

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 matthewmarks.com

Gary Hume

Press Packet

Charlesworth, J.J. "Gary Hume Gets Self-Conscious." *ArtReview*, October 6, 2024.

Blythe, Finn. "Gary Hume's Swans Dissolve into Abstraction." *Frieze*, September 19, 2024.

Jeffries, Stuart. "Artist Gary Hume: 'I Use Sex Less Now - but I Still Find the World an Erotic Place.'" *The Guardian*, September 9, 2024.

Burger, Mark, and Gary Hume. "Gary Hume Paints The Beauty of What's Left Behind." *Interview*, September 12, 2019.

Hudson, Suzanne. "Gary Hume." *Artforum* 57, no. 8, April 2019, pp. 200–01.

Knight, Christopher. "Review: Gary Hume's first L.A. Gallery Show in 25 Years." *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 2019.

Pollack, Barbara, and Gary Hume. "Gary Hume's Valentine to His Mum." *The New York Times*, October 29, 2017, p. F30.

Katz, Marisa Mazria, and Gary Hume. "Hume With a View." *Monocle*, no. 107, October 2017, pp. 110–12.

Wullschlager, Jackie. "Critics' Choice." *Financial Times*, October 7 – 8, 2017.

Gayford, Martin. "'The abstract paintings all went in the bin': Gary Hume interviewed." *The Spectator*, August 26, 2017.

Macpherson, Amy, and Gary Hume. "'It's like making a garden' – Gary Hume RA on Printmaking." *Royal Academy Magazine*, February 17, 2017.

Gayford, Martin. "Kate Moss Inspires Gary Hume, Caulfield Heads to the Bar." *Bloomberg*, July 7, 2013.

Wullschlager, Jackie. "Shared Passions." *Financial Times*, June 8 – 9, 2013, p. 17.

Vogel, Carol. "Finding Meaning in the Mundane." *The New York Times*, June 20, 2013, p. C26.

Aldridge, Nick, and Gary Hume. "'I like to not know what I'm doing most of the time.'" *Tate Etc.*, June 2013, pp. 31–35.

Milliard, Coline, and Gary Hume. "'I'm Not an Intellectual Artist, I'm Instinctive': Gary Hume Returns to Canvas." *ArtInfo*, January 19, 2012.

Wei, Lilly. "Gary Hume." *ARTnews*, September 2009, pp. 110, 112.

Smith, Roberta. "Gary Hume." *The New York Times*, June 19, 2009, p. C29.

Straub, Kimberly. "Art: In Living Color." *Vogue*, May 12, 2009.

Neal, Jane. "Gary Hume." *Modern Painters* 20, no. 9, October 2008, p. 119.

Vallely, Paul, and Gary Hume. "Gary Hume: Colour Magic." *The Independent*, September 12, 2007.

Mendelsohn, Meredith. "Gary Hume." *ARTnews*, December 2003, p. 117.

Liebmann, Lisa. "Gary Hume." *Artforum* 30, no. 8, April 1992, p. 94.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 matthewmarks.com

## ArtReview

### Gary Hume Gets Self-Conscious

J.J. Charlesworth Reviews 06 October 2024 ArtReview



Gary Hume, *Untitled*, 2024, satinwood and gloss on aluminium, 105 × 150 cm. Photo: Joe Hume. © Gary Hume / DACS, London, 2024. Courtesy the artist, Sprüth Magers, London, and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

***Mirrors and other creatures* at Sprüth Magers, London finds the YBA artist conceptually hovering between the two registers of artistic culture and design value**

Gary Hume's paintings have long refused the easy way through to an image. Painting with everyday household paints in wonky, glossy compositions of bright, flat colours, where only line and outline could do the job representing something, Hume emerged during the 1990s perfectly

Charlesworth, J.J. "Gary Hume Gets Self-Conscious." *ArtReview*, October 6, 2024.

attuned to the cheery cynicism and performative vulgarity of the Young British Artists. Some of his first paintings of note were of brightly coloured circles and squares – jokey postmodernist abstractions, but really the designs of hospital doors slammed in the viewer’s face, the artist laughing somewhere offstage.

It would be trite to say that older age has made Hume more serious, but *Mirrors and other creatures* presents paintings that hone and refine his long-term preoccupations, while not leaving much to play or whimsy or bombast. If there’s a recurring motif here, it’s the outlines of the head and long neck of a bird, a goose maybe, or a swan. A large diptych (all works *Untitled*, 2024) sets out overlapping outlines of the birds, the lines standing proud of the otherwise uniform surfaces of paint they circumscribe. The top section is the upside-down twin of the part below, even if the colours are different: the birds in a mute khaki green against a dull cream in the top part, a lifeless mauve in the other. The birds are, representationally speaking, neither here nor there, hovering somewhere in the mind’s eye. As an odd accent, a tracery of pink threads its way along the line of a beak.



*Untitled*, 2024, satinwood on aluminium, diptych, 145 × 239 cm each. Photo: Joe Hume.  
© Gary Hume / DACS, London, 2024. Courtesy the artist, Sprüth Magers, London, and Matthew Marks Gallery, New York

This game of overlapping outlines, ridged and filled in with colour like enamel *cloisonné*, dissolves away Hume's older reliance on flat colour and bold outlines to singular subjects, even if these were always obscured, silhouetted or blocked out. There's a deadpan humour to this idle filling-in of crisscrossed lines, the kind of doodling exercise that generates itself, such as the skewed assembly of apparently abstract Calderesque blobs and warped off-white geometries of another *Untitled*, but which reveal, once more, the presence of two (or three?) beaked heads hidden in the intersections of the surrounding black. These optical games are reduced to their essence in the almost art nouveau-stylishness of the charcoal-on-canvas works, where the birds are reduced to interpolated blacks and whites.

It's tempting to see these birds, with their animal muteness and watchful attention, as Hume's further comment on the treachery of images and image-making. This a painter almost puritanically opposed to naturalism, modelling, light and shade, and illusionistic space, so much so that blankness and opacity become rebuttals of the pleasure of looking 'into' a painting, pushing us back to the more materialistic delights of colour, line and surface finish, flirting all the while with the latest colour fads of interior design.

But at the same time, they're flirting with the presence of the image too, making for an odd object conceptually hovering between these two registers of artistic culture and design value. To make the point, compositions are exactly reproduced in oil-on-aluminium and charcoal-and-pastel-on-canvas versions, notably one wobbling black mass with coloured insets, looking faintly like a forgotten Hans Arp painting, oozing midcentury modernist pretence. There are jokes, too, to alleviate the conceptual and art market irony: in another gallery a tall painting, black columns either side of a deep green, is obscured by a silly curtain of silver tinsel strands, dangling from the top edge. What becomes apparent is Hume's commitment to a sort of awkward self-consciousness – to do with seeing oneself seeing, experiencing the shifting sands of taste in real time – and to the playful fiction that these paintings (though it's an absurd thought) might be looking back.

**Mirrors and other creatures at Sprüth Magers, London, through 19 October**

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 matthewmarks.com

# FRIEZE

## Gary Hume's Swans Dissolve into Abstraction

A new exhibition at Sprüth Magers, London, showcases the artist's distinctive style, reimagining animals and humans through layered forms and enigmatic reflections

BY FINN BLYTHE IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 19 SEP 24



Twenty-five years after Gary Hume represented Great Britain at the Venice Biennale, the artist continues to confound expectations with his dynamic body of work, as evidenced by his exhibition of new paintings and drawings at Sprüth Magers, ‘Mirrors and Other Creatures’.

Flora and fauna – especially avian creatures – remain central themes in his repertoire. However, instead of the garden birds that peppered his earlier work, Hume has lately turned to the regal and altogether more imposing form of the swan. For an artist who takes such obvious delight in the delicate economy of line and form, the swan’s sweeping silhouette (first emerging in the series of drawings ‘Swans’, 2021) is perhaps a logical choice, the motif affording him no shortage of complex, interlocking arrangements.



Gary Hume, *Untitled*, 2024, charcoal, pastel and acrylic on canvas, diptych, in artist's frames, 1.1 x 1.8 m each. Courtesy: © the artist, Sprüth Magers, Matthew Marks Gallery and DACS, London, 2024; photograph: Joe Hume

In the exhibition's opening room, two swan diptychs (all works *Untitled*, 2024) exemplify this sumptuous interplay, one in satinwood paint on aluminium, the other in charcoal, pastel and acrylic on canvas. Both paintings, presented stacked rather than side-by-side, evoke the swans' reflections in water – a mirror effect that becomes a mirage. Hume's hallmark rigorously flat representation underscores his interest in form and pattern while recalling art nouveau's elegant, swirling line.

The smaller diptych, immediately striking for its charcoal and pastel rubbed over raw canvas, beguiles by showing the artist's hand in a way that his gloss paintings do not. The elongated swan necks slither like black snakes. Where they converge, their outlines coalesce into scarcely decipherable entanglements of eyes, heads and beaks, which, in turn, yield new, ambiguous forms. Whatever Hume's subject matter – human, animal or plant – its initially simple appearance pulls the viewer into increasingly complex visual layers.

Elsewhere, Hume edges closer towards abstraction. In one painting, produced using his characteristic pairing of satinwood and gloss paint on aluminium, the meandering

curves of a mysterious black silhouette – containing shards of pure green, white and purple – recall the fluid energy of Henri Matisse’s paper cut-outs, such as *Le Cow-boy* (The Cowboy, 1947). Only a beak suggests the presence of a swan. In other paintings, we encounter conglomerations of bills, the avian body almost completely dissolved, pointing aggressively in different directions and projecting a palpable sense of threat – although, by comparison, this work emanates an enigmatic aura.

While swans take centre stage here, the human body makes, quite literally, a bit-part appearance: two versions of a sinewy foot, flexed like a ballerina *en pointe*, and a torso morphing into a flower, or embellished with hair-like silver tinsel, give a uncanny flavour. Two concurrent shows of Hume’s work are also taking place in London at Lyndsey Ingram (‘Gary Hume: A Selection of Prints 1994–2022’) and Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert (‘THIS WAY/THAT WAY’), which celebrates his well-known, bold, colourful paintings from the 1990s. However, the new works at Sprüth Magers are characterized mainly by chromatic understatement, with a paler palette of greys, browns and faded pinks.



Gary Hume, 'Mirrors and Other Creatures', 2024, installation view. Courtesy: © the artist, Sprüth Magers, Matthew Marks Gallery and DACS, London, 2024; photograph: Matthew Westoby



Gary Hume, *Untitled*, 2024, satinwood on aluminium, 87 × 69 cm each. Courtesy: © the artist, Sprüth Magers, Matthew Marks Gallery and DACS, London, 2024; photograph: Joe Hume

Hume is an expert at oscillating between figuration and abstraction, using outlines to isolate forms, flattening their mass and distilling their essence. In some of the paintings here, he almost completely dissolves the swan motif, breaking it up into puzzle-like mosaics. In one, he employs grey, brown and white for different fragments of the swan's image to confuse our perception further. At its best, Hume's work enchants viewers in its refusal to reveal itself fully and invites us to look again, with the promise that there is always something new to discover.

Gary Hume's 'Mirrors and Other Creatures' is at Sprüth Magers, London, until 19 October. 'Gary Hume: A Selection of Prints 1994–2022' is at Lyndsey Ingram until 03 October, and 'THIS WAY/THAT WAY' is at Hazlitt Holland-Hibbert until 26 October.

Main image: Gary Hume, *Untitled* (detail), 2024, satinwood on aluminium, diptych, 1.5 × 2.4 m each. Courtesy: © the artist, Sprüth Magers, Matthew Marks Gallery and DACS, London, 2024; photograph: Joe Hume

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 matthewmarks.com

# The Guardian

Art and design

Interview

## Artist Gary Hume: 'I use sex less now - but I still find the world an erotic place'

Stuart Jeffries



📷 'If in doubt, put a swan on it' ... Hume at his studio. Photograph: Linda Nylind/The Guardian

Mon 9 Sep 2024 11.03 EDT

**G**ary Hume's studio is overrun with swans. They don't quite outnumber all the tins of Dulux gloss, his go-to paint, but it's close. Avian necks and elegantly drooping heads, liquefying into abstraction and then curdling back into figuration, drift across the walls of his east London workplace. One charcoal drawing is echoed by a painting opposite, rendered in gloss and satinwood. Elsewhere, there are

Jeffries, Stuart. "Artist Gary Hume: 'I Use Sex Less Now - but I Still Find the World an Erotic Place.'" *The Guardian*, September 9, 2024.

swan diptychs, Aubrey Beardsley-like affairs in black and white. Each has a horizontal line that bisects the swans, making them seem like winged Narcissuses gazing at their own reflections.

These are all destined for Hume's new exhibition, *Mirrors and Other Creatures*, about to open at Sprüth Magers in London. While it's true that there are paintings of other living things here – humanoid flowers and other natural forms – this place feels more like an aviary than a studio.

Why swans? "I use my dreams quite a lot," replies the 62-year-old former Young British Artist. "If I'm having a problem with a painting, I ask my dream to solve it while I'm asleep." And one night, his dream spoke to him. "It said, 'If in doubt, put a swan on it.' So in the morning I drew some swans, then I added another in paint. And I like the picture now. I'm not interested in swans in any big way, but I like being as open to the subconscious as I am to my conscious. I don't treat it like a brand new world, like the surrealists would, somehow separate to my conscious life. I treat it as a bonus to my conscious life."

