

DICKON DRURY
FEATURING
AMELIA BARRATT

TIME FLIES LIKE AN ARROW,
FRUIT FLIES LIKE A BANANA

30 APRIL – 29 MAY 2021

Looking at Dickon Drury's new paintings through the frame of my laptop – ubiquitous to our Covid times – I am repeatedly revisited by the image of Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors*. Both deploy objects in densely coded matrices, we read these object-clues to piece together the narrative of the paintings' protagonist. Drury's canvases are notable in their absence of figures, his 'ambassadors' stand just off in the wings. Holbein's luminous items reveal his subjects' position as men of Renaissance pursuits and learning, globally networked masters of the celestial and material, albeit with the spectre of death hanging over them. So too do Drury's protagonists display objects that convey a specific life and philosophy; that of a twentieth lockdown - a near future pandemic-proofed self-sufficient life of botanical experimentation, hydroponic agriculture, architectural future building, and idling time away. Time drips inexorably on in his paintings; here a candle burns down, a clock face ticks quietly in a corner, or vegetables are entropically drained of their energy, drawn upon to charge a phone or light bulb; memento mori, ones as subtle but insistent as the Holbein's oblique skull.

These are first and foremost, paintings that anyone can approach and decode. Everyday objects; laptops, fruit, vegetables, photographs, lie strewn over tables – the detritus of lockdown life. Look more closely and they begin to reveal rich art historical references. For example, in *Time Flies Like an Arrow, Fruit Flies Like a Banana* (2020), a chilli plant sits in front of a miniature Philip Guston painting – a reference both to the position the of the artists' places in Drury's frame of reference, but also the specific moment in 2020 of Guston's USA and UK exhibitions being wrong-headedly cancelled as institutions became nervous of the Ku Klux Klan figures that feature in many of his canvases. Elsewhere, a Peter Doig Tunnel is posted to the wall, transformed by our present moment into a visual echo of the rainbows displayed in windows during the pandemic in support of the NHS. These objects and images have been transformed through the context of Covid, a stark reminder of the way in which our world has irrevocably changed.

In *Organic Architecture* (2020) a Campbell's soup can props up a shelf of urns and cans, Peter Shire mugs sit on the table and lemons abound in homage to Joseph Beuys's light-hearted Capri Battery (1985). A light bulb protrudes from a lemon with the instruction that you need only 'change the battery every thousand hours' – with no on switch included presumably the battery should last forever. Most present in this painting, however, are visual clues that point to architects Imre Makovecz and Frank Lloyd Wright, proponents of 'organic architecture' in which buildings are designed to sit in sympathy with a site, to become one with it, in harmony with nature. Alongside these sits a pangolin-like architectural model that points to this space being occupied by an architect who is working to envision the perfect post-pandemic building, or perhaps a 'bug out' location – a survivalist hide-out from which to sit out an apocalypse.

Drury's paintings are replete with markers of self-sufficiency – a pressing concern of late - but read prismatically through the medium of painting, via signifiers of transformation and alchemy. Pickling and fermenting preserves forms, just as the hardened oil paint does. Vegetables as batteries, and pendulous pumpkins nurtured through hydroponic growing techniques, all create circuits of transforming organic matter to make energy and nutrients. Drury is ever engaged in meta commentary, so that these processes sit alongside the artists' own preserving and ingesting ideas and forms, and over a period of slow time, locking them into oil paint. In the lack of lockdown, where most things were taken away from us, the resilience of the artist to conjure from that nothingness, to enrich the desertification of our personal lives, is palpable in these images. Drury holds us to an awareness of the materiality and labour of his images. A carefully wrought object sits next to one that is sketchily rendered, each a different marker of time spent in front of the canvas layering fizzing hue upon hue. The background seems to push forward into the foreground, by virtue of highly saturated and complementary colouration, and through Drury's process of often painting the background last. This subtly inverts the usual chronology of painterly composition, creating a slight affect that puts the viewer in an active role of deciphering a complex pictorial plane and muddies that temporal structure of its making.

The painting that most starkly comments on the shutdown of Covid times is titled *Plein Air*, (2020). An easel stands on a beach, empty of a canvas, and carbunched by snail shells – a contagion of little homed and solitary creatures, the perfect visual metaphor for our alienated existence. The easel casts a crucifix shadow onto the sand behind, as if spotlight, or caught by the beam of a roving torch. The cross references the artists' father who restores cathedrals, but perhaps points also to the emptied hallowed spaces of the museum and gallery. That this painting was made during the ten weeks of having no access to his studio is telling.

