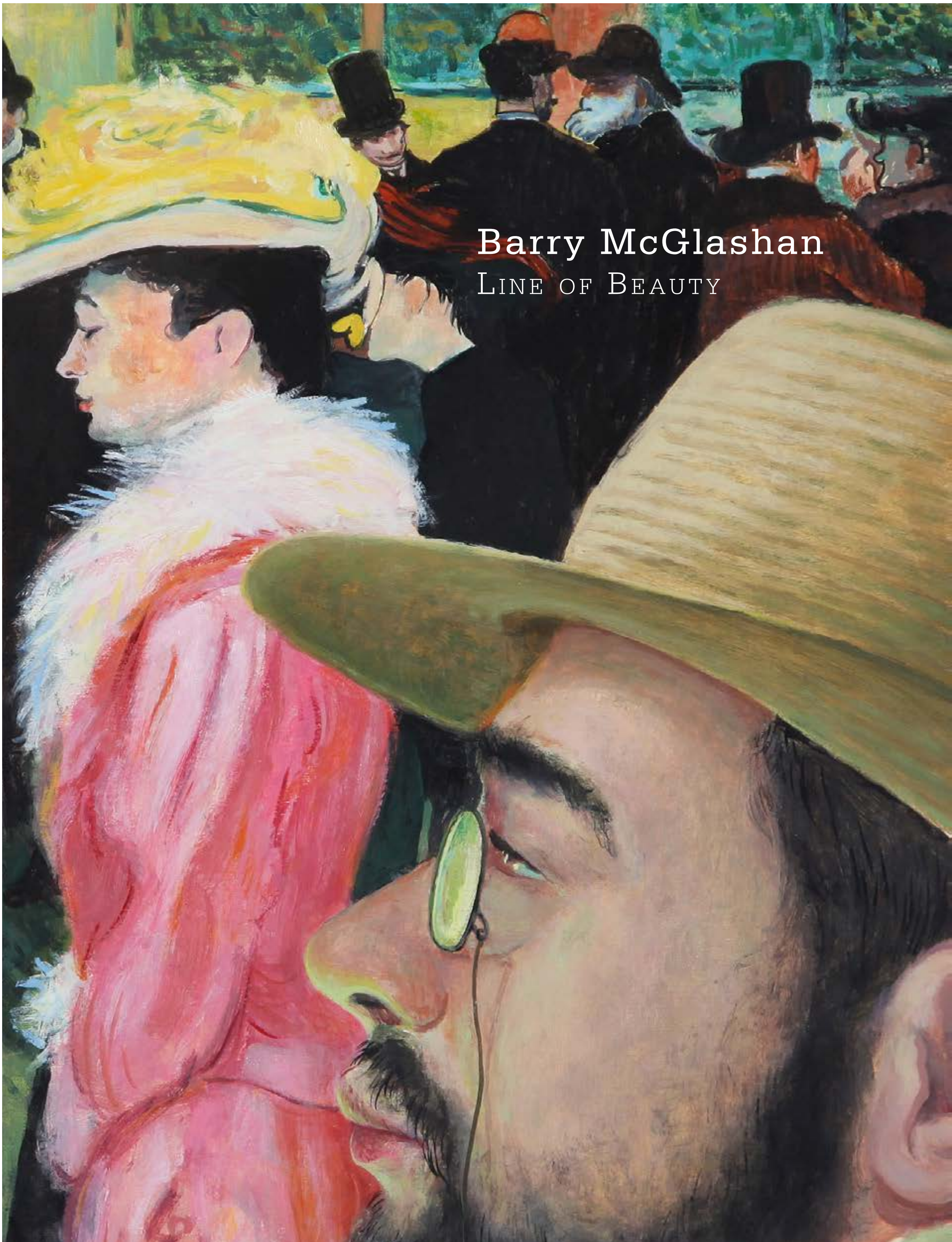

Barry McGlashan

Line of Beauty

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2–24 November 2018

Foreword by
Waldemar Januszczak

John Martin Gallery

Barry's World
by Waldemar Januszczak

Talk about a kid in a sweet shop! What evident fun Barry McGlashan has had recreating and imagining the studios of great artists. Let loose on the entire history of art, free to pop into any studio he wants, buzzing between geniuses and epochs like a bee collecting pollen, McGlashan paints pictures that throb with the Hello! Magazine pleasure of sneaking into people's houses and having a good gawp.

Look, there's Raphael with his mistress, La Fornerina, sitting on his knee while he paints her portrait! Look, there's Leonardo at work on the Mona Lisa! And isn't that the table around which Jesus and the Apostles sat in the Last Supper? Look, it's Toulouse Lautrec watching La Goulue at the Moulin Rouge! Look, it's Picasso's studio in Cannes! Look, it's Rubens!

Of course, this spectacular access to the inner sanctums of great artists is entirely fictitious. Enormous skill, excellent comic timing, and layer upon layer of intricate detail have gone into fashioning these far-fetched interiors. Part of what McGlashan is doing is pure fan worship. He doesn't pop into the studios of any old artist. He goes for the biggies – Leonardo, Raphael, Rubens, Picasso. When Barry peeps through a keyhole he peeps into a career that is already rich with meaning and achievement.

The job of the details with which he crams his pictures is to remind us of these achievements, to encapsulate them, and play with them. There's Raphael, that's his mistress, there's his portrait of Pope Leo X, and that huge drawing on the wall is his cartoon for The Death of Ananias… Our job as viewers – our pleasure as viewers – is to explore the details, make sense of them, puzzle over them, connect them, decipher them. Some of the pleasure you get from a Barry McGlashan picture is the kind of pleasure you get from a Where's Wally book.

In fact, artists taking on other artists is a genre with plenty of precedents. To give you an immediate example, Rembrandt's great self-portrait at Kenwood House, the one with two mysterious circles looming up behind him, was a deliberate riposte to the celebrated Greek painter, Apelles, who was famous for being able to draw a perfect circle, freehand. By showing himself with a circle, Rembrandt was going mano a mano with a legendary name from antiquity. The present was taking on the past.

