

Diverse
Realisms

Jane Frederick
Michael Middleton
Nicholas Middleton

18 June to 16 July, 2010

The Minorities Gallery
74 High Street, Colchester CO1 1UE

Opening times: Monday to Saturday 10.00am to 4.00pm
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Diverse Different Framings Realisms

Matthew Bowman

Since the French announcement of the invention of photography in 1839, the relationship between the new technology and the older medium of painting has been fraught. Construed as a form of mimesis, the painter skilfully mixed colours, applied brushstrokes, worked out perspectives, arranged the composition, and imagined narratives in order to construct depictions of actual or otherwise somehow plausible scenes. The process of painting was time consuming, necessitating hours of labour; and attempts at perfect verisimilitude were doomed to failure. And then, along comes photography in the guise of the Daguerreotype – an invention that was capable of fulfilling the duties traditionally assigned to painting, but within a fraction of the time needed by painting, and able to make images of astonishing life-likeness. Yet, even though some proclaimed, as history painter Paul Delaroche did, the death of painting – that is to say, its condemnation into anachronistic obsolescence rather than any disappearance of painting as such – centuries of picture-making had not only produced but also naturalized expectations of what images should look like. For

instance, photographic images are frequently circumscribed by rectangular frames common to paintings and engravings despite the simple fact that the photographic image—because of the shape of the camera lens—colour photography techniques, moreover, a whole commercial enterprise was built up for the hand-colouring of photographs, again underscoring the dependency of the new medium upon the history of painting.

All that being said, it's clear that through the nineteenth century painting increasingly surrendered its mimetic function and instead advocated the ideology of the artist as Romantic subject; paintings were thus no longer representations of the world but expressions of the individuated perceptions and feelings of the artist. Meanwhile, photography utilized its superior mimetic power (stemming from its purported indexicality) and its non-reliance upon the individuated mind for the creation of an image, to become a scientific instrument. In that way a truce of sorts was accepted between painting and photography. Nonetheless, this truce was anything but stable. Painting moved increasingly within the realms of formalism during modernism in order to attain a more self-critical, objective, and quasi-scientific status at the expense of the sacrifice of subjectivity. Photography was frequently tempted away from documentary operations into art photography, with its often subjectivist visual rhetoric. However, by the late 1960s there was a reconciliation of sorts between painting and photography: abstract painting and minimalism had effectively showed that a non- or anti-subjectivist—that is to say, an objective—approach to art was thoroughly plausible; indeed, some artists and critics argued that it was necessary. On this basis, not only could photography claim to

be an art medium successfully for the first time in its history, but because paintings always retain a bare minimum of subjectivism then photo-graphy could furthermore claim to be the very paradigm that modernist painting had been trying to achieve.

From that historical point onwards, artistic practice—conceptualism being the prime example—was dominated by the usage and logic of photography. Paintings continued to be painted, of course, but it struck many artists and critics as a medium now exhausted in its possibilities, thereby becoming a solution to artistic problems of yesteryear rather than the present. The influential journal *Artforum* asked in September 1975 if painting was officially now a dead medium. However, by the decade's end, belief in painting's demise was problematized by the commercial resurgence of figurative painting often typified by furious gestural brushwork. In New York, Julian Schnabel's first show was a big seller. And in London the Royal Academy of Art staged a blockbuster exhibition titled *A New Spirit in Painting* (1981). One of its curators argued 'The artists' studios are full of paint pots again and an abandoned easel in an art school has become a rare sight.... The new concern with painting is related to a certain subjective vision, a vision that includes both an understanding of the artist himself as an individual engaged in the search for self-realisation and as an actor on the wider historical stage.' Generally referred to as Neo-expressionism, fierce debates raged around this return of painting. The core issue here was that support for Neo-expressionism aimed not to widen the art market and the possibilities of artistic practice, but instead to supplant the Minimalist and Conceptualist practices that immediately preceded it. Thus the pendulum swung back to painting at the expense of

photography, and, moreover, led to a generalized trashing of 1960s art and criticism in favour for often conservative artistic values that belonged to early twentieth century art.

Given the history I've sketched out it might seem that this current exhibition, *Diverse Realisms*, is another step back towards painting, and therefore claims a distance from photography. Yet if these works seem distanced from photography, then it's important to acknowledge these paintings are equally distant from paintings. To what extent any of these works shown here could be called paintings as such, purely and simply, is fundamentally open to question. Jane Frederick, Mike Middleton, and Nick Middleton are all working within an artistic trajectory that builds upon the researches of 'painters' such as Gerhard Richter and 'photographers' such as Jeff Wall, Thomas Demand, and Andreas Gursky. Rather than endorsing or sacrificing medium-specificity, these three artists engage with renewed conceptions of the medium that have emerged in the last few decades and have intensified with the proliferation of media and digital cultures.

At first glance, Mike Middleton's work appears simple, perhaps even a little naïve. Painted with bright acrylics on surprisingly tiny canvases are images of houses and buildings. Their smallness creates a beguiling charm reminiscent of amateur paintings sold at fairs and craft stalls. Initially, perhaps, we're tempted to doubt the art status of his paintings; but there's a deceptiveness here that unsettles and forces us to look again. Mike Middleton takes as his source material the property pages of local newspapers. His eye is drawn to photographs where there is a suitable play of colour, contrast, and lines. These found photographs serve not so much

as source materials for inspiration but as readymades to be appropriated and reused. Generally photographed artlessly by non-professionals, and representing the home as commodity object (a somewhat ambivalent commodity object insofar as the photographs convey a double message: 'Look at our home. Isn't it nice? Do you want to buy it?' and 'Look at our home. We don't want to live here anymore. Do you want to buy it?'), these photographs through the process of painting become something else altogether while nonetheless testifying to their origins.

