

Mudlarks

Rebecca Sitar

Dan Roach

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Mudlarks (I & II)
Rebecca Sitar
Dan Roach

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Mudlarks

foreword by Rebecca Sitar

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Dan Roach and I touched base during the national lockdown of 2020, initially as two artists supporting each other during a challenging time. We began to have conversations about what we shared and reflected on the possibility of a collaborative project.

I first came across the term mudlark whilst I was doing research on the nature of lost objects. Mudlarking settled with us as an idea and we began to explore its conceptual and poetic potential; drawing interesting parallels to our ways of thinking and making.

‘Mudlarks’ were known in the nineteenth century as riverbank scavengers, impoverished people (often children and women) who walked the intertidal flats of the river Thames, combing for valuable objects washed up and embedded into the muddy shores. The Victorian journalist, William Mayhew, noted that they were often viewed with disdain yet they also held a certain curiosity for the middle classes in their otherness: slightly mythical creatures set apart from the norms and conventions of daily life, perhaps even possessing magical powers. Through further study another meaning attached to mudlark also captured our imaginations: that of a magpie-lark of Australian descent that builds its nest from mud. The term implies both earth and sky, the grounded and ethereal.

In painting, the physicality of earthed pigments equates to the very substance of mud. Its movement and traction may reveal or conceal, excavate or re-bury that which we may seek to find and shape and lose again.

Mudlarking invites a different way of being in the world. The attentive gaze is alert yet needs to be relaxed to see clearly that which may reveal itself. We felt this approach and commitment to looking encapsulated pivotal moments within our respective practices. We also felt the action of looking down on a terrain can be seen as analogous to a painting's surface when it is laid flat. Like the mudlarks: eyes to the ground, we too scan the surface to excavate, to glean what is of interest.

Dan and I recognised that we share a particular kind of pictorial language, in that our imagery signals the emergence of seemingly lost or abandoned forms and objects. These at times are evocative of experiences unearthed from memory; a resurfacing of those impressions which had once registered and ruminated over time.

We came to realise that during the act of painting, a kind of re-imagining takes place. Objects are transfigured to form poetic emblems that resettle (sometimes awkwardly), in the spatial fields of the newly formed painting and prints we create.

By the nature of these works we hope to offer an experience to the viewer in which they can lose themselves, leave the ordinary world behind and take on the cloak of a mudlark: to find for themselves – those broken treasures in the painting terrain and what they may trigger in the mind's eye.

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Kaleidoscopes of Atomic Shards

by Richard Davey

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From the moment we emerge screaming into the world, gasping lungfuls of air, eyes open to this new environment, we exist in the 'here'- bounded bodies interlocked with time and place, unable to escape the ever unfolding present of 'now'. We consume the world with focused gaze, sensing the solidity of our surroundings through inquisitive bodies, looking, interrogating, wondering, learning, naming, eager to understand. Through our modernist desire to 'know' everything, this trajectory of constant discovery sees the world shrink, with wonder reduced into a way-marker on the inevitable, linear path to an Enlightenment where mystery is tamed by knowledge.

Mudlarks today scour the tidal zone of rivers and shorelines; looking for treasures that when held between inquisitive fingers can collapse time; rummaging amongst sand, silt and murky water for things that might hold memories. Forms emerge in this tidal clearing - lumps of clay and corroded scabs of metal, waiting to be identified and named through research and investigation - clay pipe, buckle, fragment of a pot, coin, weight, harness. With a name, these forms find their function, their purpose is revealed, their worth ascribed. Sometimes, however, an eroded shape defies identification, remaining nameless, existing only as a cloud of unknowing, a quiet blurring of sensible reality, a nebulous, untamed cluster hovering before our eyes, teasing, not hard-edged facts but infinite possibilities.

As our gaze wanders the world, restlessly roaming across its surface, our brain brings the gathered information into focus. But only two percent of what we see in any moment is actually in focus, the rest is a blur of unformed sensations, a twisting, tumbling kaleidoscope of dancing atomic shards, constantly shifting between the decaying prison of time and solid being and the release into timeless freedom that exists outside the boundaries of form. This tidal edge-land of our peripheral vision is like memory - a space that appears solid, but is really abstract, fluid and continually emerging. When we look back and remember, the images that emerge in our mind's eye seem clear. They have form, presence and familiarity. But like the sharply focused world we think we see when we look outwards, these inward views are also illusions. Our memory is a palimpsest, where fragments from time past and the dreams of our unformed future collide with the present moment, bringing together a cacophony of disparate emotions, thoughts and sensations, merged with shards of sound, colour and form, until they become transformed into a familiar picture of reality in the mind.

