

FREELANDS  
PAINTING  
PRIZE 2024

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## FOREWORD

The Freelands Painting Prize celebrates outstanding painting by final-year students attending art schools and universities across the UK. The prize was established in 2020 with the goal of understanding where distinguished practice is taking place across the country, fuelling the Foundation's interest in the shifting status and syllabus of painting. Each year we have invited every higher education institution in the country offering an undergraduate course in either Fine Art or Painting to nominate a graduating student for the prize. Their work is judged anonymously by an independent jury that selects the winners, whose work is featured in an autumn exhibition and accompanying publication.

Over five iterations of this annual prize we saw the participation of more than 70 institutions located across the UK's four nations. This year we received 53 submissions – more than ever before. It was brilliant to see The Art Academy and the University of Chester joining for the first time. The enthusiasm of institutions in participating has been heartening: a demonstration of the liveliness of painting practices fostered across the country, despite the challenges faced by art education at all levels.

These five years of the prize have offered us an incredible insight into the teaching, thinking and practice taking place in UK art schools. Each prize has been an exciting journey; the publication and exhibition are the culmination of a process that starts in March, with the thrill of discovering participating institutions and nominated artists, and unfolds throughout the year. Being able to delve into the eclectic work of so many emerging painters always feels like a rare opportunity to treasure. It is an inspiring experience that imparts an unusual, wide-ranging overview of the work that artists devote themselves to developing.

Reflecting on the paintings of the winning artists featured across the exhibitions, a significant formal variation was their shrinking in scale due to the practicalities of making in a domestic setting during the pandemic. This year – like the previous year – there has been a substantial increase in larger work being made, as shown in this exhibition. It has been enlivening to witness the endless variety of styles employed, genres referenced and subject matters chosen by the artists; and themes have ranged from light-hearted to decisively serious, with figuration often used to tackle explorations of identity

or memory. Yet, due to the nature of the prize, each year it has been impossible to identify a specific thematic *fil rouge* drawing the works together, and the exhibitions have proven consistently distinctive. As Michael Archer observes in this publication, ‘The old categories – portrait, genre, landscape, history, abstraction – are not exhausted or exhaustible because they encompass all that exists or could be imagined’. Painting is persistently reinvented to reflect the inextricably complex reality painters live in, and it is with this awareness that the works in this year’s exhibition shall be observed: a kaleidoscope allowing us to look at the world through unexpected perspectives and colours.

I would like to congratulate the twelve winning artists: Ali Cook, Iona Gordon, Bunny Hennessey, Leila Hussain, Denny Kaulbach, Anugrah Mishra, Varshga Premarasa, Benedict Robinson, Shannon Ward, Parker White, Jack Woolley and Unica Yabiku.

As ever, many thanks to all institutions participating in the prize. Congratulations to those nominating this year’s winning artists: The Art Academy; Bath School of Art, Film and Media, Bath Spa University; Camberwell College of Arts, UAL; Cambridge School of Art, Anglia Ruskin University; City & Guilds of London Art School; Goldsmiths, University of London; Kingston School of Art, Kingston University; Middlesex University; Newcastle University; University of Lincoln; University of Suffolk and University of Wolverhampton.

Thank you to our panel of judges: writer and art critic Michael Archer, gallerist Vanessa Carlos, curator Séamus McCormack and artist Zadie Xa; and to Henry Ward, Director of Freeland Foundation, for chairing the jury. Finally, thank you to Michael Archer for his brilliant text gifting us an insightful exploration into the artists’ practices.

*Giulia Vandelli*  
Programme Curator

## SPACES OF CONTEST

The Freelands Painting Prize is by its very nature a means to showcase a number of individual artists. Those nominated by their respective colleges are not working to a designated theme and yet there are many cross-currents, related preoccupations and shared passions to be found among the paintings on show. The work is immediate, it is of the present moment and speaks to the conditions we encounter daily, but the texture of its language is a dense weave of threads reaching back into the past in a shared search for the means with which to articulate possible futures. Where one recognises influences, one also sees those sources drawn in to provide a low note or grain to a new voice.

For Anugrah Mishra painting is an 'act of resistance', an exploration of the sociopolitical issues surrounding imbalances of power across the globe and the experiences of those forced to uproot their lives in consequence. We talk of this as a 'refugee crisis', a problem to be dealt with in order to make it go away, but Mishra's paintings express with force the fact that this is a situation in which we are all implicated. The pair of figures in *Refugee's – Resilience and Dreams* have their backs to us as they look out of a window onto the cityscape that is theirs and which they are leaving. A birdcage sitting between them houses a building – a memory to carry with them of the place they have left? – while below it a crow with spread wings and open beak sits atop a pile of debris to be picked over. This couple does not confront us, but instead we stand looking out of the window with them. We are in the painting with them. The paint surface is substantial, the image emerging from many strokes of the brush and palette knife, each one a conscious, defiant act of construction.

In his practice Jack Woolley breaks down the physical fact of a painting into its constituent parts – canvas, stretcher, paint, line, shape and so on – before rebuilding these various elements into the finished work. The diptych, *Leaflet Drop – 100 years*, is stitched together from canvas fragments to form a surface suggestive of a doubled landscape seen from the air. Patches of colour, printed numbers and painted text make the elements both aerial or drone photograph and map, and the many threads running top to bottom over the surface disorient our sense of what is up and what down.

