

Lyndsey Gilmour + Peter Chalmers would like to thank Josie Steed, Michael Agnew, Leigh Chorlton, Freelands Foundation and their colleagues at Gray's School of Art and RGU.

Esther Thorniley-Walker would like to thank Lyndsey Gilmour and Peter Chalmers, for inviting her to participate in this research project. She would also like to thank the Freelands Foundation and the whole Painting Department at Gray's School of Art for giving her the opportunity of being the 2023 fellow and welcoming her as part of their team for the last year. Esther would like to give particular thanks to Ellen Macdonald for working in collaboration and responding to her work over the last six months.

Ellen Macdonald would like to thank Lyndsey and Peter for inviting her to take part in the project, and their support throughout the process. She would also like to thank Esther for her painted responses and for collaborating over the last six months. Thanks to her family for their support during the project.

Zoom Exhibition Talk: Tuesday 27/02/24, 10am

Zoom Link: tinyurl.com/painted-conversations

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Painted Conversations

Exhibition Three: 17/02/24 - 22/02/24

Whitespace Gallery, Edinburgh

Esther Thorniley-Walker + Ellen Macdonald

Painted Conversations is organised and facilitated by Lyndsey Gilmour and Peter Chalmers, a collaborative partnership that has formed through their roles as Lecturers and Early Career Researchers in the Painting Department at Gray's School of Art, Aberdeen.

For Gilmour and Chalmers, Painting remains elusive; it offers continued moments of revelation and breakthrough, and they share a belief that Painting can continue to offer valuable insight into our shared reality. Painted Conversations seeks to consider and test the potential of visual dialogues between practitioners in realising these breakthroughs in Painting practice.

Gilmour and Chalmers presented a pilot exhibition for this project in June 2022 with the intention that it would expand from that initial exhibition into a series, with Gilmour and Chalmers thereafter inviting participants to contribute to these visual discussions, all the while building a network for contemporary Painting within Scotland. This exhibition is the third in the series and presents the work of Esther Thorniley-Walker and Ellen Macdonald together for the first time. They have focused on a sharing of knowledge by participating in each other's research questions to test how this can contribute to the advancement and discovery of both individual and shared solutions.

Esther Thorniley-Walker's art practice tries to create the disorientating sense of being swept into nature's chaos of movement. This fusion of natural imagery with imagination and symbolism, explores the concept of wilderness and human relationship with the environment. Working mostly from observation, Ellen Macdonald focuses on the process of mediation that occurs in painting, to examine the relationship between objects and actions, and how this relationship intersects with representation. Her work addresses the potential specific to painting to move between being, doing and the moment in which materiality renders these processes visible. She treats paintings as images that are also documents since they simultaneously represent and act as evidence of the activity of their own recording.

In preparation for the exhibition, both artists presented each other with an existing piece of their work around six months prior to the exhibition opening, which acted as a visual question or statement for the other practitioner and invited a painting to be made in response. The response and the original paintings were exchanged once more, for a further final response to be made. The opportunity here was to consider how they could use the other's work to expand and move their own work and ideas forward. The resulting visual dialogue created six pieces of work in total, three by each artist, which make up the content of the exhibition.

Esther Thorniley-Walker's Painted Conversation with Ellen Macdonald

E.T-W.

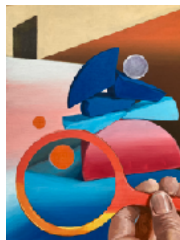
I picked this painting for the first blind exchange because it was where my fixation on minute detail developed within my painting technique. These areas of intense obsessional interacting layers of colour seemed to add an uncanny movement, enhanced by the thick interacting brush marks. This feeling of being caught up within the turbulence of nature has always been relevant, yet this painting created a strange depth of writhing marks that is still prevalent in my current art.



The Devil's Leap, 2021
Esther Thorniley-Walker
Oil on Canvas
115cm x 88cm

E.T-W.

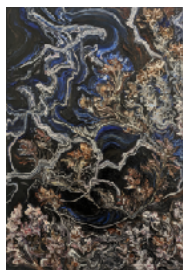
Ellen's response plays with the depth and composition; despite the flat application of paint there is an illusion of layers that alludes to my mark making. There is a precariousness in the balancing stack of shards and my eyes couldn't help be drawn to the black doorway in the corner; which mirrors the area of escape in 'Devil's Leap'.