Certain motifs run across all the paintings, such as the pumpkins, laptops, vegetables; but the most keenly observed in of these all is the Dandelion. This humble 'weed' is the subject of multiple paintings across the exhibition as a curious symbol of our relationship to plant life, histories of botanical use, and interweaving of such forms into our own symbolic and emotional systems of meaning. The dandelion clock – in which you blow onto the seed heads until the stem is naked to determine the time – is foremost, and Drury has rendered the dandelions leaves and stems to create the arms of a clock. A tradition holds of blowing the seed heads to carry wishes to a loved one; a poignant gesture of hope in times of division from family and friends. Drury mentions the idiom 'in the weeds'; an expression that refers to the need to get away from the details to see the world or a situation from a greater distance for clarity. Although regularly exterminated as a weed, the dandelion has traditionally been used to make tea, soup, salads, and even brewed for beer; across time our perception and use has shifted. This perhaps the uniting theme of the exhibition, a reflexive rendering of objects and plants as the preservation of a moment in time, and their own transformation as an image in relation to others. A re-grafting of the still life tradition. The rainbow, game of solitaire, and profusion of plants are forever altered as objects and motifs, parts of a dense iconographical system that anchor our memories and fears from the pandemic months.

Natasha Hoare, 2021

Kendall Koppe is thrilled to present *Time Flies Like an Arrow, Fruit Flies Like a Banana*. This is Dickon Drury's second exhibition with the gallery and features a new audio work by Amelia Barratt. *Building a Building* by Barratt is available to be experienced via headphones in the gallery and subsequently on the gallery website.

Dickon Drury (b. 1986, Salisbury) lives and works in London. He is a graduate of the Slade School of Fine Art and a recipient of the Slade School of Fine Art, Desiree Painting Prize (2016). Recent solo exhibitions include: *Dickon Drury*, Condo London, Koppe Astner at Carlos Ishikwa, London (2020); *To Be The Key*, Galleri Opdhal, Stavanger (2019); *Art Review Asia Xian Chang section at Westbund*, with Koppe Astner, Shanghai (2018); *Tennis Elbow*, The Journal Gallery, New York (2018); *Holed Up*, Galleri Opdhal, Stavanger (2018); *If The Sea Was Whiskey*, Frutta Gallery, Rome (2017); *The Who's Who of Whos*, Koppe Astner, Glasgow (2016); *Optics Don't Make Marks*, Spike Island Project Space, Bristol. Selected group exhibitions include: *Generation Y*, Platform Foundation, London (2019); *A New Kitchen Sink*, Josh Lilley, London (2017); *Glossary*, Safehouse 2, London (2016); *Curse of the Laughing Hand*, Rogue Artist Project Space, Manchester (2016); 2015 *Imagine* (Curated by Tomma Abts and Alistair McKinven), Londonewcastle Project Space, London (2015); *Drawing Room*, The Old Cycle Club, London (2014).

Amelia Barratt (b.1989, Reading) is an artist based in London working across text, performance and painting. She studied BA Painting and Printmaking at The Glasgow School of Art (2011) and received an MFA from Slade School of Art, London (2016). She is a recent recipient of the *Annotations II* Outset Study Commission and residency at Drawing Room, London (2020-21). With Martha Barratt she founded live performance series *Oral Rinse* (2016-19), a vocal showcase of experimental work by visual artists, writers and musicians. Her performance works have recently been shown at: Seventeen, London (2020); Live Art Development Agency, London (2019); Museum of London (2018); Cubitt Gallery, London (2018); Glasgow International (2018); Assembly Point, London (2018); Edinburgh College of Art (2017); and CCA, Glasgow (2017).

Natasha Hoare is Curator at Goldsmiths Centre for Contemporary Art, London (since 2018). Previously she was Curator at FKA Witte de With, Rotterdam (2014-18). She has curated and co-curated exhibitions including *An unpredictable expression of human potential, Chapter II*, Sharjah Biennial, Beirut Arts Center (2017), *Self-Reflection: Mark Wallinger*, Freud Museum, London (2016), and was Assistant Curator of the Marrakech Biennial 5 (2014). Natasha is Contributing Editor of ExtraExtra, and author of *The New Curator* (Laurence King, 2016). She has contributed to publications including Flash Art International, Cura, Art Review, frieze, Elephant Magazine and The White Review. She holds an MA in Curating from Chelsea College of Art and Design, London, and a BA in English Literature from Edinburgh University.

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