

# Jennings Kerr

## Tanya Wales *Season*

### *Yeah, It's a Pink Moon*

Tanya Wales paintings on first inspection seem simple, full of a colour or in cases some colours. These works like many of the great minimal abstractionists are nuanced in a complex process in order to reach these surfaces. The colour field and other works are created through pouring many layers, skins of thin acrylic laid flat down on the primed raw linen. The paint flows and spills out over the often large surfaces, it is poured from bowls and buckets, moved around by brush, smeared and wiped off, more layers laid down. The works are built up slowly over time, days and nights drying on the studio floor with a patience and trust in the process. The sun sets and a night walk to process the days achievements as new ideas boil away. Back in the morning for another layer. There is a warmth that comes from letting the linen through, the various paintings as a show start to resemble different times of day, seasons and weather. I look at one and feel cooled by what seems to be a dive under water during a night swim. The show as its title suggests follows the skies and climates of our seasons. It ties itself to the familiar, its gradients or large flat sections of colour allow very little room to hide. The control of her medium is clear and like many situations these minimal works only appear simple but in fact are very technical in their process based sense as well as how they operate in time and reflect it back at us. Whenever I think about process in this sense, I always think about something the American painter Matt Connors refers to as the works making themselves. How different works might bump into each other and in conversation a drip from a pour might land and stain another painting or work in progress. All this alchemy in the studio, paintings feeding each other with ideas and techniques. I think that this is how one falls into pursuing the purity in this kind of minimal abstraction.

I have followed the progression of the house that Wales has been building with her family. We have discussed the evolution of the paintings and the show and I always ask how the house is coming along as well. I think they are interesting in relation to each other. I think watching it progress from site to slab to frame to lock up, creating a space to enjoy time, to build memory and cherish experience. This is mirrored in the many layers of acrylic glazing and like architecture the simplicity and minimal demand a control and proficiency that requires great skill. Mark Rothko, Ad Reinhardt, Clifford Still and the other colour field painters of the New York set cannot be ignored with this work. For me, Wales seems to pursue more of an incidental mark, the brush is hidden, the hand concealed and the paintings polished in all their fluidity. Perhaps the architectural equivalent would be Tadao Ando or the Japanese Shigeru Ban with their wall-less concept house. It is all in chasing the pure, stripping out the superfluous and finding tranquillity. It is no wonder Japanese design and architecture comes to mind with all its elegance and refinement but in looking at Tadao Ando's Chichu Art Museum for Naoshima Island, with its roofless observation space, I am also reminded of how depth and colour operate in the work of James Turrell. All this is set around the gaze, staring into space and light, looking at the sky. I see so many different skies in one room here, perhaps a little more sun than we have had of late but we even get the cool, crisp and rain as well. These paintings are surfaces to get lost in, to contemplate and consider our environments but these deep velvety lakes I also think of as mirrors to dive into and find ourselves.

The work *Midnight*, 2022 has a ghostly area, hovering over the darkness. There is richness and depth in the dark of night. Like when you check the doors are locked and move by feel through the room, returning is always a little easier. The ceiling from bed an endless void in the night, while you overthink the days activities. These paintings offer so much in such sophisticated surfaces. *Things Behind The Sun*, 2022 is another one of the darker and more pure colour field works but the title also alludes to the 'all giving', and to the other paintings in the show that are in many ways representational of our sun and its majestic play in the sky. I also love Nick Drake and his album *Pink Moon*, 1972 from which the title of this essay is borrowed, but I think this is more uplifting, it is about slowing down in the process, appreciating the season for what it is and capturing it on the linen. The two *Pink Moon* paintings despite sharing the title are very different but they both show signs of the pours being wiped away, smeared from the linen and lifting a static pulse to the surface. These paintings show a maturing and confidence coming through. I love the singular pursuit in the work of the late American painter Robert Ryman. The application of paint was exhaustive and despite all the variety of tone, the diversity of substrate, affect of under painting, scale and the many other variables the journey continued. His practice shows that even the most simple change can explode things out and change the work. Wales is on a journey that I see occurring gradually through a very subtle and nuanced progression.

I was told about the uneven floor in her studio, paint running in certain directions that gets redirected by propping up the milk crates and door stops on certain sides of the canvas. A grapple with the studio architecture, all the rain and humidity slowing the layers down. Off to see the house and hear about the rain delays. Waiting for the weather and painting it along the way. This show actually reminds me of how all these times of year, seasons on the linen are breathtaking in their own way. I am watching the leaves on the maples run the spectrum from greens to orange and fire reds and into their deep purple before spinning to the ground. Its a waiting game for the frost. This work seems to offer us a little more than what perhaps Judd might suggest is minimal. I guess we shouldn't talk too much about the weather and enjoy the painting in it's materials and process but maybe Wales is sitting in the middle of minimalism and colour field, with the works offering us more than pure paint and substrate, reminding us of our time and cycles. Pausing the season in poured pigments for us to find our moments of contemplation, to bathe in the depth and colour.

James Kerr, 2022