



JOHN FINNERAN
SELECTED PRESS ARTICLES
&
INTERVIEWS

PINK TOMB

John Finneran in conversation with Laura Copelin

January 11, 2017

LAURA COPELIN: I want to say, first of all, it has been a pleasure to take the time to consider these paintings and to be able to elbow out a space to look deeply and really notice what is going on in this body of work. The book seems to encompass a discrete moment in your practice, from 2012 to 2015 approximately. Do any particular works mark the beginning and end of the series for you?

JOHN FINNERAN: There is a painting that I think of as the beginning, *Restful Spirits (Sunset)*, 2013. This painting was the first full-color version of a composition with three women. Previously they had been mostly black with red figures. They were very graphic, without much atmosphere. *Restful Spirits (Sunset)*, which has the purple background with glowing yellow behind it, was the first painting to push itself somewhere I wasn't expecting while I worked through it. It's the one I think of most often. So much so, that I keep the proportion of that painting in mind and reuse it over and over to attempt to recapture the feeling of making it. It wasn't an idea that I executed, I was totally involved in it.

LC: This is an interesting point of initiation. Is there a work you can point to that marks the end of this investigation?

JF: I think we specifically put *Pink Tomb*, 2015 toward the end of the book. It may be an ending. It was part of the show in Los Angeles, *Dreamers at the Gates of Where Dreamers Are*. When you start you don't have any reference point for what you're about to do, nothing to look back at, so a beginning is clearer to define.



*Restful Spirits
(Sunset),
2013*

LC: You built your own formal vocabulary to fully articulate the paintings. Forms like the female figure and basic geometric shapes – circle, triangle, rectangle – are such a powerful force in the work. Can you describe the most essential forms that emerged while you were working?

JF: In *Restful Spirits (Sunset)* the primary forms were the smallest, most basic things I could think of: the circle is the sun or the moon, the triangle is female anatomy or a pyramid or a mountain. I let the eyes become a bellybutton. All of these forms and meanings are available when you start to work. You see what they become as you make the painting.

LC: There is a lot of repetition, reversal, and re-ordering in the work. How does that function for you? Looking back at the work in total, can you trace how the evolution of these forms took place?

JF: I would still like to know how it all works. It's a very reactive process and all the paintings are reactive in terms of how I am putting the forms together within them. You think the sun is sitting in its place but then later you realize it

belongs somewhere else. In *Restful Spirits (Sunset)*, 2013, the central figure is standing on the sun, she just has a toe on it. It's a simple thing but that meant a lot to me. It showed me how I can move shapes to force the figure out of a static place. That was the start of something. If you had a mountain, and you had a figure standing next to it, then you would need to figure out how that figure would interact with it.

LC: There is this radical presentness in your treatment of color and in the form of your line. The more time I spend with the paintings, the more I think about your remark in an interview about de Kooning, "there is a way in which the de Kooning's can never be resolved – its meaning is within its many meanings."

JF: The idea that you can not resolve something is more interesting. There is a loop you can be in where you have an idea for a painting and you just paint the idea and not that much actually happens. Because you know the whole thing already and there's no surprise to it.

LC: The repetition in the paintings is so primary, but the interrelations of all of these seemingly simple elements creates complex constellations of meaning and composition. Can you speak to this alchemy in the paintings? Where do you feel the source for those compositions is located?

JF: I try to locate it as simply as I can. In a feeling for how the elements touch each other and what kind of space the figures' posture is asking for. I think mood and an emotional aspect can enter the painting in those decisions. Elsewhere I've called it a concentration, or as you've said noticing or presentness. When you're answering a simple question like: "Do I rest my shoulder on this? Or do I not?" You're conveying something very elemental about how you're feeling.

LC: Sometimes you present impossible reversals or impossible positions like with the figures in *Figures in the Dream of the Moon* or *Dream of the Panther*.

The figure is at odd angles, broken up, or is upside-down. It seems important to defy gravity compositionally, to transform the order of the painting, or just to delay our ability to complete the logic of the painting.

JF: That's a nice way to describe the un-logic that developed as I got into the middle of this body of work. It was nice to look at something and say "that doesn't even make sense, how can that possibly be?" Looking at the thing that can't possibly be and thinking where you are in relationship to it, that state was important to me. To look at a thing that you know and think... "I know this figure, I know where the foot should be, where the leg should be, and I see where the foot ends but the in-between is missing..." You know that figure, so the impossibility of the image doesn't stop you, it gives you extra space to think.

LC: It allows you to enter a symbolic realm, a space that is beyond your literal experience of the world. Your titles point to this, so many incorporate words like death, dead spirits, and the dreams of human and nonhuman entities, prompting the viewer to enter the symbolic realm with you.

JF: Those are big mysteries. Dreams are very mysterious and endless to think about, and I feel the same way about death. It is endlessly unknowable within the present, but you know it is a true thing because you know that you dream and you know that there is death. To stand with that distance between something that you know and be with your the lack of understanding about the mechanics of it, I find that calming because I feel like, well, I want to know, so let me think about it for a while. I'm happy to be thinking it through. In the other realm I'm not proposing anything that isn't true in some way and to make it present for you as an image or as a physical presence, allows you to think about those things.

LC: You emphasize 'not-knowing' and forgetting when you talk about making work, which also exists in these spaces of dream, death, and creation.



Dream of the Panther,
2012

You have said before that you don't really remember making the paintings. Although you don't remember making the painting, you are reenacting or remembering certain elements while you're in the process. How does that work?

