

ART FIRST IN RESIDENCE AT EAGLE GALLERY

159 Farringdon Road, Clerkenwell, London EC1R 3AL

11 May–2 June 2017

PAPER MATTERS

Christopher Cook / Simon Lewty / Bridget Macdonald
Will Maclean / Jack Milroy / Simon Morley

Art First looks forward to welcoming our regular visitors and supporters as well as meeting new friends in this exciting residency, generously hosted by the legendary Eagle Gallery, where we will exhibit important and interesting works sharing a debt to the use of paper, books and literature.

Several of the participants are published writers: Cook and Lewty with poetry, and Morley as an historian. Maclean, Lewty and Milroy have recently collaborated in publications which will be available during the show. Meanwhile Macdonald's drawing practice constantly takes imagery and inspiration from her interest in ancient civilizations and the poetry and writing of the Romantic and 20th Century eras.

Christopher Cook includes pieces from his series *a chance encounter on the way down* executed at the Bogliasco Foundation on the hilly coastline of the Italian Riviera. The teetering location gives a dreamlike quality lodged between topography and abstraction, rendered in the liquid monochrome of his signature graphite technique. His more recent *Reaper and Bowl of Ink* suggests a disjointed narrative colliding rococo with 'now'.

Vigilant in Light and Air (1989) by **Simon Lewty** is rare and significant. Art First has recently featured re-discovered examples from this period when he combined borrowings from medieval bestiaries and colophons with his interest in modern re-creations of manuscripts, texts and calligraphy. Edward Lucie-Smith wrote in 1988: 'Lewty's palimpsests in code language of dreams and childhood . . . are maps of lunar journeys toward self-recognition'. Now eschewing figurative elements, the latest text-drawings employ an elegant secretary hand for the expression of biblical love-poetry, and a secret code of hidden meaning.

Bridget Macdonald contributes two sumptuous charcoal drawings demonstrating her fierce process of visual analysis applied to subjects that could only be treated lightly by others. Her inhabiting and understanding of landscape lead to unexpected highlights making associations we would ordinarily never encounter: a pair of wood pigeons which we have to squint at against the flurried cliff-face of the Isle of Wight's Undercliff, and the enigmatic field animal countering the distant city outline in *The Prague Hare*.

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Will Maclean has worked in association with poet and writer John Burnside on several occasions, notably with Art First's publication *A Catechism of the Laws of Storms*. The book contains a dozen collaged images each of which Burnside has responded with a poem reflecting a shared understanding, with sombre and beautiful evocations of love, loss and loyalty from the community of the sea-farers and their dependants. Maclean has taken each pairing a step further with a compelling series of colour screenprints, examples of which will be on view.

Jack Milroy's new work, *Pieces of Eight by Six*, is a consummate example of his pioneering treatment of the printed page. Copies of the new publication *Cut Out* (Black Dog, 2016) will be available. This charts his artistic evolution from art school rebel of the late 1950s to the continuing heretical 'evisceration' of books and printed matter from the 1970s to this day. Milroy emerges as a gentle and wry surrealist commentator. There is often a genuine astonishment factor resulting from his virtuosic facility—one that is underpinned by a steady intellect and purpose.

Simon Morley's most significant publication as an academic deals with 'word and image in modern art' and this literary field is also the area of his own work as an artist. His interests lie in recent cultural and political history and as such *Age of Extremes* is a significant 'book-page' example with its melancholy slabs of colour making their own commentary as they obscure the text on the pages of Eric Hobsbawm's masterwork. Another choice work is a book cover painting *Piero della Francesca*, epitomizing a rueful salute to the past in publishing practice.

We considered the title *Bookish* for this gathering of works, and indeed it is an adjective that can be readily applied to all six artists in different ways. Art and Literature is another category for the group. Perhaps the underlying common denominator is the implication of narrative, for every piece tells a story of some kind, leaving it wide open for our interpretation, the way poetry does.

A further shared feature is that every participant has taught art in national art schools (Morley and Cook are still actively in post) and all have work in distinguished museum public collections. Over two decades they have formed connections and enjoyed dialogues while exhibiting at Art First, and we strongly commend this body of work to collectors and newcomers alike.