But that's not what Barry McGlashan does. Barry doesn't enter into his fabulous tussles with other artists in the spirit of combat. There's no vanity or pride or jealousy or machismo in his work. Not a drop. Instead, there is boundless curiosity, a spirit of adventure, lots of unalloyed nosiness, laced with a quality that is rare in important art: naughtiness.

My but Barry is naughty. Where artists in the past have taken on their predecessors in a spirit of inter-epochal warfare, McGlashan does it like a schoolboy who's gone scrumping. If I had my way, I would put his art onto the syllabus of every art history course in the country. And then watch the numbers grow.

Left
The Giant, 2018 (cat. 42)
oil and gesso on panel, actual size
8¾ x 6½ inches, 22 x 16.5 cms

Dawn, 2018 (cat. 6)
oil and gesso on panel
31½ x 51 inches, 80 x 130 cms

Line of Beauty
by Barry McGlashan

I didn't expect to be back in other artists studios again. My last exhibition dedicated to the subject (The Burning Heart, 2014) was an exhausting riot of information and discovery. It was like an orchestra with each player making their own sound in their own way but somehow making it work together - and that music drew me back.

This body of work really grew out of conversations had with my wife, Wendy, relating to her undergraduate dissertation (on the influence of Raphael on English art) but that central theme soon began to change shape as further possibilities presented themselves and the story grew. The structure of that lineage became the hook to hang the paintings on, and due to the nature of lineage, the influences and responses to what came before spread like the limbs of a tree as I began to explore the rich history of that endless landscape. Paintings about paintings.

I don't intend the paintings as documents, I leave that to historians. These are my creative musings on what has come before; the stories, intentions and motivations of those artists and their methodologies. How the work is made, why and where it is made and what it leads on to. It's like an imagined line through history whereby one artist influences another, a constant reimagining of ideas, patterns and variety. There is a very human repetition, an evolution, a sense of being a part of the chain.

I spent a lot of time looking at source material, researching how things were - but never in a restrictive sense. I think it's very important to maintain a freedom which blurs fact and fiction. At times, this even became about about the idea or notion of 'the artist'. These are all elements of piecing together a puzzle, making an image…so fiction becomes subject and subject becomes fiction. There are illusory, blurred lines between true and imagined. After all, I wasn't there.

And this is where the storytelling comes in. Truths to be uncovered by the artist and the viewer, the cues and reveals. I spend my time happily lost in the world of it. That pursuit leads to always another solution, then always just one more. Like links in the chain. The constant job of the painter is to keep looking for the next thing.

This exhibition comprises paintings as well as preparatory drawings and studies. I felt that spirit of finding (and it often feels to me that I 'find' a painting) could be well shown through supporting work and those dialogues and differences between the first and final thought. Having this language laid bare was as interesting to me as I hope it will be to the viewer. Lines of thinking leading to a solution.

So the heart of this exhibition really is a question; what is a purer subject for painting than painting itself?"

(RIGHT) *Analysis of Beauty,* 2018 (cat. 5)
oil and gesso on panel
35½ x 39½ inches, 90 x 100 cms

Painter's Copy (Titian), 2018, (cat. 36)
oil on canvas
25¼ x 21½ inches, 64 x 55 cms

The Sun Amongst Small Stars, 2018, (cat. 32)
oil and gesso on panel
24 x 28 inches, 61 x 71 cms

Mortlake, (cat. 45)
oil on ceramic plate
10½ inches, 27 cms in diameter

The Muse, 2018, (cat. 20)
oil and gesso on panel
35½ x 39½ inches, 90 x 100 cms

Dreams of Flying, 2018 (cat. 3)
oil and gesso on canvas
48 x 79 inches, 122 x 200 cms

Netherlandish Painter, 2018, (cat. 18)
conté on paper
16 x 12 inches, 41 x 31 cms

(LEFT) *Northern Bacchanal,* 2017 (cat. 24)
oil and gesso on canvas
75 x 82 inches, 195.5 x 208 cms

Drawing for Likeness (after Holbein), 2018, (cat. 28)
conté and watercolour on paper
13 x 10½ inches, 33 x 27 cms

(RIGHT) *Likeness,* 2018, (cat. 33)
oil and gesso on canvas
18¼ x 19½ inches, 46 x 49.5 cms

Rubenshuis, 2018 (cat. 7)
oil and gesso on folding panels
28 x 24 inches, 71 x 61 cms

Rubenshuis, 2018, panels open (cat. 7)
oil and gesso on folding panels
28 x 48 inches, 71 x 122 cms

(ABOVE) *The Blue Sleeve,* 2018, (cat. 39)
oil and gesso on panel
4¾ x 4¼ inches, 12 x 10.5 cms

(RIGHT) *Night Painting,* 2018, (cat. 34)
oil and gesso on panel
16 x 24 inches, 41 x 61 cms

(LEFT) *Drawing for 'The King's Head' (after Van Dyck),* 2018 (cat. 14)
conté on paper, 16 x 12 inches, 41 x 31 cms

(BELOW) *Rehearsal for 'The King's Head', 2018 (after Van Dyck),* (cat 15)
oil and gesso on panel, 8 x 6 inches, 20 x 15.5 cms

The King's Head, 2018 (cat. 13)
oil and gesso on canvas
35¼ x 35¼ inches, 90 x 90 cms

The Grand Tour, 2018 (cat. 23)
oil and gesso on canvas
30 x 40 inches, 76.5 x 102 cms

(RIGHT) *Disaster as a Gift,* 2018 (cat. 19)
oil and gesso on canvas
35½ x 48 inches, 90.5 x 121.5 cms

Vuillard's Table, 2018 (cat. 22)
oil and gesso on panel
15 x 21 inches, 38 x 53.5 cms

(RIGHT) *En Plein Air,* 2018 (cat. 37)
oil and gesso on panel
16 x 16 inches, 41 x 41 cms

A Night at the Moulin Rouge, 2018 (cat. 21)
oil and gesso on folding panels
17¾ x 17¾ inches, 45 x 45 cms (panels closed)

A Night at the Moulin Rouge, 2018 (cat. 21)
oil and gesso on folding panels
17¾ x 35½ inches, 45 x 90 cms (panels open)

