

An abstract painting of a face, rendered in a style that combines realism with expressionism. The face is the central focus, with large, white, circular eyes and a wide, open mouth showing a red tongue and yellow teeth. The skin is depicted with dark, expressive brushstrokes in shades of blue, grey, and black. The background is a mix of these colors, creating a sense of depth and texture. The overall effect is one of intense emotion and raw, human experience.

Real Lives Painted Pictures

REBECCA FORTNUM
JACQUELINE UTLEY
SUSIE HAMILTON
BARBARA HOWEY
ELEANOR MORETON
LEXI STRAUSS

Real Lives – Painted Pictures

An exhibition of 6 contemporary women
painters working in figuration.

The Crypt Gallery,
St Marylebone Parish Church, London

Dates: 4th July 2016 – 29th September 2016

The Cut Gallery,
Halesworth

Dates: 10th January 2017 – 11th February 2017

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Introduction

In this age of mass global image access - through digital technology, figurative painting has seen a resurgence, especially among women painters. Why this should be is an interesting question. Painting exists in a different social and psychological space than the screen of the computer. It has presence as a thing, an object with the evidence of labour and time marked upon it. It gives voice to individual preoccupations in a physical and intimate relationship with the viewer. The paintings of these artists' explore women's lives, and figuration provides a framework for these experiences.

The works here explore painting with wit, playfulness and a lightness of touch, whilst maintaining an interrogative position both to painting and to the world they encounter. They take a look at the lives of homemakers, child-rearers, young women and the elderly through observations of the real world or mediated through art history, photography and the internet.

The work of Susie Hamilton looks in a wry, stripped back way at the trials, compulsions and chores of shopping. Her work features elderly women struggling with ageing bodies, low incomes and the daily need for food. Eleanor Moreton explores psychologies within domestic interiors gleaned from wide reference points from contemporary life to art historical motifs. Lexi Strauss's witty portrayals of men attempting to breastfeed appear "clownish and vulnerable", exuding anxiety and confusion. Jacqueline Utley's tiny domestic interiors with their heightened colour and awkward social interactions evoke scenarios of individual loneliness and isolation amongst the flower arranging and stuffed chairs. Rebecca Fortnum's faces are retrieved from a history of sculptural portraits which she encountered in different museums across Europe. They reflect 'the dumb confrontation with others' in the sculpture courts of national collections, across cultures, years, and through the hands of other artists. Barbara Howey's paintings draw on images from the internet of hyperfeminised portraits of young goth women who stage themselves very much with the viewer in mind.

Barbara Howey, 2016

Real Lives

Painted Pictures

Edited Transcription

of a Discussion

at the Crypt

between:

Eliza Gluckman

Rebecca Fortnum

Susie Hamilton

Lexi Strauss

Jacqueline Utley

Barbara Howey

and Eleanor Moreton

EG:

I'm Eliza Gluckman, Barbara kindly invited me to chair this discussion. I'm both a freelance curator and a curator of the New Hall Art Collection, which is the largest collection of art by women artists in Europe, open to the public, and housed in Murray Edwards College, at Cambridge University. Three of the artists in this exhibition are represented in the collection, which also has works by Paula Rego, Barbara Hepworth and Tracy Emin.

I know some of the artists in this project better than others having had longer studio visits with some of you, so I was hoping to discuss how each of you respond to the more obvious themes of the exhibition. The best part of my work is talking to artists in their studios about how they approach their practice, understanding a little more about who they are and the story of how the work actually comes about.

In relation to the figurative theme of the show and the fact that you are all using these figures - it's called 'Real Lives', but obviously not all the people in these works are real. Initially I am thinking about Susie's work, because the figures in her paintings are real, taken from life and stolen images of people. But you also have a very visceral response to people. I see the way you respond perhaps through the paint, and you find people grotesque, or intriguing, or sad. Lexi, your work comes from a belief in a free mind in a psychological sense, so I wanted to ask you all individually what you feel your relationship to people is in your work?

SH:

I am troubled by the decaying, untidy body and by these bodies of women in supermarkets, which are in some degree of disarray. These women are sad and downtrodden, like displaced goddesses, marginalised and rejected. But on the other hand there is a sense of persistence, resilience and idiosyncrasy about them. I did a series of supermarket women in France and they seemed more powerful and matriarchal. And so there is sometimes the feeling of a defiant being and at other times one of downtrodden disorder. I also wanted to contrast these dishevelled humans with the unreal, pristine, neon settings that they find themselves in.

