

I FELT THAT

CURATED BY JOSEPHINE BAILEY

30 JUNE – 3 JULY 2022

An interview with Lucienne O'Mara



Q: Can you introduce yourself and your practice. How did you start making?

A: My mum's a painter and has a studio at home, so I don't really remember starting painting as it was always around. My work saw a big shift in 2017 when I suddenly became very ill. The experience I had and am still having with chronic illness has changed the way I perceive the world dramatically. My work has since reflected an unavoidable need to think a lot more about vision and the way we work as bodies in the spaces around us.

Q: Why did you apply to I felt that?

A: Illness and everything surrounding it isn't something I've ever felt comfortable talking about, so applying to I Felt That was part liberating part terrifying. It revealed to me how uncomfortable I was with the idea of opening up about this part of my life. To have the opportunity to meet other women that have been through something similar, and to be able to use our work to help explain and explore these experiences is completely unique and something I didn't want to miss!

Q: Your work has a really strong sense of movement and emotion, in part due to the impasto and thickness of paint you create. How did you land on this visual language?

A: I want the paintings to feel like 'things' more than surfaces, not a picture but an event. They are trying to describe the world around me in the way that I see it, the paint is the 'stuff' that makes a moment. The emotion, the air, the feeling of being a body at the time that moment is describing. The impasto paint with multiple layers and failed paintings underneath is reflective of the baggage that comes with every experience or moment you have, they're never isolated, always surrounded by and bleeding into what's happened before and after.

Q: You say your work is about "meeting points" and "the gaps between things" - can you go into a bit more details about what you mean by this? Does this relate at all to your interpretations and understandings of this project?

A: When I became ill my eyesight dramatically changed, part of this meant I had no depth perception. The world around me suddenly appeared as a surface of stuff muddled together, with no definition between

each 'thing'. This sparked an interest in thinking about how as bodies we tend to think of ourselves a separate, but we move through a space breathing in and out, affecting and being affected by everything around us, and it's the same with looking. When you look at something it's *you* looking. You can only see through your own lens which inevitably directs how the world appears to you. This has made me think the way I started seeing the world as more of a truth than the way I did before. I began to question how much of what we see is learnt, the idea of the borders that we've created, in every sense, feeling especially relevant given the current political climate.

Q: Why do you include words on the frames of your paintings? Do you find them didactic?

A: The words are intended as pointers to add a bit of context. In the same way an area of paint can add to the way something is read, the words are adding to the whole picture of how you are reading what's in front of you. Sargy Mann is a big influence on my work, he made some of his most powerful work whilst completely blind. He devised a system using blue tac on his canvases to help him create pictures in his mind's eye whilst painting. I think of the text as having the same use to me, it grounds the paint in a reality that's not just visual, which I find to be a relief.

Q: Can you explain the meaning and context behind the work you are exhibiting in I Felt That?

A: The painting is titled 'Space Like Glass I Sit Quiet'. The combination of the text and the painting are trying to describe the feeling of having to act calm and patient so as not to appear like a 'hysterical woman' whilst being ignored and dismissed time and time again by male doctors. It seems to be a familiar story to most of the women in this group unfortunately.



Lucienne O'Mara, Space Like Glass, I Sit Quiet, Oil on Wood Board, 60 x 32 cm

Q: How have you found working and sharing resources with twelve other artists? Have you worked in such a way before?

A: I've never worked with a group who have shared experiences in this way before and it's been so enlightening and honestly better than I could have hoped. I've learnt a lot from everyone and gained confidence from their bravery.

Q: What are you most looking forward to at the end of this project? Do you think it will have impacted your practice long term?

A: I'm sure we're all going to stay in touch, and this is just the beginning of something that will continue to grow. I'm looking forward to seeing how everyone's work develops and changes after having made something specifically to do with their health issues and experiences. I've never made a piece of work for a group show with a unified brief before, so it's going to be interesting having discussions at the show and after, about overlaps, recurring themes, and different approaches to it.