The dropping of propaganda and warning leaflets has a long history stretching back to the nineteenth century. *Leaflet Drop* focuses on two instances in which such material has been distributed prior to the sustained destruction of civilian infrastructure, firstly by the RAF in Waziristan and Sudan in the twentieth century, and more recently by Israel in Gaza. Woolley refers to the subatomic world where the acts of observation and calibration resolve an otherwise indeterminate state, a process through which, 'a hidden reality [becomes] visible'.

In a very different sense Denny Kaulbach also refers to the large and the small when talking of her large self-portrait *Untitled (This Ripe Life)*. The canvas is almost square and Kaulbach's stylised upper body is distorted, the head bent to the right, the neck tendons stretched to the raised left shoulder in order to fit into and entirely fill the surface. 'It was my first time working at this scale and I really wanted to explore how micro and macro perspectives could converge in one piece', Kaulbach tells us. She cradles a cat, its straightened front leg lying between her delicately blue-veined breasts and its head close to the right nipple. The intimation that the cat might almost begin suckling brings feelings that oscillate, for Kaulbach, between abjection and care. Inasmuch as the animal leans towards a certain humanity, the human body is revealed in all its animality. Such a human-non-human connection presents the potential for establishing a very different understanding of care and wellness to that fostered and promoted under capitalism, which too readily equates health with wealth. At the bottom of the canvas the fingers of Kaulbach's hands are described in a series of almost abstract sweeps of the brush, setting up a further interrelationship between the body and the paint that forms and anchors it.

For Bunny Hennessey the limits of the canvas are somewhat akin to the limits of a body, albeit more robust. Its edges hold and contain paint in a way that our 'porous bodies' can never quite do. We experience the world as it enters us through every orifice, every square centimetre of skin, and something escapes us, is exuded, in each moment of such experience. Paint application – such as in the exuberant swirls, stains, smears and dabs of *Laundry Day* – happens in a manner Hennessey describes as one of 'frenzy and mobility'. For sure there is passion and intensity in the contrasting and variously

applied greens and oranges, reds and blues, but this sits in contrast to our own messy and chaotic emotional turmoil. Hennessey speaks in visceral terms of the body as a physically and emotionally leaky vessel, and of paint as a 'stagnant fluid' requiring expulsion in quick, concentrated bursts of activity.

The body in Ali Cook's painting is a bloated presence, at one and the same time disturbing and buffoonish. In *The Art Dealer*, it is a gesticulating homunculus standing behind a table strewn with the detritus of daily stimulus props: a can of Coke, lines of coke, cigarettes and so on. A repeated image of a tree – in leaf, bare, at night, etc. – sets up a pulse up the right-hand side of the canvas, while along the bottom is a line of curling post-it notes looking like nothing so much as leavings scavenged from the studio floor. The dealer is a bricolage, a composite body fashioned from scraps distilled out of things seen, heard and read. As with all the painters here, that range of artists, musicians, filmmakers, writers, comics and others is broad and closely observed. Cook understands the body as the prime means through which our capacity for both beauty and inhumanity can be communicated. It is grandiloquent and decadent, magnificent and absurd.

Parker White comments that, 'Distorting the perception of bodies through paint feels like the truest way to portray my vision in art. To have highly idealised bodies and insult them with an underlying of deep love is something I couldn't achieve in any other medium.' Appropriating paintings well known for eliciting a strong queer or highly sexualised male gaze, White recontextualises his content in relation to, 'bodies that could be seen as a fetish or freak – the trans body'. In one instance, for example, White made reference to one of the three versions of the martyrdom of Saint Sebastian painted by Guido Reni, the c.1615 painting in the Capitoline Museums, Rome. For the work in this exhibition, he took inspiration from Francesco Hayez's 1850 painting, *Susanna at her Bath*, in the National Gallery, London. The Hayez is more in the line of Romantic treatments of *odalisques* and the *seraglios* they inhabit, best known in the work of Ingres. They are subjects allowing the voyeuristic male gaze an untroubled view of the female body. The Susanna scene, notwithstanding its licence granted by Biblical authority, is similarly prurient. White takes the turned head of Hayez's Susanna, her face full of intimidated anxiety, and transforms it into an individual with a strong back and

delicate, bearded features, looking directly and unashamedly back at the viewer while a pansy in tattoo ink blue hovers in the air next to him. The past is reworked in the present to present a possible future.

Another gaze, the Black gaze, is a focus of Shannon Ward's painting. Growing up in a predominantly white area, she found her own experience was largely absent in the representations of daily life she was confronted with. Her work attempts to address and redress this situation. Exploring the possibility of Black portraiture, Ward begins from photographic source material. In her book, *Listening to Images*, Tina Campt writes:

“As a vernacular practice mobilized by black people in diaspora, photography is an everyday strategy of affirmation and a confrontational practice of visibility. Vernacular photographs are banal as well as singular; they articulate both the ordinary and the exceptional texture of black life.” [2017, p.7–8]

The woman in Ward's *Black Beauty* rests rather than sits on a stool. She is seen in three-quarter profile, looking off a little to the right of the viewer. Her red dress contrasts with the painting's purple background. Nearer to the figure the background is much lighter, creating a kind of full-body halo or aura around her. She is looking internally as much as taking note of whatever might be in front of her. She is fully self-possessed, occupying what Hortense Spillers analysed as a 'liberated' as distinct from a 'captive' subject position [*Black, White, and in Color*, 2003, p.306]. Ward's intention is for her work, 'to become a dialogue with the audience', allowing them, 'to embrace and accept the Black gaze'.

