

JAKE ATTREE

Front Cover Detail
An Extensive View Across an Ancient City (catalogue no. 31)
oil on panel
121.3 x 121.3 cms 473/4 x 473/4 ins

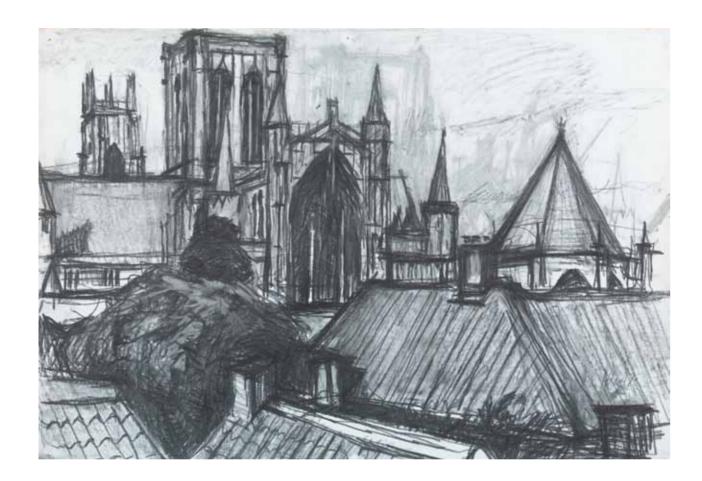
JAKE ATTREE

2013



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Foreword

It was seeing reproductions of three John Constable paintings in a magazine that solidified the 12-year-old Jake Attree's dedication to painting, indeed Constable's statement that 'there is no easy way of becoming a good painter, it can only be obtained by long contemplation and incessant labour' rings especially true when viewing the collection of works selected for Jake's inaugural exhibition with Messum's. Each of the 53 works betrays intense observation at their core, worked on repeatedly over time until the image comes into focus. Or, as his fellow Yorkshiremen would put it, they display "good hard graft".

Yorkshire's unofficial capital and Jake's birthplace, the city of York features heavily in this collection. Jake's images take the viewer on a walking tour of York, through her medieval streets, over the River Ouse, and right up to the top of Britain's largest gothic church, York Minster. Jake climbed the 275 steps to the Minster's central tower several times to produce the series of paintings *Views Across an Ancient City* presented here, the red rooftops sprawling out towards the horizon abstracting in a way that recalls the grid-like compositions of Jake's early influence Piet Mondrian and perhaps even the Roman mosaics made by the city's founders. It is interesting to note that the artist's current studio was once the site of the world's largest textile factory an

industry synonymous with York since the middle ages, further tying Jake's life and work to the history of the city.

Despite these connections, Jake is far from a parochial artist, aiming to produce a vision of the north that is both elegant and eloquent. His studies of Pieter Bruegel the Elder, and the affinity he feels towards the twentieth century painter Constant Permeke, show an artist determined to place himself in the broader context of northern European painting, absorbing and developing their use of golden light and earthy realism. Before his studies at the Royal Academy of Arts in the mid to late '70s, Jake was tutored by Mike Knowles, himself a student of Frank Auerbach at the Slade. Auerbach's work, along with that of Leon Kossoff, has likewise been assimilated into Jake's technique, particularly in his use of thick impasto.

Jake talks about an "inevitability" in his work, as if, over time, the correct balance of form, texture and compositional structure will eventually emerge, the layers of paint worked on over and over again until the piece reaches its inherent conclusion. Jake Attree's exhibition shows an artist with a sense of time, history and place that is linked intrinsically with his birthplace, and yet, aspires to connect universally. We hope you agree that his hard graft has paid off.



An Essay

by

Lynne Green

'Painting is poetry, not journalism: the art, that is, of suggestion.'

Jake Attree has drawn and painted the city of York more than any other place, with the possible exception of its offspring, New York. There are many and diverse subjects that absorb him for long periods of time, but, as with his hero Cézanne and the subject of Mont Sainte-Victoire, Attree continually turns to his native city as a source of renewed inspiration and further painterly investigation. Crucially, he makes a distinction that reflects the centrality of the personal association - rather than a solely aesthetic response - by insisting that what he paints is the place of his birth (with all that that suggests of emotional as well as visual memories); it just happens to be York. His own history is bound to this melting pot of the ancient, the medieval and the contemporary. York's iconic buildings, which make this cityscape instantly recognisable, are old friends, and as with all trusted companions, each reconnection serves to deepen and enrich Attree's understanding of its character, to know it in all its moods. But for the artist, the life of a city is also made of what he describes as 'the emotional maelstrom of the crowd'. Human figures are as important in Attree's work as are the architectural forms that direct and contain them. He is also intensely sensitive to the, at times, almost opaque atmosphere of melancholy that the past and its ghosts lend to our streets and the places we frequent.

Having as a young child learnt the qualities of absorption and concentration required of an artist (he cannot recall a time when he did not draw), Attree steeped himself in the images of art and in the works of historical masters. By nature an autodidact, his knowledge of art's history and of its wider cultural context is prodigious and scholarly. Consequently his list of touchstones, those artists who inspire and set the standard by which he judges his own practice, is long and surprisingly diverse.

The early discovery (thanks to his school library), of the work of Renaissance painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder, was both a revelation for Attree and a moment of intuitive recognition. The Flemish artist subsequently became a benchmark for Attree's own conviction in the ordinary and commonplace being rich and worthy subject matter, that bears prolonged attention and scrutiny. (He has, he says, no problem with the obvious.) Moreover, York itself has provided a further, creatively fertile visual connectivity between Attree and Bruegel. York and its immediate surroundings have revealed specific spaces and particular views uncannily like those painted by the Flemish master. As a child, Attree recognised York's Baile Hill in the structural formation of the distant landscape in Bruegel's The Gloomy Day (1559). In his own Hunters in the Snow (after Bruegel) tree forms that closely echo those in the original, are actually the long-familiar trees, which line the banks of the River Ouse. The relationship between the two artists has thus a distinctly personal resonance: with Attree taking up particular themes and formal compositions that closely parallel individual works by Bruegel. There is clearly an affinity of purpose, as well as the coincidence of parallel visual configurations within their individual environments. The fact that, at the time Bruegel painted, the life of Flanders would not have looked unfamiliar to those who lived in the Vale of York, has not escaped Attree's imaginative attention.

