

C H R I S S H A R P

TOM ALLEN

The Song

A song is not a text. There is meaning in it but it does not court analysis. We go to analysis to court meaning, yet this too, can peter out. A painting is full of information but we don't read it. Perhaps what we call trite in a song or derivative in a painting is what happens when we are presented with a pile of information, as opposed to... you know... art.

It has everything to do with relationships. My relationship to the heartbreak anthem du jour is different than yours. Tom Allen's relationship to flowers is different than most of ours. He describes his paintings of them as portraits, rather than still lifes. I like this implied relationship—in a still life there is a monastic attention to the reality of the object. In a portrait this reality splits off into likeness, by which we measure the fidelity of the painter to the physical nature of the sitter, and then there's characterization, which is a bit more subjective, more collaborative. Some subjects in *The Song* are locals. A Rose, a Hibiscus, and a Lotus, encountered during walks around his Los Angeles neighborhood. Others he meets during his travels. He takes pictures of each on his phone, preserving their likeness at the moment of encounter. But once in the studio, his skill, his palette, coupled with his cosmophagic knowledge of art history and perverse attention to detail, come to bear on the tiny plant. Between them something like personality is born. A personality that belongs neither wholly to the painter nor to his subject. This is the ontology of painting lurking in some animistic realm of vision that neither photography nor the human eye can touch on their own. It's why paintings are still, in this image-saturated age, so much fun to look at, and Tom's in particular. The darkened blush a rose casts on its own under petals is a palette unto itself. Under his brush, a tiny bunch of pistils on a neighborhood bloom reveal an otherworldly depth, a bunch of unknown species of banana, a nonexistent Eden.

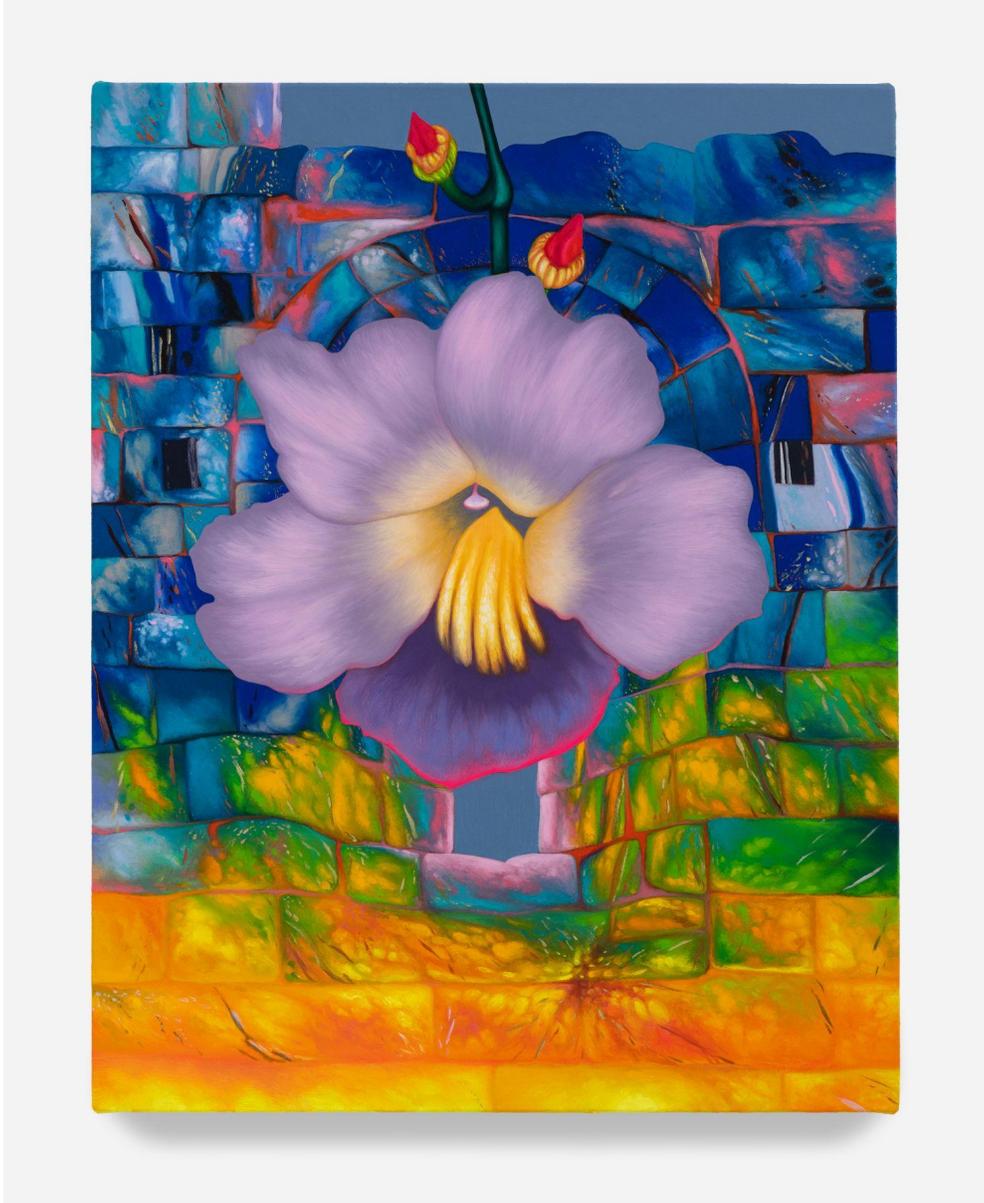
A lot of Tom's flower paintings carried a lot of attitude. They can be nasty and cool and seductive and cosmopolitan all at once. The subjects in *The Song* are lit from within by something both more fierce and more meditative. The backgrounds are pulled intuitively from decoration books and personal travel photos in Tom's library, mixed and rhymed with patterns pulled from the flowers themselves. Like many things lately, his relationship to nature has softened. His eye, is sharp as ever.

