

## **PHOEBE UNWIN**

### **Man made**

13 January to 6 March 2011

Wilkinson Gallery is pleased to present new paintings by Phoebe Unwin.

This exhibition encompasses Unwin's curious approach to painting: at once a destabilisation of expectations of style and form, coupled with a stern and enthused focus on realising a subject in paint. She cares for a painting's physical qualities of material and scale in a way a sculptor might. These paintings feel part of our world, rather than a window to somewhere else. Each is a new possibility, differing in mark, material, scale and subject, with no repeated motif. With these formal interests and challenges, it may seem a perversity that these are figurative paintings, however, it is how image relates to material that is fundamental to the work.

Unwin references and explores a world we all experience visually, verbally and sensorially: a figure infects and affects its space, as if thoughts are made into things; a grubby patterned Underground seat blocks a view; the shape of a head is formed by a uniformed edge of toothpaste-like stripes; pictures of notepaper become a layered collected mass of white on whites.

Colour is used to explore these perceptions of the familiar with a palette ranging from the irreverent to the beautiful: monochrome chromium oxide green to wet-glossy black to washed-out fuzzy fluorescents. The intrinsic materiality of Unwin's chosen media is acknowledged and celebrated within the paintings. For instance, the matte plastic quality of acrylic paint differs from the sheen and subtlety of oil paint; the opaque colour and furry-edged mark of spray-paint has both industrial and urban qualities; powdered graphite makes translucent marks of slightly sparkly soft grey. Connotations of colour combinations are communicated: the gentle, poetic, modern, dirty or minimal. The application of these colours range from brushes to simple stencilling techniques, achieving diverse results. Some paintings have a sense of its image having been near-destroyed, while others appear to show a subject playfully found; one work might have a feeling of layered time put into it, yet another is a lone economy of line.

In size and composition, some of these paintings might appear to reference the ergonomics of design, while others probe the more intimate visual conversation to be had with a small portrait form. All of the paintings are, in a sense, more about explaining, visually, what something feels like, rather than what it looks like. It is because of this interest and aim for the work, Unwin does not work from photographs or direct observation. Instead, she takes an almost phenomenological approach to materials, often working with memory as an editing tool to find the essence of a subject: both our physical and emotional navigation of it.

Phoebe Unwin was born in Cambridge in 1979 and lives and works in London. She studied at Newcastle University and Slade School of Fine Art. Currently her work is exhibited as part of the British Art Show 7, a Hayward Gallery National Touring Exhibition. Recent solo shows have taken place at Honor Fraser, Los Angeles (2009); Wilkinson (2008, 2006) and Milton Keynes Gallery (2007). Group shows include: The Saatchi Gallery, London; IFF Gallery, Marseille; CIRCUIT, Centre for Contemporary Art, Lausanne; MOCA, Los Angeles (all 2010); Jerwood Space, London (2009) CCA Andratx, Majorca (2008) Thomas Dane, London (2007); W139, Amsterdam (2007), Publications include: 'Feelings and Other Forms' solo exhibition catalogue, Wilkinson, with a text by Jens Hoffmann (2008); 'A Short Walk from a Shout to a Whisper' solo exhibition catalogue, Milton Keynes Gallery with a text by Max Henry (2007). She was commissioned to create a work for the Centre Pompidou, for inclusion in the catalogue publication of their exhibition 'Voids – A Retrospective' (2009). Other publications include 'Younger than Jesus', New Museum New York/ Phaidon (2009) and the forthcoming 'Vitamin P Survey of International Contemporary Painting' Phaidon (2011/2012).