

The annexe

Tom Allen
The Promise

8 May – 19 June 2021

Opening preview: Friday 7 May

For his debut presentation in The Annexe, and his first solo exhibition in London, Tom Allen will show new works from his ongoing series of flower paintings. Using a palette rich with fluorescent, iridescent and metallic colours, Allen draws out the most exuberant qualities of his flower subjects, but then adds more, making surfaces that flash and glimmer.

Taking inspiration from the exotic plants that grow in and around his local area in Los Angeles, nearby botanical gardens, and from his travels, Allen first photographs his flowers uncut, in their natural environment. He then returns to the studio to paint his vivacious likenesses in luminous hues of cadmium and cobalt. These are not still lives, but rather preternatural portraits intended to capture the true spirit or animating principle of the subjects he depicts.

Allen's paintings encompass an almost tantric tension between containment and ebullition. Employing small-scale canvases, highly choreographed compositions and meticulous technique, the artist exercises control and restraint over his works. Yet within each painting's borders, we encounter such an intense concentration of colour, a synesthesia of movement and form that the paint appears at times to almost burst from the canvas.

An interplay of microcosmic and macrocosmic is at work throughout the exhibition. In *The Promise* it seems as though there are moons or planets circling behind the blooming flowers. Though very different works, Allen's 'The Promise' pays homage to Barnett Newman's 1949 painting of the same name, given as a wedding gift to art critic Clement Greenberg. Conjuring Newman's 'zips' as a pair of orchids, Allen's subjects are held in perfect tension - in synchrony, but not the same, like twins or a couple betrothed.

In *Pink and Black*, we are confronted with an alluring flower that has a secret: this plant is carnivorous. Like the cuttlefish using its shape-shifting ability to hypnotise prey with a fascinating display of colour and pattern, the nepenthe entices insect victims with its colour, scent and attractive form. This inviting form is in fact a trap, evolved as a 'pitcher' containing digestive juices, which, once an insect falls in, it almost never escapes.

In the exhibition's smallest painting, *Untitled*, nacreous surfaces, iridescent textures, and kaleidoscopic patterns emanate from both the flower itself, as much as its strange and liminal surroundings. A shifting array of brightly coloured dots illuminate a kind of frame, a portal, beyond which the palette transitions to streaks of deep black, rust orange and violet. Like the potent space between Newman's paired bands, or the interstice where two doors meet, this aperture is but one of many thresholds that open up within Allen's canvases – thresholds in time, moments that can allow for renewal, regeneration and transformation.

Tom Allen (b. 1975, Springfield, Massachusetts) lives and works in Los Angeles, USA. Recent exhibitions include: Chris Sharp Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (forthcoming 2021); *Praeternatura*, Air de Paris, Paris, France (2020); *Là-bas*, Lulu, Mexico City, Mexico; *Blue Flowers*, Le Maximum, Venice, CA; *Dreamhouse vs. Punkhouse*, Serious Topics, Inglewood, CA (all 2019); *The Lovers*, Bel Ami, Los Angeles, CA; *Symbolisms*, Cooper Cole, Toronto; *Witch-Ikon*, Mortlake & Company, Seattle, OR; *Therianthropy*, Laura Bartlett Gallery, London, UK; *Ruins In the Snow*, High Art, Paris (all 2017); *A Change of Heart*, Hannah Hoffman Gallery, Los Angeles; *Outside*, MiM Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (2016). His work can be found in the permanent collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, the Sweeney Gallery at the University of California, Riverside, and in numerous private collections

Coinciding with Tom Allen: *Tom Allen, The Approach* will also be presenting Hana Miletić: *Patterns of Thrift* in the main gallery.

For further information or images please contact mail@theapproach.co.uk