For example, Mike Middleton accentuates visual aspects of the houses in a manner that recalls the mind back to moments within abstract modernist painting. The green door of the garage in one of the paintings reads less as a quotidian domestic feature than as a pure abstract green square juxtaposed against the painted mimetic representation of the house's exterior. That is to simply say, on this painting most of the brushwork is used to paint something that resembles a house; but the painted green square just is a green square. On other paintings shapes comprised of a single colour appear near the margins of the image in such a manner that they are disjunctive with the building depicted. Once again, these shapes—rectangles and triangles—present forms that correspond with instances from the history of geometric abstract painting (think of Josef Albers, for example, or Malevich); but the immediate origin of these shapes, in this case, derives not from the simplification of the house' features but, instead, from reducing the newspaper's layout to bare essentials. Inside of these rectangles and triangles would have been where the newspaper placed the property's price tag. Thus, the process of abstraction by which an

object is invested with exchange value and thereby commodified is abstracted a second time by the pictorialized abstraction of price tag into geometric shape. The brightness of the colours and simplification of forms bring to mind Pop Art, while the subject matter and the representation of architectural structure and the transformation of those structures into an array of formal shapes suggests that this series of paintings by Mike Middleton are an anglicized version of Dan Graham's Homes for America.

The source materials for Nick Middleton's paintings derive from photographs he has taken whilst travelling around central Europe. These photographs, when taken, were seldom intended to become paintings; instead, their potentiality was recognized months, sometimes years, afterwards. Many of these photographs are freighted with modern historical memory – the division of Berlin, the Cold War with its compartmentalization of the globe into first, second, and third worlds, for instance. Photographic historicization, however, is sedimented beneath depicted imagery rather than explicitly present or labelled. Sites where the notorious Berlin Wall once stood, but is no longer extant, are photographed. In these documents the past lingers; whether this lingering is visible or invisible (or 'in-the-visible') is hard to tell. Built-up urban environments are material traces and histories betokening human activity (the relative lack of human figures in these images is particularly striking to that extent). Because of photography's apparent indexical properties, the camera is a near-perfect recording mechanism that captures history in its visual availability to us. Like light travelling from a distant star, the scenes depicted here are exposures of the historical past. The impersonal grey tones of the paintings connote history and the

past in a respect that they perhaps wouldn't if they were coloured. Although Nick Middleton is exploring a slightly different seam from that explored by Gerhard Richter, their respective oeuvres possess affinities with each other. What makes the difference is that Richter's painting and his Atlas project are predominantly concerned with the German experience of memory and history after the traumatic rapture that was Hitler's Germany whereas Nick Middleton is mostly focused upon the historical legacy and present-day awareness of the disunification of Berlin into Western and Eastern zones and the ideological separation wrought by the so-called Iron Curtain more generally.

Of course, the images exhibited are not photographs; they are paintings. Nonetheless, their correlation with the photographic remains exceptionally strong. At mostly five by seven inches, these paintings precisely replicate the common physical dimensions of photographs and postcards. More properly speaking, the paper support that each painting is painted upon replicates the physical dimensions of photographs and postcards. The painting themselves are variably sized, and the correspondence between length and width is alterable. Sometimes the white margins around the painted image are larger than other times, engendering different tensions between depiction and blankness. The paintings however are carefully placed beneath a glass surface and within a black frame in a manner that produces two effects. Firstly, the second framing invokes a certain preciousness of the painting that suggests a kind of handicraft quality to postcards that are, in principle, normally mechanically reproduced. Their ostensible uniqueness thus requires protecting them from the passage of time and

accidents, and the act of placing the image behind glass serves to impose a particular symbolic value to the painting. Secondly, and connected with the first effect, is that the painting recedes or recoils from the beholder insofar as there is a distance enforced between the glass and the painting. A contrast with Mike Middleton's paintings is instructive insofar as that instead of receding from the beholder his paintings project outwards towards the beholder, and offer no protective screen that prevents the beholder from touching the surface of the painting.

If the paintings by both Mike and Nick Middleton demonstrate a focus upon exteriority structured by their respective engagements with the outside world conditioned by its social, economic, and historical manifestations, then Jane Frederick's works evince a withdrawal into the subjective, into interiority. Such a withdrawal, however, takes not the form of a refusal of the world but instead explores the internalization of the world through processes of experience and memory. And these processes, shown here on canvases that physically dwarf the other works exhibited here, are presented by Frederick not as personal expression as such. Rather she offers them as means for publicly testing and for making sense of experiences that might seem individuated. In other words, these paintings cannot be summed up by a statement like 'these paintings are a pictorial expression of my experiences, my memories' because they actually appear to ask 'do you have these experiences, these memories too? Do these images make sense to you?'

