

Painting Programme Guest Curators

**Caitlyn
Main** invited by
Rosie Vohra

**Brian
Mountford**
invited by
Rufus Newell

**Jonathan
Lux**
invited by
Jack Towndrow

**Ellie Pratt
& Neena
Percy
(duo)** invited by
Suzy Babington



Kate Mothes YngSpc.com
curating the final exhibition

Curators invited by Assembly House studio holders:
www.assemblyhouse.art

**Nov '18-
May 19'**

Painting **P**rogramme is an open all inclusive artist led series of exhibitions, structured by the format of painters inviting painters to curate painting exhibitions. Each Assembly House painter was to invite a painter of choice to curate, within this framework the curating artist can navigate their own interests for each exhibition. The exhibitions will bring together a range of artists within the philosophy that they are all painters together, pitching in and carving out ideas across a broad spectrum of activity.

Each exhibition exposes the curators' unique approach to making and their appreciation of dynamics within art. The programme, led by the four Assembly House studio holders was imagined with the idea to remove the role of the gallerist as curator with the value of handing direction to artists.

There were 4 exhibitions by Invited curators. Rufus Newell who invited Brian Mountford, Rosie Vohra who invited Caitlyn Main, Jack Towndrow who invited Jonathan Lux and Suzy Babington who invited Neena Percy and Ellie Pratt. Young Space a platform for emerging artists punctuated the shows and Jack Otway a Leeds originated painter led. The exhibitions were held at the artists studio project space Assembly House in Leeds. The programme involved 48 artists taking on the roles of co-ordinators and support, curating artists and participating artists. The experience for all involved was a learning one, about collaboration, organisation and curation.

I welcome you to read below and learn about Painting Programme and the values found in this multi-leveled collaborative project through an

Interview between Suzy Babington painter based at Assembly House Studios as interviewee and her curating artists Neena and Ellie.



Sha (Burgess Park). 190 x 150cm Oil on Canvas 2018.



Neena Percy, *Reworn Relic (outdoors)*, Garden fixing, acrylic paint on velvet, steel rod, acrylic paint and household gloss, 189 x 35 x 25cm 2018

BETWEEN BODIES

Curated by Neena Percy and Ellie Pratt.

Part of Painting Programme.

3rd - 25th November (2018)

Emma Cousin, Lewis Hammond, Mona Osman, Neena Percy, Ellie Pratt, Babette Semmer, Lucy Stein, Emma Talbot, Rose Williams, Tom Worsfold.

'Painting has often depicted the human figure as an image or surface, its exterior displayed in aesthetic form. Similarly today, much is seen to be presented on the outside. We wear our lives like clothing, a patchwork of events, photos and opinions displayed and performed online. But what really lies behind or beyond those chosen moments is much more complex. Painting, with its inherently selective process of exposure and erasure, has the potential to reveal the less perfect but far more intimate reality. In *Between Bodies* the image of the body is distorted, doubled, fragmented and expanded through paint to probe what comes from within - to go beyond - the body. In order to make sense of the self and its place within its environment, this exhibition explores the dichotomy between the image and the bodily experience. The artists exhibited depict disparate worlds in paint to create spaces that are sparse or intricately decorative, either way ambiguous settings for figures to inhabit. Be they placed within familiar domestic interiors, or moving fluidly through the sublime outdoors, the body is always framed within the canvas. Just as the experience of the self is morphed from both outer surroundings and inner consciousness, the works shown reflect this by fusing painterly tropes with depicted imaginings and figures that address their own and each other's existence. *Between Bodies* presents works that build tension and relationships between depicted figures while also setting up potential dialogues between the paintings. The group of artists reveal the inner workings of human experience while testing the boundaries of figuration within contemporary painting. The body is explored as an image and vehicle for thought; through visceral skin and flesh; challenging pose and gaze; with poetics and feeling.'



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As part of painting programme, each studio holder was to extend an invitation to curate out to another painter. I heard you two were in a studio together and thought it could be a great opportunity for a duo curation... I speculated how it might affect the experience of curating and make it potentially more beneficial for both curators. I hoped too it might the process easier and more interactive. The whole philosophy of painting programme is inclusive to excess, so it seemed like the perfect extra layer to add another curator. How did you find the experience of curating as a duo and how do you think it affected the exhibition? /What's your experience of working in a duo as opposed to working on your own?

