

– FOLD –

Pearled and Pasted and other new paintings

Mali Morris

THURSDAY 19TH OCTOBER – SATURDAY 25TH NOVEMBER 2017

Mali Morris's new paintings are vivid, playful and generous. Some are amongst the most complex she has made in recent years, others the leanest. All are part of her exploration of abstract painting that stretches back over forty years. Particularly since the mid-nineties, when she began her innovative 'clearing' paintings, Morris's work has formed a bridge between a lyrical tradition originating in Abstract Expressionism and the current concerns of younger generations of abstract painters.

Morris conceives of painting as an art of layering. Opacities and translucencies are overlaid and juxtaposed to create an image in which space moves through colour and colour through space. The result is a luminous clarity, even a kind of innocence, but one whose affirmation is simultaneously deconstructed, with formal relationships teased apart to reveal subtle contradictions and complexities.

Visible through the improvised patchwork of *Pearled and Pasted* (2016) is a large suspended oval. The same motif forms the basis of the *Ghost* series, a group of large paintings begun this summer. Although never completely occluded, the oval is differently revealed by the squares and rectangles placed across it. Its lingering presence reaffirms the frontality of the picture, while complicating the interplay of spatial registers generated by varying hue, opacity, translucency, and animated by the carefully unleashed caprice of Morris's brushstrokes.

The light that shines through the layers of Morris's paintings may remind some of the screens that increasingly mediate our lives. But these paintings are closer in spirit to Matisse's search for luminosity – an artist who Morris continues to refer to and learn from, citing his chromatic and pictorial structures as the basis of her understanding of abstraction. At the birth of modernism the cryptic conundrums of Cubism were turned inside out, and many abstract artists optimistically exposed them to the light and space of the world. Morris's own understanding of the freedom promised by abstract painting is, in keeping with our times, more individually conceived. A personal exploration into the possibilities of painting, one that values moderation – but not too much – becomes an arena revealed by and rewarding to the viewers' sensitivity and willingness to fully open their eyes.

Sam Cornish October 2017