Of the three artists, Frederick is the most painterly, thereby generating a specifically painterly automatism (akin to Surrealism or Abstract Expressionism, where pictorial or painterly markings and

lines come into existence as if of their own accord and seemingly represent unconscious thought processes) rather than a photographic one. But this statement apropos Frederick's painterliness demands to be qualified for her complex process originates from a photographic archive that she has amassed and organized over the years. These photographs are an admixture of documented locations visited in the last twenty years and photo-shoots with models carried out by herself. After that, the photographs are manipulated, colour-enhanced, and conjoined; then they are printed on non-absorbent paper. Because of the non-absorbency, the printed image quickly begins to run and distort, and whilst this happens Frederick photographs the successive stages of the picture's disintegration. Next, the photographed models are layered upon the new photograph depicting the disintegration of the earlier picture. Finally, the new combo-image is reinterpreted upon canvas as a large painting (or sometimes as an etching). All this creates a complex, oscillating relation between painting and photography. Photography is the initial stage; then allowing the inks of the printed image to distort upon the non-absorbent surface is a process equivalent to painting; back to photography again, after that; and then painting is the conclusion. Somewhat like psychoanalytic/Surrealist automatism, this surrender to chance events of the painterly medium and juxtaposition of seeming randomly elements appears pledged to reconstructing a semi-latent memory had but forgotten or a memory not quite had but plausibly existent. To that degree, it builds upon the mnemonic function of archives and photographs. Because of the communal interpretative possibilities of Frederick's paintings ('do you have these experiences, these memories too? Do these images

make sense to you?’), the viewer is invited to assist Frederick in reconstructing or proving the actuality of her memory, and therefore enact the transition from semi-latent to manifest memory. And what motors our interpretation is the recurrence of figures and elements from painting to painting, effectively hinting an underpinning narrative uniting these paintings into a single memory sequence. Yet we don’t have access to Frederick’s memories – perhaps in the way these paintings depict memories that Frederick doesn’t quite have access to either – and thus there’s no way test the validity of any narrative we construe, or of the truth-content of each photograph for that matter.

In this brief essay, I have sought to highlight some of the ways these three artists respond to issues and debates regarding the relation between painting and photography, and point to the differences and connections between their various artistic practices. In doing that, I have perhaps pushed my interpretations in directions slightly or significantly askew from the self-understanding of the artists themselves; for instance, all three are happy to refer to themselves as painters while I prefer to call them ‘painters’. None-the-less, we all agree there’s an exploration of photography here that can be profitably carried out within the framework of painting. Framing, however, occupies an important place in this exhibition and its role should be highlighted before bringing this essay to a close.

As we have already seen, the rectangular frame common to photographs evinces photography’s historical and conceptual derivation from painting and, in that way, runs against the grain of the circular frame mechanically natural to the photographic image. But the photographic frame obeys a very different logic insofar as it’s based on

a procedure of cropping. The cropped image, or the croppedness of the image, is a composition-assisting element that selects its image from a wider world and is continuous with that wider world. It makes sense to imagine what the rest of the immediate world or local environment not included in the cropped photograph looks like. Cropping is the procedural logic of photography; the photograph is an incomplete representation of the world. Paintings figure a different framing. The painted image – even when copied from a real scene that existed directly before the painter’s eye – acts as if a self-contained world beyond which lies nothing (except, perhaps, other worlds) rather than as being continuous with the outside world. This is especially apparent with modernist painting, where the surface of the canvas is frequently traversed and determined by its framing border (Frank Stella’s irregular polygon paintings are a prime example).

A rhetoric of framing enters into different zones of experience, too. It seems natural enough to say that the world is framed for us in different manners depending upon our social background, nationality, education, and the like. Returning to the artistic sphere, moreover, it’s notable that institutional critique art emphasized and analysed the discursive frame – the motley of institutions, markets, histories, etc., that comprise the artworld and the recognition of which are often occluded by the focus upon the individual artwork. Finally, the philosopher Martin Heidegger has argued that our modern age has been dominated by a kind of ‘enframing’ – Gestell – that conditions our relationship to the world by making the world appear measurable, quantifiable, and transformable into stock or ‘standing reserve’ (Bestand).

Note the different frames present in the artworks exhibited in this show. Sometimes the depicted framing edge in Mike Middleton’s work seems incongruent with the literal frame of the canvas, and sometimes coincident with it; Nick Middleton utilizes a double-framing: the first framing of often varying thicknesses in relation to the consistent dimensions of the card he paints upon and the second as a protective black frame that safely distances the painting from the beholder; Frederick deploys a curiously fragmented frame, where the inner world woven in paint threatens to overrun or dribble over the material world of the canvas. If it’s legitimate to claim that the works produced by these artists are neither quite paintings or photographs, and that they are simultaneously paintings and photographs, then one outcome of these works might be to indicate a different sense of framing – a suggestion that we can see and frame the world differently, possess an alternative or diverted conception of realism.



Jane Frederick

'Domaine is another portmanteau word for which it would be hard to find an English equivalent. 'country estate' has inappropriate connotations. 'Demesne' fits in some ways but it is a word not commonly in use.

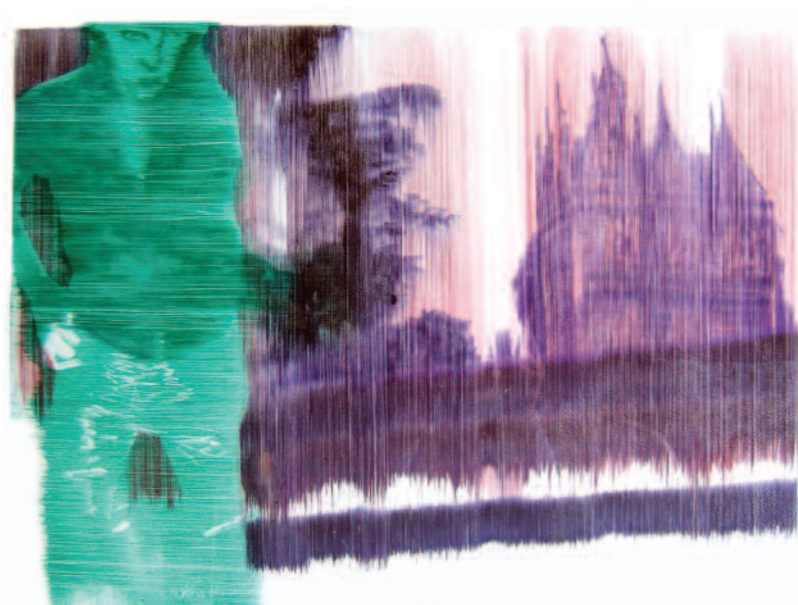
To the characters in the story domaine would be an everyday word suggesting a fairly important private property attached to a manor house or chateau; at the same time it could have the broader, vaguer meaning usually associated with our use of the word 'domain'. The author in fact does use it repeatedly with less precise, more poetical meaning in mind. With these qualifications a literal, if not exact, translation seems the best solution.'

