



fig. 1

LAILA Sydney
Tommy Carman

The Rumour Mill
20 January - 28 January

Opening Friday 20 January
5 - 8pm

Address on request

:

Hey James,



Best,
Tommy

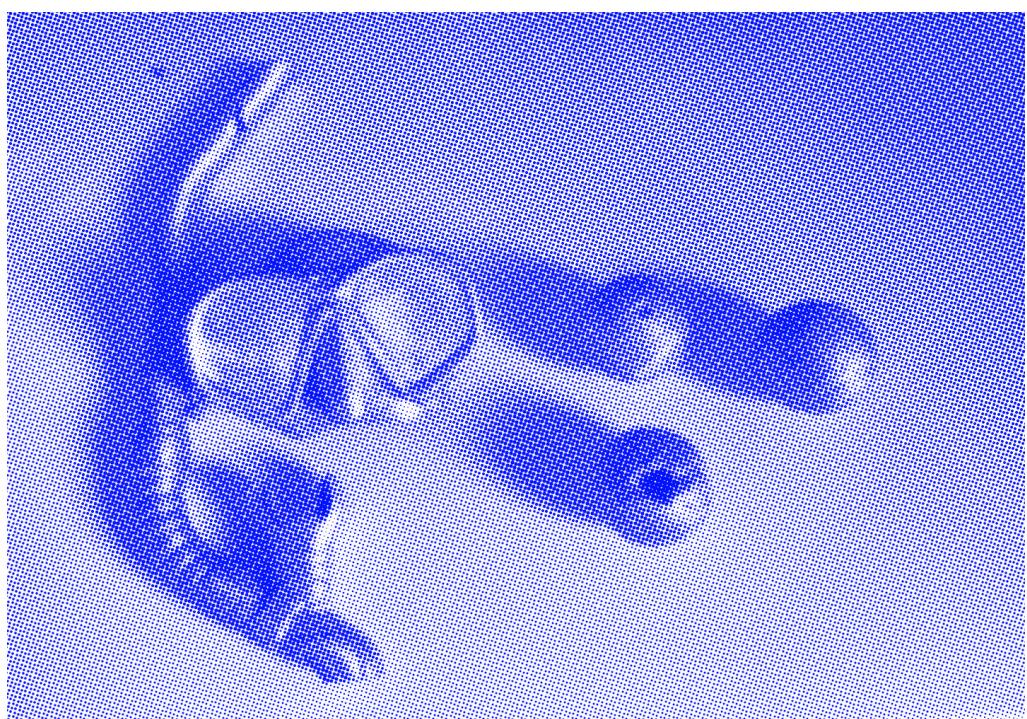


fig. 1 i. 2022, acrylic on canvas,
90 x 55 cm

fig. 2 Untitled 2022, aluminium,
5 pieces, dimensions variable

fig. 2

The following emails were extracted from a correspondence between James Gatt and Tommy Carman that took place over email between 21 December 2022 and 12 January 2023.

:

Hi Tommy,

Thanks for your email. It's nice to see what you've been working on. As you could probably guess, I'm a big Ian Burn fan. At the same time, I've always been ambivalent about 'conceptual painting', or the nexus of conceptual art and painting.

It sent a shiver down my spine seeing the snorkel gear cast, which feels a bit on the nose (so to speak!). Do you have other casts planned?

Markus Gabriel's book *The Meaning of Thought* comes to mind. Gabriel conceives of thought as a sixth sense; something directly connected to our biology and sense of reality. He establishes strong imagery in the book of the many possible realities that exist in any one situation, most of which evade our focus because they aren't significant to our current 'plot'.

Something else that comes to mind is the work of Julie Fragar, who has long used painting as speculation; a way to paint through, visualise, comprehend realities and potentialities. I most appreciate when Julie interrupts her near-photorealistic representations with an obvious brush stroke, reminding us that the picture is in fact a painting (this duality or tension is similar to your division of abstraction and figuration — the former concerned with the objecthood of painting, the latter painting's pictorial means).

