

Jennings Kerr

In Volume

Daniel Hollier, James Lieutenant, Benoit Trudeau, Tanya Wales

Fields of colour all around us, stretching out to the edges. The light in the sky, changing seasons with paintings everywhere we look. A world made up of colour and gesture, everything is a painting. These pieces fluctuate between the edge, border, the peripheries and the wonderful immersive experience and depth of the centre. They sit in the room, in space and affect its volume, they can only be considered in relation to it. Carved out, eaten into, skins flat but endless. Sometimes raw and reactive, sometimes slowly built up. Pieces that feel weightless and others that sit like lead. All these abstract pictures activate and react in space but also sign volume through their voids. They are examples of how precision, attention to detail and finish sits in relation to the minimal framework but more importantly how they are willing to allow error, chance and the imperfect into their render. Lieutenant and Hollier often chasing the incomplete, or unfinished, Wales balancing the layers to achieve depth but also sit in a way that charges the surface with a tactile voice. This is a show that affects space and creates it, a show that should be engaged with in person, in volume.

A road worker ambles along the street, keeping pace with the shifting season (time quotas to consider) kicking a can to the curb, but then an aerosol delineation on the bitumen. Marking out space, instructional gestures with their haphazard tracing. Hollier floats his mark, a meditation, directed but with freedom, tracing out the form and articulating volume. A conversation between the meticulous substrate and the fluid hand, a diligent preparation of geometry in all the angles and forms with a counter action of lightly loaded and scratchy brush. These faceted and joined panels keep the eye pinging from corner to corner, following the line as Hollier followed the form. They are filled, by activity, as well as opposing sensibility. They are moments, places, items, experiences, futures, and histories all netted by Hollier and then released out into the world. As stated above, everything is a painting and Hollier's list continues to grow. I asked him why he made the larger pieces in two parts, I suspected the seam was critical, a junction that both tears the painting apart with its energy but also binds it together in the marks leaping the gully. The geometry emphasised by the meeting of form and the contrasting energies of shaped canvas and brushed tracing. If the larger works are the centre then the smaller pieces are the edges, the frame and outside. Hollier a painter with 'artist frame' pushing the frame as extension of painting. It might be taped and sprayed, or an exquisite gold frame, or a bike frame. It is nice to revisit an earlier piece in 'Untitled Frame Painting', 2015 where the artist frame is a vibrant and rich found textile. A printed jungle pattern that frames a Reinhardt meets Kelly like void. The outside activating the interior. Representation feeding the abstract, Hollier's black geometry enlivened by the darkness of the jungle. This piece invites your eye to attempt continuing the tropic green patterning, completing it where Hollier ends it.

Lieutenant's silkscreen is leant over on the other side of the studio, rendered inactive for these pieces. It has been returned to since and continued his fixation on the photographic register in relation to mark making. One thing that comes to mind in all of his paintings is control. The field of painting as a space that Lieutenant has control over and a space for him to explore in translating his own personal history as well as that of painting. These pieces a little less conceptually engaged with the history of painting, a little less layered on and a little softer. The technologies and mechanical reproduction of image in previous work creates surfaces that are challenging to decipher, optically dynamic, that with time open up and also in many ways would fit into this show but did not. Those works more focussed on the edge, the painted object in space in relation to the field of painting. The painted surface worked unstretched and then the stretched edge and its engagement with the registered silk screen. The body in space in relation to the painted object. Perhaps they helped inspire bringing these works together for this show. Lieutenant, as he always likes to push and challenge his own painting, has gone the other way and included pieces that float out like Hollier's fields but through ignoring the edge. They have been applied in great dilution, softly touching the surfaces, very light tints meeting and in the case of 'Day 17', 2022 a single pigment laid down where in recent work we have seen the full photographic spectrum of 255 tones. Lieutenant provided a simple explanation of the painting. He wanted to focus on the serene, to engage with contemporary beauty through a more intuitive approach. He has been successful in this. These works relate to time, and if that time is returned by the viewer, will open up their spaces and unlock their beauty while rewarding in many ways.

Putting words to page, experience and relationship inked so eloquently and framed as object, penned as letters. Words on watercolour paper as a key to how time spent in consideration of paintings can open one's life up, fuel a relationship to the world around and nourish the creative spirit. The Trudeau pieces have journeyed, transformed out of discussing paintings, following these painters, discussions with painters and words accumulated like the skins of acrylic in the paintings Trudeau lives with. Built up, informed by experience, travel, other words, shaped by time and with care. It is no wonder that when we discussed their journey from writing to art object, that various permutations were revealed. A volume to be handled, turned and enjoyed, a cut vinyl, projected into and onto space, suspended in it, printed, emboss, deboss, but in the end destined to sit minimally as scribed by hand. Trudeau, perhaps a little romantic, found his art object. My initial words here, too focussed on the physical but difficult to do his words justice with mine. I have had the pleasure of many conversations with Trudeau, shared paintings and exhibitions with him. He is someone who takes time, care and his attention given where due. He appreciates the similar journey that the paintings have taken, the various permutations in their layering, masking, printing, glazing, brushing and pouring. I know he appreciates the more difficult, the pieces that challenge him and that keep him coming back. The ones that give over long periods, the ones that he can bring some of himself to, that reflect back at him but that continue to navigate his journey. In many respects I was tempted to not write for this show. Trudeau has already performed the duty second to none. Two considerations prompted the act. The first is that his words are deeply personal, they indicate how open the paintings are and how we can all fill their spaces with our narratives. The second is that I felt the quality of his text pieces should be covered and written about in the same light as the paintings in the show. I was lucky to read drafts, his sketches, minor adjustments made. Worked up in fonts from the digital, finalised in ink on paper and sensitively float mounted, pushed out, but given weight. The words should be read and then bounce around the room in space, follow along with you and show you how these paintings have touched and continue to do so.

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I see the soapy water drain from the white porcelain bath, fluidity in dance, in cyclical momentum. Wales fluidity poured, captured by the linen, tonal depth accumulated, life and time caught in the layers. Light trapped on the weave, surfaces both warmed by tactility, and cooled by colour. Fields that invite touch, teasing with their resolve. These spaces begging to be dived into, sliding from the upright under the suds to escape, to wash off the everyday. There is room for escape from one space to another, and the sky and light are the focus of the smaller pieces here. These volumes freezing moments of the day, time captured. These smaller works more still and calm, where the Hollier gesture was a meditation these pieces elicit contemplation. It is wonderful to appreciate how these minimal paintings offer Wales no where to hide in their making, however when stood up from their flat poured positions, free us for endless escape into their voids. It might be the sky, or soapy water, or the colours of the exposed red earth, it might be a swim in the lake or staring at the stars. The paintings should take you somewhere, journey with them, but bring something of yourself to them. Free yourself and find your space in relation to them.

It is thrilling to present these works in relation to each other, in our space, across into its expanded format. To sit them in volume and experience them affecting it, shaping and moulding space of their own. The show is only complete with the viewer navigating, tracing around the room, pinging off the walls, diving into the works and taking a journey.

James Kerr, 2023