Notes from the translator, taken from the novel *Le Grandes Meulnes* by Alain Fournier, 1913.

DOMAIN; ENCOUNTER
MONOTYPE
2009



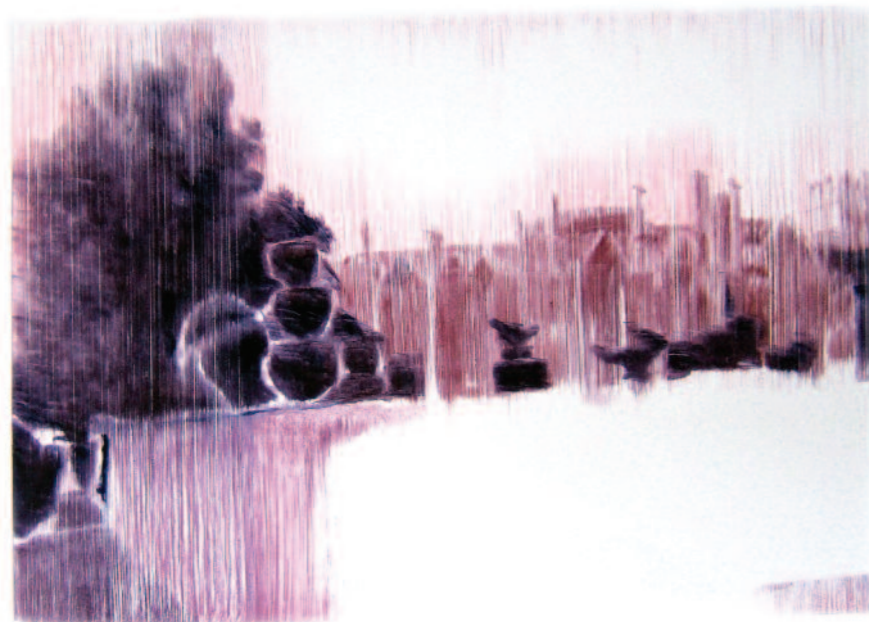
DOMAIN; FLIGHT
MONOTYPE
2009



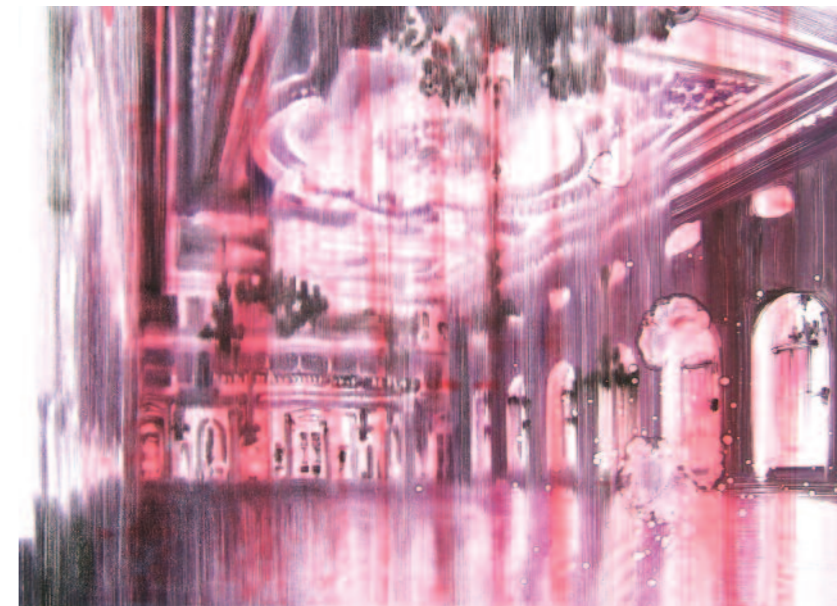
DOMAIN; MUTED
MONOTYPE
2009



DOMAIN; SHELTER
MONOTYPE
2009



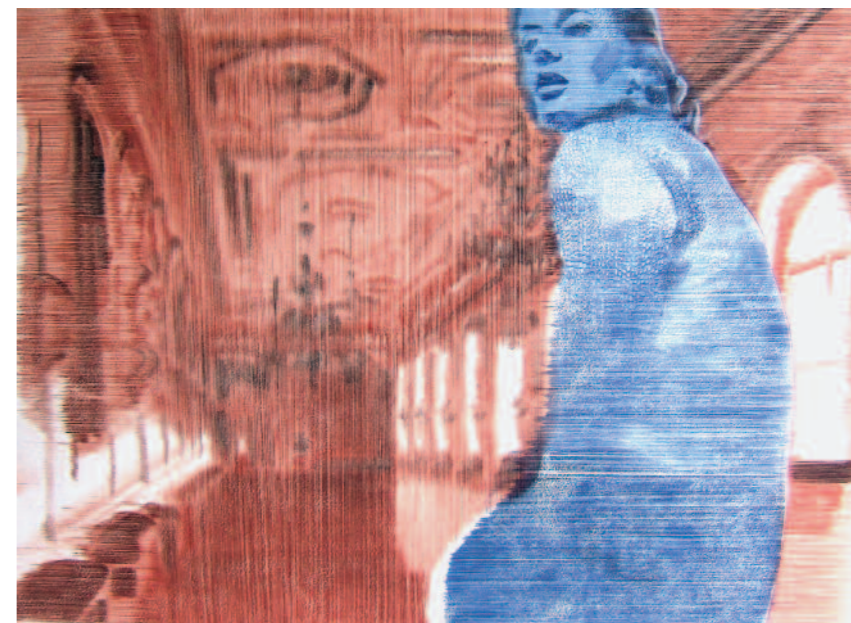
DOMAIN; VACATED
MONOTYPE
2009



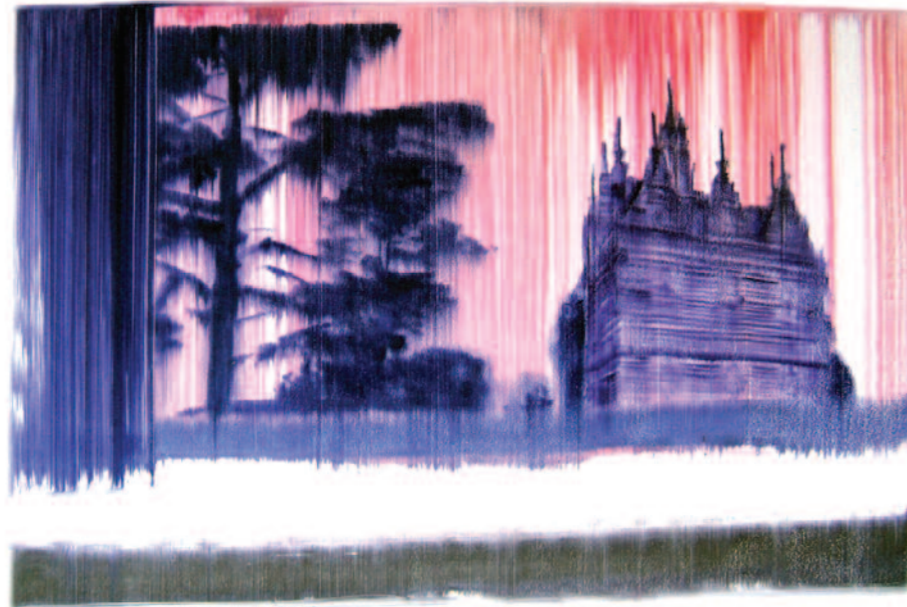
DOMAIN; SOAKED
MONOTYPE
2009



DOMAIN; SEDUCED
MONOTYPE
2009



DOMAIN; SEDUCED
MONOTYPE
2009



DOMAIN; SALON
ACRYLIC/ ENAMEL ON CANVAS
2010



DOMAIN; WAITING
ACRYLIC/ENAMEL ON CANVAS
2010



DOMAIN; SCHLOSS
ACRYLIC/ENAMEL ON CANVAS
2010



DOMAIN; SOAK (version 1)