EG:

The other end of your work is the shopping mall, those human creations and places.

SH:

Yes those strange futuristic settings with eerie light where people drift around desiring something which won't fulfill them.

EG to JU:

Do you want to say something about the relationships in your paintings? Are they women you know?



SUSIE HAMILTON: "Bad Foot", oil on canvas, 25x30cm, 2015

JU:

Some are women I know. The women in the paintings come from multiple sources: these often include biographical and archival material, workers' information, art historical sources, magazines and journals. The women come from different times. I have a process for working out how the paintings may work - I make collages, draw and make watercolours before I make the painting.



JACQUELINE UTLEY: "Waiting Room", oil on linen, 20x30cm, 2016

EG:

Do you feel you have a personal relationship with the figures in the works or are they source material? They look or feel like theatre sets. Are you building a narrative as you put them together?

JU:

Yes, I become very involved and attached when making the painting - to the women and the rooms/spaces where the conversations take place. I start out with an idea of what the narrative might be but that shifts and changes as the painting progresses. I work on them over a long period of time - a figure from another painting may make their way in to a painting or another may leave.

EG:

When you say a long time how long to you mean?

JU:

They can take six to eight months, I work in clusters, groups, series.

RF:

The two women are portraits of statues; one is in the National Gallery of Washington and the other is in the V. & A. Both are terracotta. When you confront a life-size head, a bust, it's almost like another person - it's a representation of another person, but it is historically mediated and it is also mediated by the artist who made it. For me it's about the unknowability of other people, the inability to really understand somebody else outside of you. But you can still have this one to one encounter as you walk around the gallery - you have the sense of another person who is not really there. What is it that people leave behind them? The artist leaves behind the work. Quite often the busts are of lords and ladies that have commissioned the work, although this is one of a Breton peasant girl from the 19th century. There is a sense of bringing them back to life by painting them. But I don't think this resuscitation is entirely successful. For me they are hovering between life and death and have a static frozen quality. The other thing I would say is that in all of the portraits their eyes are either closed or they are looking down, so you might be projecting a kind of

encounter - when you talk to someone you look at their face and their eyes and so, this is a kind of thwarted relationship.

EG:

An inability to connect?

RF:

Yes, or maybe they are in another world. I have that classic fantasy that the museum comes to life when the lights go out. Or maybe they come to life when you look at them, maybe they are just resting - and in a hundred years will they still be there? They have stood the test of time to some extent; we are still looking at them now. We don't know who they were, and I am quite intrigued by that.

BH:

These grey paintings of mine are new. I have just started working on this series and I have been thinking about them over the last few weeks and what they are about and why I was attracted to the subject matter. They are based on images taken from the internet of young goth women. I didn't know why I was attracted to them initially apart from the fact of their odd conflicting personas. They appear quite doll-like, yet most of the bodies of the young women don't fit into the "ideal" image of the rake-thin goth. They are normal-sized bodies in a self-conscious guise. There are some interesting psychological things going on between the goth

women and men. The young men adopt a dress style which is hyper-feminised, a type of androgyny, but this only works one way. The young women on the other hand can only be hyper-feminine and do not in the main adopt androgynous tropes in their way of dressing and behaving. I was interested in these conflicting things about them.

I was having a conversation with my relatives and it occurred to me that a very close relative, who has since died, was a goth and I really didn't know anything about them as a young person in that way. I suppose these works are an attempt to understand what they were about and what they stood for. So it's a way of trying to understand my past through a mediated representation of the present. I think that



BARBARA HOWEY: "Lolita goths"
oil on board, 40x30cm, 2016

this is how memory works in some ways; something triggers something off, sets a train of thought in motion which can prompt reflection on the past.

I also like the way the goths span history; the Romanticism of them, their poetry reading and gothic dress. I like the way they slip between different meanings and this offers a lot of opportunity as a painter for thinking about the present, memory, painting, history and gender.

LS:

Well, I suppose I'm very interested in viewing humanity through the lens of the 'clown'. It's the way in which humour can alert us to deeper ideas,



LEXI STRAUSS:
"Tupperware Party"
acrylic on paper
42x29cm, 2013

which help us to understand ourselves and one another better.

For me it seems like a very superior way to communicate anything important, because it sears through so much rubbish. One can quickly get to the heart of things. So when I come across imagery of people, or situations between people that are powerful enough to make me laugh, then I like to paint about them.

