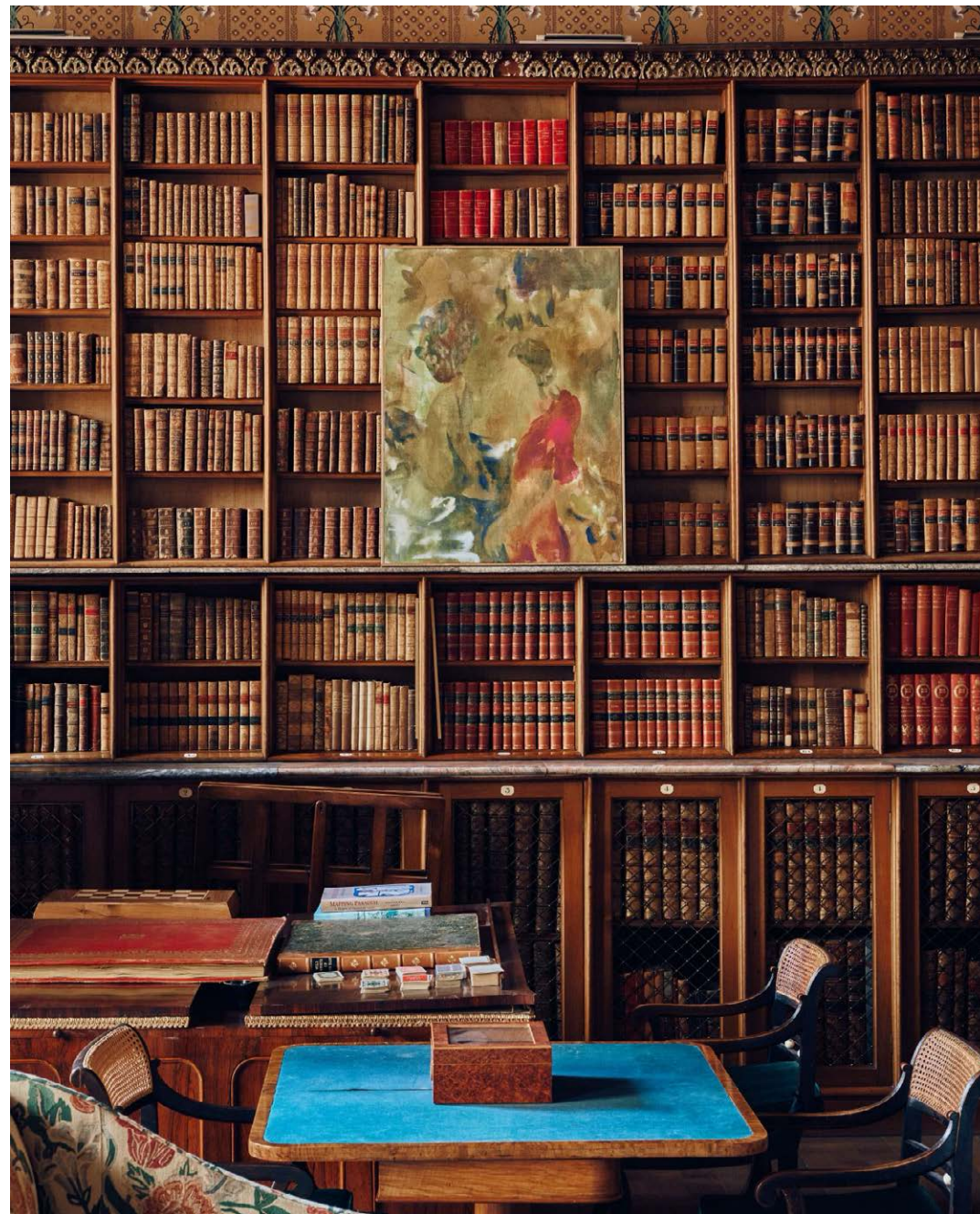


The new way to view modern art? In a stately home

Boring white boxes? For the gallerist India Montgomery, founder of The Dot Project, the best place to exhibit is in real homes — even if they are grand historic houses



Culture

Top 25: *Global*

The feel-good hits of the summer

Put your peers in the shade by getting to know 25 of the most sizzlingly hot people, places, shows, gadgets and beyond this season - including a stylish Lisbon restaurant that transforms into an intimate nightclub, Anya Taylor-Joy as a classy con woman and scenes from the life of London's hottest artist.

