

April 2025

3 Painters

Mark van Heygen

Ben Varney

Helen Cook

Dynamics of Quietude

First in a series of exhibitions to follow the spring and fall equinoxes.

Visit the exhibition online: helencook.art/garage/doq

Mark van Heygen

Mark van Heygen uses painting as a way to focus and think, and describes painting as an opportunity to find the unexpected. Oil paint is layered extensively and then scraped away revealing the history of the processes he uses across the canvas. Mark often uses shapes drawn in paint, such as birds or boats, as symbols that embody his memories. Surprising colour and texture come out of the layers built up by constant reworking. Canvases are often entirely reworked and become deeply textured and layered, and yet the whole effect creates a dynamic stillness. The initial impression of simplicity is in tension with the subtle marks and colours that are generated through the process of making, and with the depth of thought that goes into the work. Mark's difficulties with his eyesight and physical health are limitations that temper the strength of his working. Forcing a particular pace and vision. And with it Mark creates works embodying a deep sense of calmness, calmness hard won and profound.



Beach and Birds
Oil on canvas 61 x 61 cm
2024

£200

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f Mark van Heygen

Ben Varney

Ben Varney's first tool is line, a strong vibrant line, that gets buried - & occasionally resurrected - by layers of paint. Texture is created through many techniques, some carefully planned & some open to chance; including pressing wet paintings together to transfer paint, creating patterns like lichen or the wear on long faded signs. Colour is hard found, tortuously built up and mixed for a personal, plastic deepening of what are transitory shades in nature. Imagery and ideas are developed from local research - walks organized to visit folk art in medieval carving or painting - layers of paint echo the layers of use the landscape is put to. An unofficial piece of history. And also the paint is worked to points of resolution analogous of growth and decay. Wherein drawings and patterning inspired by lichen and root systems and flow of liquid hit points of disintegration, and the painting itself appears to break down. Drawings might return but are nearly always broken into fragments or ghostly forms, and then combined in unexpected ways. The overall effect of the paintings is to present a richly textured canvas of closely considered and connected ideas that encourages reflection.



Roots and Toes
Oil on canvas 85 x 60 cm
2025

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Dr. Helen Cook

Helen paints as a therapeutic pursuit, using gentleness against suffering. Using watercolour that is left to flow as it will on the page, texture comes from using paints and paper that encourage granulation. With layers of washes, subtle differences are encouraged into landscape like formations that emerge from an uncertain haze. The effect is one of waiting in an uncertain and shifting landscape, paralleling the experience of chronic illness — of living in a body with different capacities day to day, while also surviving in an increasingly eugenicist political climate.

The paintings are developed slowly over time, when capacity allows. Making is an organic process with multiple points of contact and with various opportunities for chance to play a part, but guided by the patterns of pressures placed on Helen and the materials themselves. Helen paints with a sensitivity to subtle changes. The work moves in slight gradations, and the force of the slightest mark on the paper is felt very deeply.



Paths #2 (Running)
Watercolour on paper 20 x 20 cm
2025

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Still Art

Slow dynamics. Quiet art that dwells on resilience. A way of making art that is engaged with understanding and minimising its impact on the natural world as a reaction against accumulation and spectacle. The quietness of still art is the result of a thoughtful examination of our cultural, political and economic landscape. Building new landscapes on the foundations of memory, history, and poetics. Still art draws on diverse subject matter, weaving together systematic observation of built and wild regions, with histories of oppressed people and extracted landscapes. Refusing hegemony and resisting the paradigm of power structures. Slow built dreamscapes rooted in local ecology and focused on our sense of ourselves as part of our landscape - and the repercussions of disregarding our impact on our environment. Humanity is nature, nature is humanity. We look to create constellations of ideas and forms. This is a project with a sense of 'history from below', often created from scraps, reused and foraged materials. Creation and imagination are at the forefront, the work itself is an example of not just resistance to hegemony, but in its making demonstrates the creation of a still way of being.

The spaces created by the three painters have an outward aesthetic similarity, a unified feeling of calm and quiet underlaid with a subtle dynamism that is created through the specific subjects of their contemplation: memory, creation, waiting. For each of them, the paintings exist as open systems -- open to new paths of inquiry and offering many points for engagement. The work asks the viewer to take time, to forget any need to search out specific meaning, and to absorb the colours, textures, shapes, and presence the paintings have.