The Moment, 2018 (cat. 43)
oil and gesso on panel
13 x 16 inches, 33 x 41 cms

Harmony, 2018 (cat. 46)
oil and gesso on panel
8 x 11 inches, 20 x 28 cms

Study for Essential Lines, 2018 (cat. 31)
oil and pastel on paper
12 x 16 inches, 31 x 41 cms

(RIGHT) *Essential Lines,* 2018 (cat. 30)
oil and gesso on panel
24 x 31½ inches, 61 x 80 cms

Study for La Californie, 2017 (cat. 2)
oil on paper
16 x 12 inches, 41 x 31 cms

(RIGHT) *La Californie*, 2017 (cat. 1)
oil and gesso on canvas
48 x 38 inches, 122 x 96.5 cms

Study for 'The Pause', 2018 (cat. 17)
oil and pastel on paper
12 x 23¼ inches, 31 x 59 cms

(RIGHT) *The Pause,* 2018, (cat. 16)
oil and gesso on panel
24 x 31½ inches, 61 x 80 cms

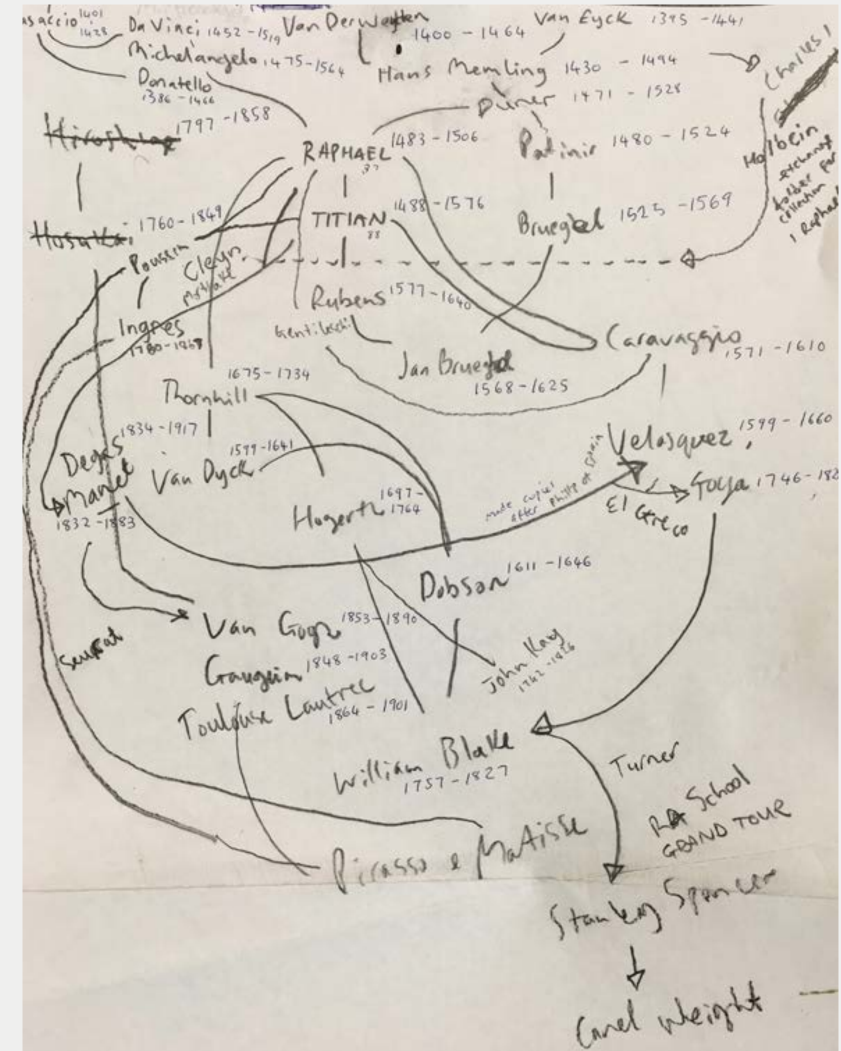
Painter's Copy (Velázquez), 2018 (cat. 35)
oil on panel
7½ x 6 inches, 19 x 15 cms

(RIGHT) *Conclave,* 2018, (cat. 9)
oil and gesso on panel
24 x 31½ inches, 61 x 80 cms

The Line, 2018, (cat. 11)
oil and gesso on canvas
38 x 43 inches, 97 x 109 cms

(RIGHT) *Crapola,* 2018, (cat. 47)
oil and gesso on panel
16 x 16 inches, 41 x 41 cms

(ABOVE) *Final Painting*, 2018 (cat. 41)
oil and gesso on panel
19¾ x 24 inches, 50 x 61 cms



LINE OF BEAUTY
Cast List

Raphael (1483-1520) The Muse (cat. 20)
When I started to think about this exhibition, maybe a year and a half ago now, it was to be a show of paintings about lineage with Raphael as the instigator. His famous cartoons, now held in the collection of the V&A, were commissioned in 1515 by Pope Leo X to serve as designs for tapestries depicting the lives of St Peter and St Paul which would grace the Vatican's Sistine Chapel. They were later bought by Charles I and brought to England where he would commission further tapestries from them at the newly establish Mortlake Tapestry Works and their influence grew. It's a huge subject and as I worked through the exhibition it inevitably began to change shape a little as the lines of influence grew further and further…but still I kept avoiding making this painting about its origins. For a long time I think the story behind it was just too daunting. I wanted to include Raphael's progress on those huge cartoons which would dominate any space (they're enormous, he painted them on individual sheets of paper which were reinforced by pasting together on a further paper support) but I also wanted to include that intimacy of his relationship with Margherita Luti, 'La Fornarina' or 'The Bakers Daughter' who was his mistress and model. It's the archetypal artist/model relationship and apparently led to Raphael's premature death aged 37, after a night of excessive passion. In his famous artist's biographies, Giorgio Vasari writes: '…pursuing his amours in secret, Raffaello continued to divert himself beyond measure with the pleasures of love; whence it happened that, having on one occasion indulged in more than his usual excess, he returned to his house in a violent fever. The physicians, therefore, believing that he had overheated himself, and receiving from him no confession of the excess of which he had been guilty, imprudently bled him, insomuch that he was weakened and felt himself sinking; for he was in need rather of restoratives.' So, a lot to fit into one work. On the wall, the whole scene is sternly overlooked by Raphael's portrait of Pope Leo X himself and above, the drawing of the Mona Lisa that Raphael is making years earlier on his studio visit to Leonardo da Vinci in 'Dreams of Flying' (Cat. 3) I thought to make the painting quiet but with a visual intensity. In many ways it's a painting about opposites (even in its colour) and it was when looking at a Dutch painting of all things, in Apsley House, that I saw a version of those intense orange/red windows. Illuminated from behind with a feverish sense of light and warmth, I hoped they would afford this scene a sense of drama and excess which would say something of Raphael and his beloved muse.

Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1525-1569): Northern Bacchanal (cat. 24)
I think I can honestly say that Pieter Bruegel The Elder is the reason I am a painter. I first saw his work when I was a child and the power he has as a communicator worked it's magic even then. It was a strange landscape to discover, somehow familiar but also completely 'other' - somewhere between nostalgic memory and fever dream. There's something so democratic about how he tells his stories; everyone and everything is treated with equal importance. The paintings are often filled with figures whose faces can't be seen, going about their day, examples of the 'everyman', examples of us. But there is also a wisdom in his work which I find really appealing, he can make things humorous, vulgar, tender, filled with pathos, grotesque and beautiful all at once. It works because it is so true. His technique of often tilting the picture plane up towards us so that we become absorbed in reading the surface is fascinating (and more so since I discovering he was friends with map makers). For me, as someone who just can't seem to avoid telling stories in their work, this 'theatre of the world' where all the elements play out at once; the 'Weltlandschaft' or 'world landscape', a sense of there being too much going on to tell the whole story, always something else tantalisingly just out of reach…it's an irresistible lure to me. I wanted to make a painting that was a homage to all of this. I thought this Northern 'Festival of Fools' seemed the perfect setting for all that human drama. Bruegel himself can be seen in the window to the right, a witness to the comedies and tragedies playing out in the streets below.

Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1851) Disaster as a Gift (cat. 19)
It was in 1820 that JMW Turner was racing home across the Alps from one of his painting tours of Italy. He had stayed too long but being an ambitious sort, wanted to get back to London by Spring to have a canvas ready in time for the RA Annual show (which would be on the subject of Raphael as it happens…and perhaps the longest title in the history of painting; 'Rome, from the Vatican. Raffaelle, Accompanied by La Fornarina, Preparing his Pictures for the Decoration of the Loggia'). Due to bad weather, Turner's usual coach service was suspended so he and another gent hired a private coach…but this was a very bad time to travel. They had just ascended the Mont Cenis pass in terrible weather when the carriage overturned at the summit. He later wrote: 'We were capsized on the top, very lucky it was so.'

Had this happened on the narrow and treacherous trek up, it likely would have been the end of Mr Turner, some 30 years too soon. They broke the windows to escape as the doors were frozen shut and had to struggle in knee-deep snow down what Turner described as 'the precipitous zig-zag'. As a romantic dedication to this great painter's endeavour, I thought I would imagine him pausing for a moment atop his mangled carriage to capture the dying sunlight, a monument to his own determination. His hero and inspiration was the French painter Claude Lorrain. Sunsets really were his thing and when Turner saw 'Seaport with the Embarkation of the Queen of Sheba' with its grandiose sunset, it was said by an eyewitness that he became 'awkward, agitated and burst into tears.' I like to think he was chasing that sunset for the rest of his days.

Rembrandt Van Rijn (1606-1669): Night Painting (cat.34)
There is something of the alchemist about Rembrandt. I've visited his house and studio in Amsterdam a couple of times and I remember it as something of a confusing space, a tall warren of a building. His mixing table and pots of colour sit on the workbench as though he has just popped out for the day. And that is something else about Rembrandt; his paintings always feel as though they were made in the night. I read that he owned an engraving of the Blue Sleeve portrait by Titian, a painting which keeps coming back into the story of this exhibition. The painting on his easel, Self-portrait at the Age of 34, is clearly influenced by Titians composition. Also, pinned to his easel is his sketch of Raphael's Portrait of Baldassare Castiglione which Rembrandt saw and drew whilst it was on auction in Amsterdam. I included this as it ties up the story quite neatly; another link in the chain which brings us back to Raphael yet again. I find Rembrandt's continual recording of his own self interesting, it feels like quite a modern thing to do. I imagine him in that dark studio, documenting the slow change in his face over the years with great scrutiny…and yet he said that his work was made to be viewed from a distance and that: "…painting is not to be sniffed."

Leonardo Da Vinci (1452-1519) Dreams of Flyings (cat. 3)
There is so much going on with Leonardo. Normally when I make a painting I go straight onto the canvas with the brush; no drawing, no preparation, just working it out as I go along. I love this way of working, it allows me to surprise myself. But, when I started to think about Leonardo da Vinci I realised this was a rare opportunity to make a plan. It became a new thing for me with this exhibition, making studies and drawings - creating paperwork. Leonardo was surrounded by his thoughts on paper and due to its value at the time, he would use every scrap. Questions like 'why is the sky blue?' might be found alongside 'describe the tongue of the woodpecker.' Another could be 'get hold of a skull', 'calculate the measurement of Milan and suburbs' and simply the word 'nutmeg.' This constant recording of thoughts and enquiry towards invention seems to have been a way of life for him. One of my favourite things I read about him was that he discovered how a dragonfly's wings worked by simply watching them intently for hours until he saw what was physically going on. It's little wonder he became a sought-after mind. As shown here, Raphael visited him as a young artist, at the time he would have been working on the Mona Lisa. I imagined the scene of Leonardo's studio to be a treasure trove of renaissance thinking, part comfort and hospitality, part creation and analytical thinking. The painting itself became a list of clues to be found relating to his life and works; Vitruvian Man, the wax models he would make whilst attempting to square the circle and find the 'divine proportion' of the golden ratio, his great Milan horse, flying machines, anatomical studies, a half finished 'Virgin of the Rocks' and the drawing of a fossilised whale…that 'wondrous fish' he found in half light, suspended in a cave wall as a young man. I also couldn't resist the suggestion of his Last Supper, with its stretched table. All of this went on in Leonardo's world, but it seems he was also an uncommonly kind man. He was known to buy caged birds at the market only to set them free. Perhaps one of his earliest memories, recounted by Leonardo in his notebook pages and later analysed by Sigmund Freud, holds a clue to his pursuit of flight: "…it comes to my mind as a very early memory, when I was still in the cradle, a vulture came down to me, he opened my mouth with his tail and struck me a few times with his tail against my lips." An odd recollection indeed, but perhaps not from one of the first minds to dream of flying.

Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) Rubenshuis (cat. 7)
Unlikely as it is, I couldn't resist the idea of Rubens visiting the colourmen to choose the pigment that would give the perfect red. He is such a sensual painter, you can almost feel the slide of his brush when you look at his surfaces. I wanted the pressing of that red into his palm to be a foretelling of the great painter's planned subject. Of course I'm sure the range of pigments seen here would not have been available in the early 17th century, but sometimes I think it's worth getting to a truth via a lie. This is what painting is all about after all; illusion.

When the painting is opened we have the interior of Rubens's studio workshop in Antwerp, a bustling environment of production and artistry sat over by the master himself, surrounded by preparatory studies. I hoped his Descent from the Cross, a giant of a painting, would dwarf everything else in that space. It's an incredible image that Rubens made. That serpentine line of the figure of Christ against the stark white, and the deep red centre of Saint John's robe. Various assistants are working on the outer panels, mixing colour, preparing surfaces. His greatest pupil, the young van Dyck, sits to the right, working between a drawing by Rubens's hand and his own effort. I wanted this to feel like an austere Northern cathedral, with Rubens delivering his sermon from his elevated position. When I'm making a painting like this which physically opens up, it's always a challenge to construct the composition and at the same time tell the story - you have hinges in the way no matter what you do so I tend to build them into the composition as much as possible. I find the eye accepts them as long as they make structural sense somewhere in the space (in this case, the two back corners). They can actually help to divide the picture plane and create a stronger centre to the image. The painting has a few tricks in it to make the space more convincing, all those vertical and horizontal lines become useful to create a convincing space out of nothing. Again; illusion.

Titian (c.1488-1576) The Sun Amongst Small Stars (cat. 32)
Towards the end of his life, Titian didn't finish much. Rather, he worked and reworked his paintings as if somehow warding off the inevitable. When I started to think about making a painting about him, I discovered that he's one of those artists of which we know a great deal, but also surprisingly little. At the time of his death in his beloved (but plague ridden) Venice, he must have been in his late 80s at least, possibly even over 100. There is some confusion to his true age because he lived such an enigmatic life, extraordinary for someone so famous, and would exaggerate his age to gain sympathy from clients and patrons, often pleading poverty despite his obvious great wealth. In any case, he was twice the age of typical life expectancy at this time which gives us a sense of the endurance of this great artist, outliving both his peers and rivals and known even in his own time as 'Titian The Divine' and 'The Sun Amongst Small Stars'. His studio assistant said of him: 'He would leave a painting for months without looking at it, until he returned to it and stared critically at it as if it was a mortal enemy. If he found something that displeased him he went to work on it like a surgeon and in the last stages he used his fingers more than his brush.'

I knew there were elements I wanted to include in this painting, his famous Blue Sleeve portrait which makes several appearances throughout this exhibition, such was its influence…a small painting of the Dolomite mountains from his homeland of Cadore, often glimpsed as a beautiful but distant deep blue wave across the horizon in many of his works…and of course the last light dropping across the lagoon of Venice as night draws closer. But here Titian is still toiling away on those final revolutionary works, extraordinary for their time, his 'poetic inventions' or 'poesies' as he called them. By this time his eyesight was said to be failing but I find that hard to believe given the power of these paintings. In them you can see the influence he had on great painters throughout history; Rubens, El Greco, Rembrandt and Goya to name but a few. But you can also see a tenderness for his subject, such as his Pietà which he intended to hang over his own final resting place.

The Grand Tour (cat. 23)
When I graduated from art school, I was lucky enough to receive a scholarship from The Royal Scottish Academy to study in Florence. It feels like a lifetime ago now. I suppose it is one of the last vestiges of that (mainly) British thing known as the Grand Tour whereby an education could be complemented and advanced by immersion in the various cultures of Europe. Appropriation is often how we build knowledge and this exhibition is no different…. but there's something very opportunistic about it; thousands of years of hard-fought progress and cultural identity snatched up by some wealthy magpies in frock coats and periwigs!

Joachim Patinir (1480–1524): Dawn (cat. 6)
The Flemish artist Joachim Patinir has fascinated me for a long time. He's not that well known but was one of the first to pictorialise landscape in the way we now think of it, the 'weltlandschaft' or 'world landscape'. He would paint biblical scenes but the subject, whether it be a Saint Jerome or a flight into Egypt, always seems to me to be overshadowed by the natural wonder of the landscape. He was also a friend of Albrecht Dürer, known for his melancholy and interior sense of self. This is a painter who painted himself as Jesus Christ after all. I think their friendship is interesting as they seem almost opposite - Patinir with his wonder for endless landscape and Dürer, with his sense of introverted self. I have them sitting here as the sun rises across a serpentine valley, the type you get in that period of Northern Renaissance painting. Dürer, having finished his analytical Great Piece of Turf (propped against the tree) plays a melancholic flute whilst Patinir points out to the endless horizon of a new dawn.

Hans Holbein The Younger (1497–1543): Likeness (cat. 33)
There is a very old technique, still used by some today, called 'pouncing' which is a method of transferring a drawing. The line of the original work is traced with a pin and then fine chalk dust is pressed through with a soft pad to the support beneath to make a copy which can be the basis of something further. Hans Holbein used it a lot, you can often see the pin marks left in his drawings, it's a reminder of their material nature and technically fascinating (for a painter at least!) This painting became about the concept of how we use an image and how it can become something new. When I think of it, much of this exhibition is doing that same thing in one way or another.