WRITERS: Leila Latif, Josefina Nagler Gómez, Karen Krizanovich, Natasha Tripney, Chiara Rimella, Guy De Launey, Lucrezia Motta, Rory Jones, Fernando Augusto Pacheco, David Phelan and Francesca Gavin

Artist: Nick Jensen

Nick Jensen is the name to drop if you want to impress your art-collector friends. His sensitive, fluid paintings sit somewhere between abstractions and figuration, and depict scenes of his life in London. The British painter is a hot ticket for US fans, who have been snapping up his work at his solo show at Tara Downs in New York. Downs is also creating a showcase exhibition in Paris this October during Art Basel for an artist unafraid to wear his emotions on his sleeve.

Francesca Gavin

ARTS & CULTURE • FINE ART • ART REVIEW

The Best Art at Frieze New York, Future Fair, NADA and Esther III

The spring art fairs offer a whirlwind chance to take in works in every style and medium—from rococo- and Renaissance-inspired paintings to digital sculptures that destroy themselves.

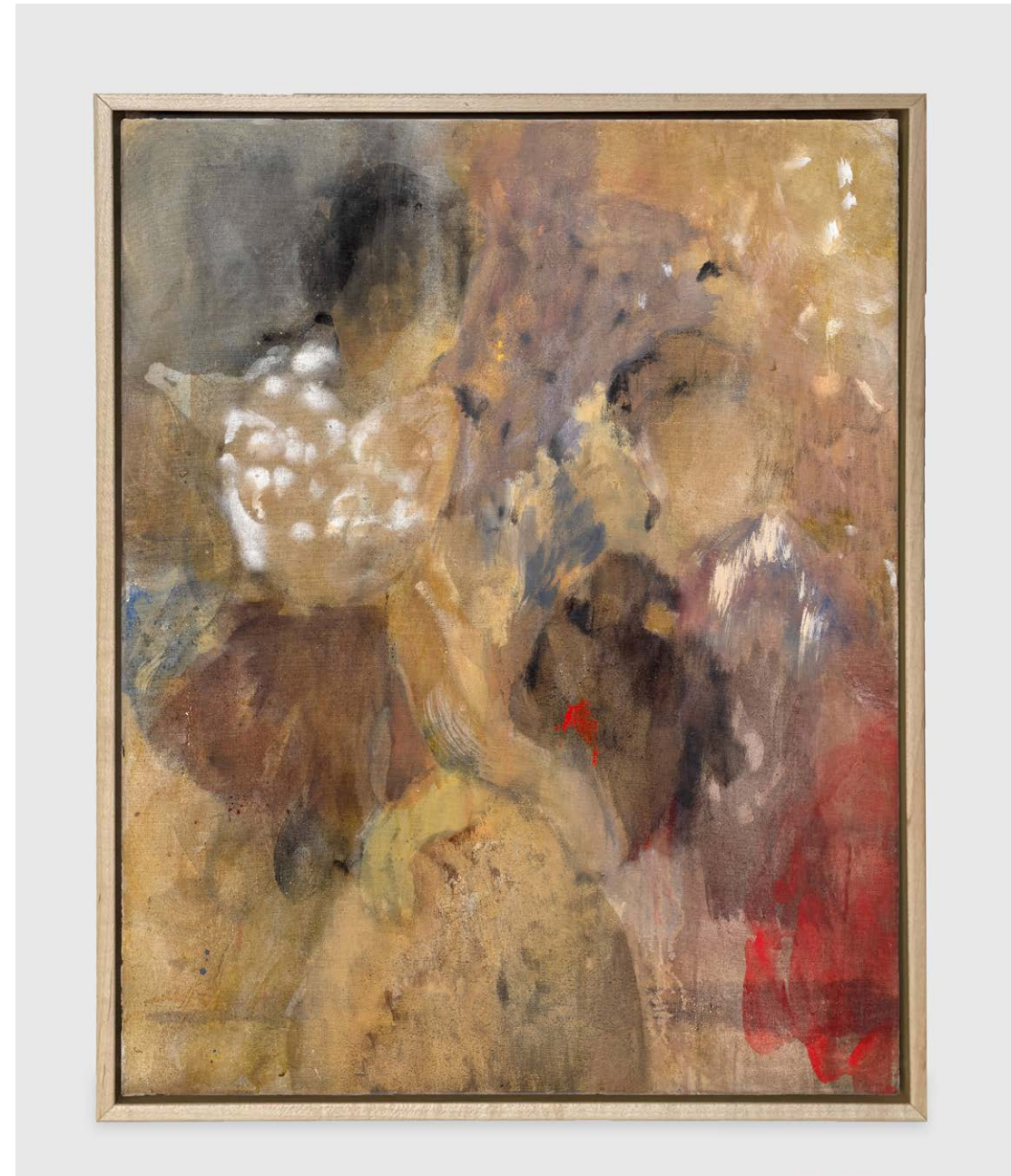
By **Brian P. Kelly** [Follow](#)

