

The painting is divided into two main horizontal sections. The upper section is a dark, almost black, textured band with visible brushstrokes. The lower section is a bright yellow, textured field. Scattered across the yellow field are several dark, vertical, brushstroke-like shapes that resemble stylized figures or trees. The overall style is expressive and gestural.

JAKE ATTREE

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JAKE ATTREE

Landscapes for the Elsner Sisters

15 September – 7 October 2012


campden
gallery



Two Turning Figures on a Grey Ground
oil on panel 61 x 27,9 cm

Right: Baile Hill and Clifford's Tower / A Wooded Hill
oil on board 121 x 152 cm

Landscapes for the Elsner Sisters

I have known Jake Attree a long time. I've seen his work oscillate between a wild and wonderful excess and a tessellated constraint; I've seen him tackle urban and rural landscapes, modern and mediaeval buildings, imagined and captured figures. The work he has prepared for this exhibition not only represents his range of obsessions over the last decade; they are also among the best examples of their kind. He seems to me to be establishing a new high watermark.

There are artists who ascribe value before they paint; and there are artists who find value as they paint: frontal lobe artists and reptile brain artists, respectively. Attree knows what he is – 'I'm definitely a reptile.'

The reptilian artist is throwing a ball into the dark court of their memory and hoping to catch it on the rebound. 'You know,' says Attree, 'I'm always painting pictures of York ...', and so he is. If he painted a lunar landscape it would be in some sense a picture of the city of his childhood. Attree's homages to Bruegel are the plainest depiction of this. Baile Hill, once the location of a Norman castle, has always switched in Attree's imagination with the magical Flemish painter's 'Gloomy Day' (1565). More precisely, it is Attree's childhood memory of Baile Hill and his adolescent memory of 'Gloomy Day' that have become fused. The Ancient Greeks elected memory (*mnemosyne*) as the mother of the muses; and memory furnishes the imagination with its building blocks. The mystery of the process is: why do we remember the things we do?

The Dutch novelist Cees Nooteboom wrote: 'Memory is a dog that lies down where it chooses.' And, like a dog at a bone, Attree worries his memories for the marrow of their meaning. He is readily complimented on the way that





Three Figures by the Water's Edge Against the Light
oil on wood 81.3 x 50.8 cm

his heavily worked surfaces map the dance between colour and light. But the pastels emphasise another, ever-present mechanism. They highlight Attree's utter dedication to drawing, of course; and yet pastels are an opaque medium. As Attree says, 'The lights are laid over the darks.' The prey here is not visual delineation, that's a frontal lobe thing, but topography. The imagined occupation of a space is crucial to recollection. It was the critic John Barrell, for instance, who memorably observed how the topographical distortion in Constable's Dedham landscapes recalled his childhood vision.

I've chosen to emphasise the role of memory in Attree's work because of his exhibition title. The Elsner sisters are mentioned briefly in Samuel Beckett's book, *Molloy*. It's a book in two halves, the second half of which features a character, Moran, who is sent to search for Molloy. There is a suggestion that Moran could, in fact, be Molloy; or possibly that Molloy is a fictional character and Moran is the person he is 'based on'. And it is into this moraine of imagination and memory that Beckett throws Ida and Pauline Elsner. They ran the Dublin kindergarten that Beckett attended as a child. They have no relevance to the plot. Their sole function, perhaps, is to be real.

The ensuing mystery is how, since the viewer does not share the artist's memories, we divine a work's success. I am certain that Beckett once wrote: 'Am I, in the end, writing only about myself?' and I wanted to dissipate these too tidy reflections by quoting him. Instead I found a different remark by the runnel-faced Irishman that goes, 'What is that unforgettable line?'

I prefer that. It's more ... reptilian.

Vic Allen – Arts Director, Dean Clough Galleries, Halifax, August 2012.



