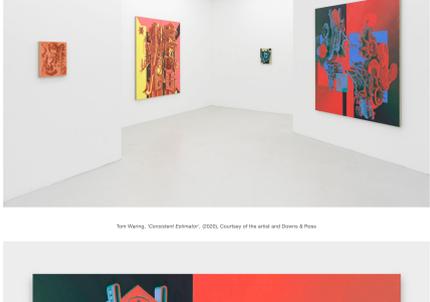




ACCESS TO ART: TOM WARING

Museums and galleries have been closed for over two months in the UK. However this restriction on our access to art and culture has not only affected the UK, it has affected cultures and communities all over the world. This includes New York, where British artist Tom Waring opened his first solo exhibition 'Consistent Estimator' (1st March - 25th May) at Downs & Ross, just one week before the entire city went into lockdown.

Upon the white walls of a New York gallery, the paintings of 'Consistent Estimator' appear like windows into an alternate surreal world. We recognise motifs within the paintings, yet their reality feels somewhat distorted from our own. A hybrid of its own making, these paintings have a lyrical quality and a story of their own to tell. Providing further insight into his work, Waring shares with us the origins of his practice, the methodologies that have influenced his work and his reflections on the need to experience art within the physical space.



Tom Waring, 'Consistent Estimator', 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Downs & Ross



Tom Waring, 'Slusher', 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Downs & Ross

**GS: The compositions within your work appear otherworldly yet adopt iconography from the real world. Where do you find inspiration and what role does imagination have in the creation and application of your work?**

TW: "Beyond the writings and artworks that have helped me formulate my own opinions about painting in a broad sense, there aren't specific go-to places that I turn towards to directly inform what happens when I'm in the studio. What helps me find the next stage of a painting is the material already on the canvas. I also don't think that my process relies on imagination in the conventional sense either. Not in the sense that imagination comes before materialising that imagination. My process would be better described as being the other way around, of me having faith that if I keep paint moving, if I keep materialising, then the canvas does much of the imagining for me."

**GS: The paintings and theology of Dana Schutz and Nigel Cooke have been influential on your practice. What is it about their work that interests you?**

TW: "My interest in their work is more theoretical and has helped me build my own attitude towards painting in the early stages of my MFA (Waring studied MFA Fine Art at UAL Wimbledon College of Arts). Their work is narrative driven, but usually revolves around narratives that are bound to painting, and can only exist in painting. Schutz's 'Face-water' series is a great example, which uses the convention of a sitter in a portrait. The subject is devouring itself, which by extension is the point of making the painting in the first place. The more complete the painting gets the further the destruction goes. I think both Schutz and Cooke touch upon this futility, pointlessness, difficulty and destructive nature of making a painting, and somehow manage to make this the reason to carry on, and not just that, but the overall subject of their work."

**GS: Have you found inspiration in any other art practices or artists?**

TW: "Most of the artists that I have been drawn to have no immediate visual resemblance to my work, however I have over time looked to these artists for answers on a variety of questions. Johnathan Lasker is a painter I really admire. As well as Philip Taaffe, Graham Sutherland, Selma Parour and the sculptors Richard Tuttle, Helen Marten and Magi Reus."

**GS: You mention how the work of Schutz and Cooke is narrative driven. What is the role of narrative within your practice?**

TW: "I think the closest one can get to a narrative in my work is the narrative of their own making. I start with the premise that paint wants to become an image, for I can't look at paint and only see paint. It's historical legacy as a material, originally and primarily developed, to transform concepts into something else is a bizarre and compelling property. It's this transformation from slippery mud to image that underpins much of what I do, and from there this narrative of painting, or meta-narrative opens up other doors."