May 14, 2026 2:51 pm ET



The scene at Frieze New York, the biggest art fair of a week full of such events. CASEY KELBAUGH / CKA

Esther III is the smallest fair to have opened this week (several others have already started or will begin today), and here artists looked to the past for inspiration. Kata Tranker’s paper-pulp sculptures and reliefs at Longtermhandstand look like they’ve just been brought back from an archaeological dig: A crate topped with human-monkey hybrids, loosely based on figures from Babylonian myth, looks like an ark or a sarcophagus.



Nick Jensen, *Paris*. Courtesy the artist and Tara Downs

Delphine Hennelly’s paintings at Pangée are based on famous art styles from the past, rendered in Postimpressionist brushwork and a palette that brings to mind the psychedelic-meets-seasick colors of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner. And Nick Jensen’s distemper-and-oil canvases at Tara Downs feel like encountering a Degas in a dream, which begins to rapidly dissolve as we wake up.

The spring art fairs always bring an overwhelming agenda to New York, and that’s just as true as ever. And though there’s a lot to see, we can be grateful that there’s also a lot to like.

ARTS • GALLERIES

As New York's Art Week Kicks Off, Here's What Not to Miss at Esther III



Esther III runs at the Estonian House through Saturday, May 16. Photo Matthew Sherman

As New York City's art week ramps up with six fairs plus a series of major auctions, Esther returned yesterday (May 12) for its third chapter at the Estonian House with 22 exhibitors and special projects. With a strong mix of Eastern European galleries, New York spaces and other European projects, it offers a more intimate, boutique and context-specific experience than most other fairs, with works staged against the elegant interiors of a four-story Beaux-Arts building. On opening day, Observer ran into Esther co-founder and dealer Margot Samel on the J train. She was carrying the Esther-emblazoned carpet that would be installed this year for the last time in the Estonian House's entryway. Running a fair and a gallery during the busiest week of the year is a challenge, she said, adding that while it has always paid off, three editions felt like the right number for a fair that set out to do something different. "Rather than trying to

Tara Downs presenting Nick Jensen



Nick Jensen, *Downhills Drift*. Courtesy the artist and Tara Downs

create a conventional art fair environment, Esther has always leaned into the peculiar character of the Estonian House and allowed galleries to respond to it in unexpected ways. That tension between architecture, history, and art is really the heart of the project. As the final edition of Esther, it felt important to leave on a high note."

Tara Downs is showing the magical realism of London-based Nick Jensen, whose hazy canvases constantly drift and slip between figuration and abstraction. Building imagery in layers, the artist engages in a subconscious, emotional exercise, reconstructing a dream by returning again and again to the same subject. Through intuitive layering in tempera and oil, figures begin to emerge from abstraction, led by the alchemy of colors and textures that replicate the phenomenological process by which we see, transform sensation into symbol and meaning, then interiorize it as memory. Yet that memory can blur back into fading shadows and untamed sensations that hint at events, where the feeling precedes its formalization into language. Jensen's work enacts this continuous back-and-forth between sensation, symbol, language and memory that shapes our experience of the world and the self. The presentation sold out by the afternoon, with prices ranging from \$6,000 to \$32,000.

An abstract painting by Nick Jensen. The background is a textured, layered composition of warm tones like beige, cream, and light brown, with some darker, more gestural strokes in grey and black. In the foreground, a child with light brown hair is depicted from the chest up, wearing a white garment with a prominent red and blue collar. The child's expression is somewhat somber. In the mid-ground, there are faint, ethereal figures of people, possibly dancing or moving, rendered in soft, blended colors. The overall style is painterly and expressive, with visible brushstrokes and a sense of depth created by the layering of colors and textures.