And why the mirror theme? By way of answer, Hume tells me about a call from his son telling him he'd become a grandad. "I rushed into the bathroom and looked in the mirror. I'd been looking in the mirror before, wondering who the fuck this is. Then I go to the loo and I look in the mirror and go, 'Oh, there you are. Hello, grandad.'"

Hume wants his paintings to capture that uncanny feeling of self-recognition. "That space between the reflection and me contains all of me," he explains. "That is what I think the paintings can do when anyone's looking at them. I become conscious of me being the object that's looking at this thing."

Despite what he suggests, Hume's swan fixation is hardly accidental: they represent for him the other. He tells me of an epiphany he had on a boat during a painting expedition

**■ ■ *We landed on this guano-covered piece of land - and suddenly the whole sky was filled with screeching birds***

to Antarctica. "We landed on this guano-covered piece of land and suddenly the whole sky was filled with screeching birds. It was as if our species was nothing."

Yet "our species" has frequently been the subject of Hume's work. "Obviously, I have a sense of

empathy,” he once said. “But I don’t make political work. I don’t make work that criticises the state. I make as human work as I can.” That humanity was especially evident in the paintings made for his 2017 exhibition honouring his mum, Jill Henshaw, then 85 and suffering from dementia. He used childhood photographs to inspire works about how he felt looking at his mother while a little boy. Mum Twisting was inspired by a shot taken in 1968 in Cornwall: a swirl of lines mirroring his mother’s dress as she twirled in the wind, observed by her son sitting on a hill. Other works, such as Mum in Bed, were based on adult visits to his ailing mother.

“It was long goodbye stuff,” he says now. “But there was a paradox, because I set out to say that I love my mum – and in fact the paintings turned out to be about me. There was no real Jill Henshaw there. You know, her lovers and disappointments and struggles and joys. There was none of that. It was all me.”



📷 Winging it ... Untitled, 2024. Photograph: Joe Hume/© Gary Hume / DACS, London, 2024. Courtesy the artist, Sprüth Magers and Matthew Marks Gallery

Despite his claim to be politically disengaged, two recent projects suggest otherwise. For several years, Hume collected press images of schools and classrooms destroyed in conflicts. Even before the current wars in Ukraine and Gaza, it became a huge collection. He made 30 drawings and 14 paintings and called the resulting 2019 exhibition *Destroyed School Paintings*.

“Often in the background of the photographs collected, I would see fragments of murals painted by children. I remembered taking my son – he’s 37 now – to school, holding his little hand and seeing murals on the classroom walls and feeling that he was going to be safe. Basically, I was full of hope. Seeing that hope destroyed was very emotional. I was doing work about the terrible cost of war, the loss of hope.”

A series of paintings called *The Archipelago* followed, inspired by Britain’s refugee crisis and taking on extra resonance this summer as windows were smashed

in hotels putting up asylum-seekers. “That series was really my response to people in lifejackets washed up on our shores – and the lack of empathy and fear they experienced.”

I wander among swans. Hume has long been a painter of singular obsessions. Before birds, he found himself an artworld niche painting doors in the late 1980s. The doors were MDF, the paint domestic gloss. Critics took it as some postmodern conceptual art gag, but it wasn't. He just really enjoyed painting doors, although the results were more Rothko than Farrow & Ball. “I've never been a conceptual artist. What interests me is the space inside the frame, how to give it muscle and energy. Your responsibility is to fill an empty field with something you can bear to look at. I never get tired of doing that.”

Charles Saatchi bought the lot and Hume, the quiet man among the brash YBAs, became the first of the gang to become a Royal Academician. By 2001, he had been nominated for the Turner prize and had represented Britain at the Venice Biennale. Ever since, he's managed to parlay his strange obsessions into hard cash.

Not bad for a small-town boy – he was born in Tenterden, Kent, in 1962 – who went to art school because he felt it was a place for kids who were “wrong”. He was raised, largely, by a



📷 A painter of singular obsessions ... in his studio with a model of the gallery for his forthcoming exhibition. Photograph: Linda Nyland/The Guardian

Jeffries, Stuart. “Artist Gary Hume: ‘I Use Sex Less Now - but I Still Find the World an Erotic Place.’” *The Guardian*, September 9, 2024.

single mum who worked as an NHS surgery manager. State support, in the form of grants, helped him leap through a door that is now shut on those from humbler backgrounds.

He left school at 16 with no qualifications, did odd jobs and enrolled in a life drawing class, eventually studying at Goldsmiths with the likes of Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin, graduating in 1988. He was from the very start enchanted by the world of art. “I found out that artists existed, that they made amazing things, and I thought, ‘How lovely to be one of them. How amazing to be famous, successful and make great things! And nobody knows who you are!’” And it has all happened for him.

When the Guardian interviewed Hume a decade ago, he said all his paintings were inspired by sex. That is no longer the case, apparently. “What was it Socrates said? ‘So finally, I’m free of the burden.’ So finally, he can just wander around without following his cock all the time. For me, it wasn’t all cock. It was rather that the world is an erotic place and everything seemed charged with sex.”

As if to underline the point, he brushes some dust off the crotch of an old sculpture of upturned women’s legs. “I used to think that without sex being within the work, the work

wasn’t true. I don’t think that now. I still have sex, and I still like having sex, but it’s not a constant drive any more. I have much less sex and I want to use it much less in my work because of that. Sex is not a prerequisite within a work – but that’s not to say the world is no longer an erotic place for me any more. It totally is.”

Hume considers himself lucky to be a visual artist. “One of the great things about it is that there’s no moratorium on making great work. It’s very difficult to be a middle-aged pop star, but not a middle-aged painter.” He’s even luckier than that, I suspect, having worked at a time when he could indulge his own obsessions (swans, mirrors, doors) without having to take fatuous commissions. “It was modernism that



📷 Glossy ... a pair of Hume's doors.  
Photograph: Nick Ansell/PA



📷 'The world is still an erotic place' ... Untitled, 2024. Photograph: Joe Hume/© Gary Hume / DACS, London, 2024 Courtesy the artist, Sprüth Magers and Matthew Marks Gallery

did that,” he says. “It freed artists from bending the knee to their patrons. But when I started I had no sense that I would be able to make a career doing what I am doing. I never expected to be so absorbed in painting and to be so happy working in this wonderful space.”

It is a wonderful space, an autonomous haven for art and making that is embraced by his friends and family. Marc Quinn, a friend and fellow artist, has a studio next door, while his photographer son Joe has the one upstairs. “I get to see his work. And he gets to see what I do.”

And the same now applies to his grandson Frankland although, being three, Frankland is more interested in the studio’s forklift truck than Grandad’s art. Everyone’s a critic. “We let him sit on it,” says Hume. But you don’t let him drive it, do you? “God no!”

Very sensible. Just think of the menace to bird life.

● [Mirrors and Other Creatures](#) is at Sprüth Magers, London, 13 September to 19 October

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

## Interview

# GARY HUME PAINTS THE BEAUTY OF WHAT'S LEFT BEHIND

By [Mark Burger](#)

Published September 12, 2019



Photo by Voytek Ketz, courtesy Matthew Marks Gallery.

Gary Hume doesn't want to worry about art—his ambitions extend beyond the dimensions of a canvas, into the nebulous atmosphere of empathy, memory, and meaning. Hume's latest exhibition, *Destroyed School Paintings*, explores the tenuous veil between trauma and nostalgia, now on view at Matthew Marks gallery in Chelsea, New York. The artist's new collection, which consists of fourteen paintings and six sculptures, was inspired by images he saw in newspapers depicting conflicts in the Middle East—many of them of burnt down school buildings, haunting remnants of lost innocence. "I was quite happy just to turn the goddamn page when I looked at all of the horror," says Hume. In particular, the flowers and houses he saw etched on blackboards amid piles of rubble

reminded him of murals from his own elementary school past, and his children's too. "We've all been to kindergarten, we've all taken our children or our nephews and nieces or god-children to school," he continues. "The fear and the empathy just overwhelmed me." Rather than emphasize these often-sensationalized images of violence, however, he chose to depict the paintings left behind. Below, Hume walks us through some of the works in *Destroyed School Paintings*, which convey a universal sentimentality in their childlike, Matisse-esque simplicity.

---

"RED FLOWER"



"I see this hideous photograph of a school that's being bombed or malted or shelled, and there's holes and shit everywhere, and broken equipment, and dust everywhere. There's books, and either a body or bodies, or pools of congealed blood. And I take out all of that and I just focus in on the little bit that I can see that was made with hope. Maybe it's just me, but I've become so exhausted. How do we feel anymore? Having any empathy for these people in this situation? It's all horrible. It's an absolute nightmare. I wish it didn't happen. I wish it would stop. I want to turn the page and read about

the new movie, because I don't really want to go there. I've just become inured to it. But what really struck me in these photographs that made me start to rip them out the newspapers was that there was something there that it wasn't really being photographed by the photographer. The destruction was being photographed. The brutality, the carnage was the subject of the photograph, and what struck an unbearable empathetic chord was seeing these fragments of hope and dreams and a sensation of safety."

---

### "THE BLACKBOARD"



"They don't have blackboards. They paint with blackboard paint directly on the wall. And then they decorate around the edge with more paint. I was remembering taking my child to school and seeing murals painted on the corridors in the schools and looking down at him and going, 'Look, it looks lovely, doesn't it? You'll be happy here.' To be able only to get these glimpses of that potential really woke me up. I thought that maybe it's possible to make images of horror that could affect me still. We've all been to kindergarten, we've all taken our children or our nephews and nieces or god-children to school. And the fear and the empathy just overwhelmed me, which was quite shocking because, of course, I was quite happy just to turn the goddamn page when I looked at all of the horror."

---

## “THE FLAME”



“I always paint on aluminum. These paintings are painted quite differently than I normally paint. They’re all painted one color initially. You could see a little bit of blue down the right hand side. This whole painting was at blue and then, all in one go, I paint the painting on it. But, weirdly, I need to have one color that enables me to float the painting onto it without trying to make the painting. I’m not making it. Normally, I grow paintings, and I’m not growing this painting. I’m just floating this painting out for you to look at, like a message in a bottle.”

## “THE TEACHER”



“That was interesting to me because it’s an image of a person. So that school wasn’t a Muslim school—otherwise they wouldn’t have a person on it because you’re not allowed to paint people. I purposely did not log where the school was or what religion the school was or anything like that, because I didn’t want to specify a conflict, because it’s never fucking ending. The desire to build empathy is not to say, ‘Oh well, thank God that’s over.’ ‘Assad won,’ or ‘Taliban won,’ or ‘America won.’ It’s any of us. I think that’s why I wanted to do her quite small. I didn’t want her to become an image of a person. It’s just a funny old shape, with funny, little, pinky, shapey-weird hand thing, but if she was nine feet tall, I thought that she would dominate the room. She wouldn’t be something I looked at. It would be something that looked at me, and I wanted to look at her.”

---

## “REMNANT”



“It’s tiles hanging down, and it’s like a little dress or an apron. That one seen outside of a school, and they’re the ceramic tiles that were on the school that have been blown off. You can see the little blobs of cement that you put on the back on the wall when you tile. It’s an interesting dilemma about the language and context. I’m calling them ‘Destroyed School Paintings,’ and then I’m giving them titles with a word that gives you a gentle ‘in.’ But of course, language, having a conversation about them, makes it clear that what they contain is what is lost. Is that only visible once we’ve had the language? The majority of people who will go to the exhibition, they probably won’t bother reading anything. Whether we even write anything, they’ll just be pretty pictures that are a bit weird. It’s a confusing thing for me to write up how overt to be other than just speaking to people. They’re better when you know that they only really contain loss.”

# ARTFORUM

## LOS ANGELES

### Gary Hume

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

Spread across the Matthew Marks Gallery's two locations in this city, Gary Hume's first solo exhibition in Los Angeles in more than twenty-five years revealed the tenacity of certain long-standing concerns and the emergence of others. Among the eight recent paintings (enamel on aluminum or paper) and three painted-steel sculptures on view, a giant trompe l'oeil of vertical boards crisscrossed with super-glossy white x's suggested the flattening of a barn's side and the sliding plane of its door. Titled *U.S.A.*, 2018, it recalled Hume's other portals, the big rectangular slabs of the "Door" paintings, 1989–91, with which he is still associated after exhibiting them in the generation-defining 1988 "Freeze" exhibition curated by Damien Hirst in London. Like those earlier monoliths, *U.S.A.* renders the painting coincident with its source—here the generically American outbuildings of upstate New York as opposed to a specific state-funded hospital in London's East End. If the previous appropriations of the swinging doors at the derelict St. Bartholomew's Hospital managed to abstractly but no less intently excoriate the Thatcher administration's funding cuts to the National Health Service, this newer version deftly imaged an agricultural locale that, as painted, shades red.

Connecting the two spaces were Hume's wafer-thin sculptures, all freestanding wagon wheels variously painted yellow, blue, and lime green. *The Wonky Wheel (Yellow)*, 2013, was the earliest piece in the

View of "Gary Hume," 2019. From left: *The Beach*, 2018; *The Wonky Wheel (Blue)*, 2018; *The Wonky Wheel (Lime Green)*, 2018; *Water*, 2018.



show (the other versions were from last year). Its bent edges indicated that it was the prototype for the other two, which similarly exhibited perfect geometry in the erect rods radiating from their centers but which were just as banged up on the outer circle. As do the “Doors,” which were also a pretext for formal experimentation with an adaptable iconography (e.g., the inclusion or omission of such otherwise banal details as porthole windows and kickplates), the wheels propose the wanton seriality of a product line offered in many hues. They connected to the surrounding paintings by design—both bodies of work were coated in Hume’s signature medium, enamel—and as wry jokes about his paintings being “the thinnest sculptures in the world,” in his oft-repeated words. Positioned in front of the *U.S.A.* painting, *The Wonky Wheel (Yellow)* likewise recalled the opportunism of the pioneers inching across vast lands inconveniently inhabited by other people.