Tom Waring, 'Slusher', 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Downs & Ross



Tom Waring, 'Rider', 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Downs & Ross

**GS: 'Consistent Estimator' features paintings titled, 'Hutch Skutch Skoa', 'Oolow' and 'Ezeleub Pip'. What are the origins of these titles and how are they developed?**

TW: "The way I named paintings [originally] came out of talking about them with other people. Often, in the early stages of a painting, there aren't a lot of definable nouns that myself or other people could use to identify them. When people weren't referring to them directly with their colour scheme, by saying 'red to blue' or 'orange to dark red' etc, people would just use syllables that they felt related to the painting. It reminded me of the bookish effect in psychology where different shapes are often given similar names across cultural boundaries. This just stuck over time [and] I would try to find a sound for how I thought the painting looked. Often the titles take syllables from the nouns within the paintings as a building block. This method also seemed to mirror what was going on visually when making the paintings, trying to draw a soup of semantic meaning out of shapes that appeared through the raw process of moving paint around on canvas."

**GS: As well as helping to identify the paintings, the use of a limited colour palette also gives a three-dimensional quality to the work. What is the significance about the use of colour in this way?**

TW: "I've often assumed that this comes from the lighting tools of a 3D modelling software, and of course I can see why, but the origin of the colour scheme is quite different. My route into painting was a classical training. One principle method that Old Master painters would use to construct their work would be grisaille or grey layer. This maps out what is dark and what is light, and is where a work's proportions would have been cemented. So, despite it being a preparatory layer, I started using this layer more and more to bring the painting to completion. Asserting what is light and dark is also the principle way our brains read 3D volume in images, so it is here that paint undergoes much of its transformation from mud to image, as previously mentioned. Today, I'm still using this principle of light and dark, albeit not in grisaille but with a selection of different light and dark colours. The choice of colours before I had planned before Covid-19 is the only choice I make with no information relating to the canvas. It's the immaculate conception from where each work begins, and those 2 or 3 colours very quickly help to inform the character appearing in each work."

**GS: People viewing your work may at first believe that it is digitally rendered, especially when they are viewing from an image. Has technology had an influence on the disposition of your work?**

TW: "I don't use digital rendering technology as part of my process since everything comes from working paint on canvas. However, on a practical level there are parallels in the way that forms are pushed around, moulded and carved. When painting with only light and dark it does feel like I am carving forms in a fictive 3D space created within the canvas. However, I couldn't call my paintings maps of their own making if that making had been mediated through the interface of CAD software. Technology has informed my work in a broader sense though. The ways that information is organised on a screen has been of interest to me. Another large part of my work is semantics, and how we draw meaning out of images. This field underpins much of how a screen is organised, how different elements relate to each other, and how we interact with it. This in turn understanding we have of how to assimilate all this information is something that I'm interested in tapping into. To be able to break down and use by organising the visual information that appears in my paintings."

**GS: Would you consider exploring a digital practice, perhaps experimenting with virtual art?**

TW: "I've never considered it. Currently my work is bound up in the very tactile, visceral and physical world of paint that they seem so far apart, and building bridges between that and a virtual realm seems a stretch."

**GS: This body of work is a continuation of your practice developed within your MFA. What are your plans for the future? How do you intend to expand your practice?**

TW: "Completing your first solo show I think means that relatively speaking it's still early days, so I don't feel the need to expand so much as continue exploring my practice as it is now. Each piece takes quite a long time to produce as you can imagine, and that limits how many pieces I have made so far. So there's still a lot more to be done I think."



Tom Waring, 'Consistent Estimator', 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Downs & Ross



Tom Waring, 'Hutch Skutch Skoa', 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Downs & Ross

**GS: 'Consistent Estimator' was your first solo exhibition in New York. Did the restrictions caused by coronavirus have an impact on the accessibility of the work?**

TW: "Given the circumstances I think I was quite lucky. The opening happened before New York was quarantined, and whilst there were still art fairs up and running. So at that time I think many people were still putting on their brave face and getting out to see things, with their sanitiser in hand. However shortly after that, all gallery doors closed and Trump announced the EU travel ban. I was almost one week away from not being able to attend at all. It's sad that exposure has been somewhat curtailed by the closed doors, but I'm thankful that said Downs & Ross took the time to get decent photographs before the show opened which has paid dividends."