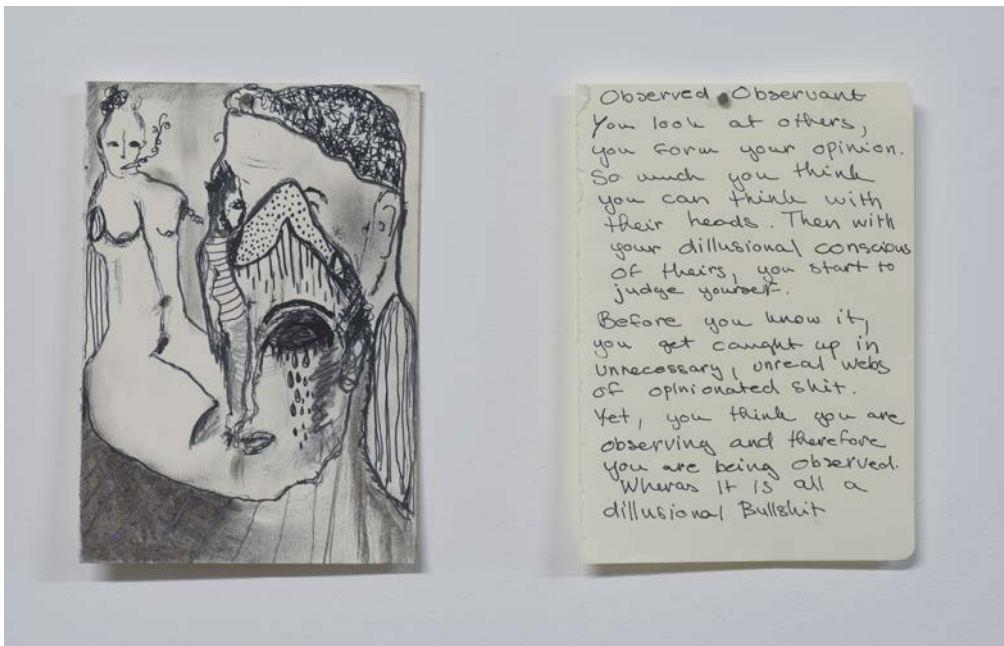
E/N: We really enjoyed working together and were so glad that you invited us as a duo. We've been close friends for a long time now and always look to each other for a trusted opinion and feedback in the studio. This definitely helped when making decisions about the show as a pair, as we were able to discuss and challenge each other. Working as a duo makes the process a lot more fun, you are constantly learning from and leaning on each other, especially when problems arise that might otherwise prove a bit daunting.

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I thought the show included different perspectives of working and conducted in a controlled and restrained manner. Each artwork seemed to have a strong voice, no pieces overshadowed each other, the positioning even seemed classical and dignified with symmetry and space so the works individually felt important. The works together seemed to present a broad and refreshing conversation on figurative painting and it was not a typical figurative exhibition. How would you describe your approach to the exhibition? What do you like to see from an exhibition and did you have any inspirations?

E/N: Representing the self, or an other through painting is an age-old tradition so to tap into that always means to look both backwards and forwards, and around to see what it currently means in today's world. Now of course, self-representation proliferates our visual culture. So we wanted to represent the multiple ways artists today are dealing with this subject: from Babette Semmer's psychological depiction, to a figure boldly reflecting back the viewers gaze, to Lewis Hammond's intimate but obscured portrait, the self is conveyed in all its multiple layers in the show. As we wrote in the exhibition text, there is in some way a parallel between the layers of exposing and hiding achieved through the painting process, and the way we choose to expose and hide elements of ourselves to those we know and the world at large.

Babette Semmer, Why do all the things I say sound like the stupid things I said before? 110x165 cm Oil on Canvas 2017



Top; Mona Osman, 'Observed Observant'; 'Stop it with the wet willy'; 'Longing for change but still holding on'; 'Whispers so loud' Biro and pencil on paper 21 x 14.5 cm sets of two: drawing and accompanying text 2018. Bottom; Lewis Hammond, Untitled (It's not the rejection that kills you, it's the hope) 22 x 16cm oil on canvas 2018

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The nature of a painting exhibition is that the exhibition would be as much about painting as anything else.

What are you both looking for and recognising in painting right now?

E: In painting right now I'm looking for new ways of seeing, perhaps different materials and modes of representation jarring each other in the same image. I'm looking for anything that really hits home in it's honesty and willingness to exist.

In my own work one thing i'm recognising is light and colour and choosing to really focus in on these things as a means to an image. I recently did the Painters Painting Paintings Residency, where I had four weeks to use this huge space and to really focus on making. I ended up creating this large painting 'Morning Run' that depicts a girl leaning against a wall looking into the distance as if contemplating, bathed in this monumental almost blinding light that is really specific to the time of day. I used this painting to explore how my use of colour and specific lighting can affect the overall feeling of the image as a way of capturing a fleeting moment. In my own work I'm always looking to give weight to transience.