JF: The aspiration to forget is part of a hope that I haven't predetermined how I'll react to those landmarks as I arrange them. As

if to say "last time I encountered this square next to a leg I felt that a certain decision ought to be made about the space around it, but now I forget what it was." That means I get to make that decision over again. If I had an idea about how I'd react when I started, I wouldn't be bringing the right openness.

LC: There is a freshness in all of these paintings that is so potent. Within the book and in the compositions themselves, you are not necessarily faithful to the "correct" orientation of the paintings or their subjects. Sometimes the figure gets flipped, or in the book format, a painting gets used as a background and/or turned on its side. There are rules of orientation that you are breaking all the time.

JF: Ultimately you are getting one correct picture of every painting in the book, which is even a compromise on my part because the book was not meant to be like that. It was supposed to be a little confusing. I liked this idea that you have expectations when you look at something. Like the desire I have of wanting the painting to be a certain way. I think, "what if I don't give myself this certain way that I want the painting to be?" This disorientation is good if it feels playful as opposed to withholding.

LC: It's like a meditative state, a forgetting or 'not-knowing' that allows you to

enter into a free space. It feels relevant, politically, right now, that art can help us look closer and more critically. Do you think that meditative state allows you to notice with more sensitivity, to see the world in a different way?

JF: You already bring so much to the moment of looking. The goal is to empty your mind a little bit. So I think “how can I get out of the way of all this and not have an idea about what I’m feeling while I’m feeling it?”

LC: Can you talk about the female figure in the paintings and how you are handling a form that has been so frequented and problematized throughout art history?

JF: This is a big subject for me and I have been thinking a lot about it because this book is coming together and the repetition becomes so strong. I had been painting the parts of a face for a while and I think it became inevitable that I paint a full figure. I just would not have been honest with myself if I didn’t try. I painted men at first too but stopped because they just ended up looking like me. I gravitated to the image of a female figure but I never knew who the faces were. I would guess that they are also me, because it is always you in some way. I wondered what is the way that I can make it the least like me? The female figure seemed an obvious answer. I wanted to understand something outside of myself.

LC: The paintings are so archetypal. They allude to representations of women in many different cultures and throughout history. What are you interested in provoking when you’re representing the female figure?

JF: I had this interest in any image that comes to you that is a pre-learning image. For me they were these the circle, square, mountain, triangle. Facial features also fit into that for me. They were simple enough things that you could recognize before you knew their name. When I first started drawing

these figures they were so specific. I couldn’t have actually painted an image of a person that was naturalistic but I felt drawn to paint the figure in this specific way. I think the image has to do with what my pre-understanding of art was before I was old enough to understand what art was conceptually. I’m sure my father and mother would have shown me objects and paintings at museums. I think my first real memory of an artwork is in the courtyard of an apartment complex near where I grew up, in the center of it was a large Picasso sculpture, it was many feet high made of concrete. I remember my father telling me that was art and I accepted that as an image of “art.” And eventually I found it again when I began these paintings.

LC: Trying to get yourself back to these original impressions and what came before the intellect intervened...

JF: Yes. And the female body has loops and moments where one symbol or part of anatomy can be exchanged for another, the triangle can turn into a mountain somewhere in the painting, or it can be genitals in another location. That is a pre-differentiation thing too.

LC: You are accessing the shape when a circle can still be a sun and a spotlight and a head and a number of other things. I want to go back to this question of gender and you being and not being in the paintings. Almost all the paintings are of female forms, except *Dream of the Spirits with Night* and *Sunset with the Sea*, where, maybe I’m just projecting, but I get this sense of a gender transformation occurring. There is a half figure without defined genitalia and a female figure in shadow, then this interstitial space between them... These female bodies feel powerful, repeated again and again like an invocation. They are grounded, their feet are flat and their posture is strong.

JF: I think I am painting an image that I’m impressed by and drawn towards. I said disarmed before but I am also in awe. My internal sense of landscape

is related more to the inside of a museum, to the paintings I grew up seeing in New York, than nature. But that feeling of being in an overwhelming landscape that pauses your humanity for a minute, of seeing something that is overwhelming and beautiful but connects you to yourself and your sense of home. I think that is what I am looking at when I look at these figures. I am looking at the ocean or a mountain range in really beautiful light.

LC: A lot of these colors are sunrise and sunset colors. The body becomes the landscape or the body and the landscapes are interchangeable. I feel so much generosity in the paintings, can you speak a bit about that?

JF: A long time ago I made a painting that I saw completed at a gallery. I recognized that the energy in it was competitive and angry. I had made something, that wasn't a generous thing. I think only I saw this but I felt sad about it. I felt like I didn't want that to be what I put into the world. That was the start of a long process of questioning every decision I put into the painting. I know that's vague but I was searching for that angry feeling, trying to root it out. I felt like if anger was getting in there, then I have to examine all of it, everything that was in there, I have to go back to zero. As I made decisions in the painting, I had to make sure they are decisions I feel good about. I want to make sure the feeling I want to give is in the painting I'm making.

LC: It's so interesting to hear how you recognized that you were transmitting information or a state of mind that you didn't want to put into the world.

JF: I'm really glad that I had that experience. Right now we are talking about the image of women in my work because I want to know everything that I am saying about that. I don't want to find that I have been ignoring something or letting myself not think about something. There are parts of this body of work that confuse me still. Sometimes you don't want to look. But I feel like that is what I'm doing now. I'm trying to look.