Migration, willed and otherwise, was the show’s unmistakable subject. In the second space, Hume configured the image of a life jacket into a repeating design that floated across the slick, watery surfaces of mural-scale horizontal paintings on paper (so thickly covered with paint that they had become rigid, even as they were ever-shifting, catching and redistributing ambient light). Arrested mid-undulation, the three 2018 works perfectly layered the life jackets onto shimmering grounds: Against the impenetrable inky expanse of *Flotsam*, the black vests nearly disappeared; in *Shadows*, the pink and purple shapes seemed to float over flag-like bands of turquoise, brown, and aquamarine; and in *The Beach*, ocean blue undergirded life jackets painted in the incongruous palette of rainbow Skittles. In each of these works, the forms summon so many similar items awash on beaches throughout Europe, buoyant but absent of bodies, or still carrying them, too late, to shore. These are gruesome sights, here differently submerged. Just a few miles away, the Marciano Art Foundation was displaying *Life Cycle*, 2018, by Ai Weiwei. Ai’s installation similarly took as its focus the global refugee crisis: A makeshift bamboo boat constructed with the technique intended for traditional Chinese kites anchored a room full of mythological beings hanging from the ceiling. Back at Matthew Marks, *Water*, 2018, a blue-green monochrome of its titular substance, deftly captured that suspense, imaging nothing but writhing waves in an improbable elegy.

—Suzanne Hudson

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

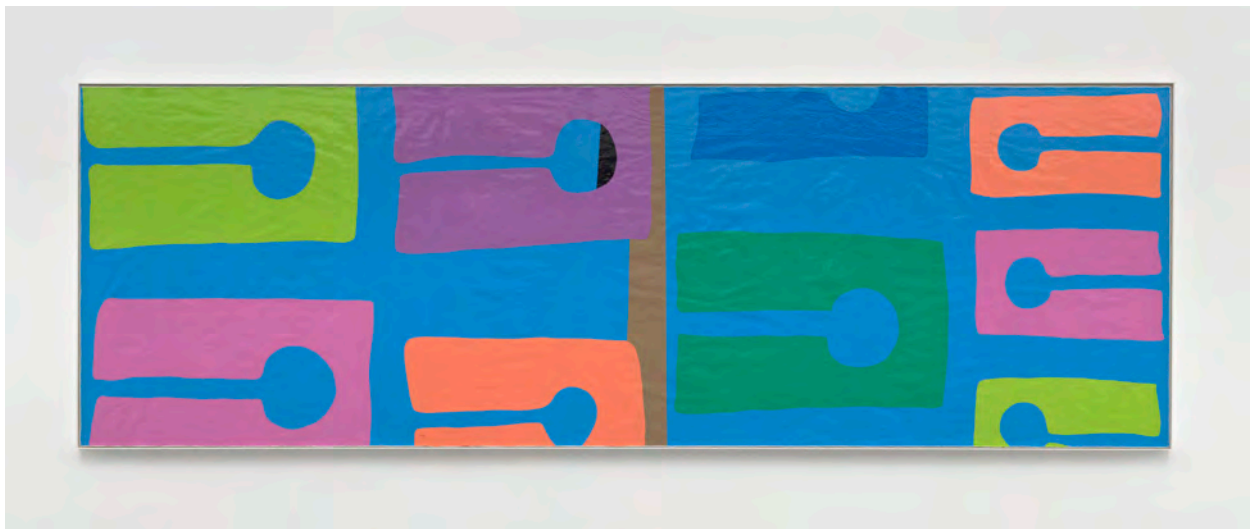
# Los Angeles Times

ARTS & CULTURE

ENTERTAINMENT

## Review: Gary Hume's first L.A. gallery show in 25 years

By CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT | ART CRITIC | FEB 20, 2019 | 3:30 PM



Gary Hume, "The Beach," 2018, enamel paint on paper in artist's frame (Matthew Marks Gallery)

New paintings by British-born artist Gary Hume, who works in upstate New York, continue his long-standing use of high-gloss enamel paints to create flat, two-dimensional shapes, sometimes figurative and sometimes not, that seem strangely corporeal.

Sculptures — notably shaped like wobbly wheels — attempt to reverse the equation: Objects stand in space while appearing oddly flat, although the visual conundrum is not as absorbing as it is in the paintings.

At Matthew Marks Gallery, Hume's first Los Angeles solo exhibition in more than 25 years features five new paintings and two new sculptures, plus four older works. The most absorbing are roughly 12 feet wide and 4 feet high, horizontal fields painted on thin sheets of paper mounted inside shadow-box frames of the artist's design. The images are abstract — keyhole-



Gary Hume, "Shadows," 2018, enamel on paper in artist's frame (Matthew Marks Gallery)

like shapes that lock together sideways — confounding any spatial expansiveness that the juxtaposition of colors might produce.

Enamel paint, heavy but light-reflective, causes the paper to crinkle as it dries. So the paintings' surface flatness is confounded, visually and physically, while the shadow box emphasizes the materiality of otherwise flimsy paper. Hume's paintings are like impossibly permeable membranes between two and three dimensions.

"Water," all turquoise ripples; "Beach," an array of mostly pink, orange and green candy-colors against bright blue; "Shadows," which clouds the scene; and, "Flotsam," a dense, nearly monochrome purple that reads as brown or black depending on how close a viewer gets, all unlock your mind and let it drift.

One place it goes is to the tension between matter and consciousness, which has vexed philosophers at least since Aristotle. Rarely is the dilemma as lovely as this.

*Matthew Marks Gallery, 1062 N. Orange Grove Ave., L.A. Through March 30. (323) 654-1830, matthewmarks.com*

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

# The New York Times

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2017

## Gary Hume's Valentine to His Mum

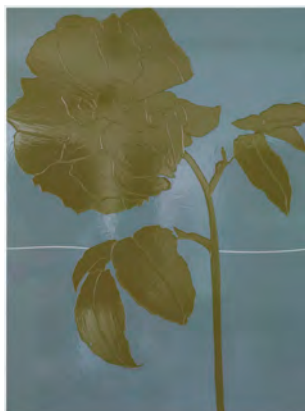
After a long break, an artist was willing to take risks.

By BARBARA POLLACK

No one would accuse Gary Hume's paintings of being confessional or revealing. He came to fame on the crest of the Young British Artists emerging in the late 1980s, but is often described as the least flamboyant of the bunch.

Instead of the exhibitionism of peers like Tracey Emin or Damien Hirst, Mr. Hume practices self-restraint, modestly producing near-abstractions that opaquely deflect straightforward narratives or easy interpretations.

So it is highly surprising that in his latest shows this fall at Sprüth Magers in London and Matthew Marks in New York, Mr. Hume has turned to a personal subject, namely his mother, or mum, as he affectionately calls her. Mr. Hume, 55, has not shown in three years, taking a break for the first time in a 30-year career that was covered in a Tate Britain retrospective in 2013. Having experimented with new materials and approaches to painting, he became willing to take a big risk with what he depicted.



GARY HUME, MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY  
"Mourning," 2016.



"Mum in Bed," 2017.

Pollack, Barbara, and Gary Hume. "Gary Hume's Valentine to His Mum." *The New York Times*, October 29, 2017, p. F30.

“I just wanted to paint a picture of my mum, and I wanted to do it to honor her,” he said this summer in an interview at his Catskills farmhouse, where he and his wife, Georgie Hopton, live four months of the year, spending the rest in London.

His mother, Jill Henshaw, 85, has dementia. She raised five children pretty much on her own after his father abandoned the family when Mr. Hume was an infant, he said. Mr. Hume described the relationship with his mother in only the most loving terms, emotions that made the painting process challenging. The artist found he was incapable of producing a portrait that objectively captured his mother, either as the vital young woman he remembered managing a doctor’s office or in her current condition.

“Even though I wanted to honor her, there’s a selfish paradox where I can’t see her as a person, I can only see her as my mum,” Mr. Hume said, stating that the paintings turned out to be mainly about his relationship and feelings for his mother, rather than a snapshot of her appearance or personality.

The series is divided into two parts: works that reflect the artist’s point of view as a child looking at his mother, based on family photographs and memories; and paintings that capture his mother from his more adult perspective, based on recent visits. One painting, “Mum Twisting, 2015,” was inspired by a photograph taken by Mr. Hume in 1968 during a summer outing in Cornwall. The resulting painting is a swirl of lines circling above the viewer, mirroring the patterns of his mother’s dress as she twirled about in the wind, standing above her son on a grassy hill.

Another painting, “Mum in Bed, 2017,” solemnly conveys the outlines of his mother’s face in a steely shade of blue against a background of institutional green. Here, the artist is looking downward from the standpoint of an adult. Mr. Hume said there was one work, “Grandma Looks at the Garden, 2017,” that presented his mother’s world from the perspective of her grandchildren, but nothing in this striking composition of silhouettes of flowers revealed this back story.

In fact, the true innovation of this latest body of work is not the subject matter, but Mr. Hume’s new approach to paint on paper, allowing the material to pucker and curl under the weight of the slick enamel house paints he employs. He is best known for his glossy paintings on aluminum, creating reflective planes by sanding down layers repeatedly until achieving a flawless sheen. But in this new work, the surface of the paper is as crimped as a seersucker suit, defying standard techniques for sizing paper to avoid just such an effect.



NATHANIEL BROOKS FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Gary Hume seen through his sculpture “Wonky Wheel” at his home in the Catskills.



IMAGES VIA GARY HUME/DACS, LONDON, 2017, SPRÜTH MAGERS AND MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

“Windbreak,” 2016.

“I love the waviness. Without the waviness, forget it,” Mr. Hume said, explaining that all of the paintings that approach his mother from the perspective of a child were created this way. The fragility of the paper and the reflection of light created by the wobbly effect seem perfectly suited to such subjects as “Mum’s Cardigan, 2015,” a line of white, oversized buttons against a pale mauve background, or “Rain, 2017,” a pattern of yellow dripping lines against an orange sky.

Inspiration is an uncomfortable term for Mr. Hume, who recoils at any interpretation that reduces the work to merely being a response to his visits with his mother. He prefers to think about the relationship to subject matter as a process of “permissions,” or, as he explains, the subject of a painting allows him to explore aesthetic choices that may seem unusual or out of character for him. He points to a large work on paper, a field of purple, pink and green stripes, titled “Windbreak, 2016,” recalling a picnic at the beach and all the families huddled behind lengths of fabric to protect them from the wind.

“I love stripy paintings,” he said. “I think stripy paintings are lovely. But, I can’t make stripy paintings. There are already great stripy paintings out there. But when I’m thinking about this holiday with my mum and thinking about the windbreak and how she acted as the windbreak, I can make a stripy painting. The permission is the windbreak.”

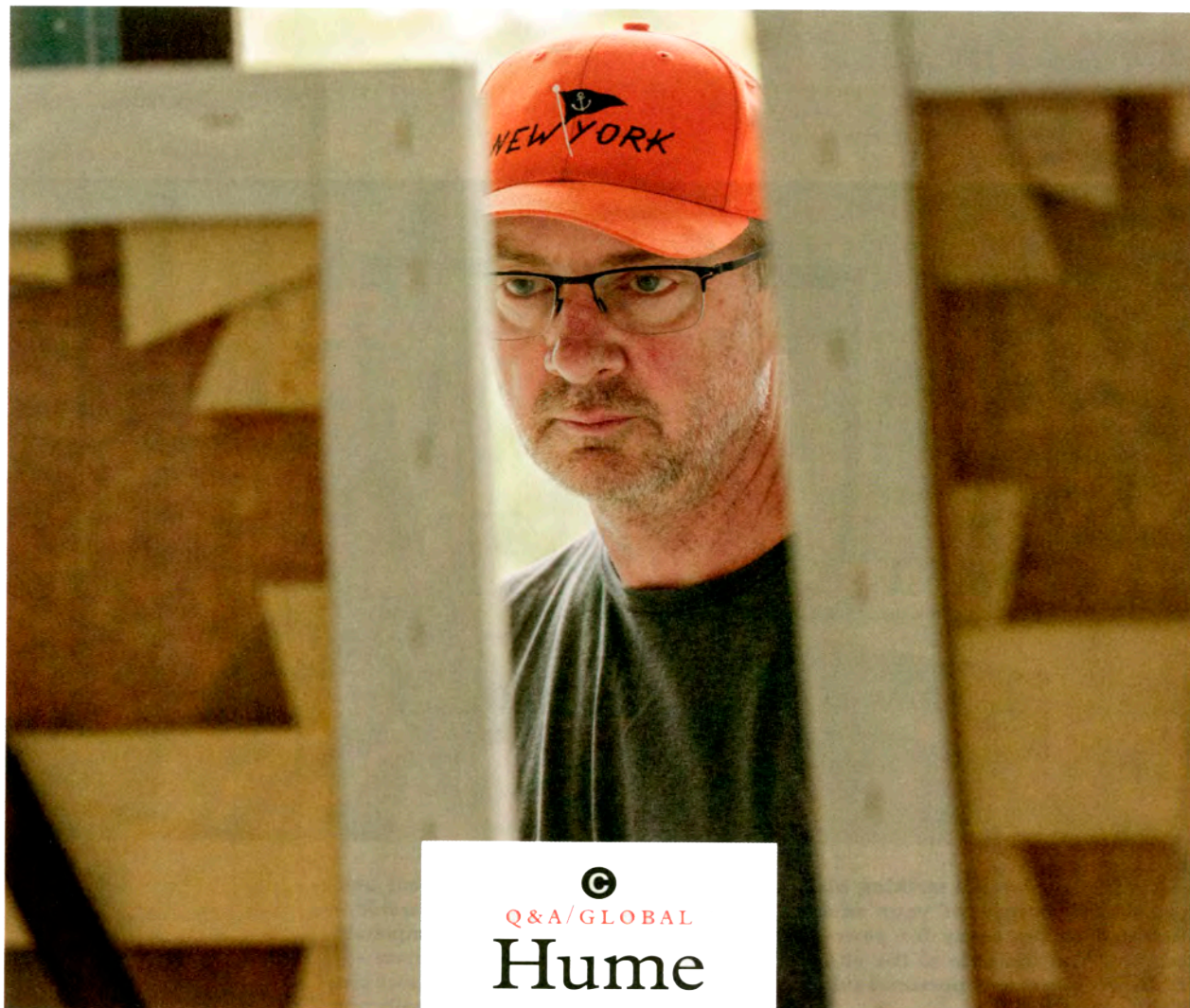
A new technique allows paper to pucker and curl under the weight of slick enamel.

