



WENDY
ANDERSON

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Odds and Evens

EAGLE GALLERY EMH ARTS



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'The use of traveling is to regulate imagination with reality, and instead of thinking of how things may be, see them as they are.' –SAMUEL JOHNSON¹

MANY ARTISTS HAVE A DUAL LIFE to sustain their creative existence. For most of us, we have a day job and a studio practice; but what happens when your occupation takes you away from the studio and into an entirely different world? The recent body of drawings and paintings by Wendy Anderson reflect an artist constantly on the move. Her practice is a holistic process that continues regardless of whether she is on a long distance flight, resting in a hotel room or painting in her studio. The threads of ideas start in notebooks and on hotel stationery that gestate over time before becoming fully realised as paintings. Her new exhibition at the Eagle Gallery, London, *Odds and Evens*, presents a body of work that has been growing over the past few years, bringing together experiences of a life on the road, in some of the world's most exotic locations and developing nations.

Wendy Anderson grew up in Northern Scotland, studying Fine Art in Aberdeen and Birmingham before moving to London in her twenties. She found her career as an artist develop over several stages, each informing her practice, taste and knowledge. She has worked in the education departments for some of the most well-known public galleries including Whitechapel, Serpentine, Hayward, Royal Academy and Camden Arts Centre. Her path led her to teach on Art Degree courses at Central St. Martins and then Wimbledon, before moving into her current role as Director of International Recruitment CCW (Camberwell Chelsea Wimbledon Colleges of Arts), travelling the world to creatively promote the university through workshops, exchanges and exhibitions. At the height of her travels she was making up to ten trips a year for two- to three-and-a-half weeks abroad each time. She has spent many weeks in Asia, South America, Russia and the USA. It is worth noting that her journeys are made not as a tourist, but in a work capacity, that provides her a deeper insight into these places.

During her travels she began to accumulate information; as a creative person she continued her urges to make, using the resources to hand, be they small notebooks forming journals of notes or hotel stationery covered in beautifully crafted doodles. When she returned from her travels she would

find herself with piles of 'souvenirs' from her trips: ticket stubs, travel passes, recorded snippets of conversations, photos and ideas, that started to feed into her artworks. Her drawings offer an insight into her practice; they are more immediate sketches and thoughts, testing out abstract arrangements, qualities of mediums such as watercolour and ink, also the introduction of collage. One pivotal piece is the collaged drawing *Untitled (New Delhi)* placed on stationery from The Imperial, New Delhi, it states:

**NO
ROADSiGnS
– horNs
haND painted
GAtes
Five Star hOTELS
TREES**

The layout feels somewhat *ad hoc* but the words it forms are significant, as they describe her associations of this city. The frenetic and overwhelming energy of India is reduced to a series of lines – concrete poetry. This experimental piece is a precursor to the more recent numbers paintings presented in *Odds and Evens* that find ways to translate her stories into concise artworks.

Anderson made her first 'Numbers' painting in 2008 – composed from cut-out sections of newspapers and magazines, either written onto or removing the numbers and letters to appropriate for her canvas. It is an ordered jumble of symbols, arranged in a series of squares, forming what could be an elaborate clock face or decorative sign. As the body of work has developed from 2008 to the present, the forms have reduced to offer a clearer message and occupy a more minimal space. An example of which is *One Week*, 2014; it lists two flights: 16D and 82C and hotel rooms 2905 and 2918. There is no indication of where Anderson was or how she felt at that time – apart from sometimes in the titles. Perhaps a frequent traveller would be able to decode more from this language, as the majority of viewers would have some idea of the reference points, but how important are they in our appreciation of the work? Her use of numbers and signs is cryptic but not with the intention of hiding information. They could be described as personal mementos; they are memories and as such contain enough information to trigger a sense of autobiography. You could argue that they are self-portraits as they tell tales of Anderson's life, yet there is a dual conflict in the isolation and anonymity she



experiences whilst travelling between these countries; her identity conjoins with these numbers and they categorise her.

