



GRAEME TODD
The View from Now Here

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'But what enhanced for Kublai every event or piece of news reported by his inarticulate informer was the space that remained around it, a void not filled by words. The descriptions of cities Marco Polo visited had this virtue: you could wander through them in thought, become lost, stop and enjoy the cool air, or run off.'¹

I enjoy paintings that you can wander through in thought. At home I have a small panel by Graeme Todd that resembles a Chinese lacquer box. In the distance of the image is the faint tracery of a fallen city, caught within a surface of deep, fiery red. The drawing shows only as an undercurrent, overlaid by thinned-down acrylic and layers of varnish that have been polished to a silky patina. Criss-crossing the topmost surface are a few horizontal streaks: white tinged with purple, and bright, lime green. I imagine they have been applied by pouring the paint from one side to the other – the flow controlled by the way that the panel is tipped – this way and that. I think of the artist in his studio, holding the painting in his hands, taking this act of risk.

Graeme Todd's images have the virtue that, while at one glance they appear concrete, at another, they are perpetually fluid. This is what draws you back to look again at them – what keeps them present.

It is a pleasure to be able to host *The View from Now Here* at the Eagle Gallery, and to work in collaboration with Andrew Mummery, who is a curator and gallerist for whom I have a great deal of respect.

Emma Hill 2015

1. Italo Calvino: *Invisible Cities*, 1972, translated by William Weaver



Graeme Todd : *The View from Now Here*

For twenty years Graeme Todd has systematically explored the spatial construction of paintings and their material properties. His subject matter is drawn from various sources – including tourist photography, art history and the landscape surrounding the places where he lives and works – but landscape for Todd is a place of the imagination, not somewhere that you can actually go. Consequently his paintings combine motifs that refer to actual geographies and histories with a more personal and surreal calligraphy. Todd's animated mark-making merges with the chance effects of the materials that he uses – including acrylic paint, ink, pencil and varnishes – to create sensual, hallucinatory surfaces that explore painting's illusionistic potential.

As an introduction to the paintings illustrated in this catalogue, Andrew Mummery asked the artist to say a little more about the thinking and influences behind them.

AM: *Place*, with all its geographical and historical connotations, has always played an important part in your work. Your experiences of East Lothian – where you live – and Italy, Japan and Switzerland – where you have also worked – have all influenced the content of your paintings. In what ways has place been an inspiration for your most recent work?

GT: The longer that I have spent on the east coast of Scotland in my adopted hometown of Dunbar the more my attention is drawn towards the area between the cliffs and the sea at low tide. This exposed piece of rocky landscape is very raw and almost primeval, surreal, dreamlike, sometimes even nightmarish. It reminds me of paintings by Max Ernst and El Greco. Dunbar was the childhood home of John Muir, the great proto-ecologist and founder of America's national parks. I have several reproductions of Muir's wilderness drawings around the house, in particular those of glaciers in Alaska in which he was able to make a monumental statement in pencil on a small, hand held scale. These have been an influence, as has something else that has a big impact on a small scale – a painting by Paul Klee called *Opened Mountain* from 1914.

This depicts a crystalline structure made up of circles and lines that make up interlocking cylindrical shapes, all realised in luminous watercolour. It has become a touchstone for me over the last year or two. I think about it often and you can see something of the unique place that it depicts in my new paintings. The landscapes in my earlier works were very often trees and forests, contrasted with open spaces. They have now taken on a more rocky and mountainous aspect where the space is less open, denser and harder to negotiate. My sensitivity to place has definitely influenced this development.

AM: Drawing is a key element in the creation of your work. Can you say something about how you approach this?

GT: The significant development in my recent approach to drawing has probably been the result of a gradual shift from pen, ink and brush – although I still use these and the particular physicality that they have – to chalks, crayons, coloured pencils, graphite and the like. These are more malleable, and physical in a different way, allowing erasing, rubbing, getting dirty, getting clean again – quite different from the precise way that I have with pens. I am expanding my mark-making and drawing vocabulary through this new combination of tools and materials and I think that this has probably also been effected by the shift in subject matter that I mentioned in reply to your previous question.

AM: What about the sources for the graphic elements in your work? As well as making art historical references, they seem to employ a cartoon-like and, in some of the small paintings, almost scatological sense of fun.

GT: The mark-making in my work can be very direct and free, like automatic drawing or doodling. Objects, images and marks appear very much in the moment. Something like the ‘ice cream cone mountain’, for example, that recurs in paintings such as *Opened Landscape with Trees* and *Mount Withinland* came about through that directness. I also like to throw or splat thick paint, something that brings a visceral randomness to the work. And yes, it is really quite fun to be able work this way sometimes! A sense of play in the improvisation of it all is a good thing.