He tears up at times when talking about his mother, but eschewed overt sentimentality when creating these paintings. That may be why so many people have described his work as “cool,” a label that he said was a misnomer.

“I’ve never thought of my work as cool,” he said. “I think all my work is hot, but maybe I’ve got a lower boiling point.”

Indeed, he said that all of his work, not just the series about his mother, had something to do with love.

“I think if you don’t love the moment you are doing it, if you don’t love the line, if you don’t love the brush with the paint on it, it doesn’t work,” Mr. Hume said. “I have to love it while I’m doing it. If I’m not loving it, I don’t like it.”



Q&A/GLOBAL

## Hume with a view

Turner Prize-nominated artist Gary Hume – lauded by the art world and a wider audience alike – is known for his vibrant high-gloss creations.

By Marisa Mazria Katz  
Photography Nathan Perkel &  
Dunja Opalko

(I) Hume viewing his morning sketch

As a core member of the Young British Artists (YBA) movement in the 1990s, Gary Hume made a name for himself with his high-gloss enamel paintings of hospital doors, a clever riff on geometric abstraction through a darkly humorous lens. He later abandoned this motif to develop a language of poetic and mysterious forms, derived from childhood memories and dreams, which he mines for imagery.

His new show at the refurbished and enlarged Sprüth Magers gallery in London breaks with his past again. Stepping away

from his signature use of working on aluminum panels, he now applies his industrial paints to paper, which warps into an undulating surface, evoking the sensation of staring at the ocean.

Ahead of the opening of this new show, *Mum*, we met Hume at his studios in upstate New York and in east London. We also made the acquaintance of his dealers Monika Sprüth and Philomene Magers ahead of the opening of their enlarged and refurbished gallery in Mayfair. Just in time for Frieze too. — (M)



**MONOCLE:** You have a striking black-and-white picture of your mother included in the essay for your new exhibit. And the title of the show is ‘Mum’, an intensely personal subject. What prompted it?

**GARY HUME:** I never know what I am going to do; it is a question of finding out. My mum is coming up on 86, she’s quite frail and has had dementia for the past five years. We’re saying goodbye to her already. I thought I was going to do that honouring thing, like get the soul of a person through a portrait – you know – the traditional notion of portraiture. It turned out my mum’s only my mum, as far as I’m concerned. So I ended up with different memory points: me as a child, remembering my mum and then me now, looking at her and remembering her. One painting – really weirdly – was painted from the viewpoint of her grandchildren looking at her.

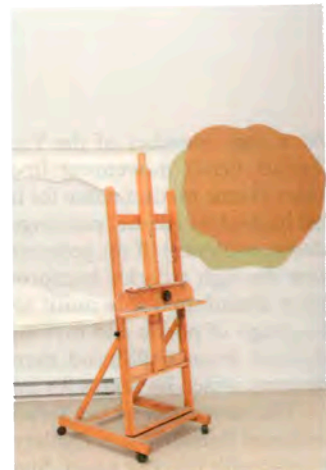
**M:** Can the life of an artist ever be one of true happiness? Or is it an unending emotional roller coaster?

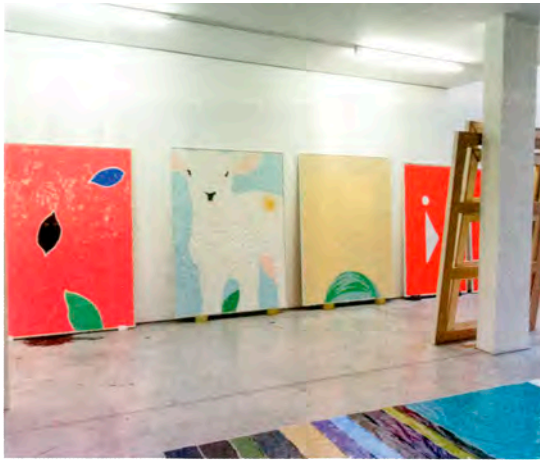
**GH:** Everything is a problem. The thing

that’s interesting is the problem and trying to solve it. What is unbearable – and what makes you into a completely useless, not-worth-being-alive person – is the inability to solve problems. Once the problem’s solved, and you’ve finally got a painting that you can bear to look at, the relief is unbelievable. You don’t even have to worry about whether it’s any good because it’s become itself. That pleasure lasts for a little while – four, five minutes – and then you turn your head and go, “What am I going to do with you?”

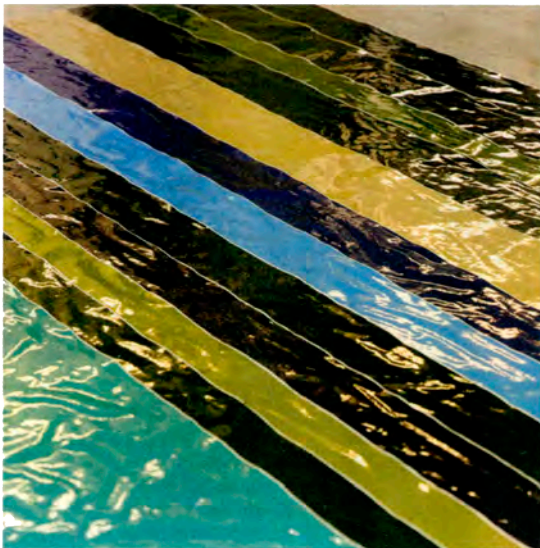
**M:** The art world has changed considerably since the formation of the YBAs: there’s the pressure of finding affordable studio space, huge student debt and also making work that sells in a globalised art market. Can pressure like this ever be a good thing?

**GH:** A lot of artists from my generation speak cryingly about the younger generation, saying they’re all career artists. I don’t feel that way at all. They’re having their own experience. We had an experience – and that can’t continue. Everything





“I try to make beautiful, singular objects to give people some pause in their life. My instinct is that this is the antidote to disgusting politics”



- (1) Hume in his studio
- (2) Easel with artwork in the background
- (3) Paintings ready to go
- (4) Gloss on paper
- (5) Going through the archive takes some effort



changes. We'll be talking to people who are 23 now but in 25 years they will be saying how it was incredible, actually, that there was so much pressure.

**M: What is the allure of living part-time in the US?**

**GH:** One of the reasons was to be an immigrant. The great thing is, I haven't got a clue who Americans are. I have no real idea who they are, or what state they come from. I don't know their accent. I don't know their class. I don't know their religion. I'm very free because of that. I wander about not knowing anything. That's very useful for making things.

**M: Immigrants have been under attack since day one of Donald Trump's administration. Has this political climate changed how you think about your work?**

**GH:** It's more like a problem of art-making. I try to make beautiful, singular objects to give people some pause in their life. And they're about being a human. How do I work in a world gone mad? And at what point do I decide that what I am making is an irrelevance to the political situation? My instinct is that trying to make true and beautiful things is the antidote to disgusting politics. We won't obviously change anything but we have to show what we're capable of.

**M: In the early 1990s you took a break from making your famous door paintings. One essay described the moment as a crisis. Your response was to say you were searching and 'found I had no ideas'. How do you work with no ideas?**

**GH:** By looking. I would like to have ideas. Also, I feel like I want to be saved all the time. So if I had a really good idea, I could be saved. Wouldn't that just be lovely? I find how I intellectually investigate something a bit poor. If it doesn't carry on intriguing me I think, "Well, it's OK but it's not brilliant." Why do I want to put something out that's based on an idea that isn't brilliant? I like being lost. And then the only way that I can find something to work on is while looking. I've got no idea – and it's a nice thing to have no idea.

(1) Hume's kitchen and garden  
(2) Paint cups (3) Philomene Magers (left)  
and Monika Sprüth, Hume's dealers

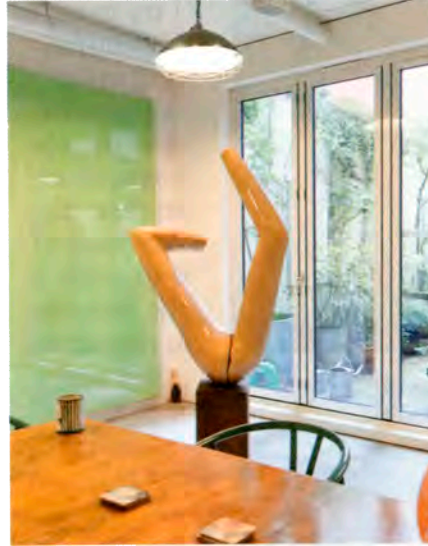
**M:** You are about to debut a new body of work and there will be a deluge of interest from the press. How do you deal with being asked the same questions about your art?

**GH:** I'm conflicted between presenting singular objects to look at that are just themselves and arrive mute, and allowing the story of what made it possible for these things to arrive in the first place – and whether that should be made public. My fear about telling the stories of what made a painting possible is that because they're words, they become true. Therefore the painting becomes fixed. I don't really want the painting to be fixed by words – I want it to be fixed by the image. I'm torn over the solidity of language versus the fluidity of the visual image.

“Hype is for something that has no value and because we were young, we actually thought that the world and culture were ours to shape. Our systems would be the only systems”

**M:** You were part of an artistic movement that was on the receiving end of a lot of hype and cultural attention. Do those days seem antithetical to the celebrity-for-its-own-sake, social media hype of today?

**GH:** If I think back now, I can see that there was possibly hype and there were people having discussions like “How can we build this? This is exciting, let's make this even more exciting.” Because I was young, and everybody was young, we just thought it was the shape of the world and that we deserved it. There was no hype. That is to say, this was just enthusiasm and accurate, truthful thrill. Hype is for



something that has no value and because we were young, we actually thought that the world and culture were ours to shape. Our systems would be the only systems. Now I just think, “Oh my God, what an amazing time.”

**M:** What advice would you give to young artists?

**GH:** I guess it is to recognise their particularity, their gift. The thing they have that the person next to them doesn't. That is actually part of their material. But it's a double-edged sword because you're lumbered with yourself, you're stuck with the only thing you happen to do. The fact is, the very things that only you can do, are the very things that only you can do. And when an artist dies, you know that's it. Whatever you think of them, you think, “Well, there'll never be another one of those. That's gone.” And artists should remember that. And then work.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

## FINANCIAL TIMES

# Critics' choice

Life&Arts

Jackie Wullschlager

### Gary Hume: MUM

Sprüth Magers, London

There was always something recalling childhood in Hume's minimalist, clear picture-book world of flowers, birds and snowmen, but his latest series, Mum delivers a newly rich emotional charge. As usual, the paintings are large, flat, shiny, vertical, starkly graphic though tending to abstraction, attractive yet disconcerting: luscious bronze flowers floating just out of reach of a wobbly vase in "Mother's Day"; a flurry of turquoise leaves, dancing, wilting, falling on a grey mound in "Graved". In the context of Mum, these almost-still lifes in enamel on aluminium, reflecting the viewer, tap themes of recollection, loss, absence, painting's relationship to time: poignant and metaphysical.

Mum was made in response to Hume losing his mother to the fog of dementia, and marvellously contrasts fading memories and vanishing presences with strikingly direct childhood perceptions. "Cheap Sweets" is a two-metre

red and white striped canvas with a couple of bright blots, evoking a child's delight in artificial colour, garish packaging, the grandeur of small delights. This is executed in thick gloss paint on paper that ripples like a crinkled wrapper.

Paper here gives lavish tactile effects: "Mum's Cardigan", with five big white buttons on pink, at first calls to mind a Hume snowman but the crumpled, worn surfaces are exactly what a snuggling child would remember. By contrast, works on aluminium are smooth, subtly evocative, and play on light to imply shifting realities: the fragment of an old lady's head on a pillow, eyes closed, but still animating the abstract shapes of the painting in "Mum in Bed"; the blue-violet silhouette "Mum" where facial features can only be seen from certain angles, so we feel the gaps, a haze between us and the subject and, as Hume says, "Mum's distance from herself". [spruethmagers.com](http://spruethmagers.com), to December 23



'Graved',  
(2017)  
by Gary  
Hume

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

# THE SPECTATOR

ARTS FEATURE

## ‘The abstract paintings all went in the bin’: Gary Hume interviewed

*There’s more to the former YBA than glossy surfaces*

**Martin Gayford**

---



*'Mum in Bed', 2017, by Gary Hume*

Gayford, Martin. “‘The abstract paintings all went in the bin’: Gary Hume interviewed.” *The Spectator*, August 26, 2017.