Sir Anthony van Dyck (1599-1641): The King's Head (cat. 13)
As his leading court painter, Sir Anthony van Dyck painted the head of Charles I again and again. My favourite of those is Charles I at the Hunt from 1635. There are so many clever tricks in that painting which van Dyck deftly lays out, he has an extraordinary ability when placing the figure. Somehow, he has elevated the king (who was sensitive about his 5-foot 4 height) so our line of sight is lower than his but the whole thing is done so subtly that we don't lose that nonchalant sense of The King on his 'day off'. The dark hat he wears serves as a terrific frame for that noble head and it was when looking at this that I came up with my composition; this foretelling of his eventual fate. The pose Charles adopts is classic van Dyck, undoubtedly borrowed from the Blue Sleeve portrait by Titian which van Dyck held in such high regard and may even have bought just before he died in 1641, it's thought that it was owned by one of these two men; van Dyck or his greatest patron, Charles.
There may not be a huge amount happening in my painting in terms of story, but I relished the closed-in feel of framing and enjoyed trying to make those smaller details count, I love the descriptive textures in van Dyck's paintings. If you look centrally, beyond all the studio activity, a little tree grows in that small green square of England – a young Royal Oak perhaps? Charles I reign may have been coming to an end, but it wouldn't be long before his lineage would continue. The butterfly on the end of van Dyck's mahlstick was actually a convenient afterthought that served to deepen the work's meaning. I realised he would be posed, looking at nothing in particular, so I introduced this as a symbol of the eventual return of Charles' line - there is even a tiny caterpillar making its way across the rim of the pot which holds van Dyck's enigmatic sunflower.

Mortlake Tapestry Works (cat. 45)
The Mortlake Tapestry works were founded beside the Thames in 1619 and I thought this 'commemorative plate' could give the ambitious venture a place in my show. It was proposed by James I although it would be his successor, Charles I, who would bring the Raphael cartoons back from Italy and begin production on his own set of the Vatican tapestries that would speak of his power (he had his designer, Francis Cleyn, create new borders relevant to his reign), further cementing his place in history as a monarch of great cultural knowledge and importance. Tapestries in those days were seen as being more valuable than painting, a symbol of great wealth, woven as they were with gold and silk. Here, Charles I is viewing the progress on the latest work. I can never find any images of Mortlake but imagine it to have a sort of Hampton Court/wooden factory appearance. The workforce were mainly Flemish immigrants, so expert were they in tapestry production. I found it fascinating that in making these tapestries, those huge Raphael cartoons were cut into strips and used again and again in the process of production; it seems such a destructive act, but they appear so well preserved in the V&A today.

William Hogarth (1697-1764): Analysis of Beauty (cat. 5)
This gave my exhibition its title. When I began working on the show, the original premise was the influence of Raphael's tapestry cartoons - parts of which can be glimpsed in 'The Muse' (Cat.20) My wife wrote her undergraduate dissertation on this subject, so I knew William Hogarth would feature as he is a central figure in that story, he is also a great favourite of mine. In Hogarth's book The Analysis of Beauty (1753), he writes about his theories of visual beauty: what makes a beautiful thing beautiful? He speaks of how a line becomes more appealing if it is varied slightly to give a serpentine 's' shape and the seemingly endless ways in which this can be applied. Variety is key. For instance, a pyramid is more beautiful than a cone because when the cone is rotated, it may be pleasing but remains constant, the pyramid however, with its four sides, creates more visual interest as it slowly changes but then reverts to original form. He gives many examples such as this. In my painting, I tried to make his writing into visual form, models and drawings as though he was pondering over his theories on beauty. The pineapple sitting in the middle of the table, whilst mentioned in his book, was also a symbol of wealth and success at that time - they weren't easy to come by of course. You can still see them today all over London in architecture, on bridges etc. This aspect of Hogarth I find interesting; a sort of mischievous competitive streak. When he painted the staircase at St Bartholomew's hospital, he did it for free to prevent the commission going to an Italian. Why pay a foreigner when Britain has its own artists? And yet…look at that painting, and it is dripping with Italian influence in its execution. Hogarth always was good at irony. In his own words: "Before I had done anything of much consequence in this walk (painting modern moral subjects), I entertained some hopes of succeeding in what the puffers in books call 'the great style of history painting'. So without having had a stroke of this grand business before, I quitted small portraits and familiar conversations, and, with a smile at my own temerity, commenced history painter, and on a great staircase at St Bartholomew's Hospital, painted two Scripture stories, 'The Pool of Bethesda' and 'The Good Samaritan', with figures seven feet high." I also wanted to show something of his extensive career in printmaking, he was a great businessman with his paintings often serving as adverts to sell his engravings. His famous 'Gin Lane' and 'Beer Alley' hang above, but in progress on the table is his 'Paul Before Felix' in two forms, the copper engraving plate on top and the print itself beneath. He has borrowed figures from Raphael's highly influential tapestry cartoons which are now in the V&A (as did his Father in law, James Thornhill, for the dome of St Paul's) so the line continues. He called his print shop 'The Golden Head' and had a gilded bust of the great Sir Anthony van Dyck, court painter to Charles I, above the door as if to suggest he was carrying on van Dyck's good work in England. The outcome of that ambition was this; after a couple of poorly performing auctions of his own work, he tore it down in a fit of pique…I thought I would reinstate it in his back room as though he kept it as a reminder of his own hubris.

Paul Cézanne (1839–1906): En Plein Air (cat. 37)
Cezanne painted this mountain many times, Mont Sainte-Victoire. Of course, he is always absent from the landscape, yet also right in it too somehow. I thought it might be good to reunite them.

Claude Monet (1840–1926): The Moment (cat.43)
In this homage, Monet stands working in his own painting of the port at Le Havre, 'Impression, Sunrise'. It was the painting said to give Impressionism its name, these quick marks capturing the moment of a sunrise across the water, but also the moment that would define a movement. Monet said: "They asked me for a title for the catalogue, it couldn't really be taken for a view of Le Havre, and I said: 'Put Impression.". It's funny how sometimes so much can come out of a brief moment.

Georges Seurat (1859 – 1891): Harmony (cat.46)
I've always been a bit suspicious of the science behind pointillism, but you can't deny its beauty. I saw Seurat's painting A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte in Chicago years ago, but I can still remember the quiet intensity of its colour, the sense of duration in the dots of its making. During the two years it took him to make the painting, he would make numerous studies and drawings of those around him who would populate it; all parts of the image to be brought together in harmony like the dots of his painted surfaces.