Stories

Feed

Paint Practice

NICK JENSEN IS A PAINTER FIRST AND FOREMOST, BUT HIS FORMER LIFE AS A PRO-SKATER HAS INFORMED HIS ART IN UNEXPECTED, OFTEN POETIC WAYS.

ARTICLE PUBLISHED: 10 MARCH 2026

WRITTEN BY FRANCESCA GAVIN

2,276 WORDS

Applying paint onto a canvas is not an easy task. The confidence of raising the brush, applying the pigment and creating the desired mark grows with time. British artist Nick Jensen doesn't attack his pictures but instead develops the imagery like layers of gauze. His work exudes atmosphere and fluidity, something echoing his use of watercolour and acrylic rather than oil. His paintings tell stories through sensation, like a moment cut from a film just before or after the action.

Jensen isn't afraid to wear his heart on his sleeve. In his former life as a pro skateboarder, he was part of a wave of skaters opening up about their own relationship with anxiety and mental health. Trained at Central Saint Martins and Chelsea College of Arts, exhibiting in London, Seoul, Brussels and New York City and running his own project space, Jensen would appear to have quite a classic route into the art world. Yet this also happened alongside a pro-skateboarding career riding for Slam City, Blueprint, Lakai and establishing his own (now defunct) brand Isle Skateboards, where he often worked with artists to design boards. That history informs his present in unexpected, poetic ways.

Hey, Nick! The text for your last exhibition, Driftwood Dragon, was a story. Where did the idea come from?

Nick Jensen: I read a book by Gareth E Rees called 'Marshland'. He's talking about the River Lee and the surrounding areas in the marshland just outside my studio – my commute from Tottenham to the studio on my bike, going past all the canal boats. He talks all about Walthamstow Marsh and the same vista that I pass every day. Anecdotes, like this "driftwood dragon". That's where the title for my last show came from. He saw this wooden makeshift dragon hung outside a canal boat. These departure points from the mundane into mystical spaces.

It reminds me about the sense of action in your work. Something's happened, but we're not seeing the full thing happen. It's off stage, or we're looking at things from a side angle. It's a poetic take on narrative. You're depicting atmosphere rather than action.

I like that. The more and more I paint, the more I'm getting less interested in defining solid outlines and figuration. It's more about the atmosphere of what's happened or what's going on. How can you make a painting convince the viewer of that, or be charged with atmosphere in that way? Because it can just fall into dissolution and nothingness.

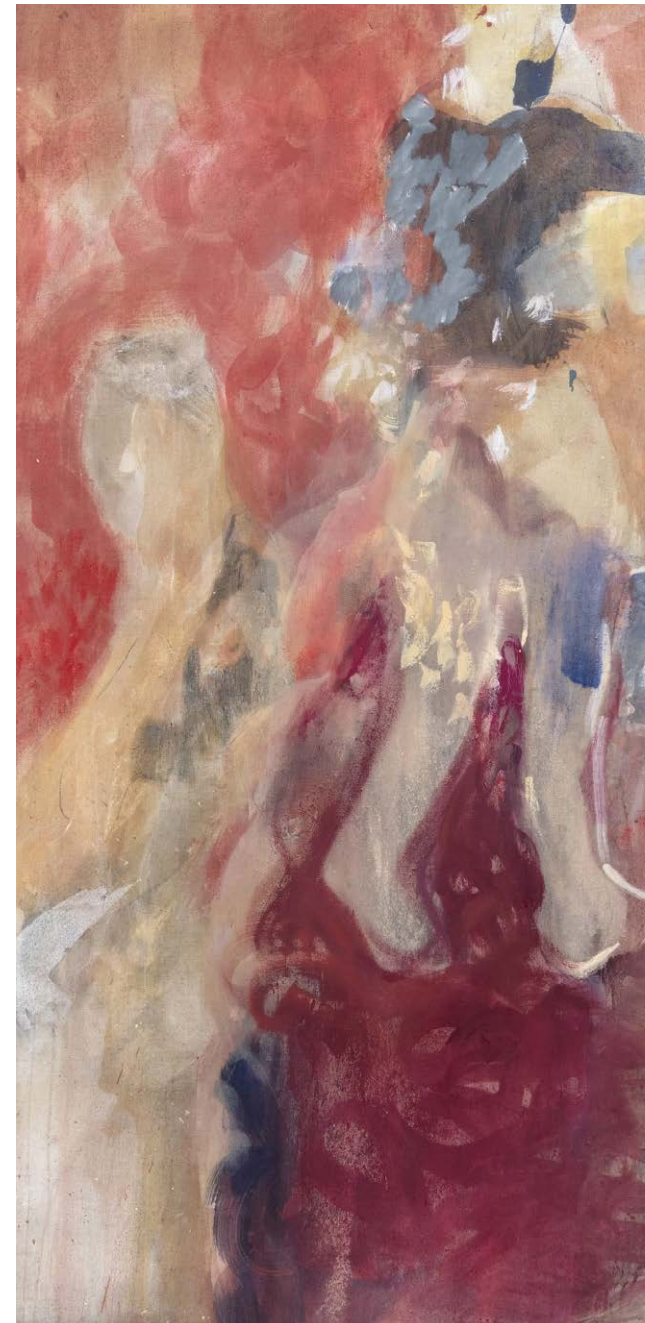
You're almost walking that line. At some points it feels like the paint does dissolve, like we are watching forms become unclear.