In addition to the content, the paintings are heavily weighted in formal considerations such as use of motif, composition and colour. As noted, the layout of the paintings act as signs in themselves, there is an order and sense of balance to their placement, but not a hierarchy of motif. The painted areas are composed from layers of oil paint, floating signs highlighted by bands of circles, sitting upon totems, rectangular signage boards and more. Anderson uses hand-bound oil paints created from raw ground pigment and oil binders to maximise control of her palette. In her formal education she learnt about colour theory and this interest has continued into her research of the properties of pigment and their places of origin. She doesn't link the choice of pigment to the location of the paintings so the colour use is instinctive and permeates from her sense of these places. Looking at photographs taken on her travels, this can be evidenced more clearly from the sights that have stayed in her mind. The choices are also inspired by the Modernist painters she has experienced and admired during her days working in museums, soaking up their colour palettes and presentation. One example is Prunella Clough who documented post World War II industrial Britain through her colour, textures and abstraction. They share parallels in their interest for exploring the mundane elements of society without necessarily defining the content or subject of their paintings.

The painted forms are combined with collaged elements, roughly cut out from discarded magazines, that sit upon the canvas in textured strips of lines and digits. Using abstracted models' faces, hair and fabrics from fashion adverts, or generic images of the urban landscape, they continue the painterly quality whilst quietly referencing Anderson's travels. They also are a nod to Matisse's cut-out period – he invented this method of working in his later life due to the restrictions of ill health and immobility. He described the process: 'I am obliged to remain often in bed because of the state of my health, I have a little garden all around me where I can walk.'² His works are celebrated for their clarity of line, bold gestures and reduced forms. Although Anderson's paintings are made with much more freedom they still marry the two separate parts of her life; and likewise they replicate that same air of immediacy and confident simplicity of shapes. In truth, they are made over several weeks or months, the durational progress of the paintings allows a careful balance to occur between the numbers, objects and lines as they layer up over time.



Her memories not only resonate in the 'Number' paintings but also in a series of larger paintings such as *Balloon Block*, 2015–16. This is one of the richest images of the exhibition; it combines many different ideas of her practice. In part, inspired by a plaster balloon sculpture made during her residency at Kuandu Museum of Fine Art in Taiwan, it positions these balloons on what she describes as an 'origami paper fold game' or fortune teller, that perhaps alludes to the feeling of unpredictability within her life despite having a preordained schedule to these trips. There is another nod to her occupation as the structure is sitting on a tripod for presentation. It also includes her own source material, a photo of a rock that has been scaled up, transferred into a photocopy, then collaged into the canvas. Its rough surface is mimicked in some of her scraped brush strokes across the vibrant colour palette and multi-textured collaged elements. Building up an image of moving blocks of colour folding and unfolding, it has a sense of potential energy, where the forms are lifted and moving within the canvas. She is very aware of the balance within the canvas and this concern can be seen in all of the paintings. They have a strong presence that fills the space, defining its territory, yet with a feeling of ease.

The paintings are completed at the point where more information could be added, but Anderson purposefully halts painting as she puts it, 'you start the idea, the viewer finishes it'.³ This reinforces the idea of her providing just enough information in her 'Numbers' paintings; they draw the audience in and leave them thinking. Although these pieces talk of a world passing her by she has no regrets for it has enabled her to explore the world, growing in confidence and allowed privileged experiences. Anderson's paintings find their roots and inspiration from everyday life, which in her case is multi-cultural. This larger scope is subtly presented as abstract paintings with a figurative core. In an increasingly worrying time for global politics; her body of work compounds the importance of openness, freedom of travel and exchange.