SILKSCREEN AND ETCHING
2009



DOMAIN; SOAK (version 2)
SILKSCREEN AND ETCHING
2009



DOMAIN; ILLUMINATE (version 1)
SILK/SCREEN AND ETCHING
2009



DOMAIN; ILLUMINATE (version 2)
SILK/SCREEN AND ETCHING
2009



DOMAIN; LIBERTY
SILKSCREEN AND ETCHING
2009



DOMAIN; DIALOGUE
SILKSCREEN AND ETCHING
2009



DOMAIN; WAITING
SILKSCREEN AND ETCHING
2009



DOMAIN; LIBERTY1
DIGITAL PRINT
2009



DOMAIN; LIBERTY2
DIGITAL PRINT
2009



DOMAIN; LIBERTY3
DIGITAL PRINT
2009



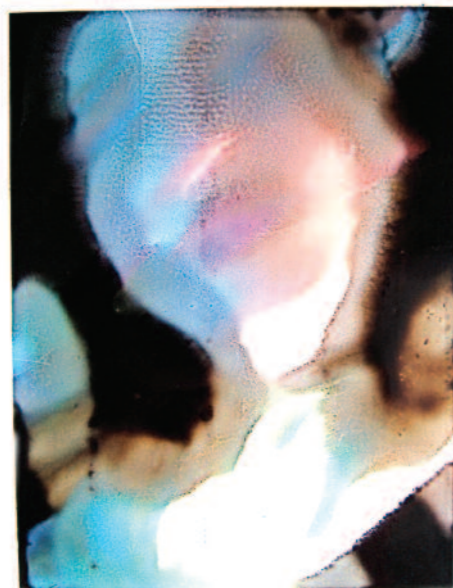
FALLING1
DIGITAL PRINT
2009



FALLING2
DIGITAL PRINT
2009



FALLING3
DIGITAL PRINT
2009



FALLING4
DIGITAL PRINT
2009



FALLING5
DIGITAL PRINT
2009



DOMAIN; RECOLLECT