Leila Hussain thinks of her work as a kind of 'anti-portraiture', an approach to composition that withholds direct access to a painting's subject. Instead she provides an indication of the interaction between subject, the objects around them and the space they occupy. The Belgian artist Luc Tuymans is clear in understanding that cropping a figure, cutting them off at the edge of the canvas, was a potentially brutal act. Hussain uses focus and cropping as a means to isolate and heighten awareness of certain aspects of her subject. *Lounge*, though small in scale, is a richly layered collection of materials, surfaces and textures. Fake fur, upholstery fabric, carpet, heavy curtain fabric, wood, glass and, in the extreme foreground, hair. We see no more than the very top of a head facing, just

as we the viewers do, into the space of the painting. Rather than acting as a barrier, this scant indication of human presence has the effect of pulling us into the painting's space, somewhat as an open corner has traditionally allowed the viewer entry to the world of a painting. For Hussain the mixture of juxtaposed and overlaid fragments enables us to participate in the unfolding of a narrative that sits allusively in relation to the painting's subject. 'Representation', Hussain says, 'can go further than just likeness of an individual'.

Benedict Robinson has strong memories of his childhood in the early 2000s: the programmes on TV, the video games, the adverts, the food in the supermarkets. His paintings are an effort to orient himself in a world grounded in his first encounter with these things. Back then we were already living to an extent in a digital world, but this was still largely before the establishment and explosion of social media. His compositions consciously structure a world of apparent innocence. There is an insistent flatness that sees things stacked up the plane of the canvas rather than receding into its space. This approach both echoes the screen and recalls pre-Renaissance picture-making, a period prior to the development of perspective and the creation of an illusionary three-dimensional space of rational order on the canvas. His use of quick-drying acrylic rather than the more malleable and adjustable oil paint is in tune with the immediacy of the world depicted here. A still from a 2003 episode of *Peep Show* inspired the painting here. Boxes of Cornflakes and Ritz crackers, a large bottle of Coke at the checkout; a display of Fanta and shelves of Bounty kitchen rolls in the foreground, one pack of which he gleefully holds up. Today we would suspiciously call much of what's there ultra-high processed food, though back then, even while we'd have probably recognised that this wouldn't exactly constitute a healthy diet, it would have signalled indulgent pleasure more than anything – a pleasure now mirrored in the visual delight of the image.

The way in which Iona Gordon sometimes hangs or suspends her unframed painting brings the works close to the Ghanaian kente fabric designs that are a part of one side of her heritage. As much as anything this mode of presentation compromises any category separation we might want to make between art and design, between usefulness and the taking of disinterested



visual pleasure. There is a quiet refusal of hierarchy, drawing as she does from fashion, natural forms and music for her work. All these influences feed the colours and rhythms of the abstract forms in her paintings. The natural forms she finds primarily both in Accra and Glasgow, the other side of her heritage. London, where Gordon lives, has a frenetic, TL;DR pace. In contrast she emphasises the importance of taking time, consciously slowing down to allow the opportunity and space for things to come together. The painting in this exhibition is on linen, although she now also works on polyester, the substrate on which kente patterns are printed in the industrially produced versions of the cloth.

Varshga Premarasa finds in painting a means to connect with, or an attempt to retrieve, a past from before her birth. The defining event towards which she reaches is that of her parents leaving Sri Lanka as a result of the civil war. Stories told and retold become transformed in her images – always close, always just beyond her grasp. The paintings come as the culmination of a multi-faceted process involving sketching, research and montaging of imagery gleaned from internet searches. Some of this imagery is AI generated, reinforcing the complex relationship between direct experience, eyewitness accounts, memories, imaginings and fictional constructs. At first sight there is a lightness to her compositions. The flat areas of bright colour, the clean lines of the interiors and landscapes within which her characters, objects and symbols are placed, the generous use of gold leaf. But one soon recognises that there is a more troubling aspect to the narratives: images from the war, such as a camouflage-painted helicopter, a reference to colonisation and imperial subjugation seen in a flag carrying the symbol of the East India Company; minatory gatherings of Sri Lanka's ubiquitous crows; a frightened girl. In *Little Golden Memories* a mysterious cowed figure dimly visible in a picture – or perhaps a mirror – on the right is echoed in the shape of an open bird cage on the left, the decorative metalwork around the bottom of which reads *thangam* – gold – in Tamil script. A small square raised patch in the area of gold leaf, the remnant of an earlier painting, signals the presence of another puzzle: something from the past, obscured but undeniably present and unfathomable. 'Through my art', Premarasa says, 'I create their visuals that conceal a darker narrative'.

Unica Yabiku applies thin washes of paint onto and into the canvas surface, producing a soft layering which leaves many spaces for the eye to enter and for the imagination to act. Though originally untitled, her subsequent naming of the work in this exhibition, *Forest Scene (echoing Orpheus and Eurydice)*, again brings us light and darkness – the sun's light filtered through a canopy of trees, reflected from water, reverberating in colour; the dark of shadow and the deeper dark of the earth. Figures and figure-like forms cohere out of the layers and dissolve again as new conjunctions catch the eye. The Greek myth is a story of love and connection, a journey into the earth and almost back out again, abruptly curtailed by a glance of desire and tragedy. 'Out of the dark a rainbow brilliance burgeons', wrote Rilke, 'the radiance of the jealous dead who pine beneath us, buried, strengthening the earth' [*The Sonnets to Orpheus*, 1:14].