**GS: Recently the 'Frieze Viewing Room' was launched to offer an online edition of Frieze New York (8th May - 15th May), whilst many galleries have also been offering virtual gallery tours or experiences. Do you think that this is something that we could start to see more often?**

TW: "I think Covid-19 has catalysed the inevitable. I was thinking the other day about how libraries are virtual now, and I think for the large part people don't complain about losing the feel of paper. But whilst I don't need to feel the paper or see the blackness of the ink to understand a book's content, with artworks the texture of the paper could be an integral part of the work... and I really don't know how a virtual tour is ever going to manage that. I go to galleries to see things in the flesh, and I would go so far as to say that I don't really understand them until I meet them in a gallery. Ever interested in an album, I found that there was a track you always skipped, but then upon seeing the band perform that track live, you found that you had a totally different understanding of it? I think maybe the mixed success of all the stabs at virtualising artworks like the Tate or Frieze in New York should be seen as exactly that, success mixed with things to improve upon. I think it will definitely grow, but I really don't know how it can substitute tactilely. All I know is that artists and galleries will have to get very good at using 360° cameras."



Tom Waring, 'Ezeleub Pip', 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Downs & Ross

**GS: In the UK many artists are currently unable to access their studios. Has the lockdown affected your ability to work? How have you seen other artists adapting to this change of circumstance?**

TW: "Again, like the timing of the opening of my show, I think I've been incredibly lucky. My studio building has remained open, and I've borrowed a car to get to and from the studio in almost complete isolation. When I'm there I'm probably more isolated than I am at home, so I've kept on working, diligently painting anything that comes into the studio. I really feel for those who for whatever reasons haven't been able to access their workspaces, especially if studio rent is still due. I know some artists setting up mini studios at home etc. I even know of somebody who has put up a tent in their garden for pouring concrete."

**GS: What has been your response to coronavirus and the imposed restrictions of lockdown?**

TW: "It's been to largely carry on as normal. Not buy more pasta than I need, or bake cakes at the weekend. I haven't encountered anything like losing my job, my home, or close family and friends. So perhaps it has forced me to take stock of my life a bit and reassess what is really important. I had planned before Covid-19 to do some upgrades on my studio. With the building largely empty I've been pretty happy making noise with power tools in a building occupied largely just by me."

**GS: What cities or galleries would you like to visit once out of lockdown?**

TW: "I've never been to Amsterdam and have wanted to spend a long weekend there for quite some time. Perhaps there is a virtual tour?"

'Consistent Estimator' features a collection of paintings that have inspired their own creation, where the vivid colours and intricacies within the details create a hyper-real experience alluding to another world set within the two dimensional space. Within his practice, Waring allows the palette and the forms to gradually develop on the canvas through a working dialogue, which stimulates the manifestation of the final painting. This intuitive, yet precise practice is perhaps how we should also absorb the iconography and abstraction featured within their surfaces. Just as meta-narrative informs its creation, we are invited to apply our own narratives and interpretations to these paintings, allowing the work to continue it's consistent ongoing transformation.

Reflecting on canvas is a risk. It is a leap into unknown creation, a place of destruction and simultaneously a place of birth. Applying on this period of uncertainty, but also anticipation before we re-join our friends, family and work colleagues, we can perhaps draw parallels between the unfolding events of this pandemic and that of the unfolding process of a painting on canvas. Inspired by Waring's process, there is a certain unknowing that comes from creation and change that we can potentially turn into an opportunity for rebirth.

Links:

Downs & Ross, 'Consistent Estimator', 2020, <https://downsross.com/exhibitions/tom-waring-2019>

Tom Waring, 2020, <https://www.tomwaring.co.uk>