Arguably it is the quality of light inherent in a city that sits in a flat, expansive landscape that made Attree a painter of tonal values (of visual contrast): concerned primarily with the lightness or darkness (rather than hue) of colour, in relation to its nearest neighbours and wider surroundings. Broadly, this locates him in an artistic lineage that includes, not surprisingly, many of his personal exemplars, in particular the towering genius of Rembrandt. In discussing this way of modelling form, Attree lists a number of admired and seminal figures noted for their tonal subtlety, which includes Constable, Corot, Gwen John, Braque, David Bomberg, Morandi and his own contemporary, Sean Scully. Not that Attree eschews heightened colour entirely: his range is as wide as any painter and his work often vibrates with the intensity of his palette. But the latter is most often subdued, occasionally veering to the monochrome, but always controlled to a tight tonal range.

From school, where he was taught in the art class by York-born painter John Langton, Attree studied first at Liverpool College of Art and then, as a post-graduate at the Royal Academy of Arts, London. Most tutors at Liverpool (for Attree, notably Mike Knowles and Nicholas Horsfield) had trained at London's Slade School of Fine Art and were thus steeped in what R.B. Kitaj (himself a Slade tutor in the 1960s) coined

the 'School of London'. Among others this included Frank Auerbach and Leon Kossoff whose example Attree encountered at Liverpool. Both artists were to influence him profoundly in his use of deep impasto, that conveys emotion no less than the history of his mark making: out of the apparent turbulence of paint the artist discovers the image. At the RA Schools, his own sense that empirical experience examined through drawing must be the foundation of his practice, and his instinctive feeling for tonality in painting, were both reinforced in the example of tutors John Lessore and Peter Greenham. Crucially too, he learnt from the abstract painter John Holden (and through him from the example of Mondrian) the importance of geometry and structure. As a post-graduate student, Attree won among other things, prizes for both landscape and figure painting – two subjects he continues to pursue alongside portraiture, as well as cityscapes.

Jake Attree eventually settled as a professional, working artist in West Yorkshire. Yet his place of birth and his decision to locate himself in the north does not mean that he can simply be characterised as a northern artist. The training he received and the tutors he had most to learn from (and for whom he still has enormous admiration) anchors Attree's imagination and method of working firmly in a profoundly English tradition that can broadly be traced to Constable and Turner, and which via the School of London, also embraces the earlier Euston Road and Camden Town painters. It is important also to recognise that his work – his vision as a painter – belongs to a more expansive and historically longer, Northern European (as opposed to a Southern or Mediterranean) art tradition.

Attree's habit of painting in series, where one subject (York Minster being an outstanding example) and a sequence of views of it (invariably treated in a variety of scales), shows him to be absorbed by the constantly



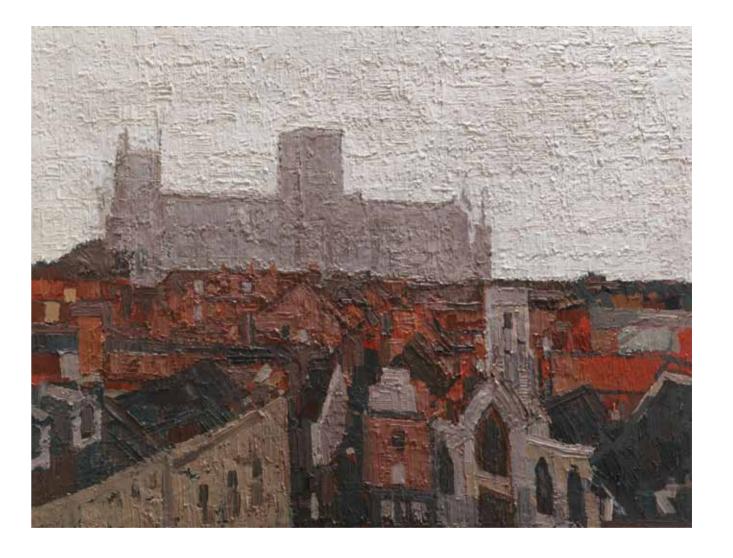
3 In the Minster's Shadow oil on panel 105.2 x 50.5 cms 41% x 19% ins

shifting nuances of empirical experience that we all share. Nothing in our lives is static, rather, all is in a process of animation and flux. To capture the unique character of a fleeting moment – its tonal qualities revealed through light, as absorbed and interpreted through his own emotional perceptions of it – is Attree's project. As is the case with Bruegel, even when dealing with elemental, universal and mythic themes, Attree locates the protagonists in his / our contemporary, tangible world: peopling archetypal themes with figures familiar to every one of us.

The 'signature painting' (the description is the artist's), York: The Minster from the Mansion House Roof is a keynote in this exhibition, with a number of other works related to it that explore different aspects of this spectacular building and the panoramic views afforded by its towers. In York: The Minster from the Mansion House Roof the dominant presence of the largest Gothic cathedral in Northern Europe over the city's medieval streets is expressed, not simply by the painting's scale but by the strongly expressed geometry of formal relationships and Attree's structural, architectonic brushstrokes. Clad in its light-reflecting limestone, the Minster sits like an ethereal ship of state in a sea of rich terracotta and ochre tones, with the façade of St Helen's church in the foreground sounding another accent of spiritual light. Mundane human life is brought to the image by the two figures that lie at its heart. From the panoramic to the contained, the small étude (the musical connotation is appropriate) The Tower of St Helen's draws in upon an aspect of the same scene. Here, close attention to architectural relationships and the spaces between solid structures, creates an almost entirely abstract exploration of the articulation of form through colour and direct, bold brushstrokes. In dramatic contrast, in An Extensive View Across an Ancient City. Attree, on the roof of the Minster's central tower, looks out across the surrounding rooftops to the Vale of York.