I often come across these images on the internet and I'll either paint them pretty much as they appear to me there, or I may change the context, by putting together a couple of different images to create more humour. Sometimes the imagery may come from my imagination and from my dreams, sometimes also from my own photographs. So for example, "Tupperware Party" and "Hostess" were both painted from images found on the internet. "Tupperware Party" is very similar to the original found image, whereas "Hostess" has become completely disconnected from its original context. The humour of the imagery has become more surreal and also political, partly through my re-contextualising this imagery with my own narrative title.

EG:

What were you searching for when you found them?

LS:

Actually "Tupperware Party" was found accidentally

when I was researching a narrative project *The Twelve Apostles as Babies*. I often string together my paintings in this way, through narratives that emerge from a process of painting many images. These paintings then seem to somehow bundle together in a way that suggests a narrative. I suppose it's a rather loose, storyboard style of working. In my case, extruding stories from imagery in this unconscious way, almost unintentionally tends to create quite surreal, political narratives that often relate to failed imaginary political movements.

A few years ago, just before I made this painting I was talking and joking with my son (who was about eight at the time), considering what the twelve Apostles might have been like as babies. It made us laugh so of course I thought "that's an interesting idea".

Coincidentally, I'd already saved images of babies in a file on my computer, and one of them was a photograph of twelve babies lined up in poor-looking hospital cots. When I counted the babies in the image I thought "oh my goodness"! there were exactly twelve. There was also a glowing light emitting from a small window at the centre of the image and big cross shape created from the life support drip stands. It was very strange!

So I painted this image initially, later I found the image of the breast-feeding businessman while googling 'babies feeding', which was for an idea I'd had about the apostles 'first supper'! It was a story about how the apostles had arrived altogether in the hospital for the second coming, but this time without Christ. So "Tupperware Party" began in the context

of that series, but later sprang a narrative concept “The Vulnerable Party” which relates the search for a divine clown-like leader, who has all their vulnerabilities on display. Perhaps rather like a Boris Johnson type figure, but genuinely sincere, more guileless, making them unlikely to gain any votes or power. It’s whilst I’m immersed in the painting that my understanding of imagery deepens and unravels narratives. Actually, this image strangely seems to feed into everything I’ve done over the past four years.

EG:

So that image actually exists on the internet?



SUSIE HAMILTON: "Lidl 5", oil on canvas, 25x20cm, 2011

LS:

Yes.

EG:

So you leap between real lives and fiction, and you're weaving an entire fictional universe based on an ideology of laughing? And then the other exhibitors are creating realities out of things that are real but perhaps no longer alive? And actually yours, Susie, is most impulsively reflecting the real world I guess?

SH:

My painting and drawings are done from life but then edited down and simplified. I want the emptiness

ELEANOR MORETON: "Fawzia in
Persia 1" oil on canvas, 50x40cm, 2016



around people. I don't want too much humdrum detail, I want them to be quite stark and bare.

EG:

I wanted to ask Eleanor about her relationship to people in her work because the work that Lucy (Day) and I have shown of hers depicted musicians that she loved - Aretha Franklin for example. But this is completely different.

EM:

The strand of my work that I call loosely the Queen paintings, including Aretha, are homages to powerful, creative women. But in nearly all my paintings I would say that people are central. Painting is a way for me to get to know them, which of course is impossible, but there may be some way that I am gaining insight through some kind of empathy in painting. In the Painting "Fawzia in Persia 1" (2016) I was struck in the photo that I was using by the relationship between the three characters, by what they were expressing about themselves in the way they held themselves. Then there's what I historically know. In "Mercy Seat," (2010), unlike Fawzia, I was painting a picture of my mother as a child, but also with memories of what she'd told me about her childhood. The two characters behind could be guardians or jailers. There's usually ambivalence, because I don't know the truth, but neither do they. I think fascination with people is a feminine thing, at least "feminine" in its aspect, even though many men have it too.

BH to EM:

Referring back to the title of the show I wonder what you feel about the nature of the “real”?

EM:

We don't know what the “real” is. We all have different versions of the real. A lot of my paintings are dealing with the past and the painting “Fawzia in Persia 1,” is in a sense real and unreal. It is from a photograph so to a certain extent it is from a real situation. Then she is placed somewhere she wasn't and in fact the background she is in doesn't even attempt to be real. It is a transcription from a different culture of painting, from a Persian painting. I don't know about the three people in the photograph - really I am projecting my own ideas onto them. Whatever it means to be connected to the “real”, I certainly am not a realist painter. I am not even attempting that. I suppose I am attempting to invest some kind of psychological truth into some situation.