Angel,
2013

LC: Looking at the book, do you get a sense, overall, of the information that you are transmitting about the female figure? Is there anything that you notice now?

JF: I think I notice recognizing myself in the faces. I used to have this process of painting the faces and trying to make them as blank as possible or so

I thought. In a lot of ways I was reaching a default image of myself, they looked enough like shapes that were familiar from my face that I thought that they were blank. Secondly, the binary that I was describing before of that not being me, I think it's something I can try to understand better. There are so many feelings you can have towards a person. I'm trying to understand if there's part of me that is comfortable with expressing warmth towards this female image that wouldn't be as natural to me if it were male. It is not how I feel in my actual life, but it is true of my concept of these images. I wonder where I can go. I feel warmth and love toward my male and female friends equally, it's not a gendered feeling. Why would it be gendered as an image?

LC: In talking it over, the idea of you being the female figure even as it defines itself as not you, now seems so obvious since this book is titled *Eye, Eye, Eye*. There is this repeated assertion of subjectivity under a different shape.

JF: I wanted to call it *I, I, I* but no one would read it that way! Everyone would think that it just says one, one, one. It is true that there is this thing where it is ultimately all me.

LC: Can you talk about your palette a little, where does your sense of color come from?

JF: There are couple practical decisions that are involved. Mostly it is just red,

yellow, and blue. I am happy with that concept. I like the simplicity of just those three colors black and white. I found that I gravitated to these specific kinds of red, yellow and blue because there was a warm feeling in them for me.

LC: For me the colors communicate the emotional weather of a painting. The feeling tone is another way to say it, in the language of dream interpretation. This palette is so full of those feeling tones. They indicate if it is morning or evening, night or day – you get a spectrum of very specific times of day through these colors.

JF: I think that I try to have all the colors be present at once in the paintings. If you looked really closely you could see there were very light glazes under everything. That is the way that I kind of mimic light. By trying to present a full spectrum across the whole painting but then emphasizing different colors to make an image.

LC: You see that in the painting *Tomb*, 2013. Looking now at *Tomb* and the painting *Goin' Home*, 2015, the compositional similarities create a circular association. We've found ourselves at the heart of it! *Tomb* and *Home* are directly connected. And there is this childlike rendering of the roofline and what appears to be an open door or a threshold...

JF: It is just so existential. What is in there? That is the question. The root of that question though? I don't even know what that is or what I was thinking about.

LC: I think the paintings teach us that what is in there is what is on the surface. The feeling tone of the painting is there – that particular salmon color and the



Tomb,
2013



Goin' Home,
2015

JF: I think you are right and I'm almost satisfied that it is just there. I don't actually want to go through. I'm interested in its presence.

LC: This existential contemplation of the ultimate end, death, seems balanced out by the repetition of the female figure and the moon that both emphasize cycles and continuity. Both cycles and ends are very relevant to what we're talking about. The painting *Heaven* has all sorts of doorways or portals, one is even directly connected to the vagina, then there is an infinity symbol that is reflected in the breast and symmetry of the body.

I'm going out on a limb, but talking about these openings gets me thinking about a secret hope I have; that the ascendance of image-based culture via the internet could return human perception to a wholistic, all-at-once apprehension that is more yin, as opposed to linear, codified, vector-like logic at the heart of a culture based on the written word, which helped establish patriarchal dominance. Everything in politics right now is screaming in the opposite direction, but my hope is that we are moving towards a more feminine or yin consciousness, powered by the prevalence of images and video as the dominant means of communication.

JF: I think I was worried in looking at these things as a whole and even

mountainous purple-blue and the overlay of the yellow on pink. As existential as the investigation is, the surfaces of the paintings are saturated with meaning, color, and information.

describing this process to you that this was going to be something passive. The paintings were going to be something passive. I think there is this passive collection of information happening that is trying not to be ordered by an internal priority system. It's just a collection of things I am seeing visually and thinking "that may be true" so I pass it on. That is an alternative to the type of painting that I grew up with in grad school. Where paintings need to have a hypothesis which creates a very directed experience for whoever is looking at it. That never struck me as a very generous idea. I'm into your concept and I hope that this idea of the process as passive turns out to be a misinterpretation on my part. That there is real value in approaching information that way.

LC: Passivity is often used pejoratively but it is about accepting or allowing things to happen. I believe that art and artists are so important because culturally, they dream, re-imagine the world, and in doing so, manifest change. I think the way we are all going to evolve is by dreaming, but this could be seen as passive too. Really, it is a political act, to conceive of another reality and bring it into existence, to make your dream real. Cultural and political leaders help the public dream. That is the art of being an orator or a poet or a revolutionary, any kind of visionary, having the capacity to bring people along in your dream. It's so nice that many of these paintings have the word 'dream' in the title or illustrate different beings' dreams.

JF: I think all of this could be true. The idea is wonderful and simple – that you can think of something you want to do or the way you want to act towards the world or the people you care about, and you can just do it. It can be difficult to make that change but it is always available to us. You have to have a moment where you are able to see it and feel it but it is right there.