—FIONA GRADY, February 2017

1. Hester Lynch Piozzi, *Letters to and from the Late Samuel Johnson*, Volume I, 1788, 137

2. André Verdet, *Prestiges de Matisse: Précédé de visite à Matisse, entretiens avec Matisse*, 1952, 20

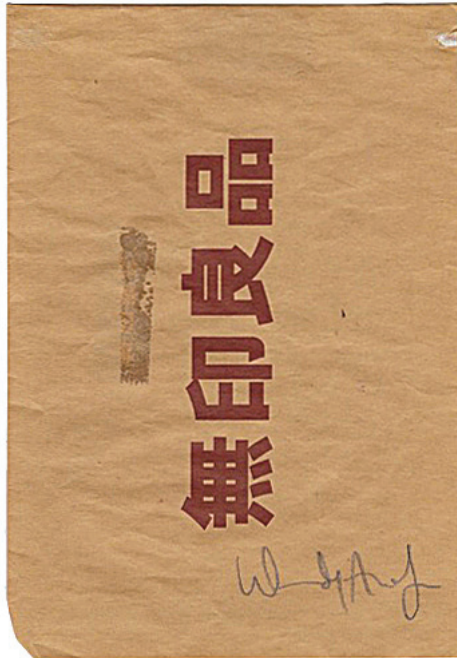
3. Wendy Anderson, at her studio, in conversation with Fiona Grady, 12 February 2017





List of Works

- 2 *American Flights* 2014
oil and collage on canvas
77 × 64 cm
- 5 *One Week* 2014
oil and collage on canvas
77 × 77 cm
- 7 *Hotel Seoul* 2014
oil and collage on canvas
91 × 61 cm
- 9 *Balloon Block* 2015–16
oil and collage on canvas
171 × 151 cm
- 10 *Flight 21F* 2014
oil and collage on canvas
76 × 51 cm
- 12 *Untitled* 2008
Brown envelope/artist's signature
17.5 × 12 cm
- 14 *San Francisco* 2015
mixed media on canvas
60 × 45 cm



Before I came to Hong Kong

(After Chapter One of Gertrude Stein's
The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas)

I was born in Elgin, Morayshire, Scotland. I have in consequence always preferred living in a milder climate. My mother's father worked in farming and forestry, near to his hometown of Granton on Spey in the Scottish Highlands. He married my grand-mother who was very fond of gossip. My mother Sarah (Sybil) was an identical twin, the more reserved and serious, compared to her twin sister, Catherine.

My father was born and brought up on a small farm-holding in Alves, near to Elgin. His cousin, Mabel Anderson, became the nanny to the royal family, looking after Charles, Anne, Andrew and Edward. She was the daughter of a policeman. It is said Prince Charles is particularly close to Mabel. I never met her. I am a republican. I am a painter with a love of textiles, interiors and flowers – even vegetables and fruit – trees. I like a view and like to sit and admire it.

I led in my childhood a good Scottish schooling. I studied music classically, with a strong voice and enjoyed singing Schubert and traditional Scottish songs. When I was eighteen years of age I went to art school in Aberdeen and my life changed.

WENDY ANDERSON 2016

(Written in a hotel whilst looking at a view of Hong Kong.)



WENDY ANDERSON

Education

- 1979–83 Grays School of Art, Aberdeen, Diploma in Fine Art
- 1983–84 Birmingham Polytechnic, MA Fine Art
- 2005 SEDA PDAF Award, Supervising postgraduate research

Solo Exhibitions

- 2016 *Odds and Evens* Eagle Gallery/EMH Arts, London
- 2015 *Travel the World* Kuandu Museum of Fine Art, Project Space, Taipei
- 2000 *Blue* Eagle Gallery/EMH Arts, London
- 1997 *Crystalline and other paintings* Adam Gallery, London
- 1992 Whitechapel Gallery touring show, Homerton Hospital, London
- 1991 Lauriston Gallery, London
- 1989 *Woman in Vogue* Freud's, London
- 1987 Spitalfields Workspace, London
Tom Allen Centre, London

Awards

- 1983 Chalmers Bursary RSA, Edinburgh

Artist in Residence (Selected)

- 2015 Kuandu Museum of Fine Art
Taipei National University of the Arts, Taipei
- 2002 Field Institute, Hombroich Museum, Düsseldorf
- 2000 Bishop Challoner School, London (Whitechapel Gallery)
- 1994 Victory School, London, (Hayward Gallery)
- 1993 Hallfield School, London, (Serpentine Gallery)
- 1994 Alderman Smith School, West Midlands
- 1985 Brooke Special School, Rugby
- 1985 Mayfield Special School, Handsworth, Birmingham

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neil@typog.co.uk

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EAGLE GALLERY **EMH** ARTS

159 Farringdon Road London EC1R 3AL

T 020 7833 2674 E emmahilleagle@aol.com

W www.emmahilleagle.com