Everything changes, but certain things persist. As with the river which, as Heraclitus tells us, flows with 'different and different waters' upon those who step into it, painting is endlessly reinventing itself yet is always painting. The old categories – portrait, genre, landscape, history, abstraction – are not exhausted or exhaustible because they encompass all that exists or could be imagined. Who we are, what we surround ourselves with, where we live, how we organise ourselves, what stories we tell ourselves in an effort to make sense of the troubled and troubling world, how we struggle to express our fears and pleasures, because, despite what Wittgenstein told us, we cannot pass over the inexpressible in silence – all of this is what we continue to find in painting. So it is that all these categories are here in this exhibition, no longer distinct, separate and pure, but multiple, hybrid, blended, as befits the overwhelming flux of our present situation. Ecological and social precarity, brutal disparities in financial circumstances, state aggression and oppression, digitisation and the creep of AI as a confining rather than liberating reality, are facts of an existence in which painting stands as a means to push back against their potentially dehumanising effect. The works here bear witness to that truth.

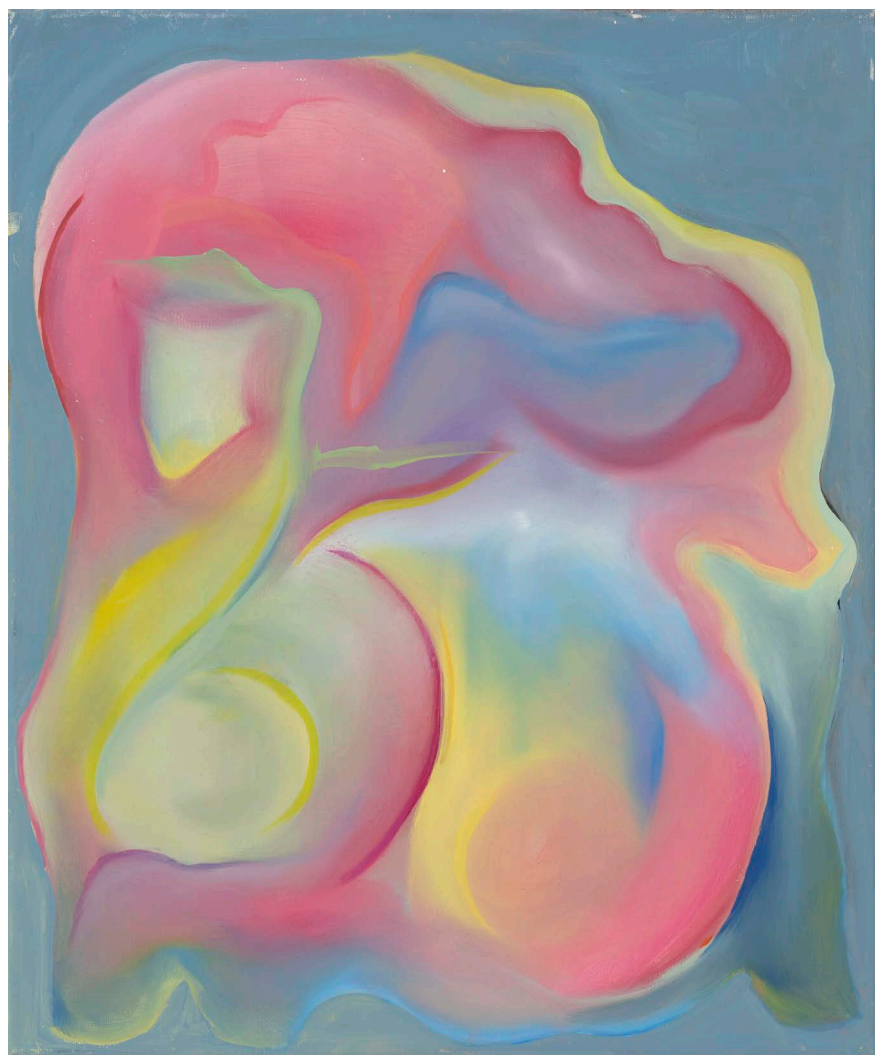
*Michael Archer*

ALI COOK  
IONA GORDON  
BUNNY HENNESSEY  
LEILA HUSSAIN  
DENNY KAULBACH  
ANUGRAH MISHRA  
VARSHGA PREMARASA  
BENEDICT ROBINSON  
SHANNON WARD  
PARKER WHITE  
JACK WOOLLEY  
UNICA YABIKU

SELECTED WORKS



ALI COOK *The Art Dealer* 2024  
acrylic on canvas, 100 x 70 cm



IONA GORDON *I knew you before we met* 2022  
oil on natural linen, 60 × 50 cm



BUNNY HENNESSEY *Laundry Day* 2024  
oil on canvas, 153 × 122 cm



LEILA HUSSAIN *Lounge* 2024  
oil on canvas, 30 × 40 cm



DENNY KAULBACH *Untitled (This Ripe Life)* 2024  
oil on canvas, 200 × 180 cm



ANUGRAH MISHRA *Refugee's - 'Resilience and Dreams'* 2024  
acrylic and oil on canvas, 200 × 250 cm