John Finneran

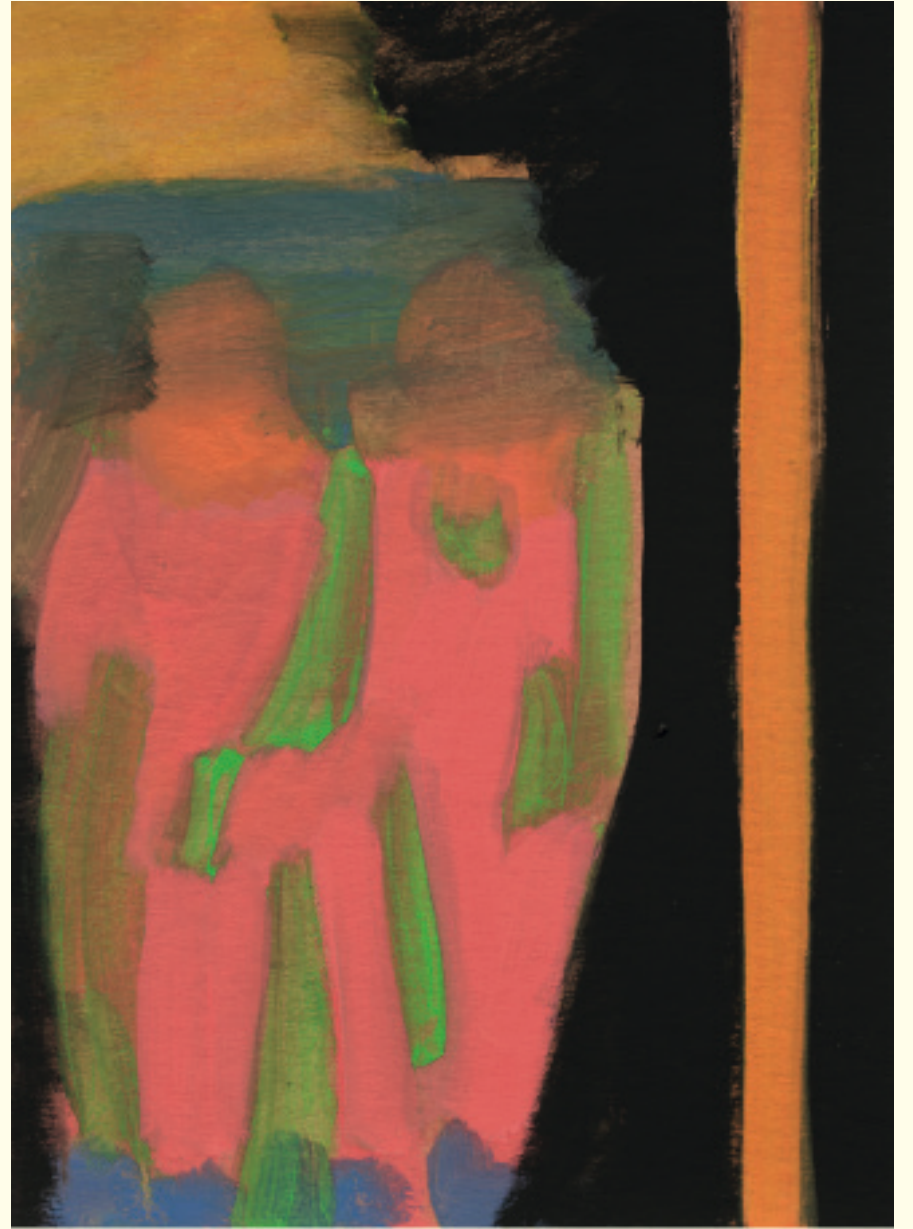
*Artiste, né en 1979, vit et travaille à Los Angeles,
www.thisisarcade.art*

Raiders,
the fire is the hills when the lights turn pink.
Silver lightning and the sound of concrete resting on itself.
Dry lightning or the thunder storm in March that was the first time I heard it,
loud footsteps over the sound of whoever we're running from,
Raiders.

Los Angeles, July 11th, 2019



P. 9-11 : *Raiders 1-2-3*, huile sur carton,
25 x 18 cm chaque, John Finneran
pour *The Drawer*, 2019.



Interview with John Finneran | Arcade, London

I think all the paintings are personal. They are all built out of what I'm able to feel while I'm making them. So I'd rather say that the newest works are part of a process of eliminating reference that isn't based in an emotion.

**giugno 1, 2016
ATPdiary**

*You dreamed of the woman between
the river and the sun and the rock
Then I thought of the mountain
and next to the mountain was the sun
and the sun was held by the woman from between the river and the sun
and the rock
In the dream there were figures in the water
and when it was cool they came out to the beach
This was dreamed many times
and when you dreamed it you were peaceful*

John Finneran, 2015

For his second solo exhibition at Arcade titled 'A Figure Searching Day and Night', John Finneran (US, 1979) presents his new body of works. ATPdiary, in collaboration with Giulia Ponzano, asked the artist some questions.

Giulia Ponzano: Your early works employed various mediums in the production of paintings, objects and assemblages with a more figurative child-like aesthetic. In the past few years, these interests evolved into a focus on paintings and your works became

complicated through an emphasis on compositions: lips, eyes, noses, female figures, circles, crescents and triangles are recurrent motifs. The same iconography and symbolism remain in your works from 2016, but shapes are abstracted by degrees and simplified. Though these ambiguous forms and enigmatic compositions on the canvas seemingly reflects your thoughts – Can these new series be considered as more ‘personal’?