(The work has its origins in the drawing York from the Minster's Central Tower.) In the painting, terracotta pantiles, landscape and sky are expressed as horizontal bands of colour, articulated in layers of paint laid down by small dragging gestures of the brush: the process of scumbling (a technique favored by Rembrandt) that produces the shimmer of colour in light and movement. The constant change and instability of the world, together with its essential tactility, have their equivalent here. From a variety of, often dizzying, vantage points, Attree discovers new ways of seeing, and thus of deepening his understanding of his subject and its context of place. Each view, expansive or focused on specific detail, relates to the others in familial connection – that together express an expanding and deepening relationship between the artist and the object of his interest.

It is essential to Attree that his art be grounded in sensory observation, for it is this that not only anchors, but also refreshes his imagination. He is, after all, a painter of the observable world (which does not however imply that the intrinsic complexities of life are not embodied in what he paints). In the immediacy and directness of pencil or pen he captures the spontaneity and energy of the everyday. The process of drawing - to which he turns wherever he may find himself - is the notation of his experience and the foundation of his vision. In what the artist refers to as 'the democracy of drawing' he sets down every form that engages him with the same level of attention: whether it be the soaring ribbed vault of York Minster or the structure of the modern chairs on which its congregation sits. Drawing every night as he travels home from the studio by bus, 'adds (Attree comments) to the sense of reality in the painting'. (His drawings of his fellow travellers are a delight, small works of artistry in their own right.) Once in the studio, the artist often works initially from his plein air drawings, or indeed uses photographs as aide memoirs. In the process of painting these are



York: The Minster from the Mansion House Roof – study oil on panel
63.7 x 84.2 cms 25% x 33% ins

set aside, becoming as-it-were additional layers of memory. His being a poetic rather than narrative art, the artist is concerned to avoid the pedantic and overly descriptive. He negotiates a delicate line between this and its opposite, the temptation to become 'too florid or metaphor-ridden'. Both are avoided by referring back to his drawings, in order to restore, as he says, 'some sense of corporeal reality', for there is already 'enough mystery in that'.

The surfaces of Attree's paintings repay careful and prolonged examination: as paint applied, mark by mark, onto a flat canvas or board, performs the visual transformation into modulated tone and modelled form. This is truly the magic that is the art of painting. In Figures Beneath the West Door I the application of paint articulates the figures as separate from the backdrop of the Minster, yet creates a sense of arrested movement that binds them to the niche-like forms behind: proposing (certainly for the artist) a formal association with the Gothic figurative sculptures of Chartres Cathedral. Yet these are also ordinary people going about their daily lives: representative perhaps of the many thousands of pilgrims that have criss-crossed this space before them. In a shift of mood and subject matter both River Aire at Hirst Wood and The Ouse Looking Upstream - Evening, in their different ways testify to Attree's debt to and continuation of, the British landscape tradition of Constable. In the former painting, his use of the scumbling technique captures the pure poetry of natural forms in movement, as the wind blows through trees and over water. It is clear that in a very tangible and cogent way Attree's response to his subject is embodied directly in his application of paint: from the structural to the gestural or impressionistic, his mark-making alters in ways that are reflective of the character and mood of what captures his attention. This is an intuitive process that the artist is not, he says consciously aware of.

For Attree, the surface of each painting needs must be a metaphor for the complexity of existence. There are not, he says, 'any false marks', for each is a response to another and to the whole. The history of the facture of a work is as much the subject, as that which is represented. His are brush marks that slowly build through the rhythmic pattern of application towards the final image. There is a palpable sense of energy and movement in these surfaces, yet each individual mark is the outcome of prolonged contemplation. Each represents a period of time taken before it is laid down, and the paint is given form through a deft touch or drag of the brush. There is inherent in this process a sense of patience and control, of the coming together of memory and emotion with skill – the deep understanding of the artist's craft.

Jake Attree describes himself, rather disarmingly, as 'an artisan' who deals 'with the physical reality of stuff, making things that aspire to be beautiful'. The stuff with which he engages is both the materiality of what is observed, and the physical reality (characteristics and potentialities) of paint that must be manipulated in the process of making manifest his unique response to his subject. Yet this 'stuff', this physicality of paint is imbued with another, deeply ambitious aspiration, which reflects Attree's conviction in the power of art to convey layered and profoundly human meaning. In a note to the author he expressed this very directly and movingly: 'I aspire to make paintings of York that have the same density of experience of Proust's Paris or Joyce's Dublin. The paintings and drawings are the material manifestation of the best part of me.'