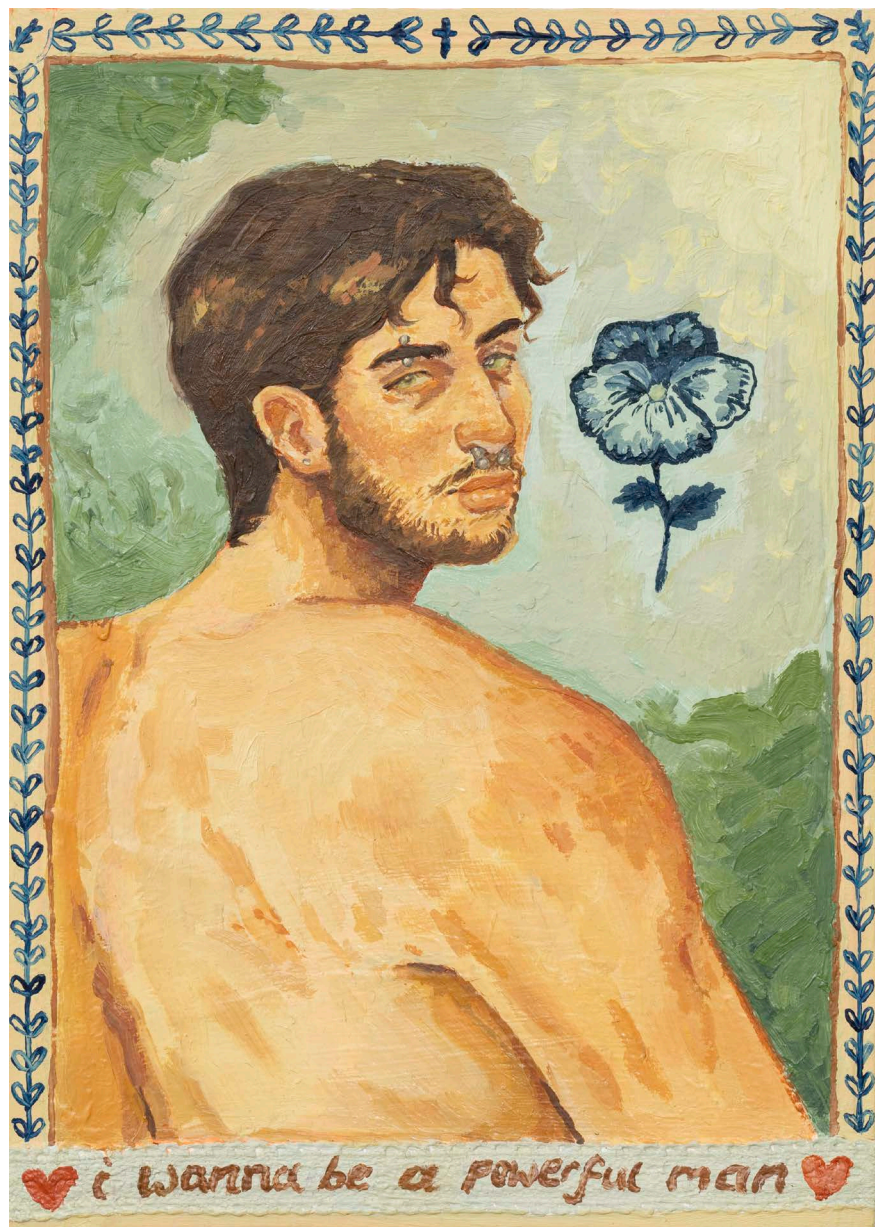
VARSHGA PREMARASA *Little Golden Memories* 2024  
oil and acrylic on canvas, 60 × 80 cm