John Finneran: I think all the paintings are personal. They are all built out of what I'm able to feel while I'm making them. So I'd rather say that the newest works are part of a process of eliminating reference that isn't based in an emotion. The eye is a good way to explain this because it's the most illustrative. When I first used that symbol, a line drawing of an eye, it was very broad. I could attach a lot of emotion to it because it's a direct way to reference a person, or a mirrored self. But it's also a symbol for "eye." So it has a lot of baggage about line and representation, and so many other meanings related to it. All this knowledge leads to interpretations that get in the way of what I really want which is a space for feeling. So I hope I'm getting closer, uncluttering everything.

GP: There isn't a clear meaning in your paintings: forms are recognisable, but these can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Compositions contain more than what is visibly present, they seem like puzzles that can never be resolved. Do they give any answers/ solutions to us? Or the answer lies in the incomprehensible?

JF: If I thought there was an answer in the work it would be found in my biography, but that's just not something I'm interested in because of how many doors it closes. I can connect some paintings to events in my life or places I've been and that would be an answer or a meaning but it wouldn't have anything to do with why I made the painting. I'm more interested in the emotion and feeling in the paintings because you can share that with the viewer. The reason doesn't matter, because it's different for me than it is for you, what matters is the depth of it and recognising something that we share. Ultimately I don't believe in answers, I aspire not to believe in answers.

GP: Christian and Egyptian mythology, the celestial and esoteric: who else has been your major influences? Do you have any musically as well?

I remember wondering why in my mind the simplest image of a woman is so Egyptian looking, only in profile...I'm guessing because that's the type of image with the least other information in it. I saw those pictures early enough in my life that I don't associate them with anything too distracting, they're 'pure'. I'm trying to go further back, to before the first trip to the museum and figure out what those images are. As far as music, I think it's free jazz and doom/drone metal. I think the overwhelming amount of aural information in there cancels out my thoughts in a way that I like. But I love country music too, which contradicts the idea I just proposed. I'll say jazz and metal at the beginning, honky tonk music for the finishing touches.

GP: Looking at '3 Noses, 3 Mouths' (2012), 'Eyes' (2016) or 'Hands' (2016) – you visually isolate four of the senses in light black outlines – juxtaposing multiple sensory organs: what is the meaning of this repetition?

JF: This is more cancelling. The repetition adds the impossibility of it being one specific figure.

GP: 'Dreamer, Dreaming Day and Night', 'Day', 'A Figure Searching day and Night'... lightness and darkness, day and night are the backgrounds on which the sensory organs are lying – The moon, the sun and the stars truly mark the passage of time. What is its function/role in relation to our perception?

JF: I'm adding a kind of repetition to the whole of my body of work by using day and night as thematic and compositional anchors for the paintings. There's definitely something to the idea that different areas of emotion seem available or more likely at different times of day and night, and that can establish the mood of a particular painting. But I think in my work repetition is there to reinforce the insignificance of those details. You can say "oh this one's at night" and that could mean that you start interpreting from there, from "night". But the next painting is "day" and then "night" again in the next one. Just like for us, it's actually either day or night. I'm interested in any moment during which we recognise ourself

in relation to what we're looking at, more than just what you're looking at.



Installation view A Figure Searching Day & Night, Arcade, London 2016 – Image credit courtesy of Arcade, London.

Intervista con John Finneran | ARCADE, Londra

In occasione della seconda mostra personale intitolata 'A Figure Searching Day and Night' nella galleria londinese Arcade, **John Finneran** (US, 1979) presenta il suo nuovo corpus di opere.

ATPdiary, in collaborazione con Giulia Ponzano, ha posto alcune domande all'artista.

GP : I tuoi primi lavori adottavano vari media nella produzione di dipinti, oggetti e assemblages e l'estetica che li caratterizzava era infantile e più figurativa. Negli ultimi anni, questi interessi si sono focalizzati sulla pittura e i tuoi lavori sono diventati più complessi tramite composizioni astratte formate da vari frammenti che sono poi diventati motivi ricorrenti: labbra, occhi, nasi, figure femminili, cerchi, mezzelune e triangoli. Le stesse iconografia e simbologia

seguono nelle tue opere del 2016, ma le forme sono più astratte e semplificate. Queste figure ambigue ed enigmatiche sembrano riflettere i territori della tua mente – in particolare quest’ultima serie, però, può essere considerata come più ‘personale’?

JF : Credo che tutti i dipinti siano personali. La materia di cui sono composti è ciò che provo mentre sto creando. Quindi, direi che i lavori più recenti rientrano in questo processo di eliminazione dei riferimenti che non si basano sulle emozioni. Provo a spiegarlo usando la figura dell’occhio: quando all’inizio ho usato questo simbolo, il suo significato era vago e nebuloso. Attribuisco a esso un grande valore emozionale perché è direttamente collegabile a una persona oppure a un riflesso del sé. Però è anche un simbolo in quanto ‘occhio’: quindi apporta un bagaglio proprio legato alla linea, alla rappresentazione e ci suggerisci vari altri significati legati ad esso. Credo che tutti questi pensieri conducano ad un allontanamento da ciò che sto cercando di raggiungere, ovvero la pittura come spazio per i sentimenti. Quindi, eliminando tutti questi ragionamenti, spero di avvicinarmi a esso.

GP : Non c’è un significato chiaro nei tuoi quadri: le forme sono riconoscibili, ma queste possono essere interpretate in diversi modi. Le tue composizioni contengono più di ciò che sia visibilmente presente, sembrano puzzle che non possono mai essere risolti. Ci forniscono una risposta o una soluzione? O la risposta risiede nella loro incomprensibilità??

