MERGE
VISIBLE
Lisa Denyer
Sarah Longworth-West
Ian Goncharov
Phil Illingworth
Lee Marshall
Laurence Noga
Playpaint
Clare Price

Curated by Charley Peters
The window is an opening, an aperture for light and ventilation. It opens, it closes; it separates the spaces of here and there, inside and outside, in front of and behind. The window opens onto a three-dimensional world beyond; it is a membrane where surface meets depth, where transparency meets its barriers. The window is also a frame, a proscenium: its edges hold a view in place. The window reduces the outside to a two-dimensional surface; the window becomes a screen. Like the window, the screen is at once a surface and a frame – a reflective plane onto which an image is cast and a frame that limits its view. The screen is a component piece of architecture, rendering a wall permeable to ventilation in new ways: a “virtual window” that changes the materiality of built space, adding new apertures that dramatically alter our conception of space and (even more radically) of time¹.

(Friedberg)

Traditionally painting in the west has been defined by its concerns with the picture plane - the translucent partition between the fictive internal space of the painting and the real space outside, where the viewer is positioned. In ‘De pictura’ Alberti used the metaphor of picture plane as an open window [aperta finestra] through which the artist sees the visible three-dimensional world and can translate it onto the two-dimensional surface of the painting. As a metaphor for the painted surface, Alberti’s window infers a representational experience for the viewer, whose position in relation to the painting is fixed and subjective; Alberti’s viewer is involved with an illusionistic space that recedes with perspectival logic into a defined pictorial background. Centuries after Alberti positioned the picture’s viewer behind a static window, painting’s audience and its experience of the image has become more visually complex. We are now used to seeing multiple ‘windows’ at the same time – on computer screens, smart phones and digital tablets – and through them we fluidly experience a stream of pixelated, disconnected images. We are living at a time when the virtual space of the digital screen is the prevailing means by which we view and understand the world – often seeing several windows at once full of images, icons and texts which can all have their own individual temporal, spatial, and aesthetic registers. Within the scope of our vision these disparate components are given meaning in relation to each other, coming together into a perceptual meta-logic.

Merge Visible is an action in the image manipulation software Adobe Photoshop whereby separate layers are compressed together to make one unified image. This flattening of pictorial elements into a consolidated viewpoint is symptomatic of our everyday experiences in the contemporary image world, in which a constant stream of rapidly shared simulacra enter our consciousness hundreds of times each day on digital screens. Merge Visible brings together a group of British painters who combine multiple visual elements or processes, enabling many fragments of information to be seen simultaneously in one assimilated painted image. They engage with techniques of layering and juxtaposition as a means of exploring the materiality of paint, creating new meaning from disparate forms and disrupting the syntax of pictorial composition, bringing traditional painterly tropes into dialogue with our experiences of reading space, material and subject in the contemporary image world. Encouraged by recent technologies of surveillance and mapping, our sense of spatial orientation has considerably shifted in recent years. Linear perspective, whose single viewpoint has long dominated our vision of space, has lost its significance in favour of the aerial views we routinely experience on satellite imagery and Google Maps displays. On the computer desktop too, linear perspective has been superseded. Texts and images shown within one window will be seen next to other windows on the same screen. Elements that are above, below, in front and behind each other are seen simultaneously, consequently not only transforming linear space, but also disrupting the logic of linear time. The rejection of linear perspective in painting, is, of course, nothing new. Pollock, Rothko and Newman, for example, all applied paint in a way that did not draw viewers’ eyes to any particular central point on the canvas – instead, they offered multiple perspectives through one flat surface of painterly space. Their work, in turn, was in the tradition of their Cubist predecessors’ Picasso and Braque, in which numerous perspectives of the same subject were achieved on a two-dimensional surface. Although breaking from the

Merge Visible: Contemporary British Painting through a Virtual Window.