Last year, Gary Hume made a painting of himself paddling. At a casual glance, or even a longer look, it might not appear to be what it is. What you see is a wrinkled, pinkish surface with a sort of dome of curving green and blueish shapes at the bottom. This, to Hume, is a sort of self-portrait as a child at the seaside. ‘I’m on the beach, I’ve got the ripples going around my ankles making little coloured shapes, and all the sand.’

Hume’s paintings are like that. They may look abstract, but it turns out that they are startlingly real. One from some years ago consists of six shiny black rectangles with yellow bars between them. In one way, it’s a recycling of one of the best known of all abstract paintings, Malevich’s ‘Black Square’ of 1915; in another, it’s a startling piece of realism, exactly what a dark window looks like at night.

If you peer into Hume’s paintings, you can see your own reflection. That’s because his medium of choice is not oils or watercolour, but household gloss. Consequently, his paintings have the smooth, reflective quality of a well-painted door. And indeed, doors — the big swing-type ones through which you enter a hospital ward or operating theatre — were the subject of the first series of works with which Hume came to fame.

Again, these looked like arrangements of circles and oblongs (the windows and panels on the doors). At the same time, they were almost facsimiles of reality: door-shaped objects, painted in gloss you could buy at a hardware store.

Initially, Hume was associated with the Young British Artists of the 1990s such as Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin. With the softly beautiful quality of his work in mind, however, and the household gloss, you might say that he was as much DIY as YBA.

Twenty years have passed since the *Sensation* exhibition in which the YBAs came to artwork stardom. Hume is no longer thirtysomething, but a mature artist of 55. Four years ago he had a retrospective at Tate Britain, shown in parallel with one by a wonderful painter of an earlier generation, Patrick Caulfield.

That pairing suggested a better way to think of Hume than as part of a loose grouping such as the YBAs: he is one of a quirky line of British painters who sit right on the borderline between abstract and figurative art (Howard Hodgkin was another). So Hume can be connected with a sort of tradition, but like all worthwhile artists brings something fresh. Frank Auerbach, a veteran observer of painting, mused recently that there is something new about space in Hume's work (perhaps it's because of that unreproducible mirror-smooth gloss).

When I ask Hume whether he feels he belongs to a tradition, the answer is revealing: 'The only tradition that matters is of artists who, whatever their work looks like, are truthful. That's one of those non-empirical judgments: you can't be 100 per cent sure of it, but you just believe them to be truthful.'

Style has nothing to do with it. 'It doesn't make any difference what it looks like because every artist can only make what they make. That might seem entirely ridiculous. You'd think we should be able to do what we like. But it turns out we can only do what we can.'

So Hume's recipe for being an artist involves probity. 'Avoid an easy fix, something that is pleasing because everybody knows about it already, or which you don't care about, but looks good. That all has to go in the bin.'

For Hume, a painting has to be a picture, by which he means ‘not an abstraction’. And a picture is ‘something to do with the world and not about art’. He quickly goes on to say that he loves abstract art; he just can’t make it himself. Recently, in fact, he tried. He made a series of very minimal paintings: ‘I was very excited and worked for a month making more of these things — just large stripes, really, thinking, “Oh God, these look really excellent!” After a month, they all went in the bin.’

Instead, he made a picture of a striped thing: a windbreak. ‘That you might have thought I could just paint, without looking at an actual windbreak, but it turned out I couldn’t at all,’ Hume remembers. ‘I ended up with a flag. So I had to do it again, go and buy a windbreak and copy it.’ And to him, a windbreak isn’t just a thing to stop the breeze, it’s roughly what a small cake dipped in tea was to Marcel Proust.

‘To me it is an incredibly happy object. It reminds me of great holidays, and also of the huge amount of care and tending by my mum. Of course, she put it up, doing every damn thing, in what was always a slightly chaotic atmosphere with everybody changing. All this is going on, with the windbreak making a sort of family home.’

Hume is currently going through an experience that happens to many people in their fifties and sixties: the final illness of a parent. ‘My mum’s got dementia,’ he explains, ‘and there’s been this slow goodbye. I’m trying to make these tender paintings in what is really quite an untender situation. Maybe death is tender, I don’t know. It doesn’t feel like that. But that’s how I’m trying to be, watching her death.’

‘How do I do a painting of my mum and somehow have the elusive quality of her now? So much now is our memories of her, rather than her actually being here.’ So his new pictures are of fragments of the past recalled and of somebody now slipping away. Hume famously said of himself: ‘All you get of me is the surface.’ But the more you look, the more depths you find.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047



**Gary Hume RA in the  
RA's Life drawing room**

Photograph by Eamonn  
McCabe

## **“It’s like making a garden” – Gary Hume RA on printmaking**

**By Amy Macpherson**

Published 17 February 2017

He shot to fame as a painter, but for the past 20 years Gary Hume RA has also made prints. Amy Macpherson visits him at the RA Schools’ print workshop ahead of his selling show in the Keeper’s House.

Macpherson, Amy, and Gary Hume. “‘It’s like making a garden’ – Gary Hume RA on Printmaking.”  
*Royal Academy Magazine*, February 17, 2017.

With their large, flat blocks of colour and seductive shimmer, Gary Hume RA's paintings have a graphic simplicity that translates terrifically well into silkscreen and linocut – printmaking techniques that are known for their density of pigment and even distribution of ink. This year Hume has been working with expert print technicians in the Royal Academy Schools to produce three new limited-edition prints, to be sold through RA Editions, in support of students at the Schools. The prints also feature in a spring survey of Hume's graphic art in the Academy's Keeper's House and online, in a selling show spanning a period of almost 20 years.

While being one of the Young British Artists (YBAs) generation, famous for their embrace of conceptual art, Hume is very much a painter, although his signature material is not oil but household gloss paint, applied to aluminium or MDF. The forms in his paintings inspire his prints, but he has a natural curiosity about the print process, and a reluctance to simply churn out a reproduction of the painted image.

"I want to make an object when I make a print, and I want to have fun making it," he explains, when I meet him in the Schools' workshop. "My printmaking began as purely silkscreen – I did that for a number of years. And then for a short moment they went very computerised. But I didn't enjoy that because there was no mixing of the inks, no physicality." The new prints combine screenprinting and computerised laser-cutting technology to create stencilled shapes from wood. These are then inked and printed onto a screenprinted base using the Schools' Columbian Press, a masterpiece of 19th century engineering that harnesses the power of counterweights and levers to apply considerable force to the inked block – for Hume, there's something pleasingly analogue about this final step in the process. "You get that lovely *schloop* [he makes a sharp sucking sound] of the ink on the paper."

It's appropriate that this fusion of old and new should take place in the RA Schools. Britain's longest-running art school has a distinguished history – its alumni include Turner and Constable – but it's also at the cutting edge of contemporary art practice, with current students embracing multimedia technologies and even virtual reality. It's the first time that Hume has used this particular combination of techniques and materials, and he's enjoying the outcome. The outlines of the laser-cut shapes might be precise replications of his sinuously drawn lines, but their wood-grain surfaces create natural – and unpredictable – variations.

"Each individual print has its own qualities. We'll print them out and then some of them won't look any good. It's an aesthetic choice, like making a garden – it's nature. How much of that nature are you going to allow, and how much will you refuse?"

For Hume, this manipulation of the surface finish brings the prints closer to his paintings in ethos, if not in execution: "The gloss paint reflects light, so you get an awful lot of *action* in my paintings. I wanted some texture in these prints, to have the action that my paintings have." Another quality that Hume's prints and paintings share is ambiguity of subject matter. His source materials are often photographs, but he may zoom in on a detail until it comes close to abstraction. Does it matter to him whether people know what he's painting? "Historically, not at all," he answers. "But I'm starting to change my mind and allow things to have a story... I like hearing other people's stories, so why I am I being so mealy-mouthed with my own?"

Of the three new prints, one is the straightforward erotic nude *Yellow Slip* (2017) – "just sex, basically" – and the other two, *Ticket* (2017) and *Keeping Mum* (2017), are part of a body of work he has been creating over the last two years with a particularly poignant subject, his mother. "My mum has dementia, so she's leaving us slowly. Anyone who's got a loved one who has dementia knows what that's like, the grieving period – it's a very strange situation. The paintings are about my mum slowly going." He describes one of the paintings as a portrait of her, and another simply as "a painting that cries".

Along with the catharsis of making these works came an unexpected discovery. "I thought I was making paintings of my mum, but it turned out quite quickly that it's all about me. I haven't really given her her own identity. It is absolutely my mum from my eyes, from my emotional standpoint."

Hume seems comfortable with the complexity of making a body of work about his mother that is also about himself. Perhaps this isn't surprising – looking at the range of subjects covered in his Keeper's House exhibition, multiple layers of meaning crop up again and again, from the *American Tan* series, with its partly fetishistic, partly satirical take on American cheerleaders, to a 2013 print that is simply titled *Migration*. It reads as both an image of a bird in a tree, perhaps poised for a migratory journey, and as a map of the world – the branches could be rivers, the blocks of colour geographical boundaries. Is there a hint of political content here? "I never really do social commentary, even though I feel like I ought to because I'm reasonably liberal," Hume says. "I'm not active in fighting for any cause. I see that where I have abilities is in trying to make things that are very directly human, and the better part of being a human. I'm not someone you could vote for, but... I want to make things that are humane."

## Kate Moss Inspires Gary Hume, Caulfield Heads to the Bar

By Martin Gayford - Jul 7, 2013 7:00 PM ET

Gary Hume once told me that he was a caveman -- stuck in his cavern, attempting to paint the world outside. It was a neat way of saying that the problems of painting haven't really changed much in 40,000 years.

Just as in the days of Lascaux, it's still a matter of making a flat image, with pigments, of a wide and complicated world. The trick is to find a way that feels fresh.



"How to paint a door" (2013) by Gary Hume. This new painting of doors functions as the actual entry to the exhibition. Source: Gary Hume/Tate /Samuel Drake/Tate via Bloomberg



"Blackbird" (1998) by Gary Hume. Birds are a favorite subject of the artist. Source: Gary Hume/Tate via Bloomberg

Hume does that, and so too did the late Patrick Caulfield (1936-2005), an artist from an earlier generation whose work, it turns out, has a good deal in common with Hume's.

They're currently being shown side by side in twin exhibitions at [Tate Britain](#) (through Sept 1). It's an exercise in compare-and-contrast from which both emerge looking good.

Hume is weathering the difficult mid-career years well; Caulfield looks more and more like a truly [great painter](#).

The new wrinkle in Hume's work could be summarized in two words: gloss paint. What he does with this household item is visually brilliant. His starting point was a series of paintings of hospital swing doors. The point about those is that they're simultaneously abstract, geometrical and 100 percent realistic.

In other words, here is an answer to an age-old conundrum - one that, in fact, goes back to the Stone Age: How do you pack a 3D subject into two dimensions? The works at the entrance to the show carry the joke one step further: They're paintings of doors that you can walk through.

### Kate Moss

After the doors, Hume continued to work the changes, finding other subjects that could be reduced to flat, reflective shapes -- among them plants, birds, and [Kate Moss](#).

Some work better than others. Yet Hume has consistently found ways to convey a lot with a little. "Yellow Window" (2002) consists of nine inky rectangles on a corn-colored background. The black paint makes a mirror surface; at the same time, it is darkness, depth, mystery.

Caulfield, during his lifetime, sometimes suffered from what might be called a filing problem: People didn't know where to put him. As a young man, he belonged to a generation labeled the British Pop Artists.

Yet Caulfield belonged to no movement. Like most major artists, when it came down to it, he was *sui generis*.

Caulfield's art is virtually unpopulated. There are hardly any figures in this exhibition. One exception is an early "Portrait of Juan Gris" (1963). His world resembles that of the early cubists, such as Gris. It consists of still-life subjects and interiors, especially restaurants and bars --places the artist loved, and where he spent a great deal of time.

### **Comical Fashion**

He found his source material in out-of-date magazines and cooking spreads. The resulting pictures conjure up a nostalgic yet comical world of the once fashionable.

Yet Caulfield's painting, like cubism, is a complex and witty game of appearance and reality. Much of the picture is composed of flat areas of color and black lines. Against these, he often sets just one or two items in brilliantly naturalistic photo-realism.

## FINANCIAL TIMES

JUNE 8/JUNE 9 2013

# Shared passions

They may be a generation apart, but Gary Hume and Patrick Caulfield enliven and dignify one another. By *Jackie Wullschlager*

This summer's first show at the newly reconfigured Tate Britain is a glorious double whammy. Even before the first room, you laugh out loud as, sweaty palm on pink paint, you swing open "How to Paint a Door" (2013) – a glossed-up pair of gallery doors that also stand in for a simplified face: chocolate-brown portholes for giant eyes, recessed hand panels for nose, sugary flesh-hued ground. The doors lead into Gary Hume's high-shine, witty, neutral world of lean, clean picture-book birds, flowers, snowmen – a seductive, media-savvy place that pretends to be all about surface but, in this small and vibrant exhibition, looks increasingly serious and resonant.

Hume made his name 20 years ago with a series of monochrome life-size paintings of hospital doors – minimalist yet painterly; abstract even as their insistent verticality opened possibilities for portraiture and figuration; just touching on the political at a time of National Health Service cuts. Paintings that looked like installations, they shared the laconic, declarative assurance of Hume's fellow Young British Artists: Hirst's shark, Emin's bed, Whiteread's "House".