JF : Se ci fosse una risposta nel mio lavoro questa potrebbe risiedere nella mia biografia; ma questo discorso è? qualcosa a cui non sono interessato, in quanto limitativo. Posso collegare alcuni dipinti a eventi della mia vita o a luoghi che ho visitato; questo potrebbe essere considerato come una risposta o un significato, ma non avrebbe nulla a che vedere con il motivo per cui ho creato l’opera. Sono più interessato all’emozione e al sentimento presenti nella pittura, perché si possono condividere con lo spettatore. La ragione non ha importanza, perché è diversa per me da quanto possa esserlo per te, ciò che conta è la sua profondità e l’identificarsi in qualcosa che condividiamo. In definitiva non credo alle ‘risposte’, non aspiro a credere alle risposte.

GP: La mitologia cristiana ed egizia, il celestiale e l'esoterico: quali altre sono state le tue principali influenze? Hai anche alcune ispirazioni musicali?

JF: Mi sono sempre chiesto perché nella mia mente l'immagine più semplice di una donna somigli così tanto a quella di una Egizia, entrambe delineate di profilo... Probabilmente perché questo è il tipo di immagine che fornisce il minimo di informazioni possibili. Sono venuto a contatto con queste figure nei primi anni della mia vita, sono immagini 'pure' che non associo a null'altro. Sto cercando di scavare a ritroso, a un tempo antecedente alla mia prima visita al museo, e di capire il significato di queste figure.

Per quanto riguarda la musica, dico il free jazz e doom/drone metal. La straordinaria quantità di informazioni sonore annullano i miei pensieri in un modo che mi piace. Ma apprezzo anche la musica country, che contraddice l'idea che ho appena proposto. Direi jazz e metal all'inizio di un lavoro, la musica honky tonk per gli ultimi ritocchi.

GP : Osservando '3 Noses, 3 Mouths' (2012), 'Eyes' (2016) or 'Hands' (2016), isoli visivamente quattro dei nostri organi di senso con contorni neri leggeri, giustapponendo queste parti una vicina all'altra: qual è il significato di questa ripetizione?

JF: La ripetizione ha maggior potere di annullare, aggiunge l'impossibilità di delineare una figura specifica.

GP : 'Dreamer, Dreaming Day and Night', 'Day', 'A Figure Searching day and Night' ... la luce e l'oscurità?, il giorno e la notte sono gli sfondi su cui posizioni le tue forme e figure – La luna , il sole e le stelle presenti nei tuoi quadri scandiscono veramente il passare del tempo. Qual è la funzione / il ruolo del tempo in relazione alla nostra percezione?

JF: Usando il giorno e la notte come ancoraggi tematici e compositivi, aggiungo una sorta di ripetizione a tutto il mio corpus di opere. Sicuramente dal giorno e dalla notte scaturiscono differenti emozioni e sono questi sentimenti a delineare l'atmosfera di un particolare dipinto. Credo, però, che nel mio lavoro il susseguirsi del giorno e della notte sia lì per rafforzare l'insignificanza di questi dettagli. Si può dire: 'oh questo è una figura di notte', di conseguenza si inizia a interpretare da lì, dal

momento 'notte' . Ma nel dipinto successivo è 'giorno' e poi 'notte' di nuovo. Esattamente come si alternano per noi la luce e l'oscurità?. Sono interessato a quegli istanti in cui, nell'osservare qualcos'altro, riconosciamo noi stessi, più che il concentrarsi sull'oggetto di per se?.



Installation view A Figure Searching Day & Night, Arcane, London 2016 – Image credit courtesy of Arcane, London.



John Finneran -The Home Where I'm Found, 2016 Image credit courtesy of Arcade, London

<http://atpdiary.com/john-finneran-arcade-london/>

Chasing the Mystic: An interview with painter John Finneran

Art — 11.08.16

Words: Molly Taylor

All works courtesy of Arcade, London



Dreamer Dreaming Day And Night (2016), oil and crayon on linen

Your works have distinct colour palettes: dusty pinks, deep blues, and a striking use of black. How did this signature develop?

I both hate and love when artists go on about this... but I have synesthesia. I have a range of physical sensations tied to these specific colors and their interaction. It's another way of saying that I'm just wired for these colors. In the past, I've tried to have a more inclusive relationship to color. I prefer the more physical and genuine connection I have to these few specific colors.



Day (2016), oil and crayon on linen

It seems as though the human body – especially the female body – is important to you.

I think about this a lot, especially lately as I've wanted to see the drawing evolve in my work. I started painting symbols connected to the body first: eyes and noses and mouths. As I got deeper into those paintings I realized I was heading towards the challenge of looking at a whole figure. Like how was I going to go from looking at a one-on-one type of interaction with a symbol to looking at a group, usually 3 figures, interacting? At first, I did paint men and women, but I found that the men all came out looking like me and that didn't satisfy me. It wasn't the subject I was looking for. I wanted to search for a way of looking at the interaction between the self and another, not myself and myself. So the most natural way to make it clear that it wasn't me was to paint women. Now years later I'm looking more closely at what the implications of that binary are. I'm pushing the figures to be more gender neutral.

I'm trying to get to a place where I can make room for emotional interaction. Within the relationship between men and women in painting, there is a whole lot more subject matter that I'm not necessarily interested in. I've felt that people who spend time with my work can sense that I'm interested in a platonic, emotional space. It's, of course, very connected to physicality, posture, and the body in the way that informs emotion. I think deeply about whether I'm reaching that subject. I feel a responsibility to interrogate my work and be honest about what's there.

