

Phoebe Unwin

Pregnant Landscape

1 May – 26 May 2018

Private view: 28 April, 6-8 pm

The title of Phoebe Unwin's exhibition *Pregnant Landscape* simultaneously invokes the traditions of portraiture and landscape painting. It also imbues the idea of a landscape with a sense of the bodily, as pregnancy suggests gestation and fecundity. Unwin does not work from pre-existing images or photographs, and the frenetic circulation of visual materials in 2.0 culture has no direct impact on her practice. Instead she makes paintings. In this case, a series of oil paintings that, as objects in themselves, conjure an image somewhere between the surface of the painting and the viewer's observation of it. She describes her way of working as a kind of abstraction in reverse; rather than a drawing away from the observed world and a distillation of its actuality, it is more a case of 'the abstract triggering the figurative.' Yet it is not so much a tension between the ideas of abstraction and figuration, or a revision of the modernist prioritisation of form, but the objectification of the painting as a 'thing-in-itself' that can surprise, seduce and connect with the individual viewer to create novel content and unique meaning.

Whilst producing this body of work Unwin had in mind Alain Robbe-Grillet's novel *La Jalousie*, one of the key works of the French Nouveau Roman in the 1950s. Robbe-Grillet was both inspired by painting – his novel *La Belle captive* was illustrated with 77 paintings by René Magritte – and in turn inspired painters such as Mary Heilmann in an early series of paintings from the 1970s. Unwin feels an affinity with 'the imagined field of vision; the subjective obscured view; the avoidance of visual metaphors, direct references or narrative;...[and] the patterns of containment' in *La Jalousie*, as well as its insistence on the reader's active participation in the generation of meaning. The paintings in her exhibition do not refer directly to the novel, but rather invoke a sense of silence and seek to establish a compelling emotional and psychological presence through a reification of form, an unrepeatable coalescence of colour, shape and scale.

Phoebe Unwin's forthcoming exhibitions include a solo show at the Collezione Maramotti, Reggio Emilia, Italy in October 2018. She has exhibited widely in Europe, US, and Asia, and her work is in public collections including Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Arts Council Collection, UK, Tate Britain, London, Southampton City Art Gallery, UK, Yale Center for British Art, USA.