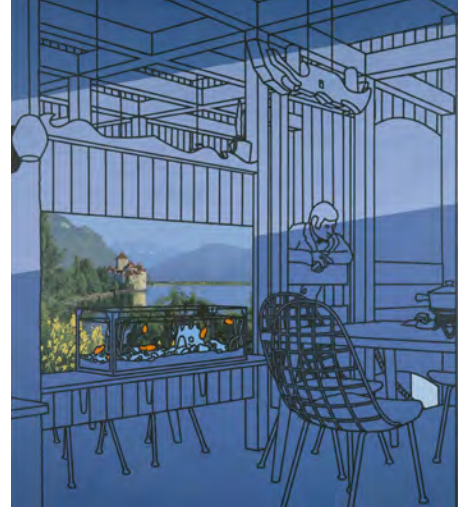
Tate superbly yanks Hume out of this familiar context. A step away from his pink portals is another mini-retrospective, this one concluding with a more sombre pair of doors: Patrick Caulfield's four-metre "Bishops". Here, an episcopal-purple interior, constructed from Caulfield's trademark planes of flat colour and outlined props of vase, alcove and plant, is illuminated by raking light cast from unlikely angles. It centres on a large yellow lampshade hovering behind

swing doors – their golden handles are the only naturalistically depicted objects – left slightly ajar, as if someone has just passed through. This most poignant canvas by an artist of generally wry detachment was painted in the year before Caulfield's death from cancer in 2005.

A generation apart, Hume and Caulfield enliven and dignify one another. They share much: stark graphic delineation; shrill, luxuriant colour; impersonal, non-gestural brushwork; optimism and humour with an undertow of sadness; banal motifs that are really an excuse to meditate on the nature of picture-making. To modernism's openings and closures, each brought a fresh and energetic approach during the two 20th-century decades – Caulfield in the 1960s, Hume in the 1990s – when British art claimed a role on the international stage.

Expect to feel hungry in the Caulfield rooms: no artist so embraced the postwar era of plenty and possibility that transformed social and cultural aspirations. At the table laid at a window with a view in "Still Life: Maroochydore", a towering black pepper mill rivals the lakeside cypress, and the leaves of a *salade Niçoise* echo the green ripples in the water. Overgrown leeks in "Still Life: Autumn Fashion" are set against Matisse-like patterned cloths; an outsize lobster lends a note of strident colour to "Reserved Table", whose otherwise cool white-lemon-grey harmonies recall Braque.

Allusions to French art, French food, snapshots from Mediterranean holiday postcards and hotel brochures – the blazing red roses on a sea-facing balcony in "Santa Margherita Ligure";



the rose architectural façades of "Spring time: Face à la Mer" – are all plundered and reassembled. In "After Lunch" a waiter – a rare human appearance in a Caulfield painting – surveys an empty restaurant: on the wall is an incongruous photorealist painting of the Château de Chillon, obscured by a cartoon fish tank, a nod to Matisse's famous goldfish series.

**'After Lunch' (1975) by Patrick Caulfield; left: 'Tulips' (2009) by Gary Hume**

The comic plurality of styles, from trompe l'oeil to complex perspectival games, itself reflects sudden consumer abundance and choice, as well as demanding, at the dawn of media hype, that we interrogate how we read and absorb images.

Caulfield is never quite satirical, although the all-over burgundy "Tandoori Restaurant" and the photorealist chicken Kiev's gleaming in the graphically simplified "Candle-lit Dinner" come close. Rather, he remained, as Christopher Finch defined him as

## Arts

---

early as 1971, “a romantic disarmed by his own sense of irony”.

Melancholy is an undercurrent, because Caulfield is an artist of feeling as well as of concepts – “feelings”, wrote his friend Howard Hodgkin, “about what it is to be an artist – about friendship and sociability. He was such a connoisseur of spaces where people gather for pleasure, such as restaurants and bars, and he managed to convey... the melancholy that can haunt such spaces – born of emptiness and artifice.”

From the film noir orange/black grid painting “Window at Night” (1969) to the finale of “Braque Curtain” (2005), where a black lamp eclipses an orange one in a composition echoing the rhythms of Braque’s “The Duet” (1937), Caulfield at his best tempers structural formality with reined-in emotion.

Gary Hume grew up with the mass-media iconography that had started when Caulfield became a painter. “Beautiful” queries what beauty means in this fetishising culture: in a tondo evoking Renaissance ideals of perfection, the subtly traced features of supermodel Kate Moss are drawn as a bas-relief within a flat bright pink plane; superimposed is an outline of Michael Jackson’s nostrils.

Hume constantly fights his instinct for grace and decorativeness. Flower paintings are monstrously gorgeous – a deep pink rose in full bloom in “The Whole World”, a single crimson bloom in “Tulips”. In “Nicola as an Orchid” the female form morphs into a flower, the head an olive oval, the hair a pale lemon streak coursing down a silvery ground with an abstracted willowy elegance that brings to mind Klimt, Alex Katz and Ellsworth Kelly.

In a sickly blue-green anti-harmony, “Young Mother and Child” captures the stubborn pride, uneasy responsibility and desperate protectiveness of a Goth-like teenage mother holding an over-large baby. As unyielding is the faceless aging figure in profile, grey-black except for a pink dot-nipple on a sagging breast, in “Older”.

“If I can’t see regret in a painting, then I think it’s less than truthful,” Hume says. The two dozen works here, painted mostly in gloss, occasionally in enamel and on aluminium, glint and reflect light in brilliant liquid pools of colour, rippling to cohere into images that at once look on the verge of dissolution, and suggest transient moments of beauty frozen on to hard metal surfaces: paintings of time by a Young British Artist who lasted the course.

*‘Patrick Caulfield’ and ‘Gary Hume’,  
Tate Britain, London to September 1  
[www.tate.org.uk](http://www.tate.org.uk)*

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

# The New York Times

---

## ART & DESIGN

### Finding Meaning in the Mundane

A Midcareer Survey of Gary Hume Paintings

---

#### Inside Art

By CAROL VOGEL JUNE 20, 2013

LONDON — Gary Hume’s paintings don’t give much away. When he depicts a person, it is often little more than an outline; a plant is only a shape rendered in rich colors and varied textures. It’s as if he wants viewers to create their own narrative. Yet walking through the galleries at [Tate Britain](#), where a midcareer survey of his paintings recently opened, Mr. Hume, 51, isn’t nearly as mysterious as his work suggests.



Gary Hume's "Anxiety and the Horse. Angela Merkel" depicts the German chancellor as a yellow blob, a bit like a lemon.  
Gary Hume, Private collection, Matthew Marks Gallery

Dressed in jeans, sneakers and a baseball cap, he talked about how putting together the show dredged up “memories of what I was thinking at the time.” On one wall is “Birdsong,” an all-green canvas from 1998 that looks vaguely like the X-ray of a thorax. “My studio used to be in Hoxton,” Mr. Hume said, referring to a neighborhood in London’s East End, “and there was this blackbird in the yard that was so overwhelming I started imagining what was going on in its throat. I like the fact that the painting’s silent although it refers to sound.”

Mr. Hume is often called the quiet one among a group of celebrated artists who studied at Goldsmiths College in London in the 1980s. The group included Damien Hirst, Sarah Lucas and Fiona Rae, and Mr. Hume’s work was first featured in Mr. Hirst’s “Freeze” exhibition, held in a dingy warehouse in the Docklands district of London in 1998. Over the years Mr. Hume has become known for depicting everyday subjects using high-gloss industrial paints because, he said, “they are ordinary and I like to take things that are mundane and make them beautiful.”

Soft-spoken and somewhat shy, he appears to be the last artist who would tackle political subjects. But he does, in oblique ways. A painting from 2011 called “Anxiety and the Horse. Angela Merkel” depicts Ms. Merkel, the German chancellor, as a yellow blob, a bit like a lemon. “It’s all about leaders who suck on lemons for politics,” he said.

Why not show her face? “I’m not good at faces,” he explained with a chuckle.

Even ordinary objects have meaning. “Yellow Window,” from 2000, a black canvas with bright yellow outlining the window panes, is “about van Gogh and Duchamp,” he said, “because I like to look at the world through their eyes.” Then there’s “Baby,” from 1994-95, in which red eyes and a white mouth peek out from an otherwise dark canvas. He made it that way because, “When they arrive they’re real and totally alien,” he said, recalling when his son, who is now 26, was born. “I’m drawn to vulnerability and ugliness,” Mr. Hume went on. “As a kid growing up in Kent I was the ugly duckling.”

A newer canvas, “Red Barn Door,” from 2008, resembles rough-hewn planks in brilliant, rich red tones. “It’s saying hello to American art,” he said, adding that “the color, the iconography is of America dreaming.” The door also refers to a farm in upstate New York where Mr. Hume spends six months of the year when he’s not in London.

Early in his career he was singled out for his painted doors, a comment on what he perceived as a troubled British national health system.

“Everything’s a picture, nothing’s real,” he said about the canvases reproduced from actual hospital doors. At the Tate show, on view through Sept. 1, visitors enter through a pink door he created for the exhibition.

“The door is generally one of the first things you see and one of the last,” he said. “They’re incredibly simple and also banal.”

## TATE<sup>ETC.</sup>

GARY HUME AT TATE BRITAIN

31

Gary Hume at Tate Britain — Gary Hume's glossy, highly coloured paintings are immediately enticing, but also elusive and enigmatic. His subject matter may seem ordinary – a bright red barn door, baby Lucas in silhouette, Kate Moss, an ominous looking blackbird sitting in a tree – but is far from it. Tate's Nick Aldridge visited him in his studio among his new work to find out more

“I like to not know what I'm  
doing most of the time”



By Gary Hume & Nick Aldridge



**Nick Aldridge** You are a painter and also make sculptures. Why do you paint predominantly?

**Gary Hume** There are myriad reasons why I love painting. I love creating contemplative still moments that don't particularly change, or that can change with the light. I like the act of picturing something in the mind, and then imagining it on a canvas or an aluminium panel. I love the material of the paint. You can fall in love with moving a bit of paint about. It becomes a pleasure in itself. And I like to sit and look at things. For me, it's much easier to do that with a painting that I make than with a sculpture. I find three dimensions incredibly difficult; gravity is not my friend. I use household gloss, because when I first started painting I was making a picture of a door, and generally you paint doors in gloss. I ended up preferring it because it's fluid and recognisable. It's like the mundane stuff in pots we all have under the stairs. But when you make a painting with it, it transforms itself from a mundane object into a beautiful one. And it loves light. Because I don't paint light in my works, I need it in there somehow.

**NA** One of the more recent works in the Tate exhibition is *Red Barn Door* (2008), which refers back to your well-known series of painted doors, made while you were at Goldsmiths. How did this later painting come about?

Previous page: Gary Hume in his studio, April 2013.  
Above: Gary Hume, *Red Barn Door* (2008), enamel paint on aluminium, 282 × 264cm; Right: Gary Hume, *Blackbird* (1998), Gloss paint on aluminium, 234 × 164cm

**GH** It was my response to grand post-war American painting. I wanted to make a great big American painting. I live part time in the countryside on the US east coast, where there is an architectural and colour vernacular, so I chose to paint a red barn door. To me, it is the equivalent of a Jasper Johns flag. I like the whole barn door thing. As with anywhere, for example in the English countryside, there's a romance about the past and about nature that actually doesn't exist. So I made this iconic fictional painting of Americana.

**NA** Nature is a recurrent theme in your work...

**GH** I grew up in the English countryside. I used to have a ferret and go out shooting on really cold mornings in frosted ploughed fields, so I've always taken a pleasure in the isolation that nature gives you. You can look at nature and marvel at the simplest thing. And with that comes the cliché of things passing – we've got three score years and ten, while a flower has two or three days, which is the speeded-up version of your own life. Even though it's a cliché, there's something quite moving about it. And then, of course, there is nature's great indifference to it all. (I'm an atheist: our universe doesn't care that I exist.) I do gardening, and I'm constantly surprised – and disheartened half the time. If you leave your garden for a while, everything comes back. Nature doesn't care about my tinkering. I find that quite humbling, and paradoxically it makes making things more pleasurable, because in the end, it is all dust.



**NA** Is that why you've painted the moon a couple of times as well – because it reinforces how little we matter?

**GH** Well, the moon is an incredible thing. Sometimes I will have been working in my studio and I step out for five minutes, and there is this moon hanging in the world – it's almost too much to take. And it keeps changing all the time, and often I won't see these changes happening. The brevity of such things actually drives me mad. The continual repetition of nature, like the tide, is both joyous and overwhelmingly frustrating.

**NA** How do you go about the process of making a picture?

**GH** Generally speaking, I have an image that I find. And for one reason or another, the image says: "I'm your painting." Very rarely will the colours have any relation to the original. Then I trace it and project it, crop it and move it around. The drawing basically says what colour it should be. Sometimes you have a drawing and can't paint it for ages because you haven't got the right palette.

My palette goes from pastels – childlike colours – to black and dark browns and dark blues. The colours I've got may be all set up for one series of drawings that I'm working on. Then another set of drawings comes along, and I can't paint them because my palette is all wrong. So I have to make up a palette and see whether that works.

**NA** Where do your ideas come from? Is it just everyday experience, or do you go looking for them, storing them in your mind to paint at a later date?