I'm curious about the mystical elements in your work, particularly the recurring motif of the eye and the many titles that refer to 'spirits'. Can you tell us about these?

I think searching for a mysterious place like the eye, or whichever place spirits are, makes me feel more open. At work, I'm mostly pushing myself to be in a place where I don't have



The Home Where I'm Found (Ocean) (2016), oil and crayon on linen

any answers. Hopefully to learn something about what I'm feeling, or to see what I'm doing without judging it simultaneously. I love that disarming feeling of concentrating on your own eye in the mirror or looking directly into someone else's eyes. I'm interested in the mysticism of not knowing anything.

Some of your paintings are reminiscent of Egyptian hieroglyphs: bodies in rows, suns, gods – that type of thing. Are you interested in this period of history?

I wonder a lot where that comes from. I'm sure I went the Met in NY to see the mummies and stuff when I was little. I assume that deep in there I'm drawing on those memories. The way I understand it is that I'm just going back to an image I have in my mind that doesn't have too many analytical thoughts attached to it. As if you ask yourself a question like, 'what painting did I see before I knew the word painting?' But really, I don't know! I said to myself: paint a woman as simply as you can without thinking, and this is what came out. I prefer to leave it mostly as it is. I think you can change the application and intention of the images that form the core of your memories but the images themselves are more or less set. My work is formed out of those images. And it's incredibly fun for me to rearrange them, look at them, and wonder what I meant when I absorbed them.

What would you say the mood of your paintings are? Even though many of them depict fragmented bodies and are actualised in intense colours, a lot of them seem to possess (for me at least) a deep, radiating calm.

I hope so! I think everything I do, the repetition, the glowing colors, the returning posture of the figures is pointing towards a kind of calm. It's very difficult to see things clearly but it's a dream of mine, I think that's what I'm working on.



Eyes (2016)

<http://www.teethmag.net/molly-taylor-interview-john-finneran/>



Photo: Max Fargo

Artist's Favourites—Darren Bader

The power of staring: the more you stare, the more you (can) stare. Images: things to stare at. With images there's some implied injunction against touching. *Noli me tangere* says the image, says some resurrected Lord, says the butterfly (well, maybe not the butterfly as much). Imago is Latin for imitate. Staring is imitation – the image is our body outside of ourselves. Intimation: don't touch, lest you vanish. Being intimate with one's eyes only. That being said, here's my Hollywood (fickleness):

Die Macht des Anstarrens: je mehr man anstarrt, umso mehr starrt man an. Bilder: Dinge zum Anstarren. Bilder sollen nicht berührt werden. »Noli me tangere« sagt das Bild, sagt irgendein auferstandener Herr, sagt der Schmetterling (na ja, der vielleicht nicht so sehr). Imago ist das lateinische Wort für Nachahmung. Anstarren ist nachahmen – das Bild ist unser Körper außerhalb von uns selbst. Eine Ahnung: nicht berühren, sonst verschwindest du noch. Intimität nur mit den Augen. Jedenfalls ist das hier mein Hollywood (Laune des Schicksals):

JOHN FINNERAN

A person in the flesh: John Finneran, a person whose hand I often shake. A person who cares about things that I care about: painting (i.e., the historicizing act thereof), literature, pictures, devotion, emotion, austerity, clarity. Much like the best pictures of the high Avant-garde, from mid-Manet to late-Mondrian, John's work is about a world of color, about a world of line, about a world of paint-as-trueground; there is the magic of the picture, the appearance of the Other Side on the face



Lion at Rest, 2012
Tempera on linen / Tempera auf Leinen
102 x 86 cm
Courtesy the artist and 47 Canal Street, New York
SPIKE 35 — 2013 Artist's Favourites—Darren Bader

Ein leibhafter Mensch: John Finneran gebe ich oft die Hand. Uns sind die gleichen Dinge wichtig: Malerei (der Vorgang ihrer Historisierung), Literatur, Bilder, Hingabe, Gefühl, Ernst, Klarheit. Ganz wie bei den besten Bildern der Avantgarde, vom mittleren Manet zum späten Mondrian, dreht sich Johns Arbeit um eine Welt der Farbe, eine Welt der Linie, eine Welt von Farbe-als-wahrer Malgrund; es geht um die Magie des Bildes, das Auftauchen der »Anderen Seite« an der Oberfläche der Malerei. Wir haben gelernt wie man ein Bild

of the painting. We have learned to look at a painting; we have learned to love that looking-at; we come to love certain things about painting(s); the love runs very deep. I could mention Laura Owens' recent work, but John's work has a cool (like a breeze, not like a person) melancholy that makes me more at home. I like home. The history of painting is my home. John's a good host. **1979 in New York City, lives in New York City*

betrachtet, haben gelernt dieses Betrachten zu lieben. Wir beginnen manches an Malerei(en) zu lieben. Die Liebe ist sehr tief. Ich hätte Laura Owens' jüngste Arbeiten erwähnen können, aber Johns Arbeiten sind von einer kühlen (wie eine Brise, nicht wie ein Mensch) Melancholie, in der ich mich mehr zu Hause fühle. Ich mag das Zuhause. Die Geschichte der Malerei ist mein Zuhause und John ist ein guter Gastgeber. **1979 in New York City, lebt in New York City*

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

Juni 2013 23. Jahrgang Heft 90
€ 15,- [D] / \$ 25.-

TEXTE ZUR KUNST Juni 2013 23. Jahrgang Heft 90

Wie wir arbeiten wollen
How we want to work

WHO KNOWS NOTHING?