Rebecca Sitar and Dan Roach are artists who wander these visual edge lands; mudlarks seeking treasure, relishing mystery and wonder, teasing with familiarity yet resisting the known. Their works are maps of these shimmering, shifting, sometimes iridescent spaces. Like mudflats, these colour-field surfaces absorb our gaze, offering blurred spaces on the edge of vision, sucking us in and holding us suspended in a moment of wonder. Within these timeless spaces, forms emerge, incubated into hesitant Being. Born from shards of fleeting memory, poetry, song and imagined dream, they hover like larks in the sky, looking at us as we look at them, a moment of exchange collapsed into song lines of colour spanning the gap between artist and viewer, form and formlessness, memory and imagination. We want to name, hold, and objectify them, but they resist these temptations, remaining as moments of elusive timelessness in a temporal world.

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Dr Richard Davey is an international published author and freelance curator. He is a member of the International Association of Critics and has written books on Anthony Whishaw RA, Tess Jaray RA as well as contributing catalogue essays to the Royal Academy of Arts, Anselm Kiefer exhibition in 2014 and the Summer Exhibition from 2015 - 2017.

Dr Davey is also a Senior Research Fellow in Historical and Critical Studies in the School of Art and Design, Nottingham Trent University as well as being the co-ordinating Chaplain.

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list of plates

Dan Roach

1. *Aloft* (2021) oil on panel, 20 x 25cm.
2. *Pleat* (2021) oil on panel, 20 x 25cm.
3. *Sweet Array* (2021) charcoal on aged paper, 11.5 x 7cm.
4. *Night Flox* (2021) oil on panel, 20 x 25cm.
5. *Stacket* (2021) oil on canvas on panel, 19.5 x 21.5 cm
6. *Balancer* (2021) (detail).
7. *Balancer* (2021) oil on panel, 25 x 20cm.
8. *Night Stack* (2021) (detail).
9. *Night Stack* (2021) oil on panel, 25 x 20cm.
10. *Close by* (2021) oil on canvas on panel, 32 x 25cm.
11. *Light Fold* (2021) silkscreen (edition 20), 28 x 40cm.
12. *Portico* (2021) oil on panel, 20 x 25 cm.

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list of plates

Rebecca Sitar

13. *Ruby* (2021) oil on panel, 26 x 35.5cm.
14. *Chest* (2020) oil on paper, 26 x 38cm.
15. *Red velvet in thin air* (2021) oil on linen, 26 x 35.5cm.
16. *Untitled (Flints of blue)* (2021) oil on canvas panel, 25.5 x 30.5cm
17. *Wish* (2021) oil on canvas panel, 25.5 x 30.5cm.
18. *Shell of a ball* (2021) oil on linen on board, 26 x 35.5cm.
19. *Under the skin* (2021) oil on wood panel, 30 x 40cm.
20. *Trinket Box* (2021) oil on wood panel, 30 x 36cm.
21. *Wooden Knight* (2021) oil on paper, 36.5 x 26.5cm.
22. *Castaway* (2021) oil on panel, 26 x 35.5cm.
23. *Untitled (Red and white tassel)* (2021) oil on linen panel, 26 x 35.5cm.
24. *The space within* (2020) oil on paper, 36 x 27.5cm.