N: I'm curious about how common themes come about. I've noticed a wave of surrealist-influenced painting; of bodies and objects in states of morphing which are captured in various painterly ways so that they feel more open than Surrealism's naturalist style. Perhaps this tendency to distort reality and create otherworldly propositions relates to the current state of the world being so absurd or feeling precarious and on edge.

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Painting exhibitions in their nature are a restrictive thing and it could have been a peculiar request. You got around this by including Emma Talbot's large silk hanging piece that hung majestically and weightily in the middle of the space, as well as a painted sculpture piece by Neena. How did you find that challenge of presenting painting without other art alongside?

E: I think personally, as a painter, both curating and hanging the show actually felt really natural.

Emma's piece was perfect for the centre of the room as it was like a huge church hanging so it had this kind of weight that acted as the gravitational pull of the exhibition. It's made to be viewed from one perspective but obviously because it's silk and the paint bleeds through, it has two viewing points: the front and back. This reminded me of a stain glass window and the way we hung it reflected this: inviting you to view the back first then walk round to see it in all its glory. We wanted to really highlight these two different viewpoints to open up a dialogue on the way in which paintings are viewed and experienced and therefore how the artists use the painterly surface to keep finding new perspectives on the bodily experience.



Neena's work was also a painted fabric so hers and Emma's piece had a nice relationship to one another. Although it was the only other sculptural element in the show, it still heavily related to painting in its material and form. Made from velvet dotted with thick blobs of paint, its' texture and tactility invites sensations of touch and alludes to the bodily experience in order to explore the body's role in painting beyond the classic figurative depiction.

N: It was an interesting brief to work with only paintings - otherwise the possibilities are endless, which is another type of challenge in itself! We did also slightly break the rules, showing a sculpture and Mona Osman's drawings. Mona makes monumental paintings, intensely decorated with embedded figures. We really wanted to show Mona's drawings as she writes scrawls philosophical thoughts and anecdotes alongside her drawings in a way that harks back to the age of painters portraying the inner truth about humanity and the psyche. I love imagining Mona scribbling away, eloquently coming to terms with herself and others through these musings. But overall I think it was nice to give full space and focus to how these paintings spoke to each other, being able to almost imagine the figures from their different painterly worlds meeting in this room.

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It was great to hear you both working through the process of hanging, it seemed you really took care towards every work. Do you have any staple ideas around hanging exhibitions that underpin an approach? Or should every exhibition be different?

N: We really enjoyed spending time in the space to hang the show. I think that any curation should be responding in situ to the space and the artworks, as opposed to coming up with any finalised idea beforehand. The exciting thing is creating really subtle formal or narrative connections and contrasts between works.

E: I agree with Neena, every exhibition should respond to the space. I think when you are dealing with a large group of artists it's almost harder to prepare for how they will actually look alongside each other. We had a real range of works so making sure each piece held its own was very important to us. As we were dealing with a pretty much all painting show, working through the hanging process in the space was vital in order for the works to really bounce off each other and achieve an interesting show.

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I hear you visited the exhibiting artists in their studios before the exhibition which makes me really glad you did as that's the sort of interactions and connections we hoped painting programme would encourage, sometimes it's great to have an excuse to reach out to artists you really appreciate. How did you find visiting the artists and are there any stories to tell?

E/N: Yes, this was a very exciting opportunity for us. We had seen Emma Cousin's recent show at Edel Assanti and so reached out to her when we realised her work would add a bold, dynamic sense of movement through her bodily jigsaw puzzle paintings. Her studio is very near our then joint-studio so we went for tea and got to pick this amazing new painting 'Do Birds Get Vertigo?'. Emma was very enthusiastic about the concept of the show.

Emma Cousin, Do Birds get vertigo? oil on canvas, 170x190cm 2018. Bottom: Lucy Stein, Untitled (Breton maiden) 50 x 50 cm, oil, oil stick, magic marker and spray paint on, gessoed panel.





Well, a story to tell would involve picking up a key to let ourselves into an artist collector's house to collect a painting, but I think we'll have to leave it at that! Nothing went wrong, thank goodness, but it was a lot of responsibility!

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Neena you seem to have rolled into a whole series of projects. You said you were feeling like you were going through a time of asking people for things and seeing what happens. What projects have you had on recently and how's that working out for you?

