

Will Gabaldón

*Flicker*

4 October – 9 November 2024

Are you with J. M. W. Turner, who travelled each summer in search of sublime scenery and retreated to his studio in winter, when he transformed his rough sketches into iridescent pearls of landscape painting? Or does your loyalty lie with the Impressionists, who loved to work en plein air, pitting the speed of their brushes against fast-moving light and changing weather? The titles of Will Gabaldón's paintings are so date-specific they suggest that he is in the latter camp: Landscape 4.1.24; Landscape 5.17.24. And yet each one delivers a potent dose of atmosphere that transcends the momentary impressions of a single day. Gabaldón has taken something from each side, supercharging the compositions he bases on outdoor sketches with a profound feeling for place. His paintings are steeped in memory and experience.

Trying to explain the subjects of Gabaldón's paintings is like trying to describe the topography of a dream-landscape that, on waking, you find hard to recall. Detail unravels and slips through your fingers, leaving behind the memory of an enchanting atmosphere, impressions of dappled sunshine and growing dusk that keep coming to

mind at odd moments. Gabaldón paints scenes that are deliberately undramatic: his subjects are grassy fields you might see on any walk, trees massing against a horizon, glimpses of sky through branches. But once you have spent time with them, you find you cannot stop thinking of them. Part of the spell cast by his landscapes is to do with the sheer sensuality with which he manipulates paint. Visible brushstrokes swish back and forth hypnotically, suggesting a wandering path, the sway of branches in the breeze and the drowsy buzz of insects. A tree trunk is formed from the elegantly liquid line of a single stroke. Leaves are blotted against the sky as though seen through eyes half-closed against the sun.

Gabaldón is a master of tonal values with a Whistlerian feeling for colour – if his pictures did not already have titles, they could be called *Harmonies in Emerald* or *Symphonies in Sage*. His skies are washed with milky silver, peach, the greenish yellow of an unripe lemon. These muted and delicate hues are another part of the spell. If you look into the artist's beguiling dream-worlds for long enough his pictures start to unfold layer upon layer of subtle sensation and emotion. Their essential mystery, however? Now that is something they will never fully disclose.

*Text by Susan Owens*