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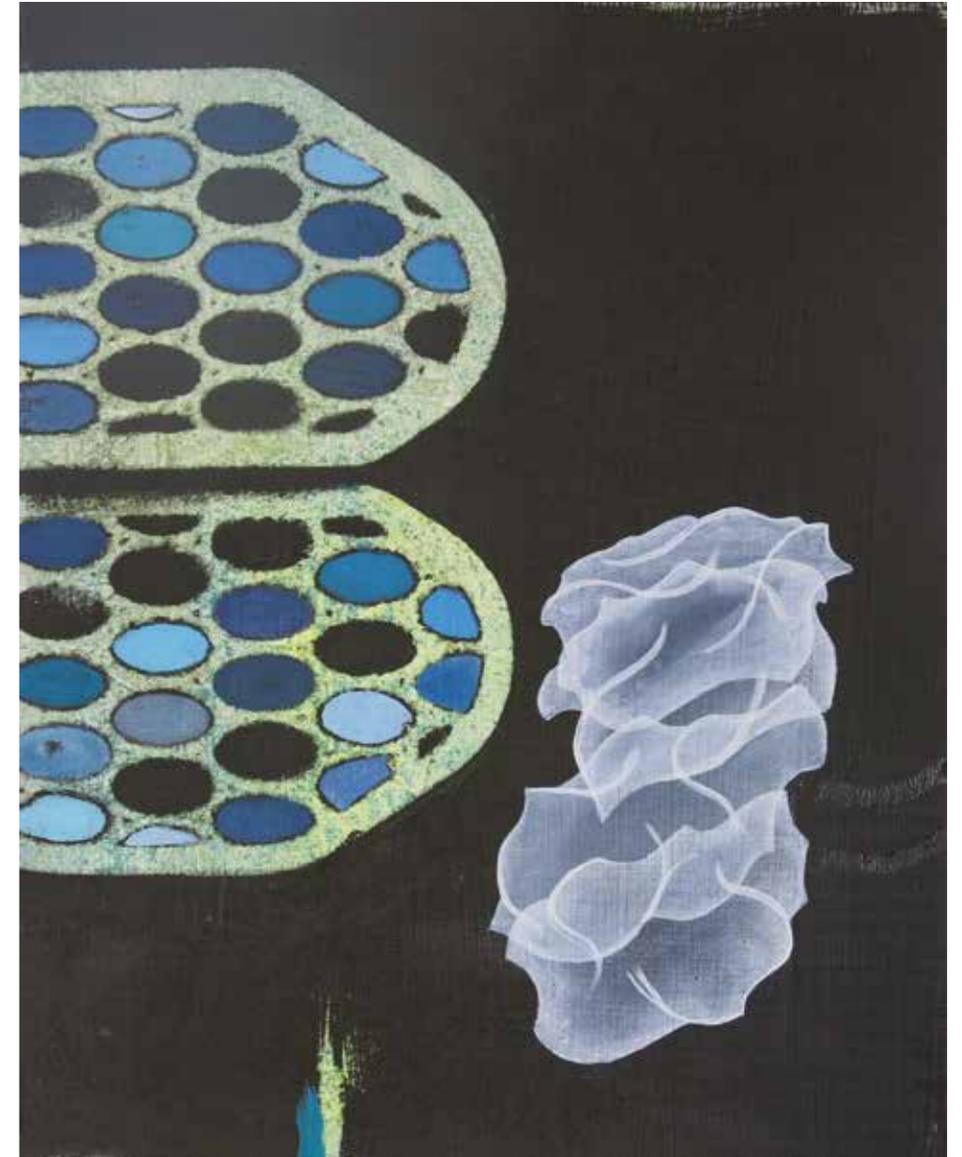
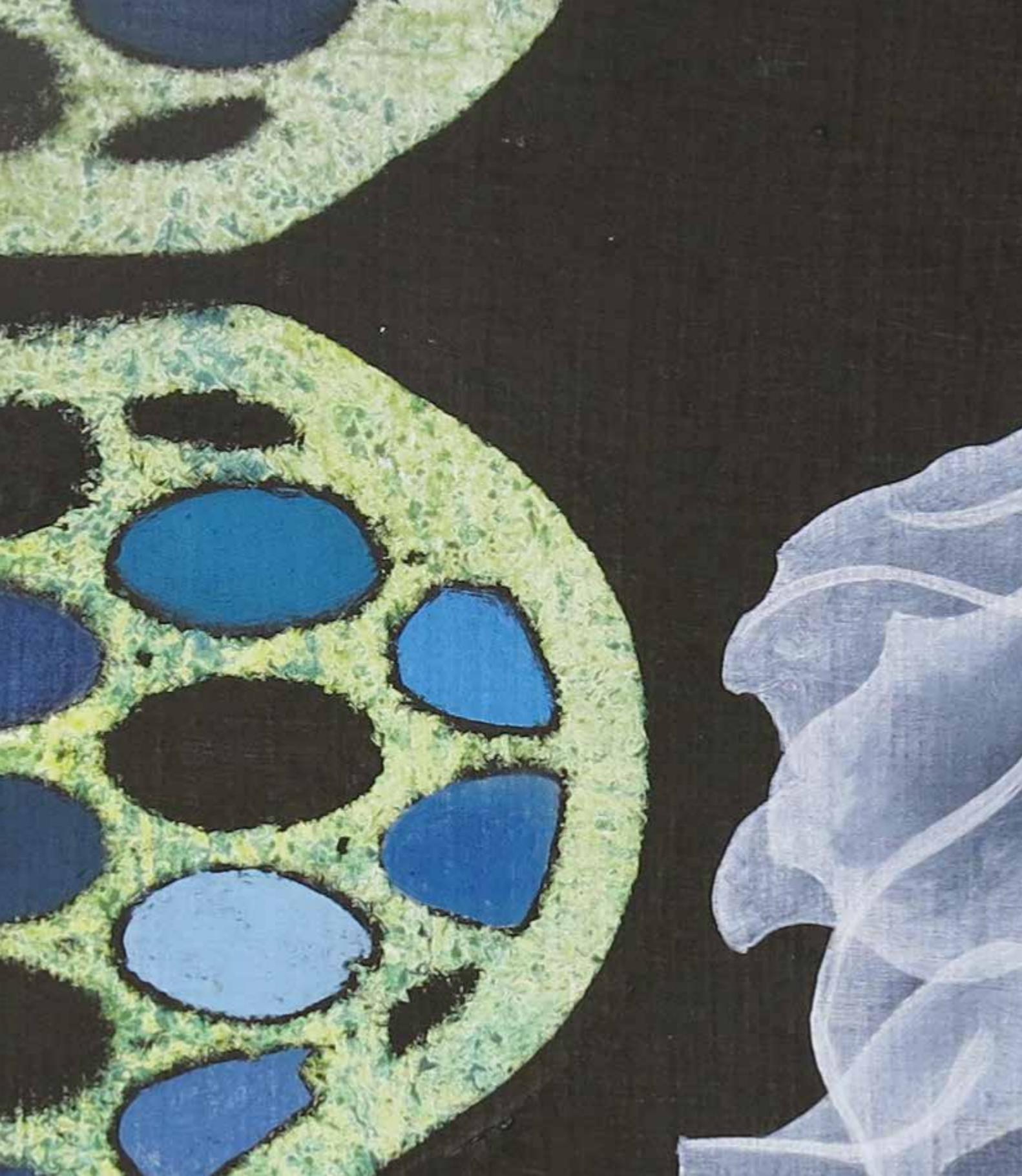


