppenheim-John Downes Memorial Trust



Imprint:

Editor: Sibylle Feucht, **DAS ESSZIMMER** – space for art+
gUG (limited liability), Mechenstrasse 25, D-53129 Bonn,
(GER) www.dasesszimmer.com | 2017

Concept/Design: Sibylle Feucht, Bonn (GER)

Images: ©das_esszimmer

exhibition view: *Untitled*, 2017, Coloured Pencil on Paper, 19 x 28cm (each)





published by

RAUM FÜR KUNST⁺
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