I use water-based paint, and often make a line and then spray it so it disappears, but it's still there.

It feels like traces of time. It also really roots your practice in your own experience. How did that happen?

Yeah, more in a psychogeographic way. I started thinking about how the figures felt like they were in these marshland spaces, or the way that the background and the figures within those spaces intermingled. I started thinking about how nature reclaims human essence. Nowadays, you don't pay attention to things because you're on your phone and you're busy. But this book [Marshland by Gareth E Rees] started reactivating some of the ideas I previously had, but they were asleep in my mind.

I didn't necessarily know they were there. I would walk around the marsh and find old thistles, or things that suddenly made more sense to me in the context of what I was making. Like an upward vertical thistle with frogs going to the right hand side would be a perfect way to then use it in a painting. Almost like action painting. Pour paint going up and then spill it to the right and then spray it to fizz it out. It anchors within the abstract space.



How did the psycho-geographic grow for you in general? Do you wander around the edges of a city?

Being a skater, and growing up being a skater, when I went to art school, Central Saint Martins, it was very much about your unique take on the world. The teachers at the time were really trying to tease out how that can be used in a conceptual way within my practice. As a fresher, slightly wet round the ears, it was just a bit naive. I was taking these things quite black and white, and wasn't enjoying the end result, because it was like a kind of diagram of how to explain my brain in relation to skateboarding in physical manifestation. I made some ramps and stuff on pulleys in a studio crit. They were more like shapes of ramps. As a spectator, you'd have to pull the ropes to activate the architecture. It was my first intervention into thinking about how other people interacted with space, but in an absurdist way.

I always found skateboarding a form of subversion, but also slightly ludicrous. You can make sense of it but you still have the rules of gravity, even to perform that trick. Psychogeography is informed by that, because wherever you go – London, LA, San Francisco, Milan, Bulgaria – you're mapping the landscape with those eyes. You are specifically looking for things that you can subvert in the language of skateboarding. It is so built in.

When I'm an old man, I'll be like, "I could ollie that" or something. The traces don't fade, but your ability does. I'll still see things and text friends – younger generation skaters coming up who are more risky than I am now, because I'm old and I'm slightly retired from professional skating. I'll be like, "have you seen this spot?" I'm sometimes worried, have I still got the eye? Are they gonna laugh at me?

It's almost repositioning what skateboarding can be. With a lot of artists who come from a skate background, it's almost training on how to rethink space.

When you start so young, you're in that malleable headspace. It's not really a retraining, it's more just developing. I think if you started when you're older, then it would be more retraining, because you understood how things function. But when you're that nine-year-old kid, you're already thinking of revenge. It could be an army base or whatever.

When did you start?

Around nine-years-old. My older brother was three years older. When I wanted to go to Southbank, he'd chaperone. So I was going to Southbank from quite a young age, skating underneath the National Film Theatre and Royal Festival Hall. Then other friends would take us under their wing. We would go street skate with the older skaters and go from there, by the Thames to Liverpool Street, Aldgate and places like that.