BENEDICT ROBINSON *Supermarket Memories* 2024  
acrylic on canvas, 102 × 76 cm



SHANNON WARD *Black Beauty* 2023  
oil on canvas, 182 × 91 cm

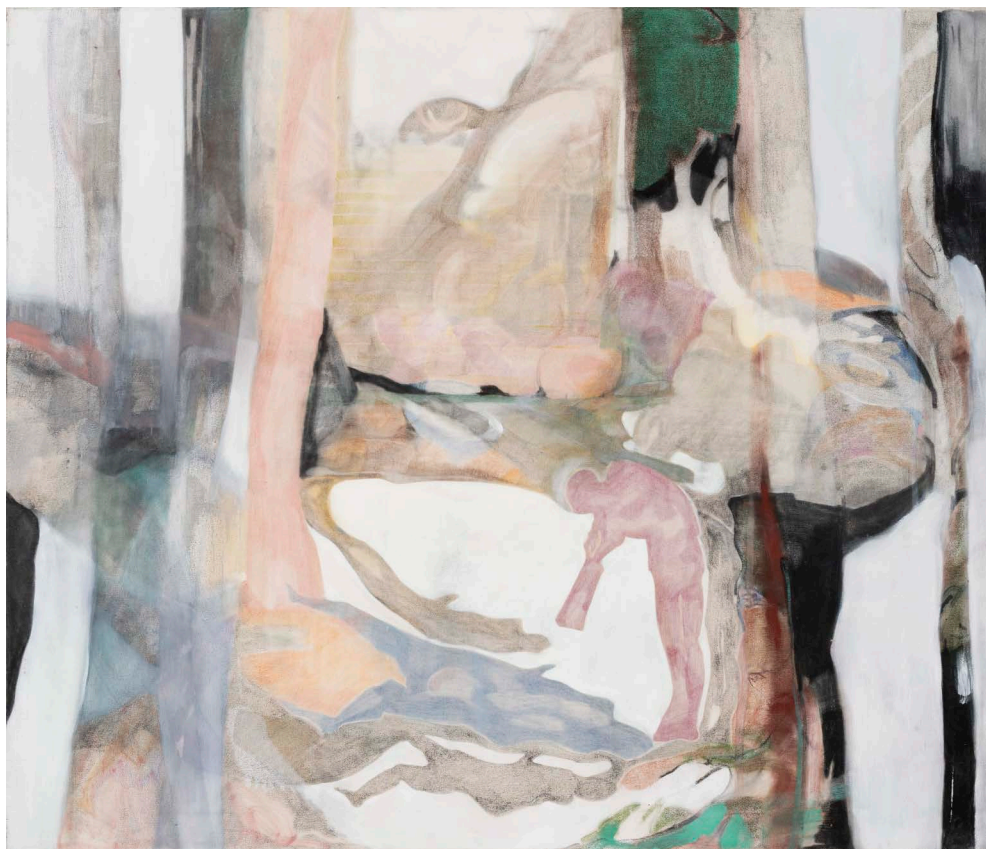


PARKER WHITE *Pansy* 2024  
oil on paper, 30 × 21 cm



JACK WOOLLEY *Leaflet drop - 100 years* 2024  
acrylic on canvas, diptych: 145 × 90 cm, each panel





UNICA YABIKU *Forest Scene (echoing Orpheus and Eurydice)* 2023  
pencil and oil on canvas, 140 × 120 cm

ARTIST  
BIOGRAPHIES

ALI COOK  
Newcastle University

Ali Cook (b.2001 in Newcastle upon Tyne, England) uses figuration to explore what it means to be human in the postmodern era. He creates pseudo absurdist portraits where the physicality of the body is created through debris and residues, while some of the internal organs are replaced with their mechanical equivalent. Inspired by the work of artists such as Giuseppe Arcimboldo, Philip Guston and Dana Schutz, and filmmakers such as David Cronenberg and Alejandro Jodorowsky, Ali's surreal subjects seem to belong to a dystopian film: facing the viewer, these characters appear to be disintegrating right in front of us. Believing in humankind's, 'capacity for incommunicable beauty and unfathomable atrocity', Ali represents the multiplicity of our nature through the body seen as an, 'environment that can sustain decadence and magnificence' at the same time. Ultimately, Ali's works are an invitation for the observer to explore and embrace our multiple, contrasting nature, and reconnect us with one another.

IONA GORDON  
Kingston School of Art, Kingston University

Iona Gordon (b.2002 in Accra, Ghana) is a multidisciplinary artist focusing on painting as their primary practice. Drawing inspiration from fashion, nature and music, Iona's paintings reflect on their life in London, where she grew up, in contrast with Ghana and Scotland, home countries to her parents. When in Accra or Glasgow, Iona reconnects with nature and instinctively slows down, taking the time to explore human relationships and entertain deeper conversations with family and friends. Iona's works, often in oil paint, are visually vibrant and abstract, with a fluidity of movement across their surface. Their vivid colours are inspired by Ghanaian smock and kente fabrics that her mum would turn into garments. Through experimentation with the materials and surfaces she works on, such as polyester, Iona aims to better capture luminosity and light.

BUNNY HENNESSEY  
City & Guilds of London Art School

Bunny Hennessey (b.1991 in Basingstoke, England) explores the body, 'its flimsy boundaries, its ephemerality and its tendency to leak both physically and emotionally'. Imagining paint as a 'stagnant fluid' within her body that needs to be expelled, Bunny works on the canvas with quick bursts of brushstrokes, to record the exact sensations she experiences. Through the layering of translucent paint, juxtaposed with more opaque impasto marks, Bunny achieves a distinctive radiance in her works. Playing with a sense of absurdity, she challenges the edges of the canvas to be less volatile, instead utilising them as a static and unyielding container to constrain the 'internal frenzy' of her porous mark-making within their boundary. Bunny's recent paintings feel both familiar, based as they are in multiple historical approaches to painting, and highly original, pushing her paint to describe the indescribable as she strives to mirror the messy inner sensations of her body.

LEILA HUSSAIN  
University of Suffolk

Leila Hussain (b.2002 in Watford, England) portrays the people she encounters in her everyday life, from friends and family in domestic environments, to strangers on an underground train. However, the subjects depicted in her practice are often overlooked details, such as a cuff or the top of a head resting on a cushion, on which she zooms in through extreme cropping. The activity of looking – often uncomfortably up-close – creates an intense, sometimes claustrophobic relationship between the painting, the painter and the viewer. Blurring the lines between representation and abstraction, Leila creates what she defines as ambiguous anti-portraits which go beyond the likeness of an individual and invite the viewer into an open narrative. Through her painting, Leila elicits a dynamic view of how contemporary portraiture can be re-presented, not only through the pictorial aspects of the works themselves, but also how the canvases inhabit the gallery: positioned above or below the conventional eye line, they disrupt sightlines and perspectives.