Lynne Green

Independent curator and writer

November 2012

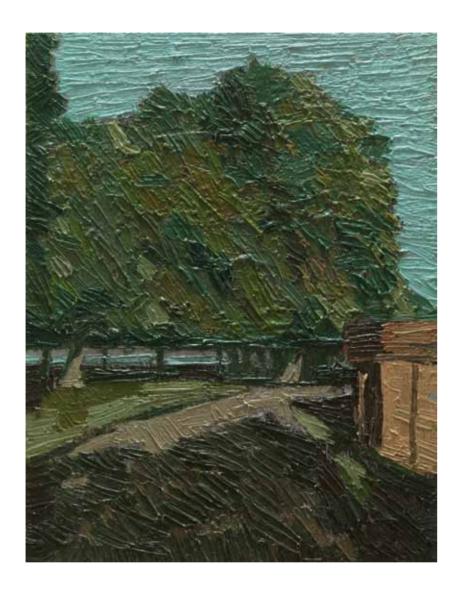


5 The Ouse Looking Upstream – Evening oil on board 35.6 x 40.6 cms 14 x 16 ins



The Ouse Looking Upstream oil on canvas

29.8 x 42.2 cms 11% x 16% ins





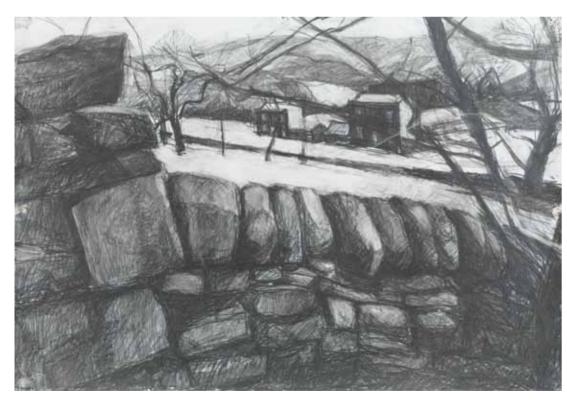




9 York from the Minster's Central Tower graphite
42.1 x 53 cms 16% x 20% ins



Northumbrian Landscape graphite 38.2 x 64 cms 15 x 251/4 ins



Todmorden Landscape graphite

52 x 76 cms 20½ x 29% ins



York Minster: The South Transept graphite
39.1 x 57 cms 15% x 22½ ins



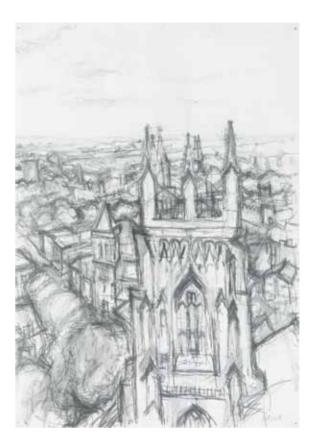
13 Bradford charcoal 60.3 x 78.1 cms 23¾ x 30¾ ins