N: Yes, this show at Assembly House was a really positive eye opener for me. We began just reaching out to people; artists we've long admired, local businesses for drinks sponsorship, and realised that when possible people are more than happy to support a project and be involved. And so, after the show I felt very motivated to do more and have since set up a co-curatorial practice Hot Desque with another artist, Lizzy Drury. We also reach out to artists, businesses and spaces. Although you get lots of non-replies or nos, you also get enough yesses to make everything possible. We're currently working towards a discussion we are hosting at Thames-Side Studios as part of Art Licks Weekend 2019. The theme of the festival is 'Interdependence' which actually speaks a lot to what we are discussing here. There seems to be a growing feeling that we should be opening up a lot more about how much we all rely on each other as artists, artist-run spaces etc. Our talk equally aims to demystify the image of living as an artist, to discuss all the multiple jobs we take on to support our practices, as opposed to omitting or covering that up.

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You both went to Slade where I met you and then you went onto The Royal College together. I always felt the peer relationships were the most important. How did you find those artist to artist relationships inside universities in comparison to now? Do you miss having tutors? How are you cultivating artist support networks in London outside of university institutions and where do you find that support and what form does it come in?

N: I soon realised I really missed the conversations with others and found myself lacking the motivation to work alone without a clear outcome to aim for. As opposed to seeing this as failing as an artist, I just began curating and collaborating in order to keep having those valuable conversations about the world and the art reflecting it. I've now collaborated with a friend and theatre artist Saudamini Kalra on a film and performance piece we made while I was in India earlier this year. We loved working together and the process of accommodating each others' ideas means you end up making something you would never normally think of. We're currently working on our next film piece, though the time difference between us is making it a little trickier this time.

Tom Worsfold, Sweet, Acrylic on canvas, 120 x 80cm, 2018



E: The difference between an artistic practise in an institution compared to now is that at university you are making work surrounded by others. Similarly to Neena, I went straight from school to Slade to Royal College so I had never really made work in a studio by myself before and it took a while to adjust. I kind of had to almost re-introduce myself to my work and it took a bit of time to figure stuff out. In terms of support networks, we are really lucky to have had such great tutors, especially at the Slade. Many opportunities since leaving school have been made possible thanks to them, so we are extremely grateful for their continued support.

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I know at Assembly House a lot of the studio holders and especially painters found the exhibitions encouraging. Having the huge range and quality of artworks around and being able to see them first hand in our own space just helps us feel part of a larger painting community and it was great to draw that into Leeds. It was especially important to feel connected working outside of a major city.

Did curating help you feel more connected?

E: For sure. I think curating a show always helps you feel more connected as you are constantly reaching out to people and engaging in conversation. We wanted the show to have a broad range of artists, some we knew and some we didn't so it was a real combination of supporting peers by including artists we already had established relationships with, but also reaching out to artist's we had never spoken to before to open up dialogues and form connections.

N: I guess that living outside London has pros and cons. The five months I spent this year assisting an artist in Goa in India and working on my own projects, gave me a new perspective on how your environment affects your practice. It was so nice to get away from the rush of London and to find yourself surrounded by more trees than people. But I don't know how I would feel about living in a place like that long term. While I was there I co-curated a show in London (thanks to high speed internet!) so I still felt quite connected by researching and then being in contact with a big group of artists and my co-curator Lizzy. I love being back in the city, with so many artists, galleries and events to explore - there's so much going on which can be distracting and overwhelming but also exciting and inspiring.

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What makes you feel connected to the art climate and culture that you're working in? Is making work simply enough?

N: As this conversation might have made obvious, I feel very excited to put on shows and connect to the art world by adding to it and creating opportunities for other artists. For me it's about working with friends and meeting new artists, which comes about in a really nice way through putting on shows. You realise you are part of a supportive network of people who are keen to be involved or help make things happen. There are so many artist-run projects and spaces which perhaps shows that artists naturally wish to connect to people outside their own studio practice.

E: What makes me feel connected is going to see shows, whether that's an exhibition or a friend's gig, I think going to friends shows is the best feeling. Obviously making work is great but personally it's not enough to sustain a level head. I think making work in solitary environment can be hard and confusing and if you don't get outside of that and see the bigger picture it can become quite stale and the will to make becomes blurred. I love going to see friends play music because you see everyone you know there and it's such a nice feeling, like we are all in it together and there's one big common goal of just making and creating and that really nothing else matters.



Suzy Babington, Toot Toot, Beep Beep! 120 x 180cm.

Oil on canvas. 2018



Centre of main space: Emma Talbot, Time Folded, Acrylic on silk, 220cm x 155cm, 2017. Between Bodies Install Shot.