DENNY KAULBACH  
Goldsmiths, University of London

Denny Kaulbach (b.1996 in Bristol, England) uses painting and drawing to, 'trace and honour connections between the human and non-human, engaging with themes of connection, care, sickness and wellness.' The figures portrayed in Denny's large-scale, meticulous paintings seem both raw and vulnerable, sombre yet sensory. Anatomical elements and muscles are depicted in detail, and through the grotesque, the artist confronts the viewer with pain. Denny's work can be upbeat, comic even, but there is an essential tenderness to *Untitled (This Ripe Life)*, a self-portrait of the artist breastfeeding her cat. Inspired by the experience of her cat suckling on fabrics as she held them, the work is an exploration of the mixed feelings belonging to the body as a natural space – an ongoing focus of their practice.

ANUGRAH MISHRA  
Cambridge School of Art, Anglia Ruskin University

Anugrah Mishra (b.1999 in Lucknow, India) works in the field of narrative painting, exploring sociopolitical issues and acts of resistance. Seeking to raise awareness and spark dialogue about the complex subject of refugees and displacement, Anugrah's recent paintings visualise several scenarios, dividing the plane of the canvas in unique and disjointed ways to portray dislocation and spaces between. The silhouette of a couple in transit viewed from behind is repeated across the series, often floating both literally and metaphorically between hostile locations and the unknown. Anugrah pushes the painterly qualities in his work and describes the decisions within his paintings in relation to the portrayal of his subject matter: each brushstroke is used to, 'visualise the tones of injustice, socioeconomic inequity, and cultural tensions which carries intention to narrate the tales of survival, echoing the indomitable spirit of those forced to flee.'

VARSHGA PREMARASA  
Middlesex University

Varshga Premarasa (b.2003, London, England) explores themes of memory and storytelling in her practice. Drawing inspiration from her parents' lives in Sri Lanka during the Civil War before moving to Britain, Varshga's work combines whimsical imagery with surreal narratives that reinterpret personal memories and family history. Her approach to painting is profoundly interdisciplinary: she creates images through research, sketching and digital photomontages of pictures found on the internet, including AI-generated material. The mysterious scenes in block colours are her response to the stories she was told: a way for her to process trauma and unresolved painful memories. Her practice exhibits some of the qualities of a rebus that invites and resists decryption. Inspired by her love for dark thrillers, such as the films of Park Chan-wook, Varshga's cryptic works, like *Little Golden Memories*, in fact conceal a darker narrative, with hidden messages, symbols or familiar signs tempting the observer in.

BENEDICT ROBINSON  
Bath School of Art, Film and Media,  
Bath Spa University

Benedict Robinson (b.1996 in London, England) takes inspiration from personal memories and his passion for popular culture from the beginning of the new millennium. Drawing from both his neurodivergent perspective and a deep understanding of the cultural zeitgeist, Benedict weaves together iconic media, personal experiences, political motifs and video games to recreate imagined environments or, 'collages of lost digital and analogue worlds'. Incorporating imagery from popular TV shows such as *Peep Show*, *Cashback* and *The Story of Tracy Beaker*, Benedict reflects his sensitivity to the nuances of the early 2000s era, whilst referencing contemporary painters like Spencer Harris and Jesse Morsberger. The quality of his marks and the use of flattened perspective – purposefully reminiscent of crude video game aesthetics and late medieval or early Renaissance painting – enable the work to talk across time.

SHANNON WARD  
University of Wolverhampton

Shannon Ward (b.2003 in Shrewsbury, England) embeds love, tenderness and the celebration of family and friendships at the heart of her painting practice. In her large-scale portraits in oil – drawn from family archives and studio-based photoshoots – memory and relationships are writ large, from the embrace of a sibling to the cradling of an infant. The considerable scale invites the viewer to experience the often-gentle touch between the subjects in the work, which echoes Shannon’s labour intensive and careful approach to painting itself. Shannon positions her own image and identity within her paintings, such as *Black Beauty*, a self-portrait focused on Black female empowerment. In front of a block purple background with a subtle glow framing her figure, she considers how to emphasise and express energy. Interested in Tina Campt’s argument around what constitutes a Black gaze, she seeks to be part of the dialogue around the complex positionality of Blackness in Britain today through accomplished portraiture.

PARKER WHITE  
University of Lincoln

Parker White (b.2002 in Newcastle, England) roots queer theory and lived experience in his painting practice through a tender exploration of the inherent joy and beauty within gender transition. His work embraces the concept of ‘the limbo’ through conceptual elements and material experiments. Upholding a political stance while keeping the work personal, Parker uses paint to distort perception and depict a ‘transmasculine body’ that feels more familiar than the image portrayed by healthcare services. Parker studies traditional paintings that have acquired a queer or hypersexual male gaze, to re-contextualise them to trans bodies. Drawing inspiration from artists like Tammy Nguyen and Salman Toor – who use appropriation to challenge whiteness in classical art – in a powerful act of reclamation, Parker manipulates his subjects’ physical form toward non-cis-hetero standards, while chosen colour palettes incorporating fluorescent hues alongside more muted tones allow the work to be anachronistic.

