

A new focus on contemporary painting
Messums London
6 July – 9 September 2022



Laurence Grave, *Crabby*, 2022

This summer Messums London presents a new focus on contemporary painting with two exhibitions in succession. The first will be the debut presentation of a new body of work by painter Tom Robinson titled *In between them doing* which follows the success of his inaugural solo show at Messums Wiltshire in 2021. The second is a group presentation titled *on Surface*, showcasing emerging contemporary artists selected by Robinson together with his work. The artists represented – Anna Brass, David Cooper, Laurence Grave and Henry Ward – all share certain affinities and approaches. This relates to their individual, diverse experimentation with ideas surrounding the painted surface from the two-dimensional canvas to painterly expression in three-dimensional form.

Tom Robinson: In between them doing
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Tom Robinson, *Light fingered*, 2021

Tom Robinson (b.1979) lives and works in Norfolk, England. His paintings are complex, rhythmic planes of overlapping colour and space. In his studio, work in progress is hung on each of the four walls surrounding the artist, creating an intense if sometimes claustrophobic atmosphere. This arrangement allows the paintings to speak to each other across the room and for different bodies of work — small scale and very large paintings; paintings on panel and canvas; paintings in vivid colour and in black and white — to proceed in concert. Each painting is balanced and compact, elevating rather than mitigating the tension and pure energy of his mark-making. His understanding of colour is subtle and often surprising. Colours bounce forwards and sink back, giving a three-dimensionality akin to a carved relief, the subject of which has been integral to Robinson's appreciation of rhythm, surface, composition and perspective in his painting.

Robinson describes his work as '*reaching for something beyond the surface: the meta image*'. His process is rooted in an intuitive approach in which formal elements are manipulated until an image emerges, hovering between stability and the possibility of a further realisation. It is an instinctive yet considered way of working. The paintings start from an inchoate impulse to use a particular colour, movement or tone and, through the process of adding and subtracting, go on to establish a structure and logic of colour. The forms move against each other: coming forwards and receding to create space, and giving the surfaces a three-dimensionality akin to relief sculpture. His paintings often feel compact, elevating rather than mitigating the tension and visceral energy of the fluid, moving paint.

Robinson is interested in art that communicates viscerally, in his words, '*...that registers as some sort of shock or force (subtle or strong). This could be a line; the outline of a jug against a wall; a rhythm; a colour. The list is endless. When you swim in a river, you connect through your senses — touch, nerves, you feel it through your skin and you are aware of the surface of the water and the light thrown off the surface and the dark under the trees. All of those sensations come before any thought. I am drawn to paintings and sculpture that seem to enter one through the senses.*'

Robinson's influences are myriad and eclectic and include literary and musical sources as well as the plastic arts. He first found the Greek and Assyrian reliefs in the British Museum as a student in London, igniting an interest that has shaped his understanding of rhythm and surface since. The overlapping forms and the particular perspective found in classical relief panels are tangible markers central to his paintings.

Robinson attended the Byam Shaw and The Royal Drawing School then moved from London to Jersey before settling in Norfolk. He was shortlisted for the Gilchrist Fisher award in 2010 and the Contemporary British Painting Prize in 2021. He has been represented by Messums Wiltshire since 2021.

on Surface
Messums London
10 August – 9 September 2022



Henry Ward, *Fold*, 2021

On Surface paints a picture of how the ideas and aspirations of a selected group of young artists consider the role of painting. Collectively, as the title suggests, they are enquiring – much like Robinson – about the role of paint in a three-dimensional world.

The work of Anna Brass hovers between two and three dimensions; her use of fabric pertaining to paint, her painted surfaces evoking stone, brick and tile. She takes motivation from the intense impulse she feels when looking at images, the inspiration for her subject matter deriving from a variety of sources including Byzantine mosaics, Sieneese painting and 1930s cartoons.

David Cooper's work is often pushed to an extreme; forms condensed to a conclusive end informed by his preoccupation with aberration and malformation. Taking fragments of

found objects, he explores them inside-out, and outside-in through a series of unpremeditated and intuitive processes.

Laurence Grave questions perception in her work by confronting imperfection and responds to the idea of harmony, perfection or transcendence that is often expected from an artwork. The spatiality of her pieces is often the result of attention paid to the materiality of the work: torn strips of canvas, visible staples, stripping the frame, the reuse of material and recovery.

Henry Ward explores the language of paint by investigating the threshold between abstraction and representation. He maintains three specific sites of practice; his kitchen table where he makes small objects, his shed where he paints on paper, and the studio. These three spaces create an ongoing dialogue between different ways of working and different paces.

While the individual practices of these artists are diverse, they are unified in their dynamic approach to materials, processes and imagery. All of the artists are operating within a particular spatial context where either the surface of the work appears to have three-dimensional qualities or there is a sense of painting taking itself off the walls and into the space. Robinson references their commonality as a force best described as 'charge'. Their work suggests a spirit of confidence in new painting.

PRESS

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MESSUMS WILTSHIRE is a leading multi-purpose gallery and arts centre set inside a restored thirteenth-century tithe barn and surrounding buildings with exhibition space, sculpture garden and restaurant.

MESSUMS LONDON is a 2,000 sq ft exhibition space on Cork Street behind the Royal Academy. It hosts a rolling programme of exhibitions for our contemporary artists and is home to our photography department.