RF to SH:

I am really curious about the way you paint - about the gesture and how you edit – do you have a high chuck out rate and how do you know when you have got the gesture right? It is a very difficult balance.

SH:

I want a combination of precision and looseness.



ELEANOR MORETON: "Mercy Seat", oil on canvas 23x30cm, 2010

I want to catch something succinctly without too much gossipy detail and waste material. I also want the marks to have a certain dynamism about them while being truthful to the subject. There was a thing that Matisse said that you could exaggerate in the direction of truth. I want truth based in reality but also want reality to be distilled, maybe exaggerated, and transformed. And so I want those marks both to refer to reality but also have a vibration in relation to each other, to seem vivid and alive. Yes I throw lots away. The paintings that work often happen very quickly. If I work too much on them the surface becomes matt and sticky and I

either chuck them or recycle by scraping off and painting over.

EG:

Editing, is that something you do?

JU:

Like Susie, I do a lot of editing. A lot of work gets chucked out! When making a painting there is also editing taking place on the surface of the canvas - paint put on and a lot taken off!

BH:

Eleanor could you tell us about your process?

BARBARA HOWEY; "Graveyard Girls", oil on board, 40x30cm, 2016



EM:

My process has changed quite a lot. When “Mercy Seat” was painted, I’d be responding to a photo quite directly. The photo was chosen very specifically for something locked within it. It would then involve decisions about scale, cropping, colour range. The actual painting process is almost automatic or trance-like, in silence, thinking and doing simultaneously. Sometimes I would start with a coloured ground, but “Mercy Seat” was white. I did a large number of these. I painted it over and over again. Actually there were two other images of my mother that produced many versions.

Fawzia is part of a shift whereby there is preparatory work, drawings related to the painting. So there’s this idea of the Persian miniature, which is where the garden comes from, and the trio have been placed within it. Because the dynamic of the three people is so important, I didn’t want to break them up, but that is something that I’m doing now, playing quite freely with my sources. This has had two versions.

I spoke recently with someone who said he found what he was painting in the act of painting it, which is a fairly common stance for a painter. For me, it’s a negotiation between the original idea and the process. That will lead you to something different. But there’s something important about the friction created by the unwieldy subject and the endless wieldy paint. Now, the fact that I’ve begun using a process that involves stages and preparatory work, to my friend it looks like it’s no longer an open process, but I think it is. It’s just that it’s broken

down into parts, rather than all taking place on the canvas. The “all taking place on the canvas” idea is very much related to American 1950s painting.

EG:

What about you, Barbara?

BH:

I do edit a lot but it is in the process of making the work, so if it doesn't work when I do it then that's it, I have to throw it away. Sometimes I don't know if it works or not until I come back a day or two later and then I have to scrape it back and start again. The process is about trying to get the fragility of the subject in one go. I also edit out all the background as grey spaces. They are then painted very quickly in about 20 minutes.

RF:

What was the decision to return to monochrome?

BH:

After the death of my husband I had a block for a while. I couldn't find my way through it so I tried different strategies to get going again. I thought I would restrict my palette. I made a lot of black and white gouache paintings of film stills and photographs and this helped. I quite like the idea of this restriction. It is quite good as a painter to have constraints because there is so much choice.

The subject-matter came out of the engagement with black and white as an equivalent to how I was feeling in some ways, a desire to create some kind of order. These works are painted wet in wet which works as a constraint to focus on the moment. It seems important for me to make in that moment.

SH to BH:

I like the way they are painterly and sexy but also death-like, with the ash colour working with grey, black and white.

RF to BH:

I like the way the photographic source in these are quite distanced. They have quite an art historical reference a Watteau perhaps? Or a pastoral scene.

BH:

What I like about the goth women as a subject is that they play with history. They flit between historical moments. I have done paintings based on goths dressed as Victorian and 18th Century women, which gives me room to play with time in terms of the present and art history. The goths are quite knowing in their references to art history; to Pre-Raphaelite painting for example.

