

A Life in Art: ViewZine Meets Johnnie Cooper

ViewZine

View Zine, 30 April 2019



Pearl City, Shanghai, 2007, acrylic on paper, 53 x 73 cm © Johnnie Cooper, Courtesy of the artist

A stunning new exhibition at Saatchi Gallery explores the work of acclaimed British artist Johnnie Cooper. His first London exhibition in over three decades, *throe on throe* features over 50 paintings and sculptures from the 70s to the present day. It's an exciting time for the artist with a recent monograph published, and further exhibitions in store. ViewZine caught up with Cooper to find out more.

This is your first show in a while. Do you feel nervous at all?

No, I am not nervous in the least. I am extremely excited to see so much of my work altogether in one space.

I know it will be quite emotional and will no doubt have a huge impact on my own reappraisal of the work.

It will be intriguing as to how this will dictate how my painting develops from this point.

Your recent monograph presents examples of many different bodies of work made throughout your career, can you tell us how you made the selection for the Saatchi show?

It has been enlightening and necessary that most of the work on show has been chosen by other people than myself. It is important to allow others with a fresh eye to choose work that hopefully will appeal to the viewers. An artist can get too close to his work and cannot see the wood for the trees.

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You have described your approach to painting as 'three dimensional'; to what extent is there a relationship between your paintings and sculptures?

Although the paintings and sculpture in the exhibition may appear to be very diverse the development of my work has been organic, but having said this, I find myself exploring areas that are often contained within certain emotional brackets and therefore there is an invisible subtext that does link the work together. The darker moods of the latest paintings do have a direct relationship with the totemic bird head sculptures.

Your studio is based in Worcestershire, how influential would you say the rural English Landscape has been on your work?

The rural surroundings of my studio are massively important to my peace of mind and psyche. Spending my formative years in the wide open spaces of Canada has had a permanent effect on me. I feel a deep connection to the land and believe my work is steeped in the traditions of English landscape painting. I adore the deep shadowed moods and mystery of bare and stormy winter forests and also the delicate fairyland atmosphere of summer woodlands as they dissolve into evening light. It beckons one to follow John Keats 'Nightingale' into the next valley

The exhibition at Saatchi Gallery, London will be followed by further shows in the UK and America, what do we have to look forward to?

These last couple of years have seen a growing interest in my work. There are plans well underway to take up offers of exhibitions later this year both here in the UK and America. I am extremely excited by these opportunities which will allow me to push forward with new work. I am also looking forward to do some traveling, possibly to the western isles of Scotland.

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Which artists do you admire and which have inspired your practice?

Many, many artists have influenced me along the way, but there are a few who's work constantly brings me great joy and solace in their simple but poignant beauty, silence and spirituality. These artists are Samuel Palmer, Ben Nicholson and Ivon Hitchens. Boat House by Hitchens is possibly my favourite painting followed by Palmers' Coming from Evening Church. I adore the minimalism of Nicholson.

If Saatchi Gallery caught fire, and you could rescue one artwork which would it be?

Without a doubt the figure of Max, our son aged five, which I have always referred to as Isaac. It remains as poignant today as it did when I made it in 1977. It symbolises a very happy time in our lives and an important point in the development of my work when I began to introduce deeper psychological themes into my work.

Find out more at:

www.saatchigallery.com/art/throe_on_throe.php

Image credit:

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acrylic on paper, 53x73 cm,
courtesy of the artist