**GH** Well, all sorts of places. In some of my new paintings the images have come from a commemorative magazine of the killing of Osama bin Laden. One with three circles [as yet untitled] came from standing in a Portaloo in the middle of the desert near the Grand Canyon. I was with my son. I stopped the car, got out and stepped into the Portaloo because it was so absurd. Inside, there were holes through which you could look out at the desert. That seemed somehow to fit into the other paintings I was doing. So sometimes I get a theme, and I'll work with that theme until it runs its course.



Above: Still from *TateShots*: Gary Hume; Facing page, left to right: Gary Hume, *The Moon* (2009), gloss paint on aluminium, 161 × 244cm; Gary Hume, *Angela Merkel* (2011), enamel on aluminium, 152 × 112cm



For example, in a junk shop I recently found some very large photographs of American children taken in the early 1960s. I don't know how I'm going to do it yet, but I will try to make some things out of these hopeful little clean-looking kids.

**NA** Many of your paintings feature well-known people, from Kate Moss to Tony Blackburn. Why these subjects?

**GH** I do the occasional painting of famous people. Generally speaking, I choose those whose public face has slipped, or their ambition has been thwarted. I enjoy making paintings of people, such as Tony Blackburn, who have found things difficult and are trying to muddle on through. It just seems human. Beyoncé might be a really good subject, but not yet. At the moment, she's too happy and too good. Maybe one day...

**NA** You also have strong characters, such as the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, but more often it's your friends...

**GH** I only really paint women. I don't like painting men very much. I prefer painting women who are very strong, and who I admire. But they also perplex me, so maybe it's a little bit about how I enjoy not knowing what the hell's going on and finding out about it. They have that quality about them that their own self is very strong. They're not necessarily easy company. I'm on my toes when I'm with them. I really enjoy being with them, but I'm not relaxed and totally calm; I feel enlivened.

**NA** Is it a cathartic process?

**GH** There is no cathartic process in painting my friends, because all I care about is the painting. I only get pleasure while there's a problem, and then when I solve it. And then, of course, as soon as that's done, I need to make another problem and solve that one. I never get to taste the fruits of a painting that I think is successful, because I'm straight away on to another one.

• 'GARY HUME', Tate Britain, 4 June–9 September. The exhibition is curated by Katharine Stout, curator, contemporary art, at Tate Britain.  
• NICK ALDRIDGE is producer and director of TateShots.

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

## BLOUIN ARTINFO



### ***“I’m Not an Intellectual Artist, I’m Instinctive”:* Gary Hume Returns to Canvas**

Artists from the so-called YBA generation usually come with newspaper-friendly tags: the “pickled shark” guy, the “vagina chicken” woman — and in Gary Hume’s case: the “shiny gloss on aluminium” man. And there are plenty of gloss on aluminium works in Hume’s show “The Indifferent Owl,” currently held at White Cube’s Mason’s Yard and Hoxton Square venues. But these are much more twisted than Hume’s one-liner reputation might have led us to believe. In the basement of Mason’s Yard, semi-abstract representations of female genitals cohabit with pictures of birds’ heads, while on the floor, a herd of phallic limestone worms sprout out of the concrete floor.

For this show, Hume has also made a dramatic departure and started painting on canvas, eager to reconnect with the medium unhampered by the technicalities of the glossy surface. A few hours before his private view, he caught up with ARTINFO UK to discuss creative anxiety, art history, and why he sometimes prefers to see things from a mole’s perspective.

*Could you tell me about your exhibition title: “The Innocent Owl”?*

I heard an owl tweeting one night. In the morning, I went for a walk in the wood and saw a deflated child’s birthday balloon. I then just imagined the owl, with its fantastic neck, watching this deflating balloon going past and its utter indifference to this: the end of the party, this moment of a seven-year-old’s happiness, the family, the cakes, the presents. That’s all passed now, and the owl is indifferent to it. It just seemed poignant — both in that sense of the end of things, and in the sense of how nature doesn’t care about the end of things. Something else will come. For me, a bit more personally, I’m sort of indifferent to the great pageant that is going on, unless it’s absolutely in my focus. I’m like an owl: if it looks like a mouse, I will concentrate, if doesn’t look like a mouse, I don’t care, I’m just going to watch.

*Writing for the Guardian, Lynn Barber quoted you saying that you are searching for “permission for the picture to exist.” How do you know when an image, or a subject, will allow a painting to be?*

It's the other way around. I make something, and often, to allow it to exist, I have to create a permission. I'm anxious and therefore I'm unsure, but if I give the painting a title, or a rationale, than I can feel relaxed. It's a pleasure and an anxiety making pictures. I'm not an intellectual artist, I'm instinctive, but we are a literate culture. People prefer a rationale. So the permissions are often rational permissions. I can tell you that there is a rational position. You don't have to worry about anything, you don't have to look at the painting. I've given you the answer. It's finished with — but that's not how I paint, that's how I allow things to be.

*Given the choice, would you rather do without this rational permission?*

Yes, I would. Because that's how they are made. I don't live in a rational space when I make things.

*For this show, you've started painting on canvas again. What prompted this return to the canvas?*

[Gesturing at the large gloss on aluminium pieces surrounding us in the gallery] These paintings, there's an awful lot of work in them. I have my drawing, and then I put my drawing onto the panel, and then I prepare the panel, and that can take weeks and weeks of work. Then I put my color on, which is another creative moment, and then hopefully the painting works, or it becomes a problem, and then there's more creative stuff. But the majority of time is spent making it, not being creative. I just got tired of the work. Those paintings [on canvas], they can't take more than five or ten minutes, whereas these paintings [showing the gloss on aluminium pieces] can take three months.

*You needed to go back to a certain immediacy between your idea, or your creative gesture, and the finished product.*

Yes. It's a very different way of making things, I'm much less sure about them, because with the paintings on aluminium I can look at the drawing for a long time, I can refine it, and then I can look at the painting for a long time, and wonder how to change it, and what is working, and what isn't working, and make it right. But with those paintings [on canvas], you can't look at them and make them right. They are done. It is what it is. I might be good, it might be terrible. And for me, it's even more difficult because, I can't tell whether it's good or terrible. I can tell for the paintings on aluminium, whether they are good or terrible, but with those [on canvas], I haven't got a clue.

*Even now that they are hanging in the gallery?*

I like them obviously, and I want them here — partly because I want to say it's about painting. This is a painting show — I know there are sculptures in it — but it's about painting. And those paintings [on canvas] are clearly paintings. Of course these [on aluminium] are paintings, but you can forget they are paintings somehow. Whereas those ones... this is what you do at home, this is a painting.

*This return to canvas happens at a moment when, perhaps more than before, you introduce art historical references: Klimt, Rubens, the sculptures themselves are quite Brancusian. Do you feel more comfortable tackling art history now that you are very established in your career and own work?*

I don't really feel like I'm tackling art history, but I feel that I can possess what I think of as really good art. I can take it without feeling that it's wholesale robbery. I'm loving it, and I'm making my own work from it, and not feeling that I'm being disrespectful to the art I love, that I'm actually joining in. It wasn't like before. I was desperate to do it but felt like I wasn't allowed. But now, if I am doing it, it just feels right.

I did actually make a sculpture, and I really, really loved it. A friend came, and he really liked it, and then he went: "I'll be back in about an hour." He went off to a bookshop, and came back with a Brancusi book. He opened it and he said: "look!" He opened the book, and it was exactly the same sculpture. So that one had to go in the bin! Even though I love some Brancusi, I don't want to make another Brancusi!

*You've said that you are looking at things with a human perspective, but also sometimes from an animal perspective, say, from the perspective of an eagle. Is it a way for you to get out of your own limited self?*

It's not a shamanistic thing, it literally is a viewpoint. I'm not always making a painting with me, a human being, looking at the painting. I'm sometimes a worm, or a mole looking at something. And what does a mole see? And then I'll paint what a mole can see. It's not a criticism of the human eye, that we all should be blind moles. It's a desire for being able to see things from a different perspective.

*The Arts Council Collection is organizing "Flashback," a show with some of your early works. How do you relate to these? Is your past work something that you still regularly think about? Or is it completely behind you?*

The proof will be in the pudding. We haven't hung the show yet. It's not a retrospective at all. It's basically things I own, things I've never sold, so things that nobody wants — there's also a painting from the Tate and two paintings from the Arts Council. I don't know what it's going to be like, although I saw one painting in storage the other day. It was next to a Patrick Caulfield painting, and it stood up to him, so that was very pleasing.

# ARTNEWS

**reviews:** new york

## Gary Hume

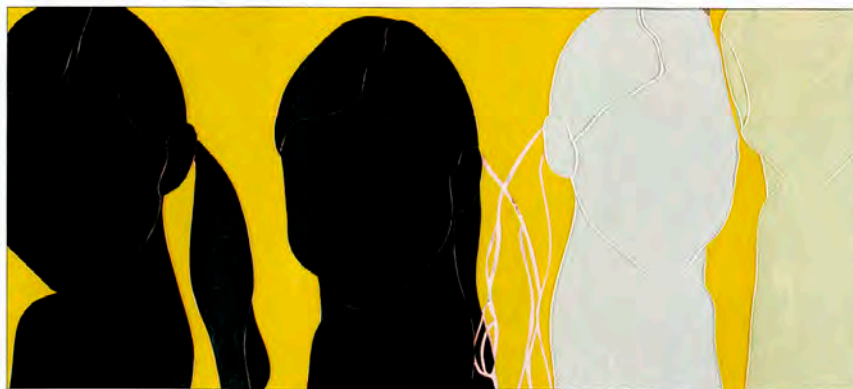
**Matthew Marks**

A Yankee accent could be detected in British artist Gary Hume's lustrous new paintings gathered here under the rubric "Yardwork." This may owe something to the London-based artist's having a studio in Accord, New York. Handsome as ever, the works—simplified forms in flat, bright, industrial colors on glossy enamel-on-aluminum panels—feature Hume's familiar motifs, but they have acquired a site-specific, rural twist. Although not exactly plein air paintings, blackbirds, nightingales, roses, and daisies of local origin, which Hume had seen from the windows of his barn, inhabit them. Nothing was appropriated from books and other sources—that is, except for the ponytailed girl whose image he found on Google.

Hume has also returned to the motif of doors—barn doors now, rather than the hospital doors of the 1990s. *Red Barn Door* (2008) and *Blue 'n' Cream Barn Door* (2009) are both diptychs that seem true to scale, with their patterns replicating those of a real barn door. Superimposed on the latter painting are a blue X and a diamond outline that extend from corner to corner and edge to edge, playing with positive and negative space. The stylized *Nightingale*, *Bird with Pink Beak*, and especially *Perch* (all 2008) teeter between representation and pure abstraction. Many of the images are surrounded by a raised or incised line—such as the roses, with petals drawn in thin gold filigree evoking cloisonné, a new direction. The high-Pop installation *Three Balloons* (2009), with its flora, fauna, country barns, teenage girls, and cast-resin

yellow pooch, reads like a disassembled landscape, a graphic New York pastoral recalling Lichtenstein and Wesselmann, a billboard for a vanishing American dream.

—Lilly Wei



Gary Hume, *Four Ponytails*, 2009, enamel on aluminum, 47 1/4" x 104 1/4". Matthew Marks.

# The New York Times

FRIDAY, JUNE 19, 2009 C29

## Art in Review

### Gary Hume

#### Yardwork

*Matthew Marks Gallery  
522 West 22nd Street, Chelsea  
Through June 27*

In this exhibition, at least, Gary Hume is at his best when painting the motifs he came up with nearly 30 years ago: big, semiabstract images of doors. They punned on the Greenbergian ideal of flatness by depicting things that really are flat, à la Jasper Johns. In addition, like many of the doors they depicted, the paintings had shiny enamel surfaces that are a Hume staple.

In the beginning the doors were the kind you see in restaurants, sometimes double, with round porthole windows, swinging both ways between kitchen and dining room. The new doors, seen in two of the dozen paintings here, belong on barns. They are big, broad and double, and reinforced by diagonal and horizontal blanks that provide Mr. Hume with compositional opportunities.

In “Blue ’n’ Cream Barn Door,” a light gray with striations that suggest vertical planks is crisscrossed with blue diagonals that form, in essence, two pairs of X’s, one above the other. In “Red Barn Door,” an ostensible monochrome, the planks form a pair of red-on-red Z’s, one the reverse of the other, so that the image is completely symmetrical.

These two paintings, especially the red one, have an implacable formal punch while disdaining formalist purity. The other paintings — similarly reduced and shiny silhouettes of young girls, birds and roses — seem much more tentative and arbitrary. Their liverish colors are intriguing, but they mainly function here as extras, forming a backdrop for the show’s two stars.

ROBERTA SMITH

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

# VOGUE

## Art: In Living Color



The British painter **Gary Hume** first made a name for himself in the late eighties and early nineties with highly reflective Necco-hued panels whose circles and squares evoked the windows and kick plates of hospital doors. “Yardwork,” his new show at Matthew Marks Gallery, offers two new additions to his ongoing investigation of portals—barn doors, one saturated in Mackintosh red, the other in Delft blue-and-white—alongside paintings of succulent posies, wonky-eyed birds, and a few extraneous (but brilliant) girls with ponytails. He was inspired by the natural bounty surrounding his Catskills retreat, where he spends four months out of the year with his artist wife, **Georgie Hopton** (the rest of the time they live in London), and which includes an old slaughterhouse that he converted to his studio.