The Fishergate Postern graphite on paper 58.9 x 39.9 cms 231/4 x 153/4 ins

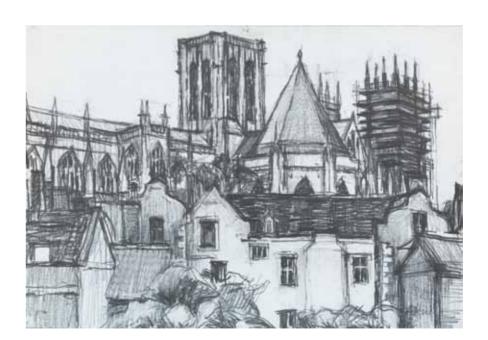


The Ruins of St Mary's Abbey graphite
47.9 x 63.8 cms 18% x 25% ins

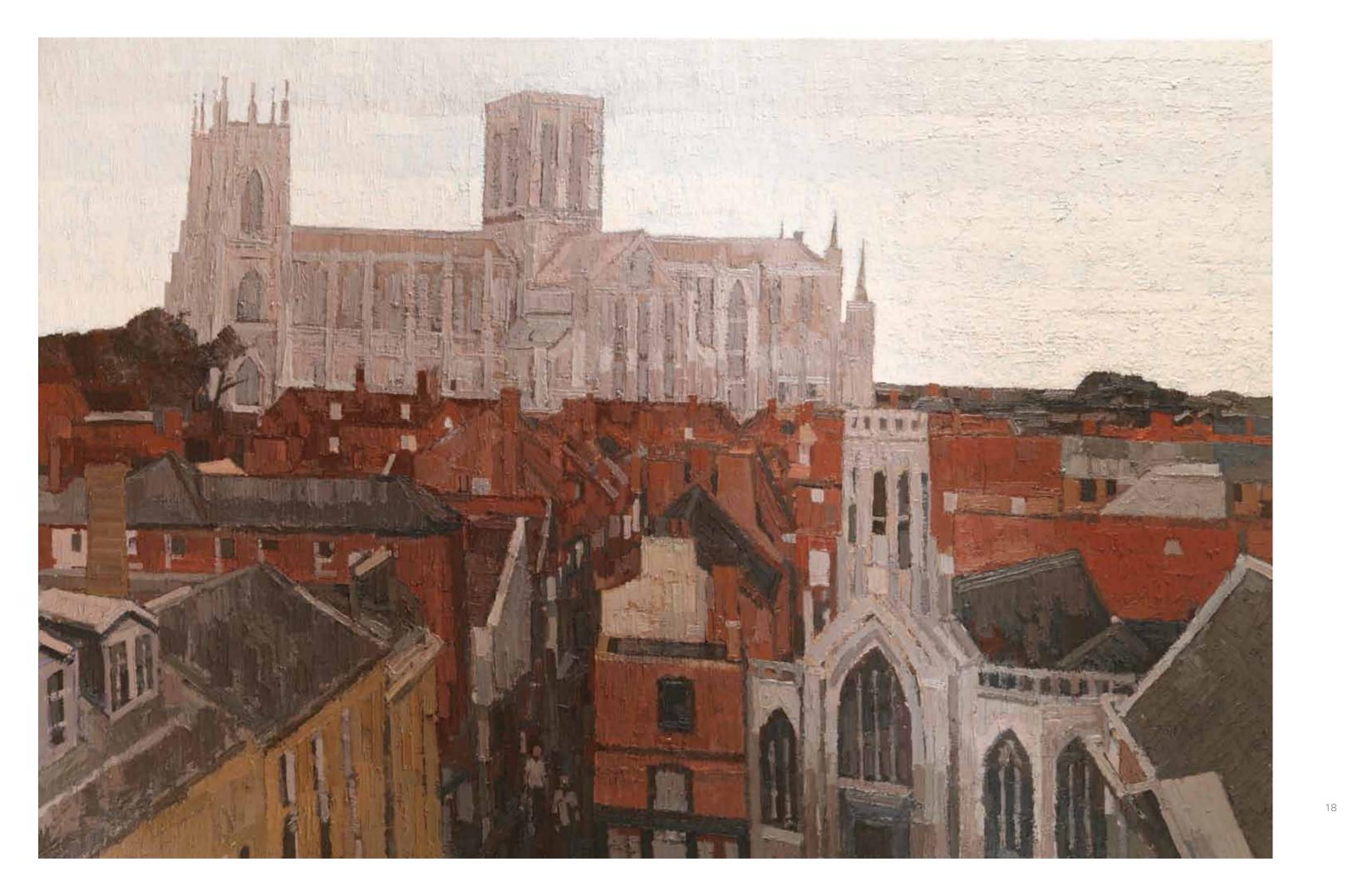


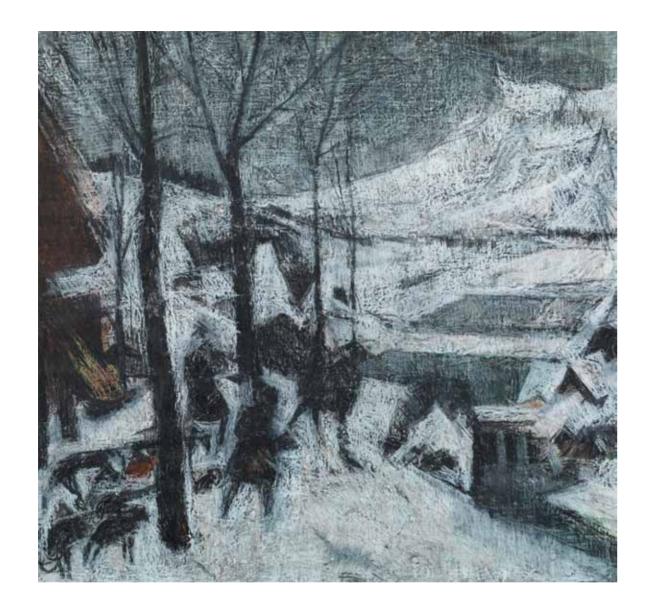
South West Tower of York Minster graphite

59.3 x 41.9 cms 23% x 16½ ins



17 York Minster from the City Walls graphite 37.5 x 54.3 cms 14¾ x 21¾ ins

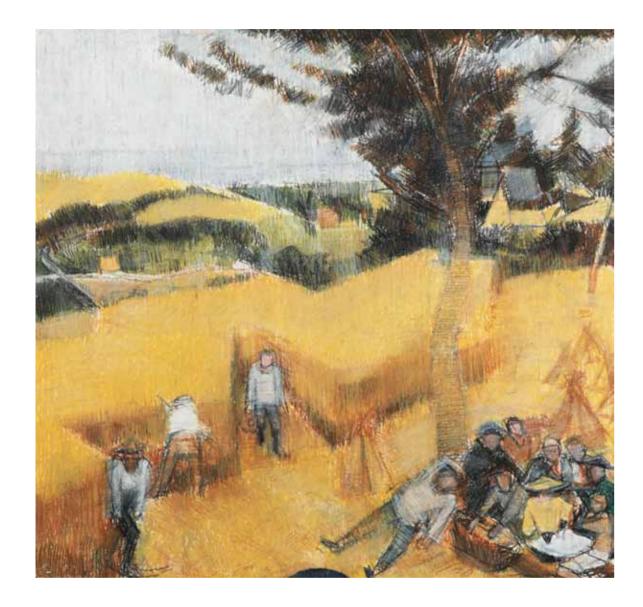




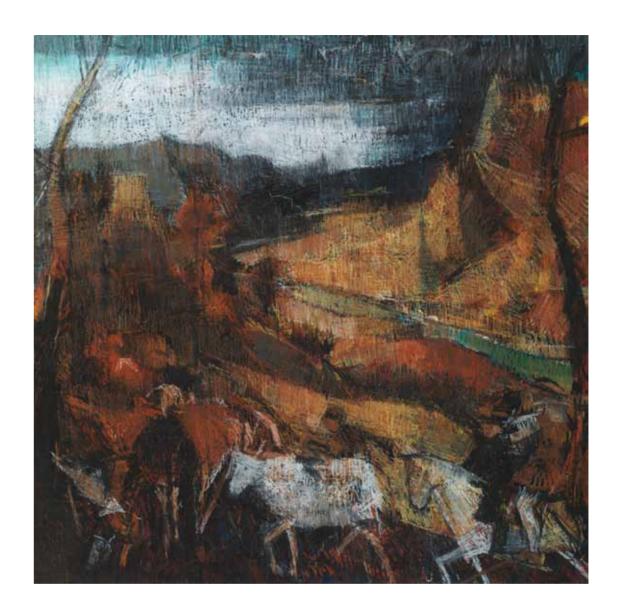
I first encountered the work of Pieter Bruegel the Elder aged about 14 or 15 at school. The library had a pretty good Art section; I had already discovered John Constable and was avidly devouring any reproduction I could lay my hands on. Bruegel was a revelation, the book in which his paintings were reproduced contained the inevitable 'Hunters in the Snow' but it also had 'The Gloomy Day', representing February/March.



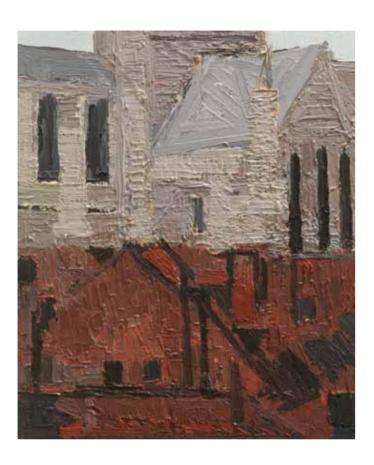
As a boy, my father had taken me to an earthwork on the South Bank of the River Ouse in York, Baile Hill, which had at one time supported a wooden bailey tower (hence the name). There was a large rookery in the trees growing on the hill and I was immediately struck by how much Bruegel's 'The Gloomy Day' reminded me of the experience of standing on Baile Hill with my father.



There were strong visual similarities but there was something more visceral or, rather, more nonverbal in my recognition of the similarities inherent in the painting of Pieter Bruegel and my formative experience of viewing the city of my birth from an elevated position.