EG:

Yes, the figures in the exhibition are mainly women, which is interesting. It just reminds me of a fellow

at Murray Edwards College and all her work is about counter culture, so she talks a lot to her sons about these things, and she bought them to see the collection at the college. Her son asked her if the collection would be full of naked images of men painted by women, since men have so often painted pictures of women naked? But then when he saw the New Hall collection he remarked 'it's full of naked paintings of women, I don't understand'. But I'm interested in the idea of women painting women, which is obviously a completely different dynamic to men painting women.

EG to RF:

Can you talk about the paired images and the fact that they are on the board?



REBECCA FORTNUM: "Untitled I (Prosopopoeia Series)" oil on board, 16x10 inches, 2016

RF:

It's all a bit experimental. I painted the faces first and I have been painting the decorative panels for a while. I wanted to put them together because I wanted a certain blankness, the refusal of the look. I have been working on the double portrait for some time – there's a sense that you might look at one image with one eye and the other image with the other eye and then put them together. You look from one to the other and ask what's the difference between the images. I am interested in the different modes of vision and representation and different modes of painterly encounter.

The boards they are showing on have the potential of a sculpture. I think of the paintings as objects, although probably if I could have drilled into the wall...

I have shown paintings inserted into part of a piano. I had a dream about a painting being inserted into a door and I think that is to do with the image being held within a domestic or architectural space, as a kind of haunting. I am still working out how to do that. I don't think it is entirely successful in this exhibition because the hanging system is too obtrusive but I imagine when I show them again they will be attached to something more physical.

EG:

The symmetry makes me think of the idea of beauty as being a symmetrical face. Probably the sculptures would have been trying to create some kind of beauty with these faces.

RF:

There is something otherworldly about a symmetrical face. You can't always quite put your finger on it straight away.

BH:

I find them quite uncanny they remind me of a zombie life, half alive and half dead.

RF:

I paint them in monochrome as if they are the original marble or whatever and then I add colour like I am rouging the face and putting make up on them which is quite primal.

BH to RF:

I was thinking of those photographic memento mori of dead Victorian children who are often dressed up and posed as if still alive.

RF:

I was drawing children with their eyes closed. It was quite difficult for the parents of those children to look at the drawings because they were like memento mori. When I have been drawing the children I would say to the parents "you might not like the drawings, they might not be how you see your child". But the children have quite an interesting relation to the images of themselves. They ask what

was I thinking? I said, "I don't know. What were you thinking?" The idea that somehow, because I had pictured them with their eyes closed - as if they were dreaming - they thought I knew what they were dreaming of. Which I find fascinating.

EG to LS:

I wanted to come back to you about paintings of children because you have depicted them in lots of your paintings and sometimes in almost death like poses, which is interesting to compare with Rebecca's. How do you feel about your relationship with those pictures, because they get quite dark?

LEXI STRAUSS: "Petite Morte" from the 12 Apostles as Babies, acrylic on canvas, 120x180cm, 2014



LS:

Yes. Those are self portraits- painted at a particularly dark period in my parenting career. It felt as though things were difficult for my child at school, but I also felt personally isolated at the time, which I now see was all due to my own history of being bullied. There's this sense of time moving very quickly- of being on a roller-coaster that won't stop for you, so you just have to keep going with it. I was aware that a child would soon cease to fit this bathtub space in the painting. There's a consistent mourning, which happens throughout their childhood; you know you're losing them to time and the ravages of the world, which runs alongside the sense that you have no control over any of it in the end, I suppose. But the little control that you do have is the ability, I guess, to reflect on what's gone, and to keep moving forward then with some element or knowledge of what's gone. Painting feels to me like a really easy tool for that reflection. There's always that clichéd idea of not being given an individual rulebook for your child, so you have to follow closely where they're going - be very present. Are the decisions I'm making useful to them? I don't know, I'm constantly making choices, making mistakes, but maybe they aren't mistakes in the end if one can maintain a close yet somewhat detached eye upon the journey? The title *Petit Mort* alludes to the small deaths we all experience through painful episodes in our lives- however, the child here is being cleansed by water, not, as initially imagined, in a coffin. In an animated installation version of *The 12 Apostles as Babies*, the child is reified- singing and telling stories of hope.

EG:

I'm also interested if everybody has always painted, or considered themselves a painter.
Have you always painted, Susie?