Edvard Munch (1863 – 1944): Insomnia (cat.48)
Those weird, otherworldly, midnight landscapes of Edvard Munch are amongst my favourites of his. When making a painting on that subject, I wanted it to be as raw as possible in the hope that it would somehow talk of how he saw the world and felt that which was around him: "Nature is not only all that is visible to the eye…it also includes the inner pictures of the soul".

His anxieties would lead him to insomnia and he would take these walks at night. The light is always interesting in his night paintings, they don't feel like an experience of a dark night at all, just as someone struggling to find sleep may well experience it. And familiar landscapes feel very different at night. It seems feeling was more a part of his picture-making than looking, so his exteriors become interiors.

Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864 –1901): A Night at the Moulin Rouge (cat.21)
When I see old photographs of the studio of Toulouse-Lautrec, they always feel like he's backstage somewhere, tucked away in a corner surrounded by ladders, old furniture, drapery and pattern. There's something very theatrical about them but of course performance and the stage was a big part of his life and his great subject. His work is very much his own voice but also serves as a vivid document of those times. He took what he saw and experienced and gave it a new life that would truly last, quite a legacy. He said of the value of subject: "In our time there are many artists who do something because it is new; they see their value and their justification in this newness. They are deceiving themselves; novelty is seldom the essential. This has to do with one thing only; making a subject better from its intrinsic nature."

The Moulin Rouge was an obvious lure for this artist who clearly loved and valued exuberant life so much, but of course he would make his paintings alone, in solitude. I decided to exploit those differences in my painting, so on the outside panel he appears amongst an excited throng; the dancers and denizens of his favourite haunts which meant so much to him. But when opened, we realise this façade is mere illusion. Lautrec drinks his absinthe alone. Thankfully, the company of a brush is great comfort to a painter, particularly one with such a singular view of life. Lautrec said: "I don't belong to any school. I work in my corner."

Édouard Vuillard (1868–1940): Vuillard's Table (cat.22)
This painting was inspired by a blurry black and white shape of a table in a very old, grainy photocopy which had been kicking around the studio floor for months. The table could barely be seen on the page. It had been copied many times so the image had degraded down and down until it felt more like a memory of a table. Vuillard's paintings are like that. They have an eerie quality very hard to describe, his interiors are like something you remember from a dream. I've heard it said before that when the music in a film is working it almost becomes a character and I feel similarly towards Vuillard's extraordinary use of paint. It seems he was well aware of this himself: "Who speaks of art speaks of poetry. There is not art without a poetic aim. There is a species of emotion particular to painting. There is an effect that results from a certain arrangement of colours, of lights, of shadows. It is this that one calls the music of painting." Eventually out of that confused image I found the table again and let this become an homage to Vuillard. Not his song perhaps but singing of him.

Henri Matisse (1869–1954): Essential Lines (cat.30)
'I will condense the meaning of this body by seeking its essential lines.'
This quote by Matisse was the starting point for my painting. I looked at his Pink Studio from 1911. I think it's probably my favourite painting of his, it reminds me of my art school years in the life drawing room; first as a student and then as a tutor (whatever that difference makes). The painting is a companion to his better-known Red Studio of the same year. I've been a little slow on the uptake here, but I realised that the two paintings actually fit together to describe the same space so it's bizarre that they're made around the same time and yet are so different from one another. Matisse was evoking things rather than describing them. Flattening space, painting how things feel rather than look. It's an alien language to me but I find that exciting; how can I translate that into my own language? It's almost like rearranging the furniture. Yet still at the heart of what he does, is that essential line.

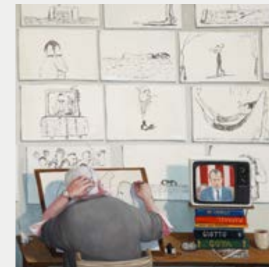
Pablo Picasso (1881-1973): La Californie (cat.1) The Giant (cat.42)
This was Picasso's studio in Cannes where he lived and worked between 1955 and 1961. You only ever see parts of it in photographs, so I tried to put the pieces together here, constructing this space from glimpsed suggestion. Because I only had parts of the puzzle, it felt labyrinthine to me which seemed appropriate given his obsession with the image of the bull. I imagined him here, dwarfed before that huge blank canvas in this arena of his own making, like Theseus before the Minotaur. The borrowing from art history into his own work seems endless, it's so often how artists find new ways to say things with their own voice and is of obvious appeal to me, so I made several references to that here. If you look closely in the centre, you can see a very small Las Meninas by Velázquez pinned to his board. Picasso said: "If someone wanted to copy Las Meninas, entirely in good faith, for example, upon reaching a certain point and if that one was me, I would say..what if you put them a little more to the right or left? I'll try to do it my way, forgetting about Velázquez. The test would surely bring me to modify or change the light because of having changed the position of a character. So, little by little, that would be a detestable Meninas for a traditional painter. But would be my Meninas." Picasso loved the view of the bay he had from the windows of La Californie, so when a new building obscured that view, he moved out.

Alberto Giacometti (1901–1966): The Pause (cat.16)
I haven't painted many portraits with a sitter, but I remember that feeling of the quiet pause of scrutiny before the brush starts moving. It's like breathing in. I wanted to make a painting about Alberto Giacometti's studio in Paris. It is such a great space visually, marked and decaying from years of work, a veil of plaster dust covering everything. I enjoy trying to make a painting of a convincing space with signs of wear and tear, sort of lived in. Clues to a life lived. It's a little like dressing a stage set I suppose, very appropriate for the subject of this painting which shows his long-term friend, the playwright Samuel Beckett, sitting for his portrait. Beckett would leave long, awkward silences (as in his plays) but Giacometti liked to talk so perhaps they were a good fit. In 1961, Beckett invited Giacometti to create the tree stage prop for his play Waiting for Godot (complete with single detaching leaf) which can be seen in the corner of his studio here. What Beckett later said of that process reminded me again of that constant need for readjustment when painting the human head, so appropriate for Giacometti. 'We experimented all night long with that plaster tree, making it bigger, making it smaller, making its branches finer. It never seemed right to us. And each of us said to the other… maybe."