Untitled (Landscape), 2023
Ellen Macdonald
Acrylic on Linen Over Board
61cm x 46cm

E.T-W.

My final response picked up on the harmony of colour in Ellen's painting, particularly the movement created between the oranges and cold blues. The shards of blue translated into shifting brush marks. The shades of Ellen's painting made me think of the tones of summer heather fading to brown. Using the bell like flower I picked up on the circular interacting shapes and like the magnifying glass I honed in on the skeletal interacting roots.



The Failing of Summer, 2024
Esther Thorniley-Walker
Oil on Canvas
80cm x 55cm

E.M.

I'm struck by the intensity and energy across Esther's painting, *Devil's Leap*. The liquid or frozen water that makes up much of the landscape is made up of many thick marks, which transition from blue to pink and white. The painting seems to me to reference Romanticism and power or dread in nature. In the foreground, the branch and short ledge of grass add to a dizzying, disorienting feeling.



E.M.

The second painting that I give Esther takes cues from the *Devil's Leap* colour palette. Spots of orange/red echo the colours on the branch in *Devil's Leap*, moving the viewer across the painting and playing with the figure/ground relationship. I respond to the thick stacked marks that describe liquid water or ice in *Devil's Leap* in making the composition for *Untitled (Landscape)* and use the triangular forms that I find in Esther's composition as a starting point.

E.M.

Esther's final painting is darker than the previous two paintings, with spindly branch-like forms and the dryness of dying flowers. There are loops of branches over dark swirling pools of blue. In the other paintings, there's a sense of frenzied growing. In this painting, the forms feel brittle and dead, and the energy is instead in the (unidentifiable) background. This painting, like *Disturbed Ground*, is zoomed in and cropped, which extends the feeling of the branches sprawling off the edges of the canvas and into the imagination.

Ellen Macdonald's Painted Conversation with Esther Thorniley-Walker

E.T-W.

The different interacting shades of white was what first struck me about this painting and the dynamic relationship between the piece of paper and the geometric shapes. The structure of the painting is very different to my own approach, with areas of restful flat colour; yet the carefulness in choosing relating colours and the interplay between shapes is very similar to my painting practice. Despite the obvious intension of the 'grass', I couldn't help associate it and the blue with nature, which caught my imagination.



SOFTLY SPOKEN *Cool grass, Warm Sky*, 2013
Ellen Macdonald
Oil on Canvas
56cm x 46cm



E.T-W.

I wanted to pull the shades of white and sky blue of Ellen's painting into my piece, but to compact it, removing the airiness and openness. The white shapes got me contemplating willowherb / fireweed and how this pink flower seems to hover in the sky, with white wisps of seed among the grass. I looked into the symbolism of this flower; how it arises from destruction and the subject kind of combined with my thinking about my response painting.



Disturbed Ground, 2023
Esther Thorniley-Walker
Oil on Canvas
79cm x 79cm

E.M.

For the first painting exchange I give Esther, *SOFTLY SPOKEN Cool grass, Warm sky*, an older painting that I feel would lend itself well to the project because of its singularity – it's not necessarily reliant on other paintings to expand its meaning or context. It encapsulates some enduring interests in my practice around form, illusion, and space.

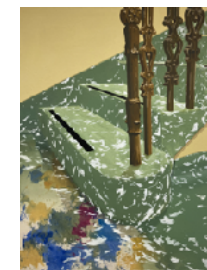
E.M.

The second painting that Esther gives me, *Disturbed Ground*, is a large square. The image is cropped and scaled up and the space feels less like a landscape than her first painting – it's a flatter pictorial space, where the thick, expressive marks remind me of a tapestry. It feels as though she may have focussed on the small section of grass from my painting and expanded or exploded it.



E.M.

The third painting I give Esther, *Communal Stair*, uses a communal staircase as the structure. I want to work with the association I have of a tapestry in my response to *Disturbed Ground*. In this painting I try to treat the layers of pattern a bit like a flat piece of fabric, that takes on three-dimensional form when draped over the structure of the staircase, first in the stains of colours found in Esther's paintings, and then in the rendered depiction of an irregular pattern on the floor. The staircase itself is a site for change, movement, and transformation.



Communal Stair, 2024
Ellen Macdonald
Acrylic Gouache on Canvas
81cm x 61cm