Three Figures by the Water's Edge
oil on canvas 122 x 91.4 cm



Four Figures on a Pink Ground
oil on wood 61 x 61 cm



Four Figures on a Grey Ground
oil on wood 61 x 71.1 cm



Tree and Figures in a Hilly Landscape
oil on canvas 40.6 x 51.4 cm



Fifteen Figures in a Hilly Landscape
oil on canvas 40.6 x 51.4 cm



Vertical View of an Ancient City
oil on panel 91.4 x 40 cm



View Across an Ancient City from a High Place
oil on panel 121 x 121 cm



Small View Across an Ancient City from a High Place
oil on board 61 x 61 cm



Looking Across the City from the Bar Walls
oil on board 61 x 61 cm



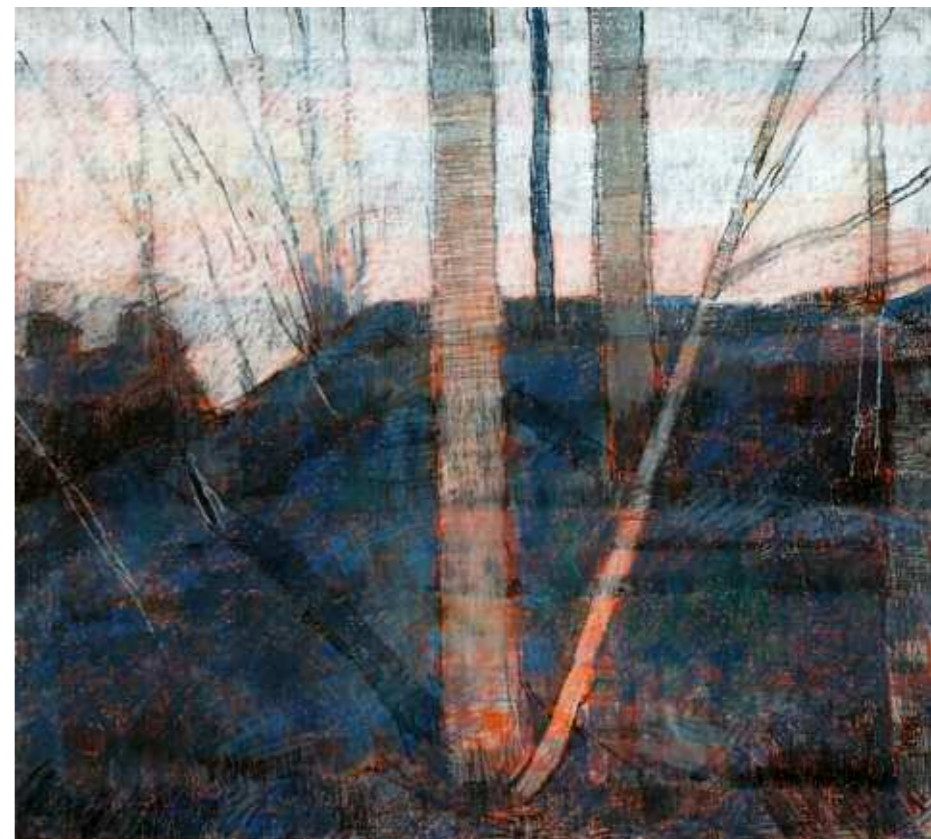
Buildings in Front of the Minster
oil on board 61 x 50.2 cm



The Red Hill
oil pastel 61.6 x 55.2 cm



Small Study by the Water's Edge
oil on board 30.5 x 27.3 cm



The Blue Hill
oil pastel 58.4 x 64.8 cm



Top left: Looking Across the City from a Wooded Hill
oil pastel 45,1 x 64,1 cm

Above: View Across a City, Evening
oil pastel 45,1 x 64,1 cm

Left: River Landscape – Autumn
oil pastel 45,1 x 64,1 cm



City Walls and River from a Wooded Hill
oil pastel 45,1 x 64,1 cm



View from a Wooded Hill
oil pastel 45,1 x 64,1 cm



Five of these oil pastels are based on Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 'Seasons' series. Although only five survive, art historians are undecided as to whether there were originally six paintings representing two months each or twelve paintings representing one month each. I have taken the liberty of adding another oil pastel based on his painting 'The Magpie on the Gallows', as it seems to me to have a spring-like quality in colour and tonality.

Bruegel seems to me to represent a view of the 'North' that is both elegant and eloquent. He paints a mediaeval Flanders that corresponds, in my mind, to a certain aspect of the York in which I was born and brought up. The language of the York Mystery Plays bears comparison in that it uses the dialect and cadence of the county, without reducing it to some parochial parody.