SH:

Yes, I only work in two dimensions: printing, drawing, painting. I never did sculpture. But after studying painting at St Martin's I gave up for a long time and



JACQUELINE UTLEY: "Kathleen, Alice, Hannah and Mary front room" oil on linen, 20x 30cm, 2015

studied and taught English Literature. The reason for stopping painting (until encouraged to take it up again by my husband who had seen my early work) was the awfulness of the course at St Martins. The tutors didn't believe in teaching or helping students develop. They left you alone and seemed especially to despise painting as if it couldn't express or contain ideas. And then many of the female students were used for sex in an atmosphere of irresponsible debauchery. There were some very talented students

there with me who never picked up a paintbrush again. I look back on St Martins as a place of wasted talent.

JU:

I have worked across mediums. My BA was in painting but like a lot of women at art school during the eighties I questioned whether I should paint. I had my children fairly young and found it difficult to paint, I worked more on a project basis - it might be I just made a daily drawing.

EG:

Did you always think you were going to go back to painting?

JU:

Yes, once my children got to a certain age I was able to start building a painting practice again. For me painting can take over. It demands a lot of time and with small children I just wasn't able to give time to it. The ideal is at least three consecutive days a week in the studio; it's easier to pick up where you left off. I find it difficult when it's disjointed time - a day here and there because of other work and life commitments.

RF:

I aspire to call myself a painter. It always seems slightly out of reach. I have always wanted to be

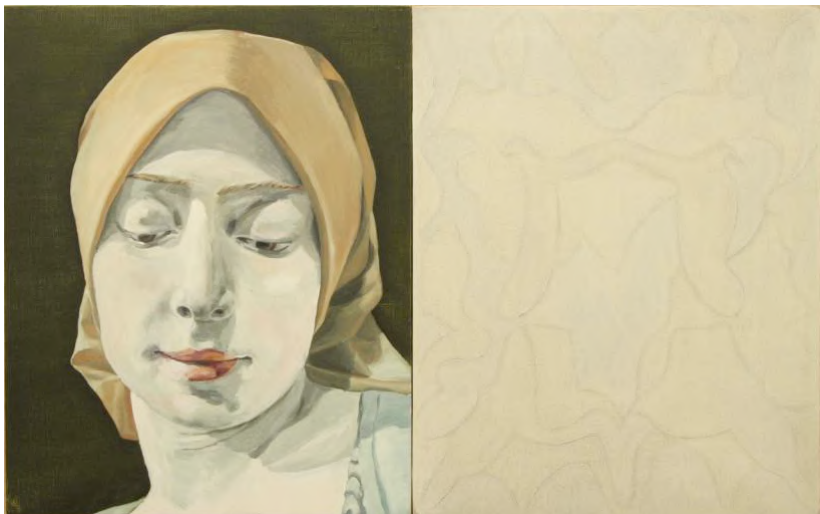
a painter rather than an artist. Sometimes I write and I didn't paint for a while because I was writing. But, for me, there is something about the history of painting and looking at painting that I find completely rewarding and quite extraordinary.

EG to RF:

Did you train as a painter?

RF:

I did a Masters in painting and an undergraduate in literature I have always been writing and painting. When I came back into visual work I ended up drawing because I felt like I had to start somewhere. I love the idea of being specialised and being a painter but I am still working towards it. For me there



REBECCA FORTNUM: "Untitled II (Prosopopoeia Series)" oil on board, 16x10 inches, 2016

was a big question for painting and women in 1986 when I did my Masters. Griselda Pollock said that “painting should be in quarantine” until such a time that it becomes OK to paint again. I think that time is right now right here. I am overwhelmed by the number of women painting at the moment, they still don’t have the coverage or are seen as significant as they should be but it seems to be a really exciting moment.

EG:

Where did the quote from Pollock come from?

RF:

I think it’s in the discussion in “Painting, Feminism and History” (1992). It comes out of a relationship to modernism, a particular moment in Painting’s history. We were talking about gesture which takes on certain types of meaning and you can understand why she said it, but as a painter you had to work your way through it - or that’s how it felt at the time. I don’t think necessarily that people think that now.

EG to RF:

But you also had an academic career?

RF:

Yes sometimes the writing has taken over the painting.

EG:

I feel that in the UK you are only allowed to be one thing. I found that when I went to Hong Kong, I did a dissertation on Chinese Contemporary Art and found Chinese artists write poetry and do other things. There was this idea that you were a creative person, you were an artist, and whatever you do is all right. I feel we are less generous in this country about doing things.

BH:

How about you Eleanor, have you always painted?

