

***I Suppose in a Dream*¹: Carole Gibbons and Luke Samuel**

23 April - 21 May 2022

Kupfer

Monday - Friday: 10am- 6pm

Saturday: 2pm - 6pm

I Suppose in a Dream is a visual dialogue between artists Carole Gibbons (b.1935, Glasgow) and Luke Samuel (b.1992, Cardiff), who are born nearly sixty years apart, yet united by their mutual choice of painting as a medium and an investigation into pictorial space.

The notions of interior and exterior are usually regarded as strictly divided, almost as the “dialectics of yes and no.”² Both artists are interested in these thresholds: Samuel by blending the boundary between the two visually, and Gibbons by merging the internal landscape of her psyche with the external landscape of her surrounding environment.

Gibbons’ early works are mythological, and even as her interest shifts to domestic narratives later in her career (the paintings in this exhibition represent the later phase), the same motifs and objects reappear throughout her practice.³ Interestingly, all of Gibbons’ works featured in *I Suppose in a Dream* revolve around two main pieces of imagery; the broken vase and the stone head. These objects, which have a personal meaning to the artist, have been present in her work for over 50 years, from the 1980s to present day.

Similarly to how Gibbons has a set of recurring visual motifs, Samuel works on recurring shapes and compositions. He often works on many paintings simultaneously and motifs build up as he is going along. This process allows Samuel to develop and redefine similar compositions, and often one painting helps him solve another work. When talking about the artist’s way of working, it is important to note the scale of most of the paintings featured in the exhibition. The small size of the canvases is important, as the scale dictates the forms and leads the compositions.

¹ The title ‘I Suppose in a Dream’ was borrowed from a text written by Adriana Francisco, which accompanies the exhibition.

² Gaston Bachelard’s ‘Poetics of Space’

³ Debi Banerjee’s ‘Waiting Figure in a Landscape: The Painting of Carole Gibbons’

The idea of recurrence in both Gibbons and Samuel's practices goes beyond form and subject matter. Adriana Francisco explores this theme further, exploring time and memory in relation to both artists' works, in the text *I Suppose in a Dream*, which accompanies the exhibition.

About the artists

Carole Gibbons is a painter born (1935) in Glasgow, where she still lives and paints. She studied at Glasgow School of Art 1953-58, where her contemporaries Alan Fletcher, Douglas Abercrombie and Alasdair Gray had a profound influence on her career.

She has had several retrospectives in Scotland and her work is held in many public collections including the National Galleries Scotland, Aberdeen Art Gallery and Glasgow Museums, yet she remains largely unknown outside of Glasgow.

Luke Samuel, born 1992 in Cardiff, lives and works in London. Luke received his BA (Hons) Fine Art from Goldsmiths, University of London, and is currently enrolled at the Royal Academy Schools (2018 - 2022).

Selected group exhibitions include: Alt Freunde, Neue Freunde, Claas Reiss, (2021); Companions, Union Pacific, (2021); Glass Houses, Mcbeans Orchid Nursery, (2020); No Time Like the Present, Public Gallery, London (2020); Premiums, Royal Academy of Arts, London (2020); LANDGRAB, The Shop, Sadie Coles HQ, London (2020), Summer Exhibition 2017; The Royal Academy of Arts, London (2017); The Painter-Stainers Prize 2016, Guildford House Gallery, Guildford (2016).

I Suppose in a Dream

The Painting of Carole Gibbons and Luke Samuel



Blanket (2021) - Luke Samuel

The earth is opening up underneath her little girl's feet.

I don't remember why I first decided to write about memory. I suppose it is difficult to ignore the sense of time inscribed in Carole Gibbon's recent work, a painter who has been active for more than 60 years. Or perhaps the idea emerged when I first looked at Luke Samuel's paintings: is it a room I once spent time in? A place in one of my dreams? An uncanny interior inviting me, or Carole, to reminisce about our past? But – of course – it is more likely a combination of these, compounded by my own mid-life point, when the might of accumulated experience and memory becomes unavoidable, like trying to dodge a waterfall of time.

I sleep in the hope of a relevant dream.

In *Suppose a Sentence*, Brian Dillon celebrates Gertrude Stein and her fondness for the verb "to suppose". The act of supposing requires you to assume something is true, correct or probable, whilst knowing or sensing that there is something crucial missing. It floats mid-air waiting for the next supposition. To suppose needs us to presume, to imply, to fabricate, to believe. "Let us agree to the existence of this thing, at least for the moment, although we know it is an intellectual fiction, a purely experimental entity". Supposing is the stuff of dreams, memory and abstraction. It is the forecasting of thought. Supposing doesn't come to you; you need to take yourself there. It is porous and in between, both immaterial and objective. It is like trying to grab water with your hands. You keep hold of nothing but your hands get wet.

It happens because there is a place.

Memories are our most prized fictions. It is in and through them that we make sense of ourselves. They are durable yet vulnerable. Memories, like breathing, cannot be observed without being fundamentally changed. Memories are flux. Luke Samuel remembers being a small child looking at the paintings that hung on the walls of his parents' house in Cardiff, many of them painted by his father. These paintings were continually rearranged. Now, this movement has been reproduced in his studio, where he is constantly moving works from one wall to another, situating them in relation to each other. Walter Benjamin's advice to a man trying to approach his own past is to act like a man digging: "He must not be afraid to return again and again to the same matter [...] to turn it over as one turns over soil. For the matter itself is only a deposit, a stratum, which yields only to the most meticulous examination what constitutes the real treasure hidden within the earth".



