

## *THIRD HAND* new paintings by Sue Kennington

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*Text by Alberto Mugnaini*



### Colour by Heart

Standing in front of Sue Kennington's recent paintings we find ourselves face to face with minimal forms, executed with a minimum of gesture, forms that allow the colour to intersect and juxtapose, as if held in a kind of placenta, fashioned from brush strokes, that whilst temporarily stable, implies an imminent release. This

colour, with its physicality and resolve, is the absolute protagonist of these paintings.



*Installation shot - Third Hand C2contemporanea 2018*

The sensuous nature of this colour, combined with the gestural mark and the flow of oil paint against the friction of the canvas, bring the work into being. This is not a question of exposition, more of exposure. Nor is it spelling out something in high definition, but instead exposing a kind of short-hand of movement in suspension, as if it had escaped the control of a regulating power. You could say it was the work of a hand disconnected from consciousness or reason, a *third hand*, to use a metaphor created by Philip Guston, directed by an alien zone of the mind, that can only operate in a sort of trance. A hand that seems to follow and mirror the specific energy of chromatic substance: making the colours expand and coil,

swell and recede, resisting any definition, swerving brilliantly, whilst remaining elusive, vulnerable, and transient. These chromatic entities, reveal themselves as contours, clusters and peninsulas, they testify to a nervous system of colour, as if this disconcerting and lambent hand, had taken the hand of the artist.



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It makes no sense, in this case, to speak of abstract or figurative painting, because we are in a chromatic carousel that goes beyond any formal argument, a hand to hand combat of colours, a *déravage* of pigments suspended in oil, capable of evoking pure emotional response - *the intermittences of the heart* - as Proust might say. This, combined with the emotional force of a nature in revolt, gains strength by abandoning the rational, and submitting to the enigmas of life.

Yet, this "third hand" does not suddenly drop from the sky - as happens in a certain painting by Guston, where an arm protrudes directly from the clouds - but rather sinks its grip into years of experience and reflections. In recent years, Kennington has dedicated much time to an encyclopaedic chromatic library, recording an endless inventory of colours on painted cards, that shimmer between the walls of her studio. These are as passes, giving her access to an endless game of combinations, contrasts and interactions, an infinite possibility of pictorial effects. But all of this, how does it manifest itself in her paintings? How can this cognitive experience and sensorial refinement, fruit of an analytical conscience, give life to a painter's practice that, we have seen, is also about losing oneself and forgetting ? How can knowledge transform itself into an inspired action, giving way to a freshness of execution ? A selection of cards, of colours ,cut in the cold light of reason, then, but even these seem to have been reviewed, wiped and skimmed through with the third hand of which we spoke. In this regard the French expression *savoir par coeur*, is useful - that in this case, we should take literally: the understanding of colour is reached through inspiration not by any rational approach, if we, the viewer, can empathise, we will find these paintings resonate within ourselves, we will lose ourselves in them, and absorb them in all their nuance and tone. An experience, citing the famous phrase of Vincenzo Agnetti, to be forgotten by heart, to be consumed and left to mature in the secret storerooms of the mind. Only through this type of experience and maturity, as the greats have confirmed from Mirò to Picasso, is the painter able to recover, at least for a moment, the purity of the gaze and the spontaneity of the hand.



*Installation shot - Third Hand C2contemporanea 2018*

*Alberto Mugnaini 2018*



Installation shot - *Third Hand C2contemporanea 2018*

## Bio

**Sue Kennington** (b. London 1955) trained in London at Goldsmiths College (MFA) 2002 and Chelsea College of Art (BA) 1994. She moved her practice to central Italy in 2002 after completing her MFA, and now works between there and a studio in San Lorenzo, Rome. In 1996 her work featured in *New Contemporaries* at the Tate Liverpool and the Camden Arts Centre, London. Since then she has gone on to exhibit regularly in both Italy and the UK. Her work is an ongoing exploration into the use of color as language. Recent exhibitions include *Glimpse* at Golborne Gallery, London 2017, *Colour, Order, System* at Sid Motion Gallery, London 2017. She is currently a finalist in the Premio Lissone in Italy. She has been curating and organizing *Hickster Projects* since 2015.

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