DIGITAL MONOTYPE
2009



DOMAIN; JUNCTION
DIGITAL MONOTYPE
20092009



DOMAIN; REFUGE
DIGITAL MONOTYPE
2009



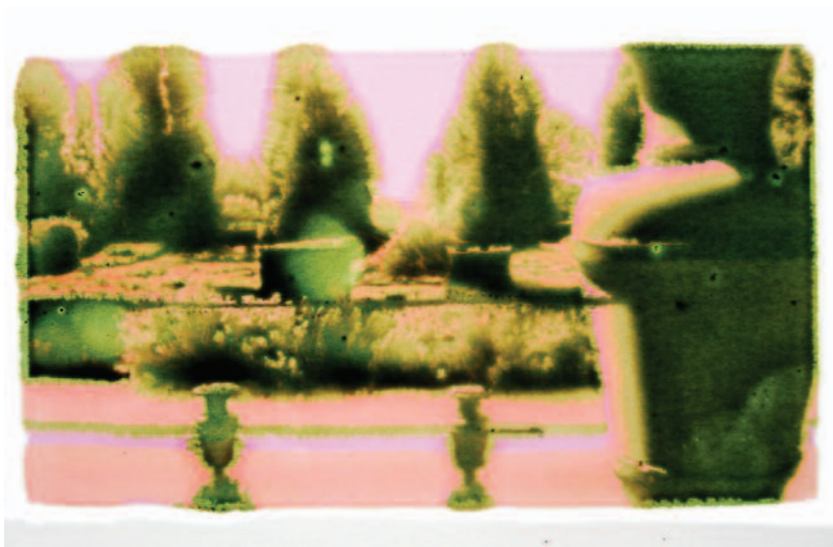
DOMAIN; MEANDER
DIGITAL MONOTYPE
20092009



DOMAIN; STATUARY
DIGITAL MONOTYPE
2009



DOMAIN; LABYRINTH
DIGITAL MONOTYPE
2009





Michael Middleton

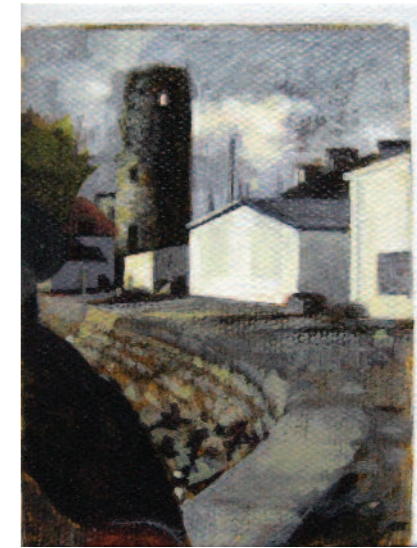
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A Distant prospect 2 2006

A Distant Prospect 2006



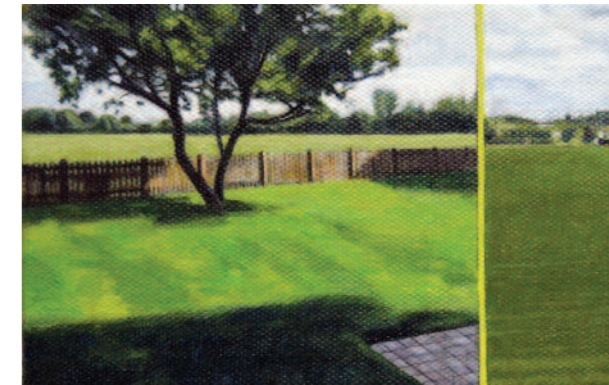
A Distant prospect1 (oil painting) 2006

A Dream Home Sudbury 2010



Bures 2007

Burnham on Crouch 2008

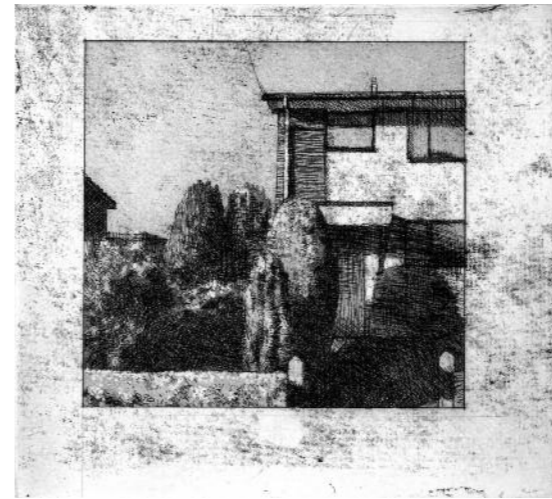
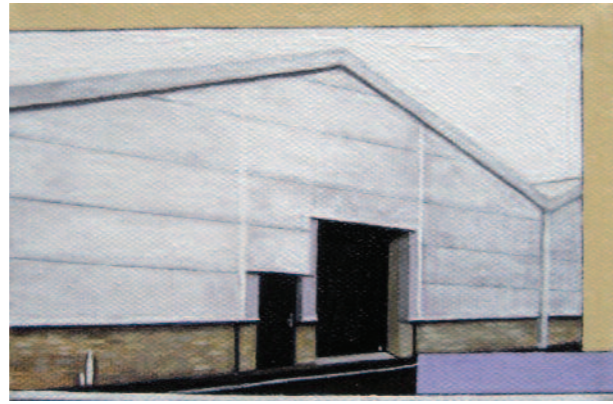