I'm also reminded of something Giorgio Griffa said: 'Every time art goes into the unknown, every time you enter, physically, the unknown.' Griffa is one of my favourite painters. And now that I think about it, many of his paintings have unstretched canvas or linen surfaces, which maintain the creases from being folded into squares. As a result, you have an overt reference to the physicality of the substrate that simultaneously holds a picture.

I had a little giggle thinking about 'narrative painting' after reading your email and in relation to your work.

One more thing regarding this idea of the degree of abstraction or figuration in a work, and how these poles interact or inform each other: there's a technique used in acting in for soliciting responses from the audience by holding back, eg. holding back tears so the audience cries for you. Of course this idea of the audience completing a work isn't new (Duchamp championed it), but in terms of the relationship between abstraction and figuration, or to what extent you push your work in either direction, I think this acting methodology seems apt (especially given your reference to screenplays).

There's more to talk about of course, but these are some initial responses...

J

Hey James,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Speak soon,
Tommy

:

Hi Tommy!

It's nice to read these ideas swimming around in your mind (pun intended). I'm interested in the intersection of your impetuses; you've shared with me that you paint with certain narratives or narrativising in mind (eg Ian Burn) but also to create or probe absence. How do you see these motives functioning in your work?

I'm also a little unsure about how your various paintings and the casts come together. All have a keen pictorial quality, and each of the completed works (cast and '1' painting) teeter between presence and absence — in fact, they behave like memories in my reading of them. They might also be read like clues (direct or misleading) to a plot, like photos from a crime scene. Of course casting, and your spray painting method, also involve 'processes of absence'.

Then there's the post-digital aesthetic of your pictures, which calls to mind early computer graphics. When I think of digitisation I think of the proliferating and accessibility of information, the exponential facility and necessity for archivisation; both seem relevant to the way you're thinking about this body of work.

I'm reading a lovely book by Barry Schwabsky at the moment, which addresses the ways contemporary artists 'participate' with history, bringing incomplete narratives into the present through this dialogue. There's something about your resurrection of Burn and the instant recall of digital technology that seem relevant here.

J

Hey James,



Best,
Tommy

Hi Tommy,

Oh I'm desperate to get to Peter Tyndall's survey at Buxton. How was it? Interesting, given our conversation, that he's a 'conceptual painter'!

Re Burn, as he states in one painting, 'A landscape is not something we look at but something we look through'. Similarly, I say we never simply look at paintings (ie content doesn't always become picture). We read paintings (in the case of text) or count paintings (in the case of, say, Maria Cruz's coin paintings). Text creates imagery just like images imply stories and provoke thoughts which may operate as words in the mind. The visual takes a verb form, like Juhani Pallasmaa's reading of architecture; a window is defined by the act of looking through it, not the pane of glass; a fireplace is about its heat; and so on.

Your knowledge of Burn is itself secondhand, readymade. Maybe all information is, but when citing someone so well-known (at least in art circles) it has different effect and implications. This is quite a tangent but I was watching a documentary about death recently, which presented an interesting image about funerals in the future and how the deceased will be remembered. Since we leave such vast data records of ourselves behind nowadays, one possibility is that this data be downloaded to produce AI simulations of us, which family and friends can visit and interact with! A much more literal way to narrativise or remember someone than in your paintings and sculptures.

The Schwabsky book is called *Perpetual Guest*. Some really nice thinking and writing about art.

It's common for contemporary artists to participate with art history. I often ask artists who work in this way about the distinction/s, in their mind, between them/their work and the work they are referencing. Of course I don't mean this in the obvious sense of being different practitioners in different times with different outputs, but more so in respect to the potential of contemporary works to resonate historically like the historical works they cite.

I wouldn't stress too much about working with Burn's history. I think it's great you're being so thoughtful in your practice; certainly not trivial. It is a sensitive topic, especially for those that knew Burn, but art should go to these lengths.

J

Hey James,



Best,
Tommy

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