**Adrienne Rooney on John Finneran
at 47 Canal, New York**

We were greeted by lips and noses, but no eyes. The eyes were in the back gallery, keeping watch at the periphery from a small painting titled “Holy Spirits” (all works 2012). They viewed the entrance to 47 Canal and looked out through the windows. When given form in language, the body is often fragmented. For instance, we locate pain through description and speak of specific sensory organs as they take in the world on behalf of the mind. Representing the body in fragments draws attention to each part as a sign for its function. John Finneran visually isolated three of the senses, in light black outlines of their anatomical origin, and in so doing persuaded viewers to consider their own. The painting of lips and noses is titled “3 Noses, 3 Mouths” – only the eyes, which observed the main room from the fringe, are holy.

The exhibition “Goin’ Home” included a total of six paintings in the main gallery. Each recalls familiar symbols such as ancient Egyptian figures, but the artist tweaks these symbols to match his overall aesthetic language. The works are neither historical representations nor imitations of history but a collective reurning of styles. For instance, “Restful Spirits (Sunsets)” depicts three nude women, one of whom is upturned. These spirits recall the three graces, and if that is indeed what they are, they give a nearly life-size form to an otherworldly interpretation: Goddesses all but neon pink in skin tone, with purple locks and matching triangular pubic hair. The woman in the center rests her left foot on a sun the size of a soccer ball, but not so as to balance; the spirits don’t need to stand on anything to hold their vertical posture. If there is a narrative here, it may

be read through symbols, or perhaps in Finneran’s choice to use them at all. There is a sense that although the eyes are holy, the paintings contain more than is visibly present.

In earlier examples of his writings, available on his website, Finneran considered his canvases as territories for his mind externalized, referencing the capacity of symbolism and iconography to contain psychological and emotional information. Previously, he circuitously delineated the narratives behind his works and their motifs. However, with “Goin’ Home” he refused to provide the “expected” textual apparatus indicating to viewers how the works should be understood. Instead, he joined the increasing number of artists choosing to use the press release as a space for layering on meaning not otherwise present in the exhibition in a concrete way. Finneran wrote a diary-like entry about his hesitant relationship with a free jazz album by Albert Ayler, from which he derived the exhibition’s title. An abstract form of music that, like traditional jazz, prioritized the expression of the performing musician over the exact voice of the composer, free jazz promoted the presence of the personal through interpretation and improvisation.

Finneran’s visual language combines symbols from everyday life with images firmly embedded in an art viewer’s visual vocabulary. In this exhibition, tumbled forms from and beyond the art historical canon populated the galleries as leitmotifs among the works. In this group of paintings, Finneran engaged with inescapably mysterious and arguably spiritual signs, such as basic shapes, strong coloration, goddesses, isolated corporeal forms, the celestial and esoteric. In “Spirit Kneeling Beneath the Moon”, composed in shades of blue, the spirit kneels upside down



John Finneran, "Goin' Home", 47 Canal, New York, 2013, exhibition views

with feet toward the sky. The moon appeared several times in works throughout the space, often in place of heads. It was an icon of sorts in “Study for the Altar with St. John”, in which purple unevenly flanks a central pink color panel, the three segments roofed by dripping black. A study for a space of religious offerings, it is simultaneously a stage – with the set being a lemon-yellow crescent moon, translucent in a pink sky. Finneran provided abstract visuals for ineffable themes, some of which have been “mimetically” rendered in the past. We were greeted by mystery uncoded; although Finneran refused to profess the subtext of his paintings, he did nothing less than allow them to speak directly to the eyes. And as is often the case with abstract painting, these works surface from and appeal to the emotions, though not necessarily freed from intellect.

Although Finneran’s forms are recognizable, their signification is not clear, and I mean this in the best possible sense. For while the paintings may be interpreted in a variety of ways, it is essential to note that his exploration of history deals more with the personal engagement with vestiges of the past than with the pedagogical construct of historical knowledge. I, for one, have been taught that the sun has personified truth (all is revealed in light) – in Christian mythology it was made, along with the moon and the stars, on the fourth day of creation. Day and night represent powers of ruin that ceaselessly mark the passage of time. I could posit that “Holy Spirits” is a flock of the Eye of Horus, an enigmatic sign of protection in ancient Egypt that saw everything. But all of this is somehow inconsequential – I know that what I saw was *seeing*, not knowing. Feeling discouraged about his generation, Francis Picabia once wrote, “Even so, I still have hopes

that nothing has yet ended; there remain myself and a few friends who have a love of life, a life of which we know nothing, and which interests us for this very reason.”¹ This could also be said of history. That we know nothing, perhaps as little as we know of now, and that that’s part of the pleasure in looking back. The object we faced in “Goin’ Home” was history, well, its remnants, as seen by the eye, holy or not. And the politics of the past floated into the room in a playful way just long enough to confuse the viewer into thinking he knew what was up or down, sacred or secular, mysterious or nothing – or both.

John Finneran, “Goin’ Home”, 47 Canal, New York, February 27–April 7, 2013.

Note

- 1 Francis Picabia, “Francis merci!” (1923) in: same, *I am a Beautiful Monster: Poetry, Prose, and Provocation*, transl. by Marc Lowenthal, Cambridge, Mass./London 2007, pp. 299–300.