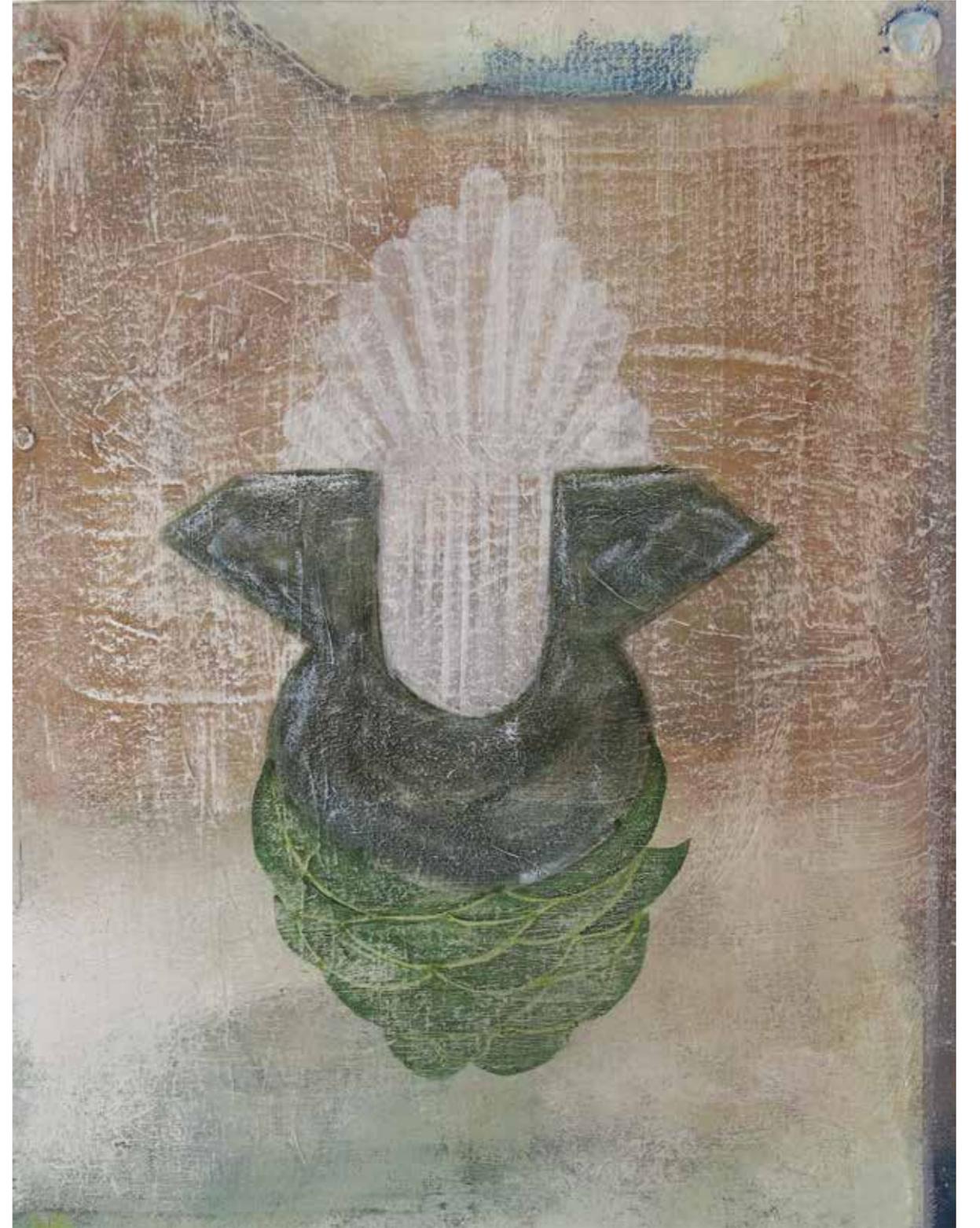


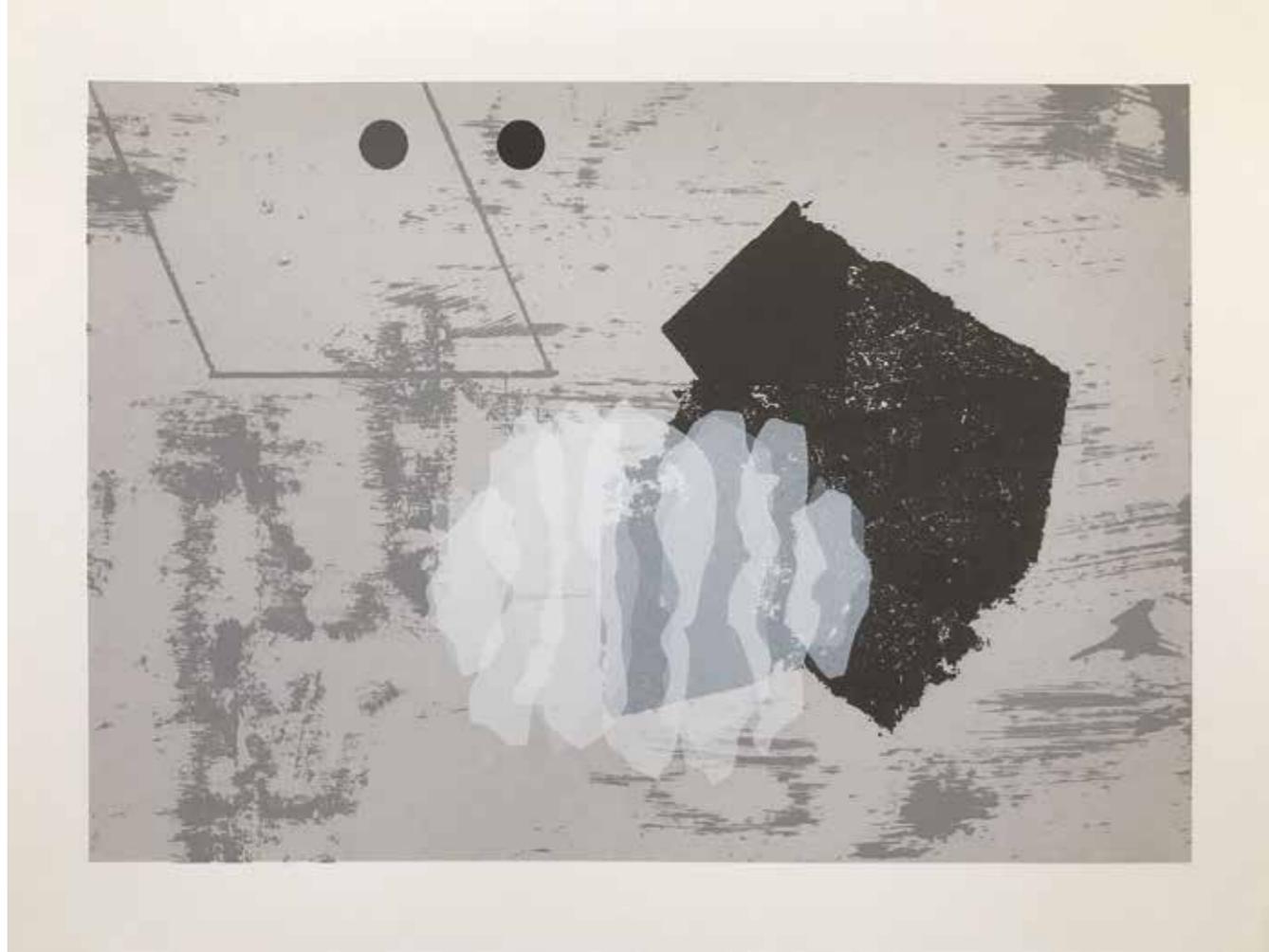






