

STYLISTIC DIVERSITY – YOUNG PAINTING IN LONDON

Lorenz Ecker, *KUNSTFORUM International*, August 2023



Sophie Barber, *Birds Sing at the Chapel*, 2020, oil on canvas. Photo: Mark Blower © Alison Jacques, London. Courtesy: Sophie Barber.

London's contemporary art scene is a thriving visual arts hotspot, attracting artists, collectors and art lovers from around the world. The city's diverse population and rich cultural history have created a dynamic community of painters who continue to push the boundaries of the medium. From established galleries and museums to emerging artists and offspaces, the contemporary painting scene offers a wealth of possibilities, movements and stylistic developments, the diversity of which can hardly be compared to other metropolises.

The well-known saying 'Painting is Dead' has been heard again and again for decades. New media, from photography to augmented reality, are often said to be trying to knock paintings off the throne of the art world. As early as 1981, the exhibition *A New Spirit in Painting* at the Royal Academy of Arts attempted to highlight that London, as a museum and gallery landscape, was committed to and enthusiastic about painting and its further development. Nevertheless, since then and up to the present day, the same question has arisen again and again as to whether painting might have gone out of fashion.



Carolina Aguirre, *Continental Drift detail*, 2023, sumi ink, charcoal, natural pigments on wood. Photo: Fold Gallery. Courtesy: Carolina Aguirre and Fold Gallery © Carolina Aguirre

Against this skeptical background, initiated by exhibitions such as *A Focus on Painting* at Thaddaeus Ropac, London 2020, or *Mixing it Up* at the Hayward Gallery 2021, painting is currently experiencing a renewed renaissance - especially among the young generation of artists. It is difficult to identify a unified scene; rather, various strands move side by side and are intertwined, creating a web of stylistic diversity. Thanks to this development, museums and galleries are seeing an enthusiastic and returning audience. It seems as if the recent trend around digital art, driven by NFTs and their rocketing rise and fall in the art market, has led buyers back to familiar themes, media and formats. In fact, figurative paintings, landscape paintings and still lifes can currently be found in painting as well as abstract compositions. Technology only plays a minor role in many of these works, if it is still relevant at all. Increasingly self-referential, they are more concerned with the technical challenges of paint and canvas within painting itself than with the subject matter of their compositions. It can be observed that the collections in the Tate and National Gallery museums are among the key

sources of inspiration for artists to learn the historical foundations and a new understanding of color, dynamics and composition in their painting. Coupled with London's rapidly changing art market, which influences trends and styles, the city's young artists have an incomparably wide range of visual and theoretical inspiration at their feet.

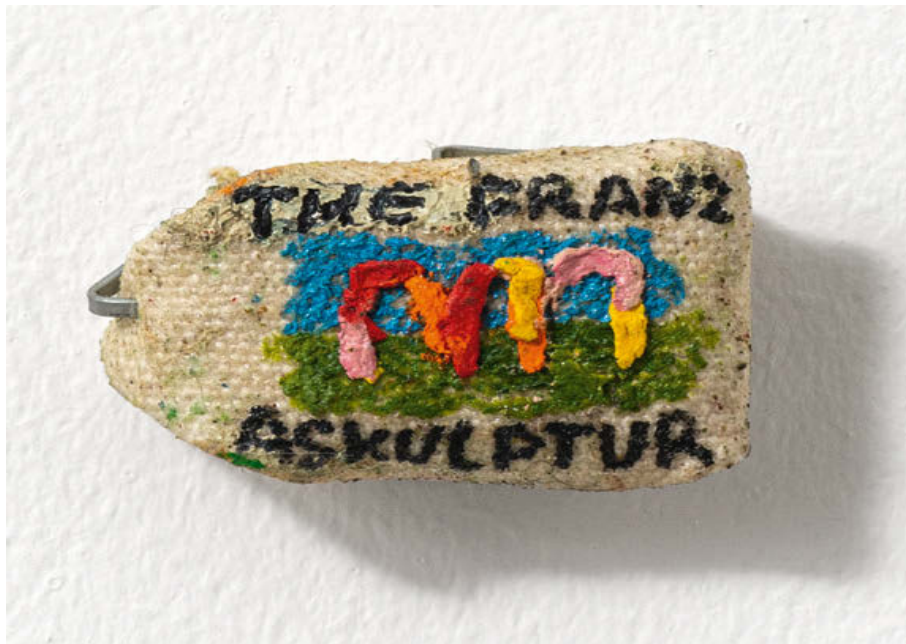


Rachel Jones, *SMMMMLLLLLEEEE*, 2020, oil on canvas, photo: Eva Herzog. Courtesy: Thaddaeus Ropac, London
© Rachel Jones

London is one of the world's most important centers of contemporary art. It is therefore not surprising that his influence within the region extends far beyond the city limits. Since many freelance young artists cannot or do not want to afford

the expensive life in the metropolis, cities like Brighton, Hastings and Margate have become popular places to live for London artists. Despite these satellites, London remains the undisputed center of the scene - also thanks to the booming art market. The following five examples span a wide spectrum and show which styles and developments are currently dominant in the British capital.

Although the artists differ greatly in style, connections between analytical, self-reflective painting and playing with the format of the canvases can be identified as an overarching commonality. The ambition to explore painting in all its possibilities and to explore new directions for the medium is also omnipresent. The meticulously researching use of color and form can be seen as a reference to the archaeological process of excavation. In addition, the artists often emphasize the surroundings of the picture through unusual placements on the wall in order to relativize the strictness and historical burden of the tradition that rests on painting.



Sophie Barber, *Franz the Asculptur*, 2020, oil on canvas, photo: Michael Brzezinski. Courtesy: Alison Jacques, London © Sophie Barber

So you can say: Painting may occasionally go out of fashion, but only to return to the fore again immediately afterwards. It remains an important, constantly changing and evolving medium of art. The scene in London proves this through its impressive diversity and quality.