Clacton on Sea 2007

Commercial Property (Unit 6) 2009

Corner Plot (Etching)2009

Dark Garden 2007

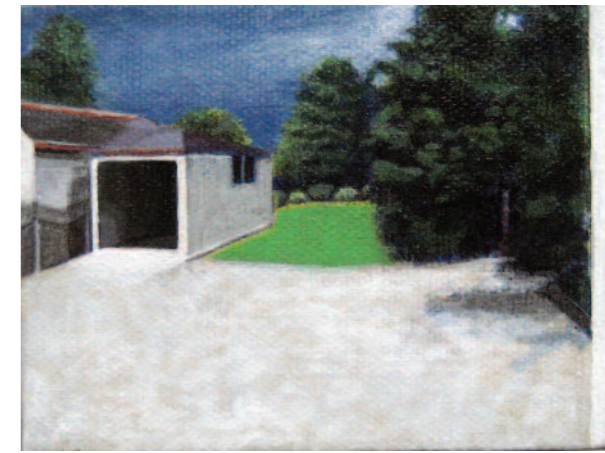


Double Garage 2009

Dovercourt 2007

Dream Garden 2009

Dream Garden 2009



East Mersea Price Reduction 2007

Ersea 1 2007



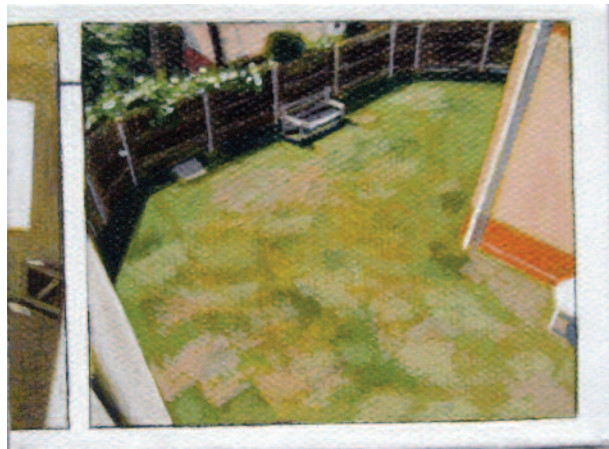
Ersea 2 2007

Fingringhoe Detached 2007



First Floor Apartment 2007

Garage 2007



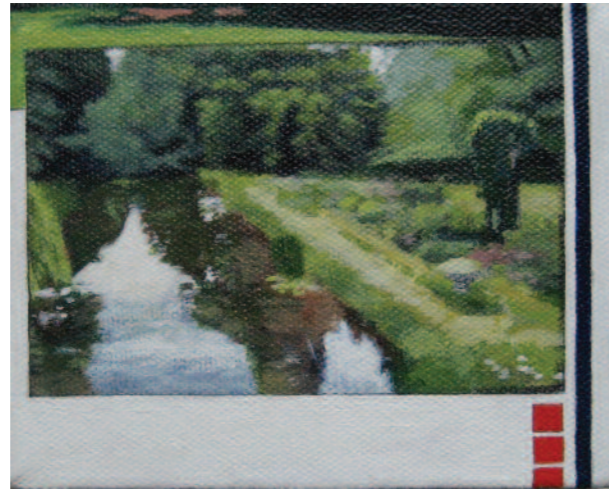
Garden in Rayleigh (Etching) 2008

Great Baddow 2009



Ground Floor Apartment 2009

Kelvedon (views over river) 2008



Kelvedon nr. to Station 2010

Langenhoe View 2008



Langenhoe View Study 2008

Lawford Dale 2007



Leiston 2008

Lexden (One Bedroomed Flat) 2009



Lexden Garden (Price on Application) 2007

Lucy Lane Industrial Estate 2009.

Mersea Four Bedroomed Detached 2008

Mersea Four Bedroomed Detached 2008



New Drive 2010

Other People 2007

Property of the Week 2008

Purvis Way 2006



Quiet Garden 2007

Rayleigh 2 2008

Rayleigh 2008

Rowhedge 2007



Small Garden 2007

Stratford St Mary 2009



The Back Garden Lexden 2008

The Back Garden Lexden (in colour) 2008

Tolleshunt D'Arcy 2007



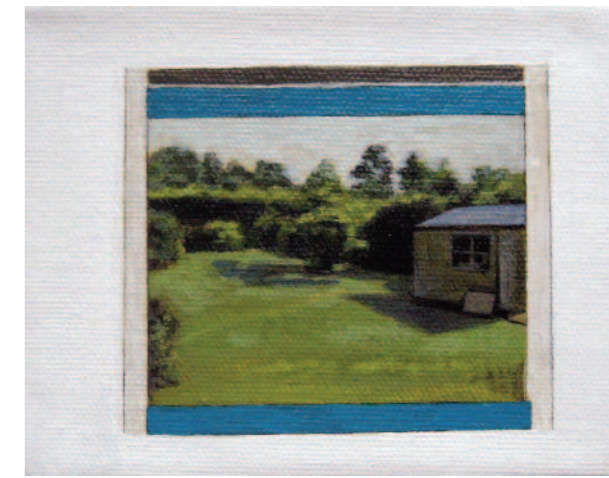
Town 2 Beds 2009



Victorian Era 2010

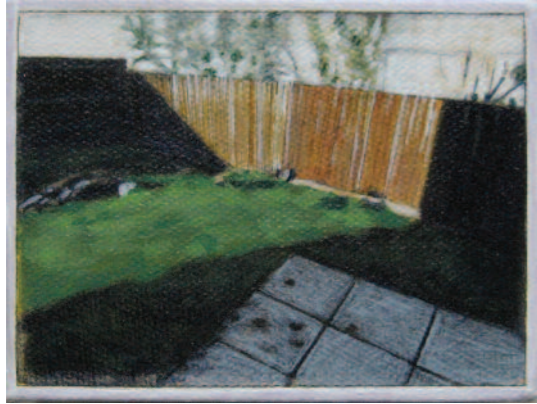


Village of Layer 2007



Waterside Lane 2007

West is Best 2007



West Mersea Reduced Property 2009

West Mersea Semi 2007



Within a Short Walk 2010

Wivenhoe 2009





Nicholas Middleton

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Entrance To Communal Living (2009) Oil
on canvas, 104x146cm