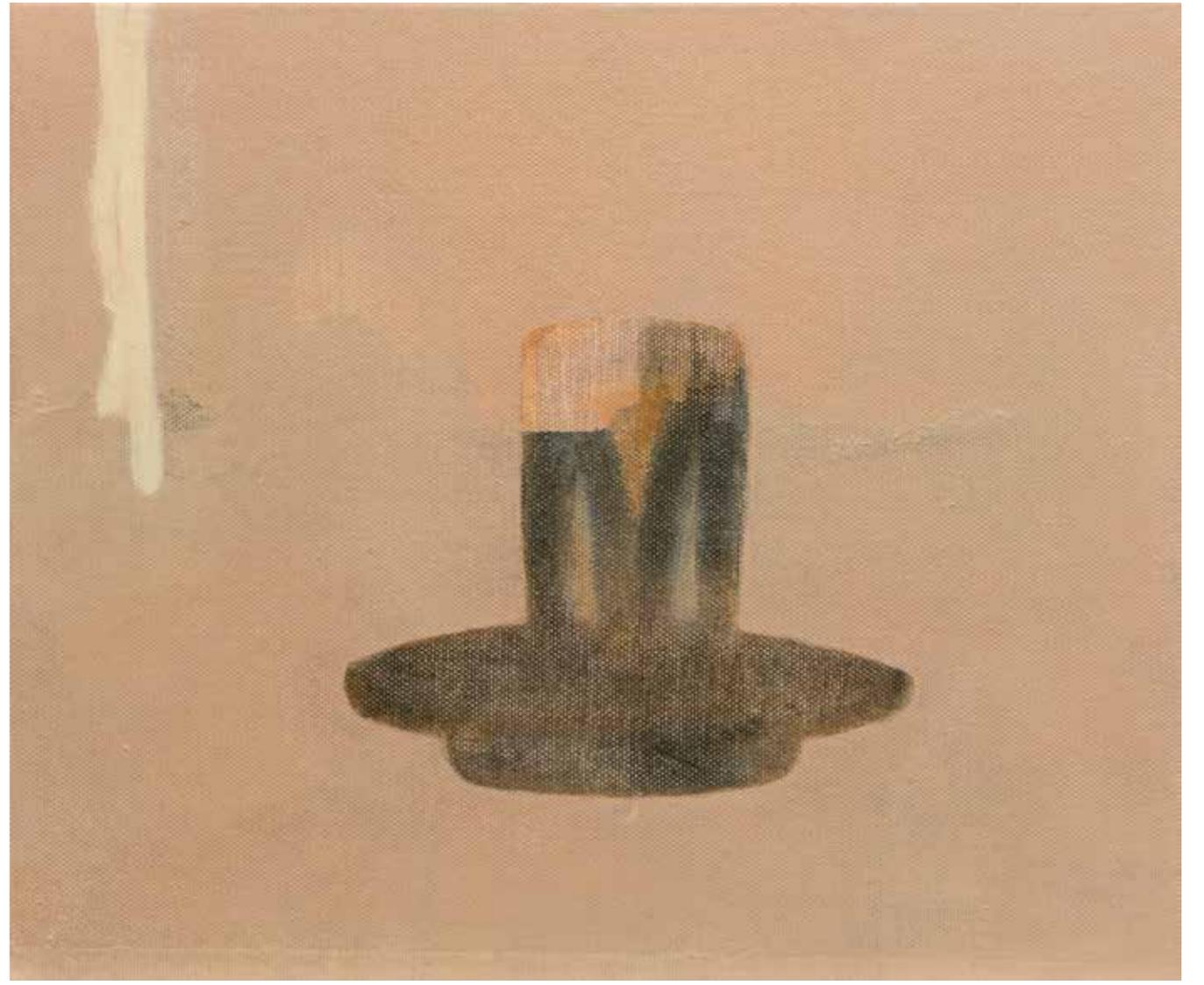