Persephone (1969) - Carole Gibbons

Why is it so silent in here?

When I asked Carole Gibbons if her paintings could be a portal to her own past, she told me that *Persephone* (1969) reminded her of being a young girl picking primroses in the Scottish Highlands. Persephone was the daughter of Zeus and Demeter. One sunny day, she was gathering flowers in the meadows near her mother's house when the ground beneath her feet opened up and Hades, who was not only her uncle but the king of the underworld, appeared in his four-horse golden chariot, and snatched young Persephone, taking her with him to be his wife and queen. Looking at Carole's painting, I see no fear. She knows the ground will inevitably open up. Perhaps more than churning the soil, sometimes, memory pushes you in.

There is enough room in time.

One of the first paintings I saw by Luke Samuel was *Spill* (2020). As always, I inevitably ignored the Sontagian commandment of *thou shall not interpret*, and immediately saw a dominant grey canvas, perhaps a window looking out at a stormy sky, obscuring what could have been the primary image underneath, fleshy pink folds hurrying to cover the diminutive space that was left for them to breathe, the poor things. It was only once I saw it next to other paintings, such as *Blanket* (2021), that I realised it was the corner of a sofa. And once you see a sofa there is no going back. Entrapped by thought, you are left missing the taste of what was (or wasn't) there before.

All day I hear the noise of waters.

The narrator in Clarice Lispector's breath-taking *Água Viva* is a painter who decides to write. Her ambitious plan is to write just like she paints. "More than anything else, I paint painting", she explains before pledging not to stop her fingers from writing until she finds the gesture or the materiality of writing. The book offers the reader no plot to follow, instead it gradually reveals a form of abstract, sensual writing with just a few glimpses of narrative here and there, something for us to hold onto before plunging, again and again, into the precipice of language. Lispector is daring us to try the impossible: go on, stop thinking, suppose we go after "whatever is lurking beyond thought".

The rug had a dream and it was messy.

Once, someone gave me the following advice to fall asleep: think of a room from your past and try to remember every minute detail, every piece of furniture, every single wall, then open the drawers and remember their contents. I couldn't sleep because I couldn't remember anything. Carole reassured me that we remember things that are significant. She remembers staying at the house of a German émigré while her mother worked as an inspector at a Rolls-Royce factory in Hillingdon, near Glasgow. It was in this house that she remembers seeing her first painting: a Cranach-like nude of a reclining figure with a large bowl and a skull next to her elbow. Items such as bowls, heads and vases have been reappearing in Carole's work since her early

works. The vase – “eerie, eerie, esoteric, greenish with the slime of time” (Lispector) – that we see in so many of her paintings was a treasured Moroccan vase that she kept in her studio. Carole was living in Spain when her father died in the late 1960s. When she returned to Scotland to attend his funeral, her studio had been burgled and the vase broken.

I am not looking for the object itself but its place inside me.

“An unoccupied stage set has often seemed to me to transmit a greater dramatic charge than the play that comes to pass upon it”, writes Claire-Louise Bennett. To me, Luke’s paintings are stages. And despite their small size – *Hole* (2020) is only 18 x 14 cm – these are surprisingly generous stages. Time is suspended in them, an intermission perhaps. The paintings seem to be showing life from the point of view of life itself. They are inviting, but never overly intimate. They say: it is likely to take time but feel free to wait here; grab yourself a cushion. Luke is concerned with what lies beyond the immediate image. It could be a memory, yes, but most often, a material, a geometry or even a landscape. Luke doesn’t feel the past is there to be owned, instead, he is interested in how the past reaches the present and is inescapably turned into an instant. A time-lapse where nothing moves. He is asking us to surrender to the present.

Persephone has no sofa of her own.

Carole’s layers of paint are thick encrustations of time. Time piled up or the absence of time. After all, what is timelessness if not time folded in on itself? In the large-scale *Untitled (Vase and Fruits)* (2010-2021), we see eleven years of overlaying. It is clear that the surface has been worked over and over again. In her dense forest of unfurling shapes there is burying but also unearthing. Some of the shapes are marked in white as if the painter was highlighting an unknown word to be looked up or something to focus on next. Carole touches things so they become significant and never forgotten. She is ready to find redemption or hell; memory or pure longing; it doesn’t matter. The substratum is always unpredictable, and she knows it. Carole Gibbons keeps delving, constantly moving towards the origins of her work.

Adriana Francisco

April 2022

References:

Walter Benjamin, “Excavation and Memory” in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Volume 2: Part 2, Belknap Press, 2005.

Brian Dillon, *Suppose a Sentence*, Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2020.

James Joyce, “All day I hear the noise of waters”, *Chamber Music and Other Poems*, Alma Classics, 2016.

Clarice Lispector, *Agua Viva*, New Directions, 2012 (translated by Stefan Tobler).

Claire-Louise Bennett, “Large Issues From Small: Meditations on Still Life”, Fitzcarraldo Editions Blog, 24th October 2017 (<https://blog.fitzcarraldoeditions.com/large-issues-small-meditations-still-life-2/>).