Subway (2008) Oil on canvas, 101x101cm



Haggerston (2007) Oil on paper, 10.2x15.2cm Private collection



Recording (2007) Oil on paper,
10.2x15.2cm Private collection



Warehouse Study (2007) Oil on paper,
10.2x15.2cm



Apartment Block At Dawn (2008) Oil on paper, 10.2x15.2cm



Housing On The Edge Of A City (2008) Oil on paper, 10.2x15.2cm



The Asiatic Company Buildings, Copenhagen (2009) Oil on paper, 10.2x15.2cm



Improvement Works (2009-10) Oil on paper, 10.2x15.2cm



Central European Railway Station at Night
(2009-10) Oil on paper, 10.2x15.2cm



Graffiti (2010) Oil on paper, 10.2x15.2cm



Escalator (2010) Oil on paper, 10.2x15.2cm



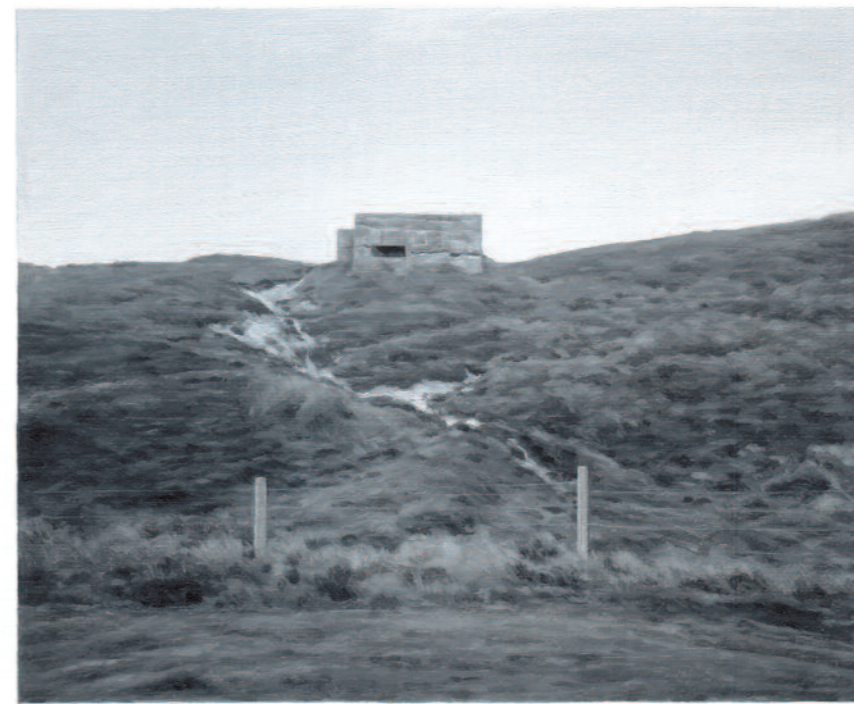
Ticket Barriers (2010) Oil on paper, 10.2x15.2cm



Classical Ruins, Dusk (2010) Oil on paper,
10.2x15.2cm



Coastal Defences (2010) Oil on paper,
10.2x15.2cm



Motorway Picture (2010) Oil on paper,
10.2x15.2cm



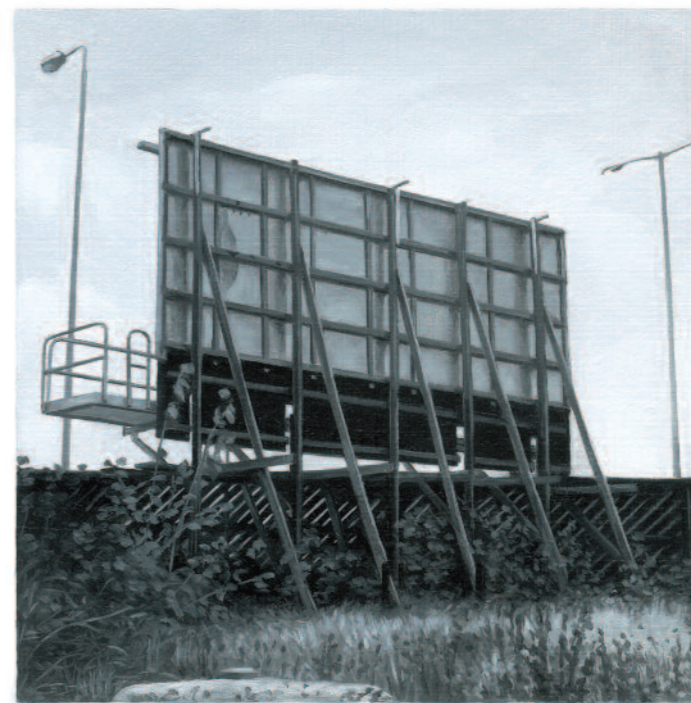
Suburban Garden (2010) Oil on paper,
10.2x15.2cm



Convenience Store (2009-10) Oil on paper,
10.2x15.2cm



Hoarding (2010) Oil on paper, 10.2x15.2cm



Grain Store (2010) Oil on paper,
10.2x15.2cm



Development Site (2010) Oil on paper,
10.2x15.2cm



The Moleman's House (2010) Oil on paper,
10.2x15.2cm

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