I learned from some really cool London skaters about the hardcore nature of being like, "let's skate this". It's almost like a Rubik's Cube. It becomes an interaction between your friends. They do something, and you can't believe they've used the space in that way. You get really illuminated and excited, thanks to them. They were like educators – Channon King, Mark Channer, Mike Manzoori. They were pushing this East Coast perception that came out of New York and Philadelphia. I think it's informed the way I am now to this day, as an artist, as a person.

Southbank is this iconic, brutalist building that's immensely central, but you're also next to the river, which is such a huge natural body of water.

The funny thing about Southbank is it's designed to be able to take in water if the Thames flooded. That's the whole point of it. The reason why it's an under passage and it's got the banks is so that if there was a flood and the Thames Barrier failed, it could swallow up the water. Often skateboarding gravitates to where water is – half pipes, bowls, pools where water is supposed to be flowing. Skating is a fluid thing.

“It reminds me about the sense of action in your work.

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happen. It's off stage, or we're looking at things from a side

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atmosphere rather than action.”

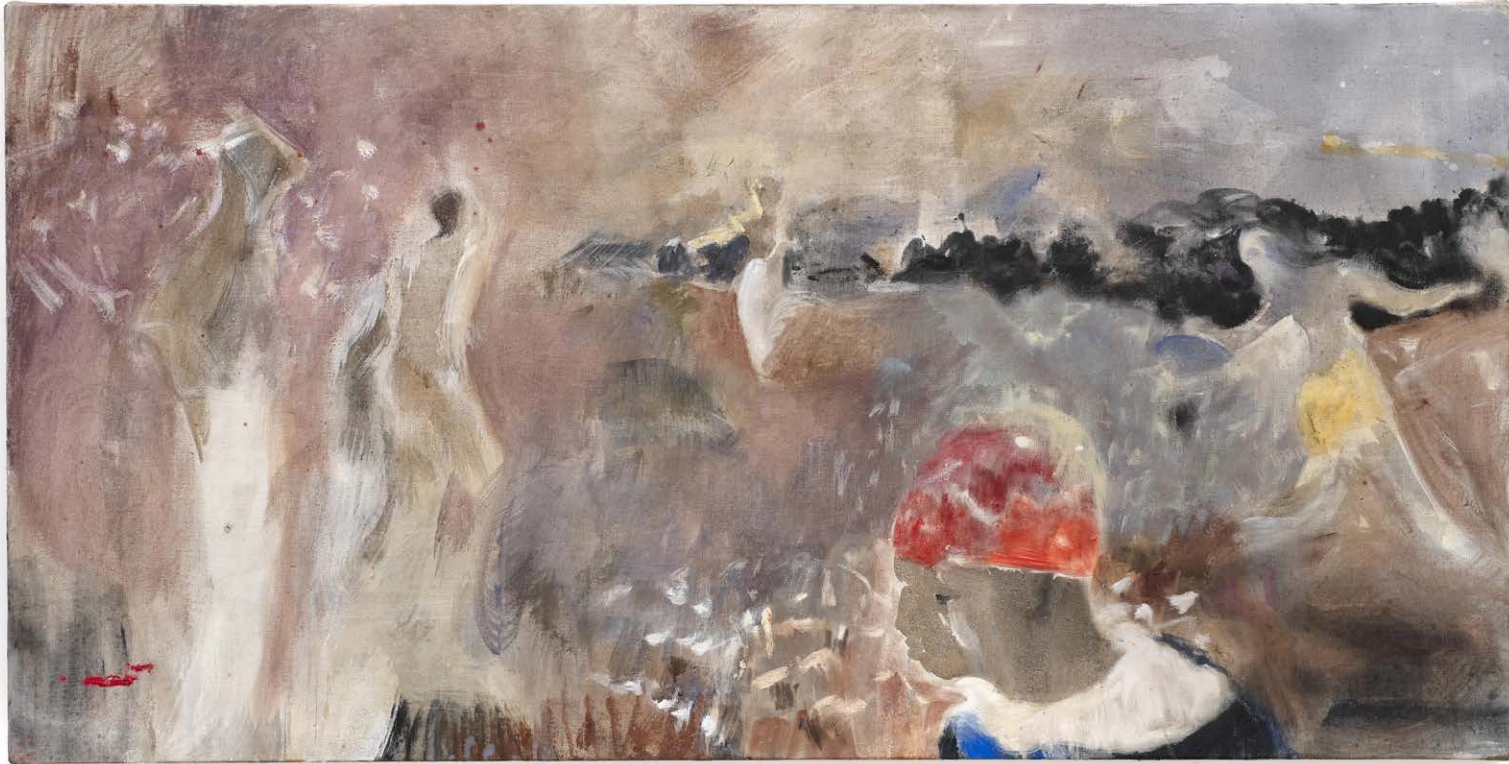
Like dowers finding water with two pieces of wood. When you started Isle Skateboard, did you feel that connected the two halves of you in some way?