I aspire to the same ambition visually and, in this journey, Bruegel is for me an important guide and compass.

Jake Attree, August 2012.



The Hunters in the Snow – after Bruegel
oil pastel 57.2 x 60.3 cm



The Gloomy Day – after Bruegel
oil pastel 57.2 x 60.3 cm



The Magpie on the Gallows – after Bruegel
oil pastel 57.2 x 60.3 cm



The Hay Harvest – after Bruegel
oil pastel 57.2 x 60.3 cm



The Corn Harvest – after Bruegel
oil pastel 57.2 x 60.3 cm



The Return of the Herd – after Bruegel
oil pastel 57.2 x 60.3 cm



JAKE ATTREE

Born October 1950
 1974 – 77 Royal Academy of Arts
 Creswick Prize (Landscape), Landseer Prize (Figure)
 David Murray Scholarship, Bronze Turner Medal
 1968 – 71 Liverpool College of Art
 1966 – 68 York School of Art

Selected solo exhibitions

2012 Hester Gallery, Leeds
 Hartlepool Gallery
 2011/09/07/ Hart Gallery, London
 05/03 New Schoolhouse Gallery, York
 2010/99 Huddersfield Art Gallery
 2009 George Smith, Chelsea, London
 Shadbolts Solicitors
 2008/00/94 Dean Clough, Halifax
 2007 Winchester College
 Manor House, Ilkley
 2006 York Minster, Inaugural Exhibition for Creation:
 Artists working for York Minster
 2004 Dean Clough, Halifax (Retrospective)
 2003 Bruton Gallery, New York
 2002 39 Essex Street, London
 2000 Bruton Gallery, Leeds
 Cartwright Hall, Bradford
 1999 The View Gallery, Liverpool
 Mid-Pennine Arts, Burnley
 1998/96/94 Michael Richardson Contemporary Art, Artspace Gallery, London
 1997 National Lotteries Charities Board, London
 1996 New York Paintings, Dean Clough, Halifax
 New York Drawings, Dean Clough, Halifax
 1991 Leader's Office, Civic Hall, Leeds (Loan Exhibition)
 1990 Sheffield University Art Tower

Selected mixed and two-person exhibitions

2012 Views of York, Fairfax House, York
 2008 Meyer Brown, London
 2007 39 Essex Street, London
 2006 Collyer Bristow, Leeds (London and Leeds)
 2002 Bonhams, Leeds (Hart Gallery)

2001 Bruton Gallery, (London and Leeds)
 1999 Rowe and Maw, London
 1997 Northern Light: The Ninth Provident Financial Triennial Exhibition,
 Banqueting Hall, London
 1995 City Art Gallery, Hartlepool
 1994 RIBA 'Site Gallery', Leeds (two exhibits)
 1993 Leeds Centenary Exhibition, Leeds University Gallery
 'A City Made Visible', Leeds City Art Gallery
 1990 Cadogan Contemporary, London
 1989 'Exchanges', Kunstlerhaus, Dortmund
 1987 New Grafton Gallery, London
 1986/85/84 Thackeray Gallery, London
 1984 GLC Spirit of London Exhibition
 1982 Serpentine Gallery, London

Publications

2012 *Views of York: Portrait of a City, 1610 to the Present Day*, Peter Brown,
 York Civic Trust
 2009 *St Nicholas Fields*, Hart Gallery Catalogue
 2008 *Marks on A White Ground*, Dean Clough Catalogue
 2007 *Views from a Hill*, Hart Gallery Catalogue
 1996 *Jake Attree* – short publication published by Impress
 1992 Illustrations (with Brita Nilsson) for *The Purlind Man*, poems by John Holmes
 1984 Illustrations for *At This Time*, poetry by John Holmes

Collections

York Art Gallery; Bradford Museums & Galleries; Leeds City Council;
 City of Dortmund; Hartlepool City Art Gallery; Sheffield University Fine Art Society;
 Calderdale Museums & Galleries; Paintings in Hospitals, Nuffield Trust, London;
 Provident Financial, Bradford.

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 France, Germany and Sweden



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