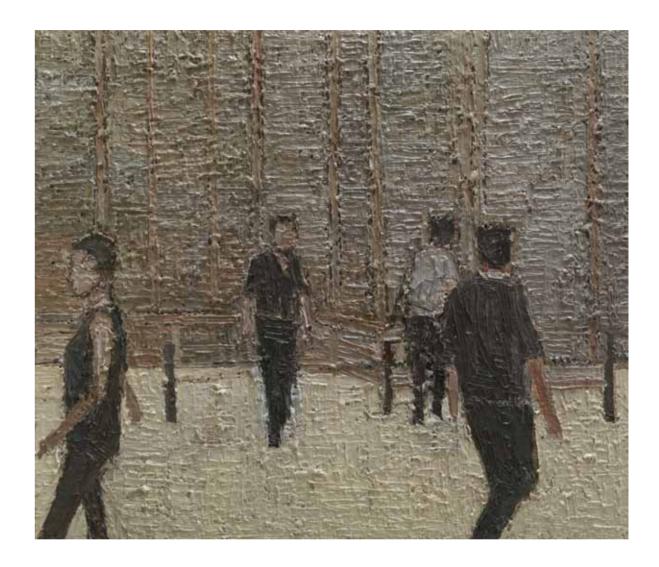


It was a long time before I was to actually feel able to make any use of these observations, or even to think they might serve as visual possibilities in terms of painting. I continued painting York and looking at Bruegel but made no attempt to unite or fuse the two in the images I was making of the city.









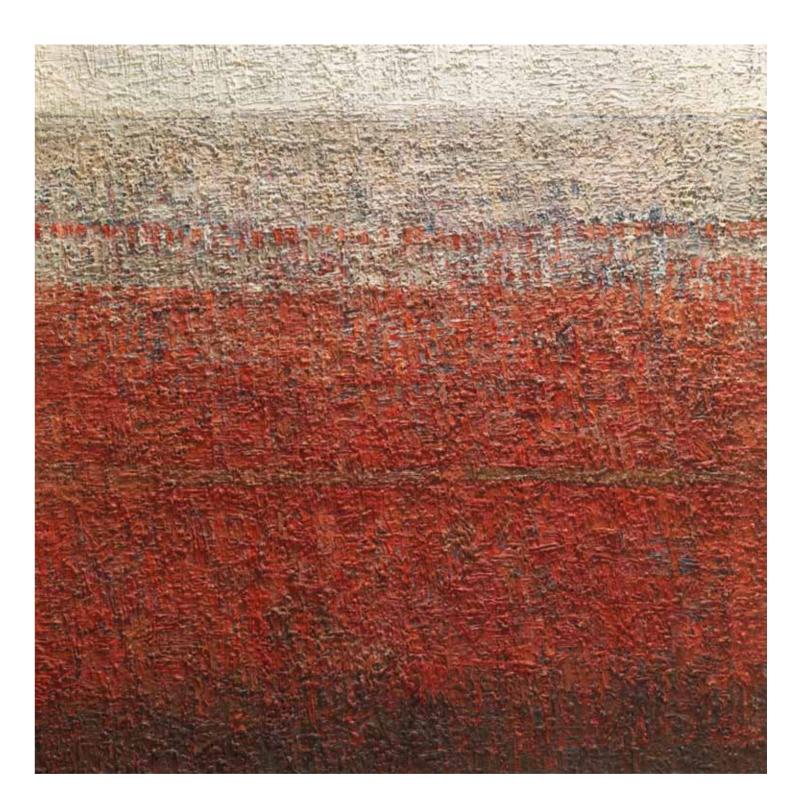








An Extensive View Across an Ancient City oil on panel
121.3 x 121.3 cms 47¾ x 47¾ ins



