



14 DECEMBER 2023 – 27 JANUARY 2024

CONTEMPORARY FIGURATION: BETWEEN BODY & METAPHOR

GROUP SHOW
CO-CURATED BY CAT NECULA

JD MALAT
GALLERY

GROUP SHOW
CO-CURATED BY CAT NECULA

Contemporary Figuration: Between Body & Metaphor

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The body is a physical and material being. However, it can also reflect a person's spirit, sense of 'self' or embrace metaphors of our contemporary age. This exhibition seeks to bring together the work of contemporary painters who explore the body as material, and as the embodiment of the immaterial, engaging in themes ranging from the notion of 'self', identity, critical race, queer theory and the technological body. It also seeks to shed light on the varying ways in which different artistic styles of figuration can engage with the question of how to picture the human subject today?

In an age where questions of embodied experience are continually accentuated by our relationship with cross-cultural exchange, media, new technologies, and socio-political change, the body has come to signify the transcendental. Different painterly styles that range from realism to abstraction, and technologically informed practices, seek to demonstrate the expansive breadth of contemporary figurative painting and its capacity to tell the stories of diverse bodies and their connotations – the polarised, the 'ideal', the natural, the technological, the liminal, and more – and help situate them within the nuanced frameworks of posthumanism, Otherness and diasporic memory.

To encourage an open-minded and all-embracing experience of the exhibition, the curatorial premise is guided by each artist's personal response to 'Body & Metaphor'. Both represented artists from the gallery's roster, and guest artists, are invited to share their thoughts in the catalogue that accompanies the exhibition to champion an artist-centric model of the gallery space and highlight the gallery as platform, rather than mediator.



**ANDREW
LITTEN**



True Nature, 2022

Oil on canvas
74 3/4 x 94 1/2 in
190 x 240 cm

**AYANFE
OLARINDE**





Aeroplani o'dabo I (the contentment song), 2023

Ink, acrylic, oil pastel and coffee on canvas

48 x 36 in

121.9 x 91.4 cm



Aeroplani o'dabo III (the contentment song), 2023

Oil and airbrush on linen

135 x 180 cm

53 1/8 x 70 7/8 in



Unapologetically, Stephen, 2021

Ink, acrylic, fabric on canvas

60 x 48 in

152.4 x 121.9 cm



**CATHY
TABBAKH**



Les Couleurs de la Nuit, 2023

Acrylic on canvas
19 3/4 x 15 3/4 in
50 x 40 cm

The Shadow of Life, 2023

Acrylic on canvas
27 1/2 x 19 3/4 in
70 x 50 cm





**CELINE
ALI**



The Painter, 2023

Oil on linen
78 3/4 x 78 3/4 in
200 x 200 cm



**EMILY
GILLBANKS**



To Have-In, Or To Take-Away?, 2023

Oil paint on canvas
70 7/8 x 55 1/8 in
180 x 140 cm



Disguising Things, 2023

Oil paint on canvas
61 x 43 1/4 in
155 x 110 cm



A Date Night in Marble Arch, 2023

Oil on canvas
33 1/2 x 55 1/8 in
85 x 140 cm



Searching for Things, 2022

Oil on canvas
32 1/4 x 27 1/2 in
82 x 70 cm



Portrait of Charlie II, 2022

Oil on canvas
48 x 43 3/4 in
122 x 111 cm



Small Portrait of Charlie, 2022

Oil on canvas
15 3/4 x 11 3/4 in
40 x 30 cm



**GEORGIA
O'KEEFFE**



Submerged, Chewing Emerald, 2023

Oil on linen
66 7/8 x 78 3/4 in
170 x 200 cm



Pulling Eyebrow, 2022

Oil on linen
59 1/8 x 59 1/8 in
150 x 150 cm



Back to School, 2022

Oil on linen
66 7/8 x 59 in
170 x 150 cm



HAN JI MIN

Shoulder, 2023

Oil on linen
51 1/8 x 51 1/8 in
130 x 130 cm





**MARK
METCALFE**



Melancholia: After Durer, 2023

Oil on canvas
60 x 48 in
152.5 x 122 cm

An anatomical model of a human torso, showing the muscles and skin. The model is positioned against a dark background. The skin is a light brown color, and the muscles are a darker, reddish-brown color. The model is shown from the front, with the arms slightly away from the body. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of the muscles and skin.