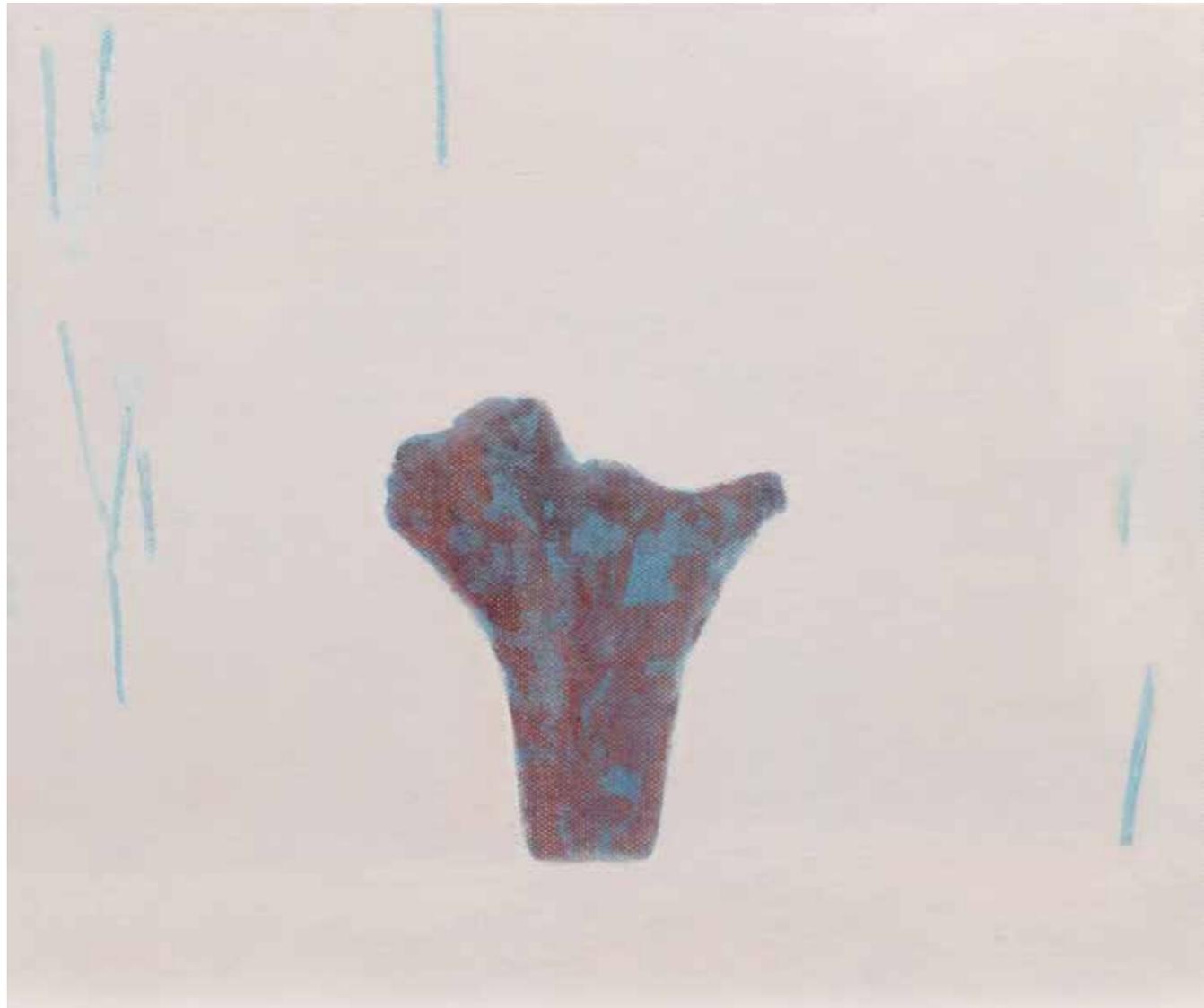






















