

Tom Waring

*All The Pomp of Yesterday*

February 28/March 29, 2025

*All the pomp of yesterday*: the title of Tom Waring's current exhibition at Tara Downs, his third with the gallery, but also a rather evocative phrase. "Lo, all our pomp of yesterday / Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!": did Waring lift the line from a poem by Rudyard Kipling, that famous "defender of empire"? This might make some sense. Arriving at a fraught and somewhat listless sociopolitical moment across the Western democracies, the paintings on view paradoxically cultivate introspection by shifting toward external cultural anxieties, grappling more forthrightly with legacies of British colonialism and national heritage than Waring has in the past, even if such concerns had been latent from the beginning. The perceived decline of Western political hegemony, alongside the emergence of revanchist forms of populism, together provide an opportunity to dissemble and reconfigure the logical armature of a fading cultural authority. To whom does the past belong? In a subtle prepositional substitution, Waring suggests that Kipling's pomp was never really ours.

Complicated, perhaps, but also exemplary of the complex formalism the artist performs in painting, submitting a vast symbology to a process of deconstruction and reconstruction. Continuing his exploration of illusionistic space, grisaille underpainting, and other devices borrowed from the advent of Renaissance painting, Waring here accentuates the works' persistent relationship to sculptural relief and architectural forms. In the past, the artist has occasionally broken the *trompe l'oeil* characteristics of his work by injecting his compositions with flat planes of color, moments of expressionistic brushwork, or other winking references to his chosen medium. Here, befitting the tenor of the exhibition, he operates in pure deception mode, more often than not framing each composition with architectural elements, like steps and scaffolding, that appear to belong to the scene. These framing devices enable us to enter into the work, but also call attention to the illusion constructed in front of us. It's as if the methods of image-making Waring often elucidates has migrated from a sort of metatextual reflexivity to the forms rooted within the work itself.

In their elaborate accumulation of representations, each painting appears to draw upon the ambiguity of Gothic architectural features, amorphous forms that dip in and out of legible pictorial representation. Yet the depicted objects that find their way into Waring's paintings, at least in aggregate, resist easy interpretation, let alone narrativization. Each beguiling composition comprises a dizzying array of references to the material world, and each individual image embedded in composition, in turn, suggests an array of possible meanings. Some of these things: a 16th century padlock, the leather studs of a Chesterfield armchair, an Edison bulb, photos of Palm Beach, a weather chart, a Sri Lankan banknote, transit timetables, a broken trophy. Others defy straightforward articulation. How do you describe a chimera that is both a horse and a lobster, or a lamppost that resembles a

cheese grater? These are objects with agency, objects that invariably change and fluctuate and expire, either through the natural course of time or by explicit design. Yesterday's forecast, a form of currency pulled from circulation, upholstery adornments put to new use: they are all objects with a sense of mutability or obsolescence already built in. Though maybe, after Heidegger, we should still refer to these compound images as "things" – they draw attention to their own (dys)functions, they gather the world. After all, Heidegger's primary example of a "thing," an object that brings together its various social and material functions, was a simple jug, as the many stacked vessels of *To be titled [the red one with the horses]*, 2025, might remind us.

"Things written or drawn in the margins add an extra dimension, a supplement, that is able to gloss, parody, modernize and problematize the text's authority while never totally undermining it," the late art historian Michael Camille once told us, in his 1992 study *Image on the Edge: The Margins of Medieval Art*. It seems serendipitous that this form of embedded critique would decline with the rise of illusionistic space in manuscript painting, in the fifteenth century, at the juncture Waring's interrogation of painting history generally resides. Yet, even more germane to *All The Pomp of Yesterday*, what Camille makes clear is that marginalia in the Middle Ages was not confined to illuminated manuscripts, but also extended to Gothic cathedrals, including those in the United Kingdom that have informed Waring's embedded architectural forms. At the nexus of nascent forms of capitalism and urbanism, civic pride and public profanity, the Gothic cathedral becomes a visual manifestation of the stable negotiation between power and its critique. What happens to this relationship when authority dissipates and reorganizes itself, mutates into something else? This is the precise question that Waring parades in front of us and puts on display.

Tom Waring (b. 1991, Reading, UK) lives and works in London. He gained his BA in Fine Art from Aberystwyth University, UK, in 2014, and his MFA Fine Art from UAL Wimbledon College of Art, London, in 2017. Solo exhibitions: "All the Pomp of Yesterday" Tara Downs, New York (2025); "A Robot Never Made Me Laugh," Galeria Maria Bernheim, Zurich, CH (2023); "Ars Brevis," Tara Downs, New York, US (2022) and "Consistent Estimator," Tara Downs, New York, US (2020). Selected group exhibitions: The Margulies Collection, Miami, US (2022); Bloomberg New Contemporaries, Liverpool, UK (2018); University of the Arts, London, UK (2017); Arbeit Studios, London, UK (2017); "Mixed Relationship," China Design Centre, London, UK (2017); "Interventions," Art House Lewisham, London, UK (2016); "1," Chelsea College of Art, London (2016); "Collection of Small Paintings," The Contemporary London, UK (2015) and Aberystwyth Gas Gallery, Aberystwyth, UK (2014). Grants and awards: The Aiden Threlfall Award; The Hackney Family Scholarship; Vice Chancellors Scholarship, University of the Arts London; The Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation Grant. His work is included in the permanent collection of ICA Miami. His work is included in a forthcoming solo presentation at Tara Downs, New York.