The thinking behind doing it was, practically, growing a position where I could get an income, which never happened. Secondly, I really enjoyed talking to artists, connecting with people. I ran a little art gallery out of my flat in East London. It was just a big warehouse space. I loved art and the conversation around it, and because I was skating at the time, I was like, "why don't I bring the two together?" I could use my artistic friends and experience and bring that into skateboards and do something different. We started making board designs that were quite different to other companies. I would make installations or commission artists to make works, and the link was more direct.

I think as an artist, it was more of a byproduct. Not to be so tunnel vision can be really useful when you paint. I'm a painter, quite specifically. I work within the four dimensions of a canvas. Those are my parameters. But being able to flex my conceptual muscle by exploring an idea with an artist outside of my painting practice was a really nice way to let off steam.

You worked with amazing artists, too. Kira Freije, Oliver Laric, Damien Roach, Liam Gillick, Paul Purgas. And you made some yourself?

Yes, as well as sculptures. I would never take ownership of it as a piece of work. As an artist, I wouldn't show it on my website or whatever. It would be under the bracket of design. It was really fun, and I never felt overly precious or worried about it. It was driven quite a lot by aesthetics. Because at the end of day, you've got to sell this thing to a consumer. If it looks good, it's gonna sell. If you do something really cleverly erudite as an artist



in a conceptual way, but you've got nothing that's sexy or sellable, then you fail in a way. It was quite fun having to sit within those rules.

Do you think there was something about images and movement that impacted the fluidity in your paintings?

Years ago that was the gravity thing, where things were falling through something.

Even how a used board can get scratched up underneath when its used resembles abstraction in some kind of way. Defacement through movement...

I don't know the answer to that, but it's obviously something that's just in my DNA as a decision making process, whether it's subconscious or not. Often I want things to feel a bit emotional or cinematic in some way. Like you need the next frame to contextualize it.

You've developed a really muted, watery palette.

When I see images at high contrast, when I make images like that, I feel like they're not who I am. It's not like I'm trying to make fresco paintings. I just think being English, you're just used to a slight film of gray or haze in life. I think there's something weirdly melancholic about my practice. It's not very sunny. Even if I use bright colors, I have to wash over with a sandy white or something. I can't quite commit. The more experienced I get, the more I'm trying to work within harder colors to use, like darker blacks and dark browns and ochres. Because if you can make that work, it can be really compelling, I'm more of a monk in my approach, like a slower burn. Less dazzle.

Kids are often in your pictures. I understand that's also part of your experience of being a dad, but it doesn't feel like just that.

It's probably slightly mourning the loss of being a pro-skater and spending all my time out and playing. As you grow into an adult, you say goodbye to that childhood thing, because you're the dad now. There's a rediscovery, in a way, of what it means to just be out and play. When I'm thinking of representing something with action or movement, I don't want to show someone dancing, or playing basketball or football. I just want it to feel like there's charge within the space. Almost like an Edgar Degas painting, but no one's doing ballet.

I spent so many years where you'd be on a skate trip, somewhere beautiful in Italy, and you would be having a break, sitting down while your friend was skating. You and your friends would all be hanging out, chatting, and you're sitting in this piazza space while someone's skating. Someone's stretching. You're just out and about the whole time. You've got a very specific purpose for why you're in this piazza in the middle of nowhere in some strange part of Italy because your friend's trying to film something. There is something about being present in space.

You mentioned Degas but in general you aren't afraid to look at art history.

I just can't help it. I love rediscovering painting. Returning to the old masters and looking at Paul Cezanne... I just love it so much. I've tried in the past to circumnavigate making references to history painting because it isn't trendy, or it's a bit traditional. That's a bit romantic. But that's what I feel like making.