**NATALIA
OCERIN**



Bodies #1, 2023

Oil on canvas
88 1/4 x 62 1/4 in
224 x 158 cm

Bodies #2, 2023

Oil on canvas
88 1/4 x 62 1/4 in
224 x 158 cm





**RICHARD
WATHEN**



Untitled, 2023

Oil on linen over aluminium panel

35 3/8 x 29 1/2 in

90 x 75 cm



**SOPHIE-YEN
BRETEZ**



*« Over there, the shadow of night Is
descending over the sea. But within me,
There is still the light. - Moon », 2023*

Oil on linen
47 1/4 x 59 in
120 x 150 cm

*« Under the stars of a coming spring, Among
the leaves blown by the wind, From the blue
night, I will rise, Like the sun does in the skies.
In my kingdom by the sea. », 2023*

Oil on linen
47 1/4 x 59 in
120 x 150 cm



« Rays of sun, dew of the sea Come! Come over my land! My surf-tormented shores Made of grains of golden sand, and thousands of silent roars. », 2023

Oil on linen
59 x 47 1/4 in
150 x 120 cm





« My desire is made of representations Which have never been mine, Those who projected onto my body Their dreams of exoticism And their darkest fantasies. - To desire beyond the male gaze. », 2023

Oil painting on linen canvas
76 3/4 x 44 7/8 in
195 x 114 cm



« *Time, I'll you mine.* », 2023

Oil on linen
55 1/8 x 39 3/8 in
140 x 100 cm



**UR
CASIN**



Beach Scene, 2023

Oil on canvas
98 3/8 x 110 1/4 in
250 x 280 cm



**YANN
LETO**



NUDES EVERYWHERE, 2016

Oil on canvas
76 3/4 x 76 3/4 in
195 x 195 cm

Ice Cream Truck Line, 2020

Oil on canvas
37 3/8 x 22 in
95 x 56 cm





The Clown, 2019

Oil on canvas
78 3/4 x 62 1/4 in
200 x 158 cm



**TEGA
TAFADZWA**



Varume, 2022

Mixed media on canvas

55 1/8 x 47 1/4 in

140 x 120 cm

SELECTED ARTIST STATEMENTS

*CONTEMPORARY FIGURATION:
BETWEEN BODY & METAPHOR*

ANDREW LITTEN

NATALIA OCERIN

EMILY GILLBANKS

My aim with this painting was to express a frustrated separateness between the human and the animal counterpart. The allegorical readings I wanted to evoke were not mindful in the cliché way of describing a harmony between the human and the animal. I painted the man with searching eyes and with reaching fingers (including extra ones on his feet) to express a longing to connect. But this curiosity is not shared by the animal which I wanted to appear ambiguous in type and behaviour. As the painting developed the animal seemed to change, as though it wanted to be painted, as if it was posing. The territory is not clear. I ended up working on this painting intensely for six years as the tensions and ambiguities grew.

– Andrew Litten, 2023.

The work that I will display revolves around notions regarding the body and societal narratives we have been conditioned to believe in. I want to criticise and dismantle the stigma that persists to this day, to break and discard all the norms associated with seduction, desire, conquest, and the way we have sex. I don't want these to end; what I want is for these things to not be constructed at our expense, subordination, harassment, and discomfort.

I am questioning whether alcohol should be an instrument for flirting and whether our bodies can be commented on, stalked, pursued, or touched by men who assume they have the natural right to do so. I am questioning our bosses and co-workers on a systemic level, to exist in the workplace without prying eyes that stare at our backsides and cleavage while expecting a level of professionalism at work. I am questioning the thought process behind why a man says he is afraid to be alone with a woman, that he no longer knows if he can 'make a comment' or 'make a pass'.

I want to shatter the glass ceiling that houses draconian ideals that encompass women, why must we be subjected to male desire, to adhere to unhealthy and unrealistic beauty standards? I want to dismantle this idea that women need to fit the mould of pleasant, touchable, and likeable, all so we can be viewed as valuable. The patriarchy has conditioned us to act and behave a certain way, constructing guidelines on how to be and subsequently suppressing who we are as individuals.

– Natalia Ocerin, 2023.

A Transferential Relationship

"For making you my property, my possession...does not accomplish any alliance between us." - Luce Irigaray.¹

"She looks at herself instead of looking at you, and so she doesn't know you." - Stendhal.²

Psychoanalytical theory tells us that transference is the redirection of one's own feelings onto others.

As a matter of course, the transferential relationship I have with my subjects comes to relate to a modern, and social-cognitive perspective of introjection.

Introjection is a process in which an individual unconsciously incorporates aspects of external reality into the self, particularly the attitudes, values, and qualities of another person or a part of another person's personality.

Over the past few years, I have repetitively painted life-scale portraits of my family, friends, lovers, and other subjects which have previously been well-known to me. It is through painting new subjects that I am reminded of previous subjects, and it is then that I unconsciously infer that this new subject is not that dissimilar to all of the other subjects I have ever painted.