Artists' Biographies

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Dan Roach (b. 1974, Barrow in Furness, UK), is a painter and printmaker based in Worcestershire. He graduated with a BA(Hons) in Fine Art from the University of Worcester in 2009 and an MA in Fine Art from the University of Gloucester in 2011. He is represented by Emma Hill, Eagle Gallery / EMH Arts, London and is a Technical Lecturer at University of Worcester School of Art.

Roach has exhibited throughout the UK and in Europe. Selected group exhibitions include *A Hand Stuffed Mattress*, Terrace Gallery, London 2019; *Counterpoints* (2017), *So We Beat On* (2016), *WHITEOUT* (2015), *Wanderer's Field* (2013) at Eagle Gallery / EMH Arts, London; *Summer Mix*, Turps Gallery, 2015; *The Discipline of Painting*, Harrington Mill, Nottingham, 2013; *Without an Edge There Is No Middle*, Pluspace Gallery, 2013. His most recent solo exhibition *Cloud Chamber* took place at Eagle Gallery / EMH Arts, London (2018).

www.danroach.co.uk

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Rebecca Sitar (b. 1969, Blackburn, UK.) is an artist based in Manchester. She graduated with BA(Hons) in Fine Art Painting from Winchester School of Art in 1991 and completed an MFA at Manchester School of Art in 1992. She is represented by Emma Hill, Eagle Gallery / EMH Arts, London and is a lecturer in Fine Art at University of Bolton.

Sitar has exhibited across the UK and Europe. Recent selected group exhibitions include *Fully Awake 5.6*, Freeland's Foundation, London (2019); *Tracer Wedge*, P.S. Mirabel Manchester (2018); *John Moores Painting Prize*, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (2014). Other notable exhibitions include *Beyond the Endgame: Abstract Painting in Manchester* (2003), Manchester Art Gallery; *Beginnings: Times of our Lives* (2000), Whitworth Art Gallery; *Slow Burn: Meaning & Vision in Contemporary British Abstract Painting*, (1998) Mead Gallery (touring). Her solo shows include: *Present & Elsewhere II* (2007), *Hinterland* (2004), *Ritual* (2001) at Eagle Gallery / EMH Arts, London; *Present & Elsewhere I* (2006), Galerija Karas, Zagreb; *Mind Breathes* (2000), Turnpike Gallery Leigh.

Sitar's work is held in various collections including Deutsche Bank AG, London; DLA, London and Manchester Art Gallery.

www.rebeccasitar.com

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Acknowledgments

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