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Christchurch

Marie Le Lievre *Trappings*

Jonathan Smart Gallery
13 March-4 April

JAMIE HANTON

In her 1993 text 'Woman and Painting', Marlene Dumas states, tongue-in-cheek with all seriousness, 'If anything, the domestic aspect of a painter's studio (being "locked up" in a room) reminds me a bit of the housewife and her broom'.¹ In *Fly Catcher*—an intimate-sized black-and-white inkjet print amongst an exhibition of massive stretched canvases and large aluminium surfaces—Marie Le Lievre lies across the floor of her compact garage-cum-studio; a painted hazy blue form, roughly the size of the artist's body hovers above like a spirit risen, but ultimately trapped. Traditionally, the studio is a private place of work; the tangible representation of the artist's subconscious space.



In *Trappings*, a title punning on the outward signs or vestiges of a role and the predicament of being caught or stuck—and the possible relationship between the two—Le Lievre explores the psychological tension between containment and release, of painterly control and chaos.

Stacked is comprised of various blocks of meticulously poured paint; the blocks, solid from a distance, dissipate and reveal their true composition close-up: the edges show layers of oil paint built on top of one another. *Marked (Violet)* and *Marked (Cerulean)* are huge colourfield works, similarly layered, and reminiscent of Le Lievre's earlier baggage forms. Here though, she has scarified the dark surface to expose glowing, burning colours underneath.

There are many moments of gloriously visceral and sensual painting in *Trappings*; bombastic and unexpected colour combinations are applied with a range of surface treatments—slick and impenetrable like an automotive finish, or a ceramic glaze at one moment, milky and veiny like concentrated microbial activity the next. At the crux of the exhibition, between the front and back spaces, are the large *Trappings (Lamp Black)* and *She (Traps)*, two distinct works hung together as if one piece. The top one contains a hulking dark cloud of tar-like paint which pushes at the edges of the canvas and seems to seep down into the painting below, onto a simplified female figure. This pairing reintroduces a bodily aspect to the exhibition; the resonant scale of human gestures in relation to the canvas.

Around the corner are the *Interior Motifs* and *Paraphernalia* series, smaller works which are characterised by pencil lines that curl and snake around a glossy surface of artists' medium. These pieces sit variously on a spectrum ranging from fully-abstract to semi-abstract, with more figurative works such as *Holy (Paraphernalia)*, *Gun Ho (Paraphernalia)*, and *Junk (Paraphernalia)* capturing vanitas-like collections of bottles, vases, and other vessels on side tables. There is a fauvist intensity and modernist sensibility here evocative of the bohemian elegance of Matisse's *L'Atelier Rouge*, which seems a long way from Dumas' description of the studio. It might seem tautological to state, but Le Lievre is a painter who boldly addresses paint (the limits and boundaries of the material) and painting (its processes, history, and attendant politics of gender and labour). In doing so, she produces confidently resolved paintings while leaving room to continue exploring the formal and metaphorical possibilities of each painting's trajectory.

1. Marlene Dumas, 'Woman and Painting', 1993, in *Painting* edited by Terry R. Myers, Whitechapel Gallery, London 2011, p. 95.

(above) Marie Le Lievre's *Trappings* at Jonathan Smart Gallery, March 2015, with from left, *Marked (Cerulean)*, *She (Traps)* & *Trappings (Lamp Black)*

(left) MARIE LE LIEVRE *Stacked* 2015
Oil on canvas, 1800 x 1600 mm.