I have an instrumental sense of power and control over the way I choose to paint my people. Every relationship, even the relationship one has with oneself is arguably transferential replay. Any painting of a person is caught up in a paradigm of portraiture, where a dualist subjectivity of likeness and authenticity operates. Lucian Freud described his paintings as "purely autobiographical," therefore, do paintings of people say more about the person that was once present, or more about the artist who chose the way in which to depict them?

The way in which I observe and scrutinise my own relationships to people akin to a data attainment process produces a coldness. An attempt at clinical data attainment process produces a coldness. It is through this examining of people

in comparison to a patient-analyst relationship which sees an analytic-situation where things are captured about people that have crept into my own consciousness.

People watching, is a prime example of things coming-into-consciousness. It is only when the personal relationships which encompass all aspects of the relationship between myself, family members, friends, and lovers, come to produce an intimate visual diary.

To repetitively paint the same subject begins to articulate a drama. For instance, how does a subject's interior life make us voyeuristically privy to an individual's psychic torment? The multiple views of the same subject assist in a way which makes the people who are represented seem as relational as they are private. A good example of this is Stendhal's 19th century novel *Le Rouge et le Noir*. The omnipresent narrator creates a psychological portrait, where most of the characters are idolised with great efforts of imagination. The characters are not seen for who they really are, and in this same way my subjects which are transposed from photographs, transferred into visual data, and then organised through gridded compositions experience a degree of elevation.

The repetition of the faces which feature again and again across my portfolio is not too dissimilar from the consumerism of the Gods and idols which can be found in the repetitive characters recurring across Early Renaissance polyptych panels, and even the celebrity icons that Andy Warhol used throughout his Pop Art Movement. Each record of a person then comes to present things I have felt about particular people in particular moments. In the same way a patient's previous object-relationships are transposed to an analyst, the transference relationship is thus constituted at the heart of the analytic situation, my portraits by any kind of analytic contract offer a mode of representation in which a transference of my own feelings about a person is projected onto how they're portrayed.

- Emily Gillbanks, 2023.

¹Luce Irigaray, *I Love to You: Sketch for a Felicity Within History*, trans. Alison Martin, New York and London, 1996, pp. 110-11.

²Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le Noir*, France: Independently published, 2020, p. 40.

To Eat-In, Or To Take-Away?

“There are three arts which are concerned with all things: one which uses, another which makes, and a third which imitates them. Art has no end but its own perfection.” – Plato.

“The thing can never be separated from someone who perceives it; nor can it ever actually be in itself because its articulations are the very ones of our existence, and because it is posited at the end of a gaze or at the conclusion of a sensory exploration that invests it with humanity. To taking up or the achievement by us of an alien intention or inversely the accomplishment beyond our perceptual powers and as a coupling of our body with the things. <...> To see the object is to plunge into it.” – Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception.

I am interested in the representation of things.

How can you take all the things in the world and make a representation that corresponds to how those things are thought about?

According to Plato, to know a thing is to know the nature of its form. He believed that painters only have a knowledge of how something appears from a certain angle and that means painters do not have knowledge of forms, and instead they have a knowledge of particulars. This suggests that when we try to grasp the qualities of things, we look to similarities in how the objects present themselves in given contexts.

What are the similarities between a physical café environment, and a series of new figurative paintings installed to mimetically setup the same environment?

Inspired by my own experiences of café culture during early morning rushes, socialising, meeting up with old friends, and taking shelter on rainy days, I wanted to use the setting to explore how Cafés represent local culture and local people.

The first café is said to have opened in 1550 in Constantinople; during the 17th century cafés opened in Italy, France, Germany, and England. During the 200

years after the mid-17th century, the most famous coffeehouses of Europe flourished in London as ready points for news, discussion, and faction.

The modern age of artisanal coffees captures a crowd that is made up of everyone. From businessmen to students. Nowadays, British coffee culture is extremely influenced by American popular culture, and the most recognisable modern cafes tend to be commercial chains.

It is said that an observer's role is to appear before a visual scene and stuff it into their mind. However, this seems to work differently when we are what the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty described as ‘perceiving subjects’ in the physical world and ‘perceiving subjects’ that scroll through endless feeds of images. Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "Phenomenology of Perception" explores the relationship between perception, embodiment, and the lived experience of the world. While the book is primarily concerned with philosophy, it offers insights that can be relevant to various disciplines, including the visual arts. In my case, I want my paintings to be immersed in the world they're supposed to be presenting. The immersive installation of the Café, I hope will mean that the people I have painted in Cafés, the interior design, the architectural elements that allow viewers to take their own role in the installation, all become apprehended as a whole horizon.