EM:

Nearly always. Painting was what I liked doing when I was a little girl. On my Foundation course I hid away in the BA life room, rather than do the different subject areas. On my BA I got lured away into the more progressive sculpture studio and began doing performances. Then I built a tent and used it to paint in! I made a life-sized knitted grandmother out of old woollen vests and painted her. They couldn't stop me, although they tried. In the end I got expelled from the sculpture department and was taken in by the painting department, but I felt humiliated.

BH:

I came quite late to art education in my thirties, I had my son at a fairly young age. I did a BA in Fine Art and then went on to Leeds University to

study Feminism in the Visual Arts with Griselda Pollock. When I did my BA in the late 1980s there was, it seemed to me, no real relationship between painting practice and theory. On the one hand there was studio work and the other there was art history. So going to Leeds gave me the theory, but still the relationship between theory and practice - especially in relation to painting - seemed problematic. I think it was an important time for painting in that the practices and consumption of art were being deconstructed in relationship to theories of spectatorship, the male gaze, bourgeois commodification and the art market. But it was difficult as a female painter to try to position yourself as there were few female role models or a theory of female painting practice. So it took a long while for me to find a way forward as a woman painter. But when I came to do my PhD in the 1990s there were some great women painters emerging. Thérèse Oulton for example and also that's when I saw one of Rebecca's paintings for the first time. It was in a show at the Norwich Gallery called Somatic States and it really impressed me. It seemed a time when painting was becoming owned by a generation of younger women and I found that really motivating.

BH to EM:

Does your work relate to feminist debate/theory?

EM:

My relationship to any theory is ambivalent. And my relationship with anything political is ambivalent.

However, I do consider myself a feminist and I do believe my work is very female. I went to college originally at a time when nobody had many ambitions for women. It was a very uncomfortable time to be a woman artist. The opening up of art history and theory was happening at about this time. That included the realisation that history is subjective; it included a more developed psychoanalytic theory, which I've been interested in. I think of it as a feminisation of the western world. It's been a sea-change. Which for me makes more urgent and painful the huge areas of the world where women and girls are murdered and abused.

I realise that calling something "female" or "feminine" is a problematic area. When I was 30 I felt I didn't know what it was to be female. I was just a person and gender was constructed. Then I began to be curious that there might be something that made me specifically female. I think traditionally people might say having children makes you realise what it is to be female. Of course, I don't feel that's the case. The family and the domestic gets a pretty bad rap in my work. I still feel that to some extent, gender is constructed, but not entirely. But opening up to a feminine quality in myself was just getting in touch with my more loving and empathic parts and that has been a pleasure.

LS:

Actually, my experiences of studying painting at art college here in London only two years ago, were also a bit sobering. It was quite a fight to do the kind of work I wanted to do, this is possibly to do with

the college I was at (the RCA), which I think has a fairly commercial bent. I felt that even many of the female tutors were coming from quite a traditional masculine painter's perspective. Well-meaning tutors who I feel wanted me to get ahead in the industry, told me not to pursue the kind of practice I was developing (emotional work dense with themes such as parenting, babies and education), because people would laugh at me, for example. They didn't always see that that it was meant to be funny and I wanted people to laugh!

RF:

But listening to you all, what comes across is that a certain type of experience in art is not valued by society. Susie's shoppers or the quirky things like goths, these marginalised things. The subject matter that has been important to women at certain times doesn't have value within the art community. We have all mentioned family and children which you couldn't mention ten or twenty years ago.

EG:

So Barbara, would you like to just say why you chose these artists?

BH:

I work outside London and it is important to me to have a dialogue through the painting and the conversations of artists I admire. The main reason for me bringing these artists together is

exactly that. Also there is something in the air at the moment which means there are a lot of very interesting female figurative painters making work. I wanted to find a space to explore some of the possible connections through the work and the lived experiences of these women artists. I am also taking this show out of London and into Suffolk to bring the debate out of London. There are many interesting women painters working in East Anglia at the moment and I also wanted to bring the work and debates to them.

Reference

Pollock, Griselda. (1992) "Painting, Feminism and History", in Phillips, A. and Barrett, M. (eds) *Destabilising Theory*, Polity.