“I use color to try to create a mood,” says Hume. “If you’re feeling more nostalgic, maybe they’ll become sentimental paintings. If you’re feeling frightened, maybe they will become like beautiful warnings.” Birds, he says, scare him a little “because they’re a bit like dinosaurs.” Critics have lauded his idiosyncratic color combinations, though he insists the selection is mostly serendipitous—oftentimes he empties a trash can before he paints and chooses his palette based on what he sees. His materials, on the other hand—enamel on aluminum—are positively deliberate. They adore light, he says. “To pay justice to the ordinary and allow its gorgeousness to come out is an absolute pleasure.”

Aside from painting, Hume, who graduated from Goldsmiths College a year ahead of his friend **Damien Hirst** and was one of the original YBAs, spends his time upstate cycling, tending two vegetable gardens, and making maple syrup and apple cider. As for what’s next, “I’ve got no bloody idea,” he says. “The vegetables are coming up, my studio’s empty, and I’ve got to paint something. But I don’t know what that is.”

—**Kimberly Straub**

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047

## MODERN PAINTERS

# OXFORD Reviews

### GARY HUME MODERN ART OXFORD

It is 20 years since Gary Hume exhibited his first "Door Paintings." Inspired by an advert for health insurance featuring a decrepit National Health infirmary, they're large-scale, formally simple—featuring circles for porthole windows and kickplates reduced to Band-Aid blocks of color—and, numbering 50 in total, are the dominating body of the British artist's career. Though metaphors for entering and exiting life, the paintings also convey a sociopolitical meaning: bearing in mind that the Thatcher government was blamed for the Health Service's decline, they've become somehow emblematic of all Britain's ills. Hume was not ignorant of such connotations. The sludgy browns and sickly pinks of *Mushroom Door* (1988) and *Incubus* (1991) atmospherically evoke the unpleasant neglect common to public spaces in the late 1980s and early '90s; and the series "Magnolia Doors" (1989–90)—painted from the most boringly predictable "non"-color favorite for the family home—transports us into the domestic interiors of middle England.

If these works hit the mark (the reflective nature of the noncolor gloss thrusting the viewers' faces back at themselves), one or two paintings also miss it: the cutesy, color-coded circles of *Girl Boy, Boy Girl* (1990–91) for example. Hume apparently became trapped by what he'd begun (as titles such as *My Guernica* [1992] suggest), but it's encouraging to see that even though he's departed to explore new art forms, subjects, and materials, time and again he returns—now to a more wonky, gestural, and fluid approach, as with *Black Door with Sash* (2006), but still to the door. —JANE NEAL

MATTHEW MARKS GALLERY

523 West 24th Street, New York, New York 10011 Tel: 212-243-0200 Fax: 212-243-0047



### **Gary Hume: Colour Magic**

Words by Paul Vallely

Portrait by Immo Klink

Gary Hume comes to the door somewhat distressed. He embarks on a convoluted story about a bodybuilder and the wheel-lock on the Vespa scooter that stands in the long narrow hallway of his east-London studio. I do not fully understand it, though I get the message that there was a problem and it is now sorted out. Hume is hard to follow. Things do not get an awful lot easier when he begins to talk about art. His speech is, by turns, furious and then halting, as his thoughts trip over one another and then reduce him to silence. His sentences are fractured, his thought-processes elliptical. You can see why he is a painter and not a writer.

Along the hallway stands a long row of empty, gleaming silver-paint cans, piled three high. If he sent them to the Tate Gallery they would probably exhibit them. But that's not Gary Hume's style, even if he did first come to critical attention alongside Damien Hirst, Tracey Emin, Mat Collishaw, Sarah Lucas and the other so-called Young British Artists who defined the whole BritArt scene of the 1990s. When his peers were busy being enfants terribles with their sharks in formaldehyde, chicken vaginas and unmade beds, Gary Hume insisted he was, unfashionably, a painter. The word "shock" was not in his artistic vocabulary.

Even so, the works that brought him to the attention of the collector Charles Saatchi were his "door paintings", life-size representations of hospital doors complete with porthole windows and kickplates. His detractors dismissed them as vacant glister but enthusiasts spoke of, for example, "a critique of modernist non-representational painting, playing as it did on the similarity between a white painting and a white painted door – a visual pun" and raved.

Hume shows me through to the light airy kitchen and makes me a nettle tea. It is surprisingly pleasant, as is Hume, whom I had been told in advance was grumpy with journalists. (He told me to read Gombrich's *Story of Art* before arriving, though I think that was a joke.) By the French doors is a huge canvas of plain magnolia, the only obvious remnant from his "doors" period. A wealthy City type had bought something similar, he tells me, and then phoned up a few weeks later to say that it didn't look as good as it had in the exhibition where he had bought it.

"I asked him: 'What time do you go out to work?' He said 7am. So I said, 'And what time do you come home?' And he said 9pm. So I told him to come home at lunchtime and look at it. A few days later he rang back and said: 'I see what you mean'."

What Hume meant was that his paintings are about light. Before I went to see him I had looked at dozens of his paintings on the internet. They gave no real idea of what he was about. The two-dimensionality of the computer screen gives no sense of the vibrancy, texture or hugeness of his work.

There are dozens of pieces – paintings mainly, but also a number of sculptures – crammed into the studio in preparation for his new exhibition, *American Tan*, at the White Cube gallery's Mason's Yard site in London's West End. They jostle with one another like solipsistic commuters. Most are close-focused studies of sections of the bodies of American cheerleaders, all legs and ra-ra skirts and frilly giant pom-poms. Mixed in with them are more abstract paintings of what Hume describes as "ugly chicks". Some of his paintings look banal, but others are viscerally exciting. There is a radiance to his work, and that is more than just because of its shiny surface gloss.

He describes the idiosyncratic process that produces it. He works from photographs that catch his fancy in magazines or books, which he traces on to acetate. He then projects the outline on to his studio wall. "I pull the image in and out to see at what size it looks best, to see when it comes alive." He then transfers the outline on to large sheets of shining aluminium and etches the shapes into it with acid. Then he lies the sheets flat on the ground, pouring on household gloss paints in pre-mixed hues.

Most of the paintings are too big for the average-sized home, which is perhaps just as well since they sell for around £250,000 a throw. "Small paintings can be fantastic. But you can't often get a narrative out of a small painting. In any case, museums are huge places and you want to take up some space.

"Sometimes I can see the whole painting from the outset in my mind's eye. But more often than not that idea doesn't last the duration of the painting. Sometimes it comes out easy, just as I had envisaged. But that is reasonably rare. I have to go with what the painting says to me. The painting is always informing me. I'm its servant; it's not mine. I'm doing what it wants."

Paradox, if not bald inconsistency or contradiction, has long characterised Gary Hume's discourse on his art. He went through a phase of painting C-list celebrities such as Tony Blackburn and Patsy Kensit, before upgrading to Kate Moss and Michael Jackson. "I wanted to honour the people I painted. I didn't want to make ironic paintings of them..." But then he talks about the attractiveness of failure. "Leonard Cohen has a line about there being 'a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in'. It's the flaws that illuminate," he adds and then sails off into a reflection about how protestors against the Iraq war make placards where "the typefaces are all over the place, and you think, my God, these people are all mad but they are the ones who go down to protest while the rest of us just stay at home and say how terrible it is. It's the mad that are brave." Make of that what you will.

But then Gary Hume's art is what speaks for him. It got him shortlisted for the Turner Prize in 1996, where he was the only artist not to talk to the television cameras. It got him selected to represent Britain at the Venice Biennale in 1999. It got him elected a member of the Royal Academy of Arts – a distinction usually reserved for grey beards – in 2001.

Did his paintings look different, I ask, in Italy, where the light has such soft brilliance? "Paintings look different everywhere. I had one exhibition in Spain where the gallery had windows in the roof permanently covered by blinds. In the art world people create a faux-natural light, because they want to fix art as a permanent thing. I'm interested in how it changes. I told them to open the blinds, to get the interplay of sun and clouds reflected in the paintings. They are highly reflective, which means there are layers of looking. You look at the picture, and you look at the surface, then you look at the reflection in the surface behind you, then you look at yourself."

He turns to glance around the spacious white studio. Soon all the work will have gone to the gallery and Hume knows he will feel bereft. "It's like your children have left home. It's like facing a blank sheet of paper and the need to create something else."

Yet his sense of paradox resurfaces. "I sometimes feel horror at the thought of yet another picture in the world. And another one by me. More bloody pictures. It's unbearable."

"There's this Japanese artist and all he does is paint the date – 27/8/07 – generally, white letters on a black background. Then tomorrow he might make another one: 28/8/07. I've no idea what he's like, whether he's gay or straight or married or alone or happy or sad or depressed or a golfer. I've no idea. All he does is provide these banal but finally quite cruel little missives that speak of all the unfulfilled possibilities, all the things he could of done instead of just painting the fucking date."

"It would be such a relief, to be an artist like that, to find something that could satisfy you that is so nothing. But unfortunately my personality isn't like that. I want to make things. So when this lot have all gone I'll be back here again, in an empty space, struggling away all day, trying to find something."

*Gary Hume's American Tan is at White Cube, 25-26 Mason's Yard, London SW1 (020-7930 5373; [www.whitecube.com](http://www.whitecube.com)) to 6 October*

# ARTNEWS

## Gary Hume

### MATTHEW MARKS

Gary Hume became known in the early 1990s for his brightly colored, ultraglossy paint-on-aluminum works combining abstract and figurative elements.

In his clever new pieces, Hume has created something subtly different, while sticking to his recipe of high gloss and flattened forms. Rather than autonomous entities, the eleven works here—three large-scale paintings and eight of Hume's celebrated faceless "Snowmen" sculptures—appeared together in a cohesive installation. Although physically separate and individually titled, the works transformed the gallery, as might a stage set, from white box to fantastic scene.

The intimate quarters of Matthew Marks's tiny, den-like 21st Street annex, where the show was installed, certainly enhanced this effect. But it wasn't just a matter of proximity. Hume, a London resident, has been living in upstate New York for the past year, and the works reflected that setting. The paintings shared a darker-than-usual palette of earthy, sometimes acrid colors—a perfect amalgam of muddy grass, fallen leaves, and the dated, dulled colors of old American cars. The ensemble presented the kind of visual experience we often have in a foreign place, where suddenly the unfamiliar assumes its own distinctive look, with patterns, colors, and angles that come to define that place for us. The abstract gray apples piled high in *Three Apples* (2003) echoed the biomorphic contours of Hume's glossy snowmen, each titled *Ink Snowman* (2003) for their bluish-gray color, while offsetting the decorative daisies that seemed to fall like leaves or snowflakes in *Meadow Sod* (2003).

All sorts of formal exchanges occurred in this way, establishing a personal illusionistic world that seems unlike anything Hume has done before. —*Meredith Mendelsohn*



Gary Hume,  
*Three Apples*, 2003,  
enamel on aluminum,  
37½" x 27".  
Matthew Marks.

## ARTFORUM

**GARY HUME**  
**MATTHEW MARKS**  
**GALLERY**

It is a rare, bracing pleasure to see a bunch of canvases that look as if they had some reason to get up in the morning. The six geometric paintings in this exhibition, Gary Hume's first solo show in New York, are smart, physically unself-conscious, and direct. Hume, who is 29 and English, uses enamel lacquer paint, and he applies it as if with great, smooth, slurping, dog-tongue licks. He also defines the sharp edges of his vibrant rectangles of color with foam-tape, producing what might be described as a Precisionist's wet look. These paintings are funny. Ostensibly abstract, each work is actually a depiction of a door, and this fundamental pun—so dumbly matter-of-fact and yet so quirkily manifold as to suggest a veritable picaresque of architectonic postures, thresholds to be transgressed, potential

assignments, and abandoned *cartes de visite*—steers straight into the *comédie humaine*. Doors are, of course, figurative. They're scaled by us and for us, and very often they echo the configuration of the bodies they variously invite or exclude, protect or imprison. Indeed, Hume's humble pun on abstraction and representation extends all the way into portraiture proper. This is a key distinction between Hume and, for instance, Peter Halley and Andrew Spence, whose works also involve irreducible pictorial puns and architectonic motifs but never suggest this sort of loopy epic.

Hume's sly pun is explicit in two paintings in the show, both abstract door-portraits entitled *Jim* (all works 1991). I don't know whether they are of Jim's door or, obliquely, of Jim himself, or whether the artist is saying that Jim *is* his door, or the sum of his many doors, but in any case Jim is characterized by bright, perky, robin's-egg-blue, yolk-yellow, grape-purple, and orange-orange. Though one Jim is very large and made up of four panels, and the other is medium-sized and consists of only one panel, they share the same colors.

Hume's doorways are Symbolist as well. *Symbolic Representation of the Journey From the Cradle to the Grave and Beyond*, and *Representation of Journey From the Cradle to the Grave and Beyond, From Another Perspective* aspire to Blakean intensity and cosmic sweep. Their overlapping, interrelated, but nonidentical color-coding—eggplant, for instance, gives way to mauve, and clotted-cream to lemon-curd—reveals an attention to detail and the preoccupation with landscape and nature's cycles that have been hallmarks of the English tradition in painting since John Ruskin's time, at least.

*Incubus*, clearly another instance of Symbolism within Hume's oeuvre, is a large painting in which an array of rectangles of closely valued colors—so close they could smother you—lend a sickly effect to neorococo pinks that might ordinarily be called "cotton candy" and "ballet." *Incubus* is a youthful tour de force. So is *More Fucking Values*. It's black, white, and two shades of gray. It's tough. It's easy. It's mean. *More Fucking Values* is the angry-young-man door portrait in Hume's most excellent show.

—Lisa Liebmann



Gary Hume, *More Fucking Values*, 1991,  
 oil on panel, 87 x 67".