The spatial context is important in these paintings as it enhances the viewers overall experience and perception of the artworks. Through the Mimesis of a café environment, I believe the viewer's bodily presence and engagement with the artworks should be considered to form an experience which resembles that of life.

When making paintings of people today I try to incorporate contemporary elements which mark the people as being from current times. I source the people I paint by using social media hashtags, location markers, and tags. This enables me to have a pool of subjects to select that are already framed in a public space.

Appropriation is a controversial topic in the arts. Appropriation in art and art history refers to the practice of artists using pre-existing objects or images in their art with little transformation of the original. Richard Prince's New Portraits Series is one of the most famous legal cases for 'lifting' images from social media and putting them straight onto the gallery walls. Often, the use of the word becomes synonymous to stolen, borrowed, or lifted. Social media, and the internet in general, has made appropriation common practice. There are so many images, videos, and reels, we are exposed to daily that it is understandable that sometimes we may feel as though we witnessed the images first-hand. What some people do not understand is as soon as people post images online these images enter a public domain, and therefore, power and control of these images are lost. For example, in the era of Ai and the Metaverse we are faced with a data-centric Odyssey of Human Generation. For a StyleGan model to facilitate the generation of a completely new image of a human figure it requires 40,000-230,000 sample images of humans. Where are these images of people coming from? It is always good to check the small print when uploading images of yourself to apps that let you see what your future baby will look like, or what you will look like when you're older as you might find that your images are being used to facilitate the generation of new, never seen before faces.

In most cases, people no longer go to museums or galleries to experience things, objects, artefacts, artworks. The modern museum experience is more about the performance of going to museums. It is not necessarily driven by the acquisition of new knowledge, or anything educational. For most people, it is about getting the photograph. The image you're able to post to say this is what I did in this moment of my life. My new paintings are about the performance of life. The performance of going to a café and selecting a drink, not because that is your drink of choice, but because the appearance of that drink will have the best instagramable quality.

Therefore, to compare painting to computational systems suggests a link to symbolic programming. In both systems, they require a kind of visual data

to be arranged and detailed in such a way it creates a memorable picture. The increased number of sample figures means the output of a StyleGan model will be more accurately detailed in pose, perspective, and features.

Painting no matter, the genre, content, and time in which it was created is inescapably an act of symbolic programming. Humans conceptualise high-level things. We love building systems and structures. Even with the highest levels of abstraction, we tend to convert them into something computable. Is painted matter the same as pixels that are arranged in detailed ways?

I contend that the act of observing is the act of turning life into data.

Is it fair to say, the future of everything depends on the phenomenon of computation?

We are entering an era where technological phenomena allow us to look back on our lives and the lives of others; enabling us to see things as they happened. Although, we will see things happening in an artist way, and the truth of experiencing these moments again still reveals lies that present themselves as much more honest.

Computation is the act of calculating something using a computer or other mode of technology. Through my own process every subject I paint is underpinned by technology in some way or other. I have been developing the idea of an artificial café by sourcing reference imagery from specific locations and hashtags on social media, and then through using artificial intelligence, I have been altering the angles, and composition of the images before beginning to plan paintings.

No one can compute how painters will respond to artificial intelligence, but Moore's Law is a good reference point for predicting how the growth and trends in technological development will aid how we see and navigate the world we find ourselves living.

Moore's Law outlines the observations made by Gordon Moore's research published in 1965. His research stated that the number of transistors in a dense integrated circuit (IC) doubles about every two years. Subsequently, this phenomenon suggests that computational progress will become significantly faster, smaller, and more efficient over time. For example, Apple's recent release of the Vision Pro is now completely transforming how we are being-in-the-world, being with each other, and being. Soon, we will be able to archive ourselves as 3D pictures enabling spaces to fuse in time and mimetic versions of ourselves can live on, and exist, forever.

Although, the great angst which presents itself as a pitiful downfall to the human condition is the fact that we know we will not live forever. Due to the fact we know how the universe works, and we have created accurate hypergraphic models. The story of science tells us we live and then we die, but images and representations can live on. Yet, we exist in a universe with endless computational possibility. We find lumps of reducibility that we can attach ourselves to relate to simple narratives of the everyday. Most people do not care for the facts that surround the ideas of space. It's simple, right? You're here you can move there. Although physically it's still you in that place quantum physics would tell you that it is you, but you're made of different atoms. But, of course, visually you could not observe with your own eyes briefly.

When painting people, I paint like a data attainment process. I take symbolic essence and compress what's going on in the everyday world into my mind and then attempt to paint scenes of people that feel relatable to general observers.

- Emily Gillbanks, 2023.

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