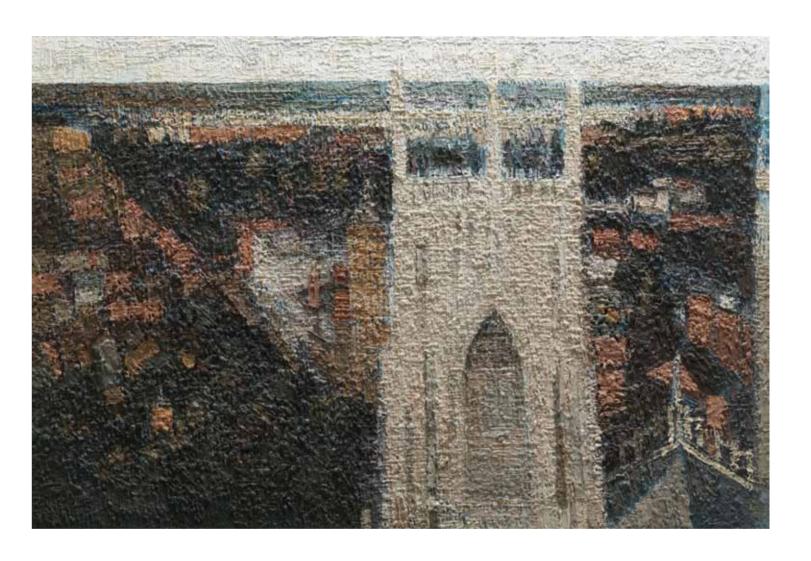


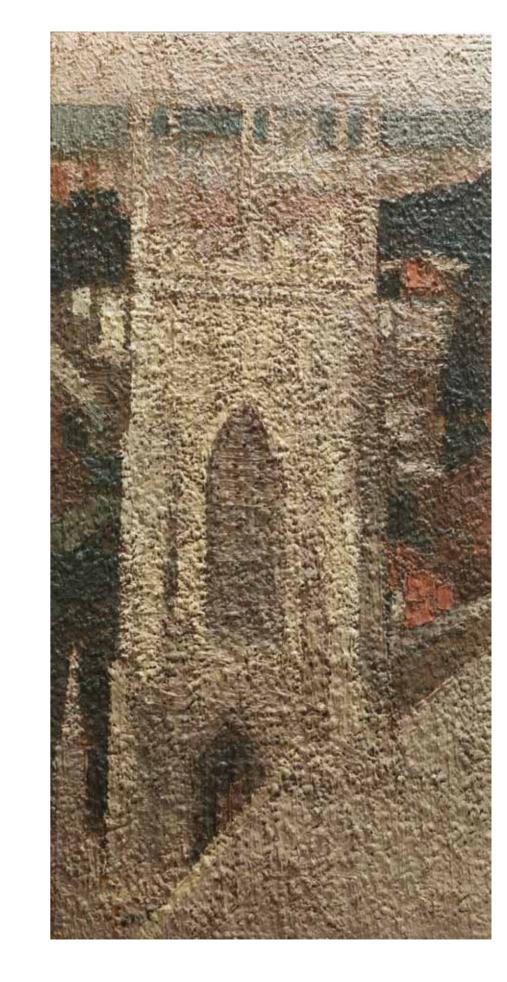


32 Ancient City (Red & Grey) oil on board 70.1 x 28 cms 27% x 11 ins

33 Morning Light, Red & Grey oil on panel 91 x 40 cms 35% x 15% ins

34 The Pale Tower
oil on board
79.9 x 119.7 cms 31½ x 47½ ins





35 The Pale Tower II
oil on panel
121.9 x 60.3 cms 48 x 23% ins

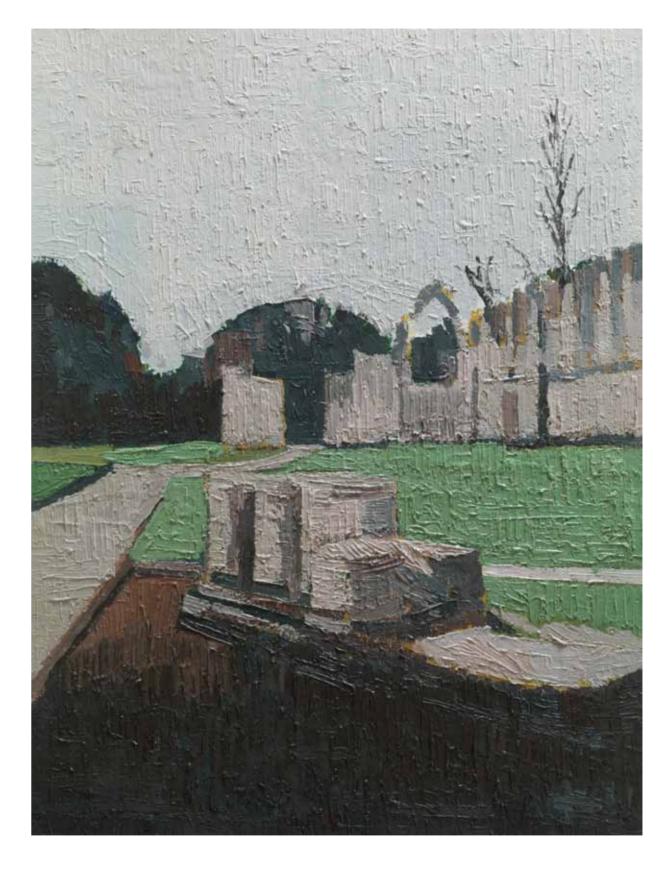






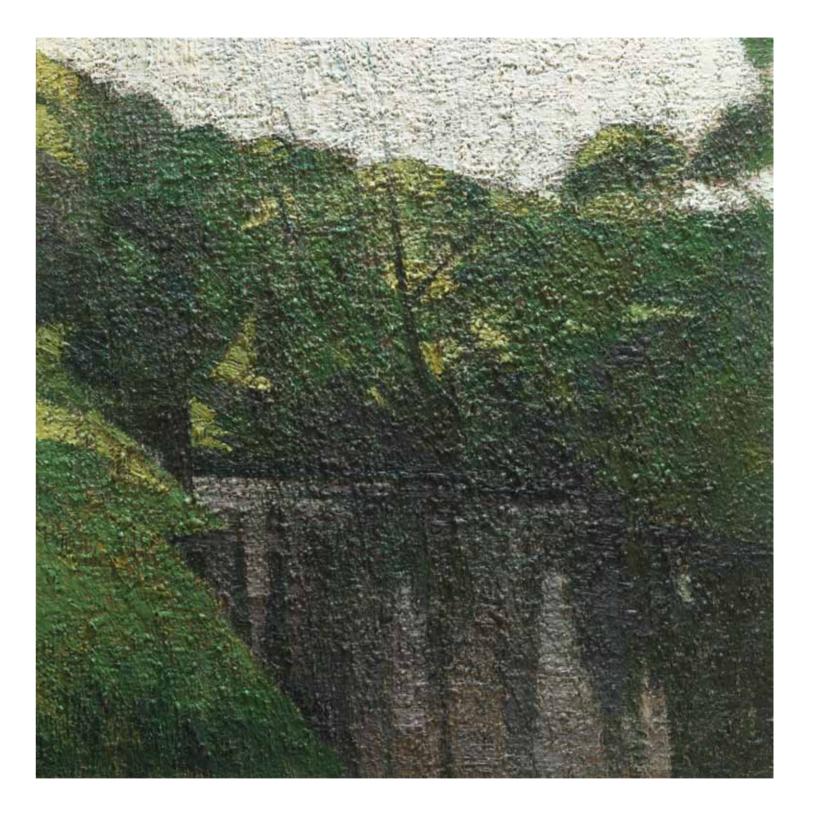






41 York: Ruins of St Mary's Abbey oil on panel 83.8 x 63.8 cms 33 x 251/8 ins

A2 River Aire at Hirst Wood
oil on canvas
108.6 x 108.6 cms 42¾ x 42¾ ins





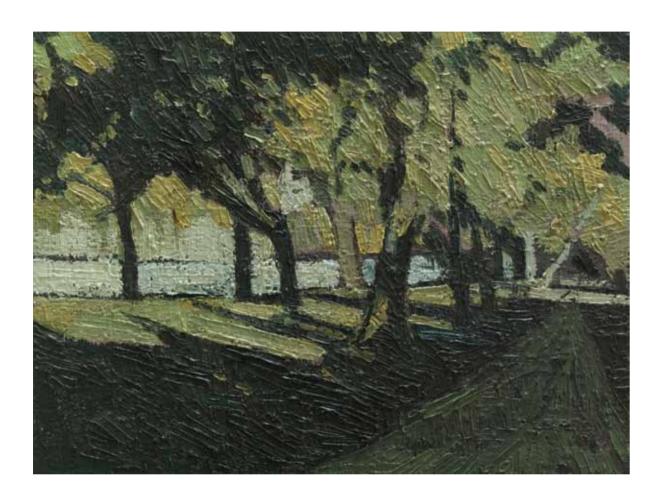


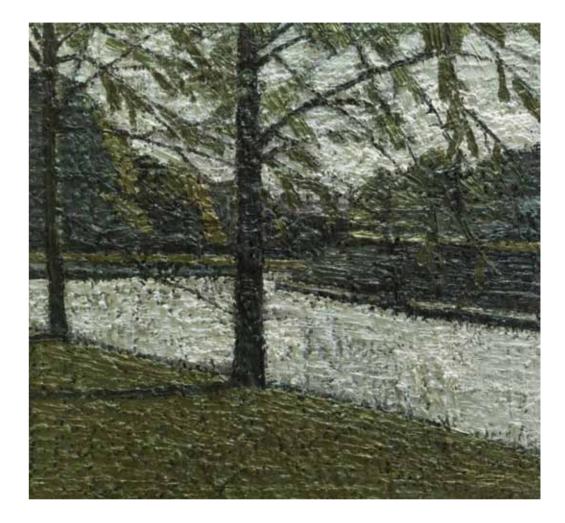


















A Screen of Trees at the Edge of the Wood oil on board 85 x 48 cms 33½ x 18% ins



JAKE ATTREE

1991 Leader's Office, Civic Hall, Leeds (Loan Exhibition)

Dean Clough, Halifax

1990 Sheffield University Art Tower

A.		Born:	13 October 1950		red Mixed and Two-Person Exhibitions	
	4	1974–1977	Royal Academy of Arts	2012	Views of York, Fairfax House, York	
COLUMN TO A STATE OF THE PARTY	MA.	1374-1377	Creswick Prize (Landscape)	2008	Meyer Brown, London	
MEE	Allha				London Art Fair	
1	2000		Landseer Prize (Figure)	2007	39 Essex Street, London	
			David Murray Scholarship	2006	Collyer Bristow, London; Dean Clough Halifax	
-		1000 1071	Bronze Turner Medal		(Curator's Choice)	
		1968–1971	Liverpool College of Art	2002	Bonhams, Leeds (Hart Gallery Show)	
1000	107	1966–1968	York School of Art	2001	Bruton Gallery, Leeds (London and Leeds)	
				1999	Rowe & Maw, London	
				1997	Northern Light: The Ninth Provident Financial Triennial	
				.007	Exhibition (Banqueting Hall, Whitehall)	
EXHIBITIONS				1996	Hull, St Katherine's Dock Development; The Crescent,	
	Selected One-Person Exhibitions				Scarborough	
2013	Messum's,			1995	City Art Gallery, Hartlepool	
2012		allery, Chippin	ig Campden	1994	RIBA "Site Gallery", Leeds (two exhibitions)	
	Hester Galle	ery, Leeds		1993	Leeds Centenary Exhibition – Leeds University Gallery;	
	Hartlepool A	Art Gallery		1000	"A City Made Visible" – Leeds City Art Gallery	
2011	Hart Gallery, Islington			1990	Cadogan Contemporary Art, London	
	New Schoo	lhouse Gallery	, York	1989	"Exchanges" – Kunstlerhaus, Dortmund; "Art '92" –	