¹ Friedberg
conventions of linear perspective and natural representation, these works still considered the picture plane in terms of its verticality in relation to the human form of the viewer. More radically, in the 1950s Rauschenberg’s Combine paintings were a departure from the verticality of the traditional painting. In his 1954 ‘Radar’ works, Rauschenberg placed the viewer at the horizontal, making a move from the painting as a window overlooking nature, to a painting as a flattened of visual process (through their surface) and document of contemporary culture (through their subject). Rauschenberg’s aesthetic of the screen was one of temporal and spatial discontinuity, as a work of the painters selected for Merge Visible is the influence of the spatial relations of the digital screen, and especially the impact of an online image world in perpetual flux. Ian Goncharov makes paintings that, like Rauschenberg, borrow data from the outside world. He refers to mass and popular culture as seen through a filter of social media – narratives are forced together like scrolling through a Facebook feed, painted in flat, disrupted planes. Each pictorial plane of the painting is its own shallow optical depth, seemingly disconnected from each other in free floating layers. Since the early twentieth century artists have used collage techniques to piece together disparate visual materials to make something new, this practice being made possible by the emergence of technologies that augmented the production and circulation of images. One century later, through the emergence of new media – and the democratisation of these technologies through home computing, smart phones and portable tech – there has been an exponential growth of images, sounds, words and objects generated or disseminated though digital means. Goncharov’s compositions suggest the principles of copy, cut and paste that underpin the transfer of knowledge appearing in digital form, forming emerging images and cultural genres. Goncharov makes compositions between his process as a painter and the DJ in Hip Hop, whereby he ‘samples’ images from mass culture and ‘mixes’ them in paintings. We experience the distinct graphic elements of collage as detached compilations of layered subjects and surfaces. The array of layered images entering the screens of our laptops and phones every day is multidisciplinary yet transient, the development of visual material in the Informa ‘click’ of a mouse or a swipe of the finger. This transience is not just temporal, it is also qualitative: the computer makes no distinction between the multiple layers of medium and the raw surface which it is applied – hardened supports such as wood, hardboard or plywood – is a primary consideration of the work. Taking inspiration from ideas around modernity, traditional landscape art forms, and formal investigations of pictorial space, Denyer explores the capacity that paintings have to mediate the existence of an oversaturated image world. Such fusions of painterly style, technique and historical reference points, can also be seen in the work of Goncharov and Marshall, characterise how painting has become interactive by forming connections between different forms of screening that either retrieve or abstract the history of art to be used by contemporary artists as a user-friendly archive in which material can be quickly accessed so that it might be manipulated and reassembled as something new. Texture is a material property of paint that cannot be experienced via a screen. The delicate, flawed surfaces created by Sarah Longworth-West suggest the transience of the contemporary image. The paintings start with found source material, which Longworth-West manipulates through drawing to create edited and abstracted forms. These images are then recontextualised over a surface of traditional handmade gesso ground, which is pigmented and applied in layers. Sanded to a smooth finish, colour is fused in between the overlaid gesso to produce an unpredictable and inconsistent surface. Longworth-West exploits the incidental qualities of the materiality of paint while also exploring the limits of the recognisable image. Showing both the surface and the picture simultaneously, the traditional painting techniques that Longworth-West employs are a means of emphasising the material quality of the painted surface, and also an intimation of the many disconnected images we see, click, swipe and share each day. The physical nature of painting is considered further through Longworth-West’s presentation of her work on custom-made shelves, tables or as floor pieces, exploring the dimensional space that painting can occupy. The material qualities of painting and its tangible elements, such as texture, are essential to provide a material presence, which is contextualised by viewer self-reference, Illingworth rejects notions of interaction with particular experience as a means of interpreting or explaining painting – a position at odds with the ease at which images can be accessed, repurposed and recirculated online, for example, the internet meme. A contemporary, populist model of self-reference, the internet meme is digital image that has been interpreted by an individual, re-captioned and released on social media to be shared. A viral trend, memes spread cultural ideas and symbols online in a digital space that allows both image and meaning to be transmitted almost immediately. In her paintings, Illingworth’s paintings, however, are conversely intended to be read as pure material and form and not as subjectively interpreted ‘meaning’. The bodily materiality of paint is at the centre of Clare Pifer’s work which is informed by traditional and contemporary painted surface. Clare Pifer’s flatten, vibrational gesture is layered with translucent geometric forms. Price is concerned with the notion that ‘art comes through the body’ and her paintings employ the ‘realness’ of paint to record the relationship between the physical being of the painter and her materials in the studio – what the artist describes as a ‘hidden performance’. As discussed earlier in this essay, our contemporary bodies now exist in a (virtual) environment in which traditional understandings of temporal and spatial contexts have been reformulated. Our experiences of the corporeal self as a separate entity to technology has shifted as the majority of us are, in the Western world at least, connected by smartphones, reliant on plastic cards and under surveillance every day. Price’s paintings are a document of the rare time in which we can be disconnected on a technology and from using materials that include enamel, acrylic, and powder pigment applied in successive vertical bands by brush, roller or pouring, Noga creates planes of highly-saturated, optically vibrating colour. The paintings’ surface record the making of the work. The series ‘Olive’ is made from the pigment used on expanses of flat colour lie next to fluid, bubbled enamel; hard edged areas of paint are juxtaposed with dispersed pigment. Noga uses a systematic process to create his paintings, but the system is interrupted and transformed by the material, uncontrolled properties of paint and the physical means by which it is applied. The materials of painting allow Phil Illingworth to challenge what contemporary painting could be. Often working in three dimensions, he nevertheless approaches his work as a ‘painter’, the history and visual syntax of painting providing him with a field of enquiry through which to explore the conventions of both painter and viewer. Illingworth’s works are created with the intention that they have no projected signifiers other than the physical realisation of the work, its material components and the language used to describe it. Contesting that art cannot be progressive if it is contextualised by viewer self-reference, Illingworth rejects
being watched; her canvases manifesting the traces of painterly material encountering surface in the privacy of her studio. As much as the work is a record of Price's activity in the studio, her paintings also continue a dialogue with art history. The fluid marks and poured paint onto raw canvas are redolent of Abstract Expressionism – Price cites Joan Mitchell and Helen Frankenthaler as influences – these gestural elements are restrained on the canvas by geometric shapes derived from modernist forms and digital drawing tools. As such Price's work embodies a new, layered temporality, simultaneously presenting the momentary present with the historical past.

