



Response to Jerwood Painting Fellowship 2016

By Dr. Christian Edwardes



TheGallery

Curator's Overview

Since 2010, the Jerwood Painting Fellowships have offered early career, UK-based painters the opportunity to work, for one year, with a notable mentor. This year Francesca Blomfield, Archie Franks and Dale Lewis have been respectively mentored by Phoebe Unwin, Jane Harris and Dan Coombs. These relationships are pivotal to the fellowship process and provide not only critical support during this intense period of practice, but also professional advice and expertise.

A less remarked facet of this process are the relationships that have developed between the fellows themselves. Francesca, Archie and Dale all recognise that, whilst their work comes from different places, there are a significant number of cross-overs between them. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is a mutual interest in a number of contemporary concerns: a fascination with the faux-glamour of an aspirational culture; a preoccupation with the peculiarly banal; and a profuse appropriation of motifs, objects, images, that appear divorced from any symbolic hierarchy.

Yet, each artist also traces points of reference in histories of visual practice, from the hard-edged abstraction of American Modernism to the precarious frivolity of Fragonard's paintings. Some of these are more evident than others, Dale Lewis's *Chicken Wings* (2015) appropriates Henry Moore's *Harlow Family Sculpture* (1954–55) as a direct allusion to memories of growing up in that town. Other are more nebulous. In Archie Franks *Some of Our Best Efforts* (2015), he finds as much affinity in Mark Leckey's *The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things* (2013), as he does with Giorgio de Chirico's paintings. These associations are fluid and lateral: taking up, as Francesca does, a sense of the spiritualism of Agnes Martins work, whilst, simultaneously, reflecting on the flatness of a TV screen.





There is a sense that all of these painters maintain a vitality in their image-making by deliberately avoiding neat categorisations, or pronouncements of authority, on the material they draw from. And, there is an instantaneity to their production that seems to prohibit any overly-mannered deliberation of their subject matter. For example, whilst it is possible to see some of these works as critiques of excessive consumption, or of the vacuous sentiments carried in inspirational memes and marketing communications, there are often far more elusive relationships going on. The artists take both an active and voyeuristic position in the lifeworlds they present to us. Francesca does not feel it is her role to present judgements on the lifestyles represented in the limousine paintings, but acknowledges her own fascination with these interiors. Archie describes his references to the rococo as ways of both critiquing and condoning the idea of pure, frivolous, pleasure.

So, in hosting the Jerwood Painting Fellowship, we are not only presenting an exhibition of three outstanding early career artists, but the results of a series of ongoing correspondences that are born out of relationships forged between the artists, their mentors, and their shared preoccupations.

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