2010	Huddersfield Art Gallery			1000	Generals Huis, Maastricht	
2009				1987	New Grafton Gallery, London	
	George Smi			1986	Thackeray Gallery, Kensington Square, London (also in	
	Shadbolts S	olicitors – Loa	n Exhibition	1000	1985 and 1984)	
2008	Dean Clough, Halifax			1985	Royal Academy Summer Exhibition (also in 1975)	
2007	Winchester	College		1984	GLC Spirit of London Exhibition (Highly Commended)	
	Hart Gallery			1982	Serpentine Gallery, London – Summer Show 1	
	Manor Hous			1002	ocipentine dullery, London outliner onow i	
2006		linster, Inaugural Exhibition for Creation:		PUBLICATIONS		
		ing for York N	linster	2012	Landscapes for the Elsner Sisters, Campden Gallery	
2005	Hart Gallery, London			2012	Catalogue	
2004	Dean Clough, Halifax (Retrospective)			2012	Views of York: Portrait of a City, 1610 to the Present Day,	
2003	·			2012	Peter Brown, York Civic Trust	
	Hart Gallery			2009	St Nicholas Fields, Hart Gallery Catalogue	
2002	39 Essex Street, London			2008	Marks on A White Ground, Dean Clough Catalogue	
2000	Bruton Galle	*		2007	Views from a Hill, Hart Gallery Catalogue	
		Hall, Bradford		1996	Jake Attree – short publication published by Impress	
	Dean Cloug			1992	Illustrations (with Brita Nilsson) for "The Purblind Man",	
1999		d Art Gallery		1002	poems by John Holmes	
		allery, Liverpo		1984	Illustrations for "At This Time", poetry by John Holmes	
		e Arts, Burnle		1304	illustrations for At This filtre , poetry by confirmines	
1998	Michael Richardson Contemporary Art,			COLLECTIONS		
		allery, London			urt Gallery	
	Batley Art Gallery, West Yorkshire			Bradford Museums & Galleries		
1997	National Lotteries Charities Board, London				Leeds City Council	
1996	New York Paintings and New York Drawings,			City of Dortmund		
	Dean Clough, Halifax (two exhibitions)			Hartlepool City Art Gallery		
	"City Visions", Leeds City Art Gallery			Sheffield University Fine Art Society		
	Michael Richardson Contemporary Art,			Calderdale Museums & Galleries		
	Art Space Gallery, London			Paintings in Hospitals		
1994	Michael Richardson Contemporary Art,			Nuffield Trust, London		
	Art Space Gallery, London			Nulle	Parity of the state of the stat	

Provident Financial, Bradford

Private and corporate collections in Great Britain, USA, Australia,

Austria, Brazil, France, Germany and Sweden