AM: You gave your 2002 solo exhibition at the Kunsthauus Glarus the title *Space is Deep*, and spatial construction is one of your principal concerns when you make a painting. How would you describe the very different spaces in the works *Needle Hill* and *The Hare Hunt*, paintings that were made twelve years apart?

GT: Looking at *Needle Hill* now I can see that the approach to space is closer to the kind that one can see in Japanese landscape painting – the floating world with its idea of ‘form and void’ with both elements having equal importance. In contrast, *The Hare Hunt* takes something from Breughel’s drawing of the same title from 1560 and combines it with the crystalline structure of Klee’s *Opened Mountain* to create a combination of the *terrestrial* space – where the hunt is taking place over the (imagined) mountain landscape – and the *internal* space of the mountain (again imaginary) with its structure and magnetic tension. This is also visible in one of the most recent paintings, *Mount Withinland*, where the mountain structures appear to float over an ambiguous landscape that could be terrestrial, subterranean or cosmic.

Surrealism has always been important to me – it’s probably what took me to art college in the first place – and later Klee came to represent for me the kind of artist who makes a bridge between the poetic world of the imagination and a more formally aesthetic, abstract painting. The idea of space, or place, that I’m interested in is a mixing of the actual and the imaginative, in order to make something that stands on its own terms. As Klee says, “Art does not reproduce the visible, rather, it makes visible”.









List of Works

- 2 *Needlehill* 2001
acrylic, ink, gesso, varnish on mdf panel
105 × 122 cm
- 4 *Mount Withinland* 2015
acrylic, ink, gesso, pencil, varnish on plywood panel
80 × 100 cm
- 8 *Brightchord* 2015
acrylic, ink, gesso, pencil, varnish on plywood panel
75 × 110 cm
- 9 *I've been out walking* 2015
acrylic, ink, gesso, pencil, varnish on plywood panel
75 × 110 cm
- 10 *Floatingweed* 2015
acrylic, ink, gesso, pencil, varnish on plywood panel
80 × 100 cm
- 11 *Opened landscape with trees 2* 2015
acrylic, gesso, pencil, varnish on mdf panel
30 × 42cm
- 12 *The Grips* 2015
acrylic, ink, gesso, pencil, varnish on plywood panel
22.5 × 30 cm
- 13 *The View from Now Here* 2015
acrylic, ink, gesso, pencil, varnish on plywood panel
22.5 × 30 cm
- 14 *The Hare Hunt* 2015
acrylic, ink, gesso, pencil, varnish on plywood panel
75 × 110 cm

Graeme Todd

Graeme Todd was born on Glasgow in 1962.

He studied at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art, Dundee (1979–1985), and currently lives and works in Dunbar, East Lothian.

Todd is represented by Andrew Mummery/Mummery + Schnelle, London; Galleria Alessandra Bonomo, Rome; and Galerie Brigitte Weiss, Zurich. He has had regular solo exhibitions with these galleries since 1998.

Solo exhibitions in museums and public institutions include:

1994 Collective Gallery, Edinburgh

2000 *Mount Hiddenabbys* Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh
and Leeds Metropolitan University Gallery, Leeds

2002 Kunsthaus, Glarus

2004 Osaka Contemporary Art Centre, Osaka

Group exhibitions in museums and public institutions include:

1990 *Scatter – New Scottish Art* Third Eye Centre, Glasgow

1993 *Walk On Jack* Tilton Gallery, New York & Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh

1994 *3 + 3 + 3* Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh

1995 *The Persistence of Painting* Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow

1998 *Intelligible Lies* Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh

1999 *Paint/Land/Beauty* Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland

2001 *Here and Now: Scottish Art 1990–2001* Dundee Contemporary Arts

2002 *New: Recent Acquisitions of Contemporary British Art*
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh

2004 *Memorable Memory: The Migros Museum Collection*
Neue Kunsthalle, St Gallen

2008 *Bilderwahl! Im Dickicht der Städte* Kunsthaus Zurich

2012 *A Parliament of Lines* City Art Centre, Edinburgh
touring in 2013 to Pier Arts Centre, Orkney; RMIT Gallery, Melbourne

Public Collections include:

Arts Council England; City Arts Centre, Edinburgh; Fleming-Wyfold Art Foundation;
Kunsthaus Glarus; Kunsthaus Zurich; Migros Museum, Zurich; Scottish National
Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh; UK Government Art Collection

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