—Christina Catherine Martinez

Tom Allen (b. 1975, Springfield, Massachusetts) lives and works in Los Angeles, USA. A selection of recent solo exhibitions includes: The Promise, The Approach, London (2021); Praeternatura, Air de Paris, Paris, France (2020); Là-bas, Lulu, Mexico City, Mexico (2019); The Lovers, Bel Ami, Los Angeles, CA (2017). A selection of recent group exhibitions includes: Blue Flowers, Le Maximum, Venice, CA; Dreamhouse vs. Punkhouse, Serious Topics, Inglewood, CA (all 2019); 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.



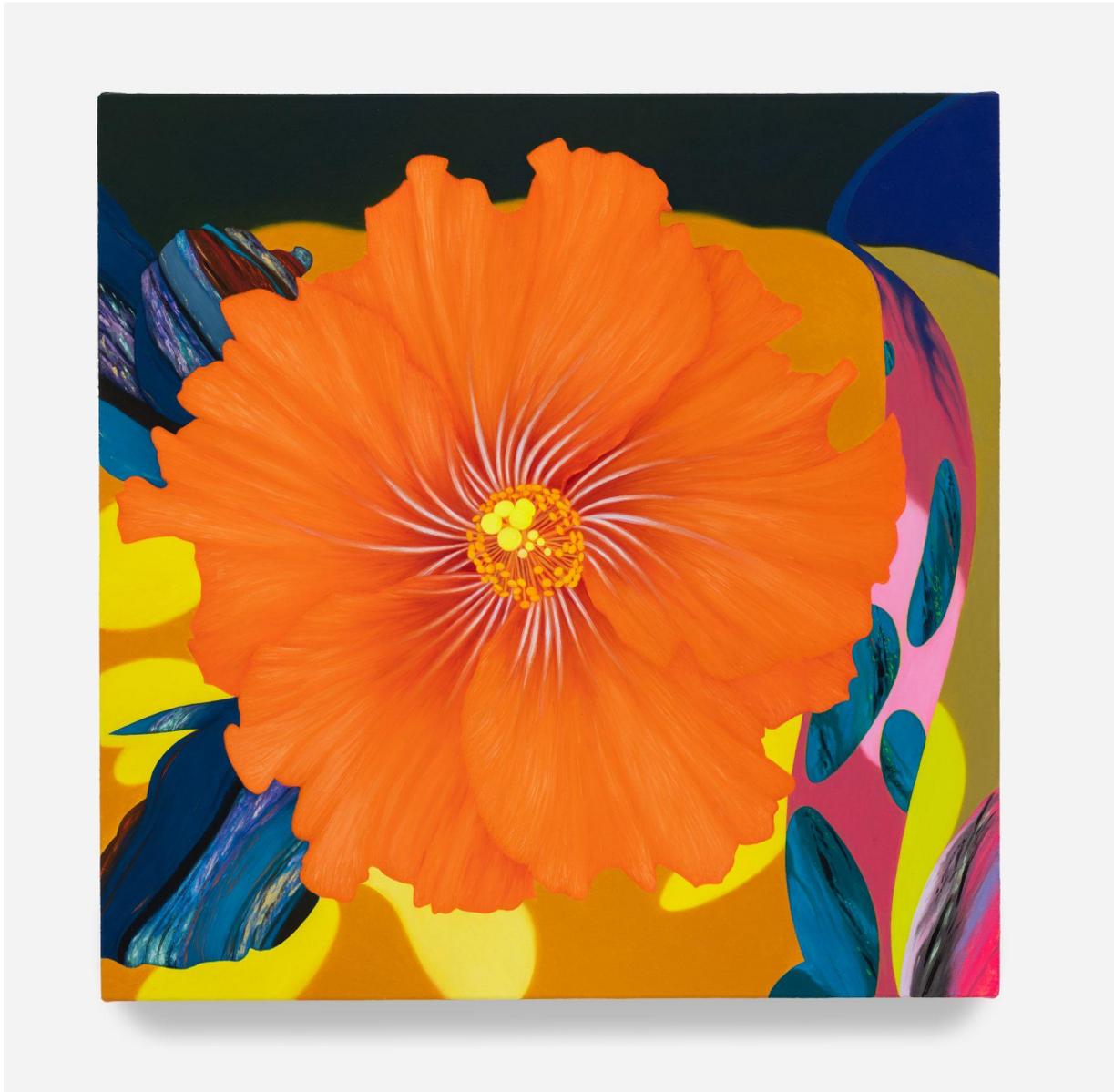
Shards of Pan, 2021. Oil on canvas, 31 x 27 in (78.74 x 68.58 cm)



Open, 2021. Oil on canvas, 18 x 14 in (45.72 x 35.56 cm)



Roses (Cythera II), 2021. Oil on canvas 22 x 28 in (55.88 x 71.12 cm)



The Miracle, 2021. Oil on canvas, 17 x 17 in (43.18 x 43.18 cm)



The Song, 2021. Oil on canvas 33 x 33 in (83.82 x 83.82cm)