Artist

Biographies

Barbara Howey studied for MA at Leeds University and a PhD at Norwich University of the Arts. Recent exhibitions include Edgelands touring to: A.P.T Gallery, Deptford London 17 November – 11 December (2016), Aberystwyth Arts Centre: 28 January – 18 March (2017), Hartlepool Art Gallery: 27 March – 25 May (2017), Alison Richards Building, University of Cambridge: 1 June – 30 July (2017), Beverley Museum and Art Gallery: 2 September – 14 October (2017), Gloucester City Museum and Art Gallery Mid-October – mid-December (2017). Contemporary British Painting (2016), The West Gallery, Quay Arts Centre, Isle of Wight. John Moores Painting Prize (2014), Contemporary British Watercolour touring exhibition, Maidstone Museum and Bently Art Gallery (2015-2016), Turner in the South, Swindon Museum and Art Gallery. Exeter Phoenix (2010) Barbara has work represented in Madison Museum of art (USA). Swindon Museum and Art Gallery. University of Suffolk. Her work is also published in Sullivan, G. Painting as Research, Sage (2010) and is currently guest editor for the Journal of Contemporary Painting (2017).

Lexi Strauss studied her MA Painting at the Royal College of Art (2012-2014) and a BA Fine Art (1st) at Hereford College of Art (2009-2011).

Recent nominations/awards include: Shortlisted for Catlin Art Prize (2015), John Moores Painting Prize (2014), Jerwood Drawing Prize (2014) and Exeter Contemporary- Audience Choice Award (2014).

Nominated for Saatchi New Sensations (2014) and Shortlisted for New Contemporaries (2013).

She has work represented in the New Hall Art Collection, University of Cambridge and recently completed a Radical Sabbatical residency at the University of Birmingham with Eastside Projects. Lexi lives and works between London and the West Midlands.

Rebecca Fortnum is an artist and academic. She has been a Reader in Fine Art at University of the Arts London, Professor of Fine Art at Middlesex University, London and is currently Professor of Fine Art at the Royal College of Art. Fortnum has received awards from organisations including Pollock-Krasner Foundation, British Council, Arts Council of England, British School in Rome and the AHRC. Her books include, Contemporary British Women Artists; in their own words, and On Not Knowing; how artists think published which she co-edited with Lizzie Fisher. Solo exhibitions include Absurd Impositions, at the V&A's Museum of Childhood (2011), and Self Contained, at the Freud Museum (2013) with an accompanying book published by RGAP. She is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Contemporary Painting which launched in 2014.

Susie Hamilton studied painting at St Martin's School of Art and Byam Shaw School of Art and read English at London University. She is represented by the Paul Stolper Gallery, London. Solo shows include *in atoms*, Paul Stolper (2016), *Here Comes Everybody*, St Paul's Cathedral (2015), *World of Light*, Triumph Gallery, Moscow (2008), *Paradise Alone*, Ferens Art Gallery, Hull (2003). Group shows include Drawing Biennial, Drawing Room, London (2015), John Moores Painting Prize, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (2014, 2004), International Print Biennial, Hatton Gallery, Newcastle (2014), RA Summer Exhibition (2004, 2009, 2014), Jerwood Drawing Prize (2012) and Threadneedle Prize (2014, 2012).

Jacqueline Utley, lives and works in London. Selected group exhibitions include: *Stardust Boogie Woogie*, Monika Bobinska (2010), *Prognostic Bridewell*, APT Gallery (2010), *BLANK PROMISCUITY* part of Deptford X (2012), She was an exhibition finalist in the fringemk painting prize, Milton Keynes (2009). Recent projects include: *Suppose An Eyes* a project devised in collaboration with Lady Lucy and Flora Whiteley (tour) *alpha nova-galerie futura*, Berlin, *Transition Gallery*, London and *Vane*, Newcastle upon Tyne (2013). *Obscure Secure* in collaboration with Hayley Field and Claudia Boese, Wolsey Gallery, Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich (2014). *Nancy's Rooms* (Solo) St Marylebone Crypt, London (2015).

Eleanor Moreton studied painting at Exeter and Chelsea Colleges of Art, and Art History and Theory at UCE. Solo shows include *Im Wartezimmer, I See the Bones in the River* and *Tales of Love and Darkness* at Ceri Hand Gallery (Liverpool and London) and *California Dreaming, Canal* (London), *The Ladies of Shalott*, Jack Hanley (NewYork). Group shows include the John Moores; East International; and *Behind the Mask* at the New Art Gallery, Walsall. International shows include *Make Believe*, Magnus Karlsson Gallery (Stockholm) and *Galerie Vidal St Phalle* (Paris), She was Durham Cathedral Artist in Residence 2007-8. Her work features in *Picturing People* by Charlotte Mullins (Thames and Hudson 2015).

Real Lives

Painted Pictures

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