Francis Bacon (1909–1992): Conclave (cat.9)
I hadn't planned a return visit to 11 Reece Mews - it's a space which is now so familiar due to its forensic documentation. To many of us, it is *the* studio. So how to find something new? I think as artists we all have our images we carry with us throughout our careers. For Francis Bacon, I'm sure he had many, but the clever money would be on Pope Innocent X by Velázquez. In his conversations with David Sylvester he talks about the power of that image in his mind. He would buy books or magazines purely to own a new version of it, yet bizarrely had never seen the real painting as an object in the gallery. I have painted a trompe l'oeil version of it as it appeared in his studio (Painter's Copy (Velázquez) Cat 35). For Bacon, the image was all. This fascinates me for two reasons. Firstly, as an artist who always works 'at a distance', in a remote corner of the country, the image as opposed to object becomes incredibly important to me. It's my way of seeing what is out there. The second reason is that, having said all that, the idea of a painting as a unique object is also incredibly important to me - because I don't make images, I make paintings. These are objects, made by my own hand. They have edges and depth, drips and surfaces, weight and a tactile quality.
I made this painting very quickly, I wanted there to be a mess in its making (which I then tidied up) just as there appears to be a mess in that room - but of course to Bacon it was a kind of order. Of painting an image, Bacon said: "…there is the possibility of an extraordinary irrational remaking of this positive image that you long to make. And this is the obsession: how like can I make this thing in the most irrational way?". To be any good as a painter Bacon believed it was now necessary to 'deepen the game' as he put it. For painters, the image was now free of a religious quality which had previously confined the likes of Velázquez and Rembrandt, two artists he speaks of frequently. Those numerous screaming popes he made after Velázquez have a quality which is pure Bacon, so I began to think of all those images of Pope Innocent X floating around his studio, out of which he found something new. In doing that I hope I found something new too.

Gulley Jimson: The Line (cat.11)
Of all the works in this show, this is the only one truly born out of fiction. (Of course, in history, fact and fiction become easily blurred). I was watching the film The Horse's Mouth starring Alec Guinness, from the book by Joyce Carey. There's a scene where Alec Guinness, as the reprobate artist Gulley Jimson, wakes in a room in which he should not be, staring at a blank wall on which he sees his masterpiece. He's wrapped in this pink satin duvet, he gets up and pulls himself to the wall like some sort of giant pink snail. The music swells, his arm extends, and that first mark is made. It's such a strong symbol of the sense of a creative beginning, that first mark. I just couldn't resist its inclusion in this show about artists and their lines.

Painter's Copy (Titian) (cat. 36)
This crumpled copy of Titian's great Blue Sleeve portrait has been in my studio for some time, it's now believed to be of an aristocrat by the name of Gerolamo, but I can't help agreeing with Kenneth Clarke; it feels like the young Titian's self-portrait to me. It's been gathering splatters and dollops of paint as it keeps me company whilst I work on other things. I find it an incredibly powerful image and as it gathered my careless additions, it felt more and more part of my space, talismanic beyond the object itself. I thought I'd make this trompe l'oeil of it to somehow capture how it felt to me and give it another meaning. The illusion of it interests me, the trick of it. What is the real image here?



Philip Guston (1913–1980): Crapola (cat.47)
My admiration for the painter Philip Guston is huge so it's always odd to read about his anxiety and self-doubt. Of course, as I get older I realise it's part of being a painter and can be as much a tool at your disposal as the brush is. Guston famously said: "So when the 1960's came along I was feeling split, schizophrenic. The war, what was happening to America, the brutality of the world. What kind of man am I, sitting at home, reading magazines, going into a frustrated fury about everything—and then going into my studio to adjust a red to a blue." These feelings about his earlier life as an abstract expressionist would lead him to the best works of his career. Part of that has to be his satirical drawings, made in protest against Richard Nixon. They are heavily influenced by the work of the underground comic artist Robert Crumb; it's a style that would bleed into his painting out of which he made something truly new and shocking. Guston, after all, was not shy of using (what was seen as) high and low culture in his work, everything had a value. He would meet with his friend, the writer Philip Roth and they would talk about life; books, junk, diners, art…and politics. Guston described all this as 'crapola.' He understood the power of images and what they could be used for.
In my mind I saw him here, sat over his drawings, Nixon on the telly, his pen scratching out line after line, meaning after meaning. What he said about the image feels so appropriate to this body of work: "We are image makers and image ridden. There are no 'wiggly or straight lines' or any other elements. You work until they vanish."

Sir Howard Hodgkin (1932–2017): Final Painting (cat.41)
I was very sorry to hear of the death of Howard Hodgkin, an extraordinary painter. His studio, with its island of furniture, reminded me of Monet's Giverny waterlilies studio. He had that same thing of furniture surrounded by oceans of work, a central retreat. These canvases Hodgkin turned to the wall weren't paintings at all but rather moveable screens to hide works in progress, to remove all distraction other than the current concern. I imagine him sitting in that red chair for long periods of time, looking and waiting, before moving to the wall and making one of his beautiful, brief gestures which somehow is filled with the meaning of all that time of looking and waiting. It always seemed a very calm and ethereal space. Colours were emotion to him. One of his final paintings was the sublime 'Indian Ocean' which I have tried to suggest here. What a perfect and serene final statement from a painter of colours.

To The Wall (cat.25)
It's sometimes helpful to turn a painting to the wall now and again to let the image recede and quieten in your mind. It can help towards resolving things. I painted this last year, but the sharper sighted amongst you may notice the canvas is dated 2016. It felt like a lot went wrong with the world that year. If 2016 was a painting it would still be facing the wall today, waiting to be resolved.

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I'd like to take this opportunity to thank a few people. To everyone at John Martin Gallery, past and present; I wouldn't be writing this here today had you not steered the ship so ably all these years - thank you all. To Waldemar Januszczak, for his spectacular yet warm introduction; a wonderful advocate and true friend of that which I hold so dear - painting. And to my wife Wendy; so much of this show is her and our evening talks with a glass of wine is where these paintings began. As they say, without whom...

Barry McGlashan, 2018

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(ABOVE) *To The Wall,* 2017 (cat. 25)
oil and gesso on panel
13 x 11¾ inches, 33 x 30 cms

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