JACK WOOLLEY  
The Art Academy

Jack Woolley (b.1962 in London, England) experiments with painting, investigating it from all sides: as object, illusion and surface; through deconstruction and reconstruction. Considering core questions such as, what if the stretcher bars become the dominant form, towering over the canvas? What if the canvas is sewn together according to its own intrinsic topography so it becomes a three-dimensional map? Behind this questioning is a political impetus: Jack is examining historical and contemporary injustices, and sociopolitical themes he finds troubling. Paintings such as *Leaflet drop – 100 years* form an interrogation into the gap between representation and reality. Jack’s practice of expanded painting embodies his responses and ideas, both through analogous imagery and process, but also through the visibility of deconstructed conventions. His material language is carefully considered: along with oil and acrylic paints, he variously weaves in childhood-learned sailing stitched canvas or embroidery thread, as a seductive nod to technology.

UNICA YABIKU  
Camberwell College of the Arts,  
University of the Arts London

Unica Yabiku (b.2002 in Naha, Okinawa, Japan) has a drawing-based painting practice that explores the interplay between abstraction and figuration. Often referencing photography, landscapes and the body, Unica uses soft hues to carve out forms woven with delicate layers of drawing to reveal glimpses of figures and other unexpected elements. Through the sensitive application of materials like pencil, chalk and stone, alongside oil paint, Unica gives physicality to her works to communicate tactility and capture how the body processes experiences. Drawn to the work of Barbara Hepworth and Helen Frankenthaler, Unica is endlessly fascinated by how these artists playfully negotiate surface and space, cultivating a profound sensitivity to material, time and place. In her most recent paintings, including *Forest Scene (echoing Orpheus and Eurydice)*, Unica channels interconnectivity to evoke a sense of liminality and corporeality as she ‘invites the viewer to explore spatial relationships and the interplay of forms’.

# PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

EAST OF ENGLAND

1. Harsh Pratap Singh Bist  
University of Hertfordshire

2. Leila Hussain\*  
University of Suffolk

3. Sara Michaels  
Norwich University of the Arts

4. Anugrah Mishra\*  
Cambridge School of Art,  
Anglia Ruskin University

5. Chrissie Richards  
University Centre Colchester

EAST MIDLANDS

6. Toby Curtis  
Nottingham Trent University

7. Ruby Fellows  
University of Northampton

8. Parker White\*  
University of Lincoln

LONDON

9. Iona Gordon\*  
Kingston School of Art,  
Kingston University

10. Bunny Hennessey\*  
City & Guilds of London  
Art School

11. Jay Ho  
University of  
East London

12. Denny Kaulbach\*  
Goldsmiths,  
University of London

13. Varshga Premarasa\*  
Middlesex University

14. Meghan Salisbury  
Slade School of Fine Art,  
University College London

15. Poppy Tilbury  
Central Saint Martins,  
University of the  
Arts London

16. Jack Woolley\*  
The Art Academy

17. Unica Yabiku\*  
Camberwell College of Arts,  
University of the  
Arts London

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Teesside University

NORTHERN IRELAND

22. Claire Ritchie  
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23. Olivia Boyle  
Lancaster University

24. Jessie Farnsworth  
Manchester School of Art,  
Manchester Metropolitan  
University

25. Eleanor Gray  
University of Central  
Lancashire

26. Bethany Hardman  
Liverpool Hope University

27. Olivia Hawkswell  
Liverpool John Moores  
University

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University of Salford

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University of Chester

30. Rosie Woodruff  
University Centre St Helens

SCOTLAND

31. Laurence Clouston  
City of Glasgow College

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Gray's School of Art, Robert  
Gordon University

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University of Dundee

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Edinburgh College of Art,  
The University of Edinburgh

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39. Siuli-mo Pal  
University of Reading

40. Amy Thompson  
University for the  
Creative Arts Canterbury

41. Andreas Wilkinson  
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Creative Arts Farnham

SOUTH WEST

42. Thomas Mundy  
Arts University Plymouth

43. Benedict Robinson\*  
Bath School of Art,  
Film and Media,  
Bath Spa University

44. Thea Schultz  
Arts University  
Bournemouth

## WALES

45. Maddie Graham Hobbs  
Cardiff Metropolitan University

46. Maisy Cerys Lovatt  
Coleg Menai, Grŵp  
Llandrillo Menai

47. Heidi Lucca-Redcliffe  
Swansea College of Art,  
University of Wales Trinity  
Saint David

## WEST MIDLANDS

48. Shannon Ward\*  
University of Wolverhampton

49. Xing Tan Ying  
Birmingham City University

## YORKSHIRE AND HUMBERSIDE

50. Ed Green  
University of Leeds

51. Aysha Khalid  
Leeds School of Arts,  
Leeds Beckett University

52. Joshua Lawrence  
Sheffield Hallam University

53. Margaret Taylor  
Open College of the Arts

(\*Denotes winning artist)





## ARTISTS

Ali Cook, Iona Gordon, Bunny Hennessey,  
Leila Hussain, Denny Kaulbach, Anugrah Mishra,  
Varshga Premarasa, Benedict Robinson, Shannon Ward,  
Parker White, Jack Woolley, Unica Yabiku

## JUDGING PANEL

Michael Archer (writer and art critic)  
Vanessa Carlos (Founder and Director, Carlos/Ishikawa gallery)  
Séamus McCormack (curator)  
Zadie Xa (artist)  
Chaired by Henry Ward (Director, Freelands Foundation)

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