Painters today habitually look, think and work in ways that are influenced by technology. The digital environment has influenced how we understand pictorial conventions; the layered logic of programmes such as Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator has affected our comprehension of colour, depth and volume, its painting tools our recognition of a distinct quality of line, and the multitude of windows visible on our computer screens at one time has normalised fragmented spatial composition – all of these elements relate to the formal considerations that lead to an artist’s application of paint to surface. In our cut-and-paste culture the combination of numerous painterly elements is both symbolic of an ever-generating visual environment and simultaneously transcends it, reinforcing the physical textures and haptic qualities of the painted surface as a contrast to the dematerialized space of the screen. Painting has developed into a more interactive discipline by forming relationships between genres, using existing art histories as a catalogue from which to generate new material. The paintings included in Merge Visible are at once suggestive of our vast yet disembodied relationships with the image in the digital age, yet they all remain manifestly ‘painterly’ in nature.

Charley Peters
Lisa Denyer is a painter from Manchester, currently based in Berlin. She graduated from Coventry University in 2009 with a BA (Hons) in Fine Art. In 2010 she received second prize in the Gilchrist Fisher Award, held at Rebecca Hossack Gallery, London. Other awards include being shortlisted for Salon Art Prize (2010), Bankley Open (2014), Greater Manchester Arts Prize (2016), and Beep Wales Painting Prize (2016).


1. Shuriken (2016)
Acrylic and emulsion on plywood
30cm x 30cm
2. Arcade (2016)
Acrylic, emulsion and collage on found plywood
22cm x 20cm
3. Plaza (2016)
Acrylic, emulsion and collage on found wood
28cm x 24cm
4. Forecast (Undulation) (2016)
Acrylic, emulsion and sandpaper on plywood
30cm x 30cm
IAN GONCHAROV


Plonked (2016)
Oil on canvas
120cm x 120cm

Competitors Ready (2016)
Oil and enamel on canvas
50cm x 40cm
Phil Illingworth has exhibited in the UK, the USA, and at the 53rd Venice Biennale. His works have been selected for the John Moores Painting Prize, the Marmite Prize IV, and the Jerwood Drawing Prize. Recent exhibitions include the solo show, Apocalypso, Platform A Gallery, Middlesbrough, and group shows 'We Work In The Dark, We Do What We Can, We Give What We Have', Rye Creative Centre, Rye (2016), 'Contemporary British Painting Summer exhibition', Quay Arts, Isle of Wight (2016), and 'And Ings', Noho Studios, London (2016). He lives and works in England and France.

Jesus Toast (2011)
Calico, acrylic paints, wadding, PVC, plywood
86cm x 136cm

In Chorus (2016)
Oil and acrylic on canvas over panel
61cm x 76.5cm

Procession (2016)
Oil and acrylic on canvas
50cm x 60cm
Playpaint is based in London. Recent exhibitions include 'Summer Mix', Turps Gallery, London (2016), 'Myth Material', TAP (Temporary Arts Projects), Southend (2016) and 'This Year's Model', Studio 1.1, London (2016). In 2015 Playpaint curated 'Autocatalytic Future Games' at No Format Gallery, London. Playpaint was selected for the John Moores Painting Prize (2016) and the Marmite Prize for Painting (2013).

Add Click Khudge (2016)
Spray paint, emulsion paint, acrylic paint and acrylic varnish on canvas
104.5 cm x 104.5 cm
Clare Price studied BA Painting at Central St. Martins and graduated from Fine Art MFA at Goldsmiths in 2016. Her work has been shown nationally and internationally including solo shows at Galeria Bacelos, Madrid, Spain (2016), Studio 1.1 (2012), Charlie Dutton Gallery (2011) and the Acme Project Space (2014).

Recent group shows include the Marmite Prize for painting (2013), 'What Cannot be Contained', Smiths Row (2015) and 'London 2.0', Galerie Biesenbach, Cologne (2015). She was the recipient of the Acme Jessica Wilkes Award (2014), won the Student Prize at the Oriel Davies Painting Open (2016) and received the Goldsmiths Jealous Print Prize (2016), for which she will be producing a number of prints for the London Art Fair in 2017. Clare Price lives and works in London.

**CLARE PRICE**

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**Plume (2014)**
Oil, acrylic and paint pen on canvas
153cm x 178cm

**y.s.b. (2015)**
Oil and acrylic on canvas
153cm x 178cm
Acknowledgments

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