ART FIRST

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*Transit Query,
Reaper and Bowl of Ink,*

Christopher Cook



Cantique des Cantiques, de Salomon: C'est la voie de mon bien-aimé! Je vois,
 Je vois, d'aussi haut sur les montagnes, pendissant sur les collines. Mon bien-
 aimé est semblable à la gazelle ou au faon des buissons. Je vois, il est derrière notre
 mur, il regarde par la fenêtre, il regarde par le toit. Mon bien-aimé parle & me
 dit: Lève-toi, mon amie, ma belle, et viens. Car voici, l'hiver est passé; la pluie cesse,
 cesse son chuchotement. Les fleurs paraissent sur la terre, le temps de qu'en est éternité. Et la
 voie de la tourterelle se fait entendre dans nos campagnes. Le figuier enlève ses feuilles,
 et les vignes en fleur se balancent leur parfum. Lève-toi, mon amie, ma belle, et viens!
 Ma colombe, qui te suis dans les sentiers du rocher, Qui te tiens caché dans les parcs escarpés,
 fais-moi voir ta figure, fais-moi entendre ta voix. Car la voie est droite, Et la figure est apaisée.
 Prenez, nous les regards, Les petits regards qui regardent la voie; Car vos regards sont en fleur.
 Mon bien-aimé est à moi, et je suis à lui; Il fait paître son troupeau parmi les lys. Quand que
 le jour se reflète sur les ombres, et que les ombres fuient. Prenez!... Sois semblable, mon bien-aimé,
 à la gazelle ou au faon des buissons, sur les montagnes qui nous séparent sur ma route, tendent des
 mines. J'ai essayé celui que mon cœur aime, je l'ai essayé, et je ne l'ai point trouvé... Je me livrai
 et je suis le tour de la ville, dans les rues et sur les places; Je cherchai celui qui mon cœur aime
 ... Je l'ai cherché et je ne l'ai point trouvé. Les païens qui font la route dans la ville vont venant.
 Cherchez-vous celui que mon cœur aime? Où le trouvez-vous? Où le trouvez-vous? Où le trouvez-vous?
 que mon cœur aime, je l'ai cherché, et je ne l'ai point trouvé jusqu'à ce que je l'aie amené
 dans la maison de ma mère, dans la chambre de celle qui m'a conçue. Je vous en conjure,
 filles de Jérusalem, par les gazelles et les Biches des champs, Ne vous en allez pas, ne vous
 allez pas l'amour, avant qu'elle seveille. Que est celle qui monte du désert, comme des
 colymbes de fumée, au milieu des vapeurs de myrrhe et d'encens Et de fait les aromates des
 montagnes? Voici la biche de Salomon, Et autour d'elle se jouent les biches de Simeon,
 des plus vaillants d'Israël. Tous sont armés de l'épée, sont exercés au combat; Surtout
 porte l'épée sur sa hanche, En vue des alarmes venant. Le roi Salomon s'est fait une
 statue de bois du Liban, il en a fait les colonnes d'argent, la dalle d'or, le siège de pourpre.
 Au milieu est une baccante, avec d'amour, des filles de Jérusalem. J.L. 2016.

Vigilant in Light & Air, 1989,

Cantique des Cantiques, 2016,

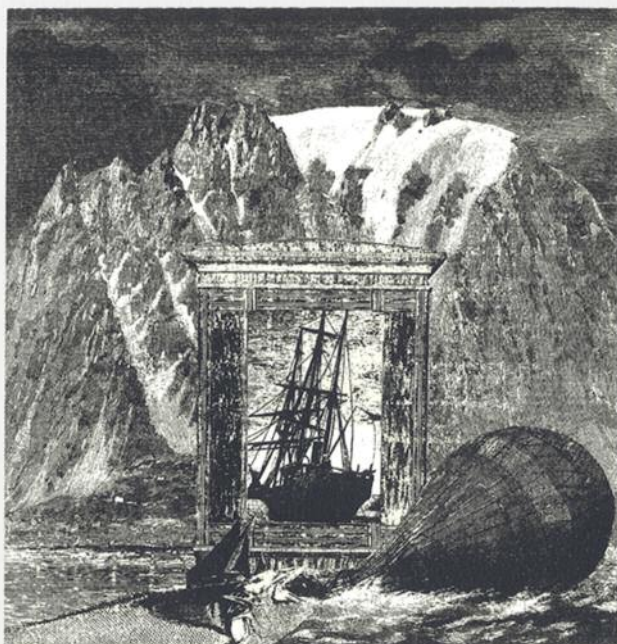
Simon Lewty



Octavius, 2017, medium, 56 x 76 cm

Prague Hare, medium, 81 x 122 cm

Bridget Macdonald



Stormbreeder

He was travelling north in
of questions I had never t
speck of a brother, someh
and calling home, in Russ
of tundra, harbours frozer
ripe with the smiles of ea
By the time I could read a
so all I found was blizzard
that might have been the l
- a longboat, say, or one o
that fold into the ice all w
the men on deck, with cal
and nothing but sky to co



Stormbreeder

He was travelling north in the garb
of questions I had never thought to ask,
speck of a brother, somehow outliving himself
and calling home, in Russian, through the years
of tundra, harbours frozen in his wake, the shadows
ripe with the smiles of early cosmonauts.
By the time I could read a map, he had moved away,
so all I found was blizzard, and a keel
that might have been the basis for a vessel
- a longboat, say, or one of those research ships
that fold into the ice all winter long,
the men on deck, with callipers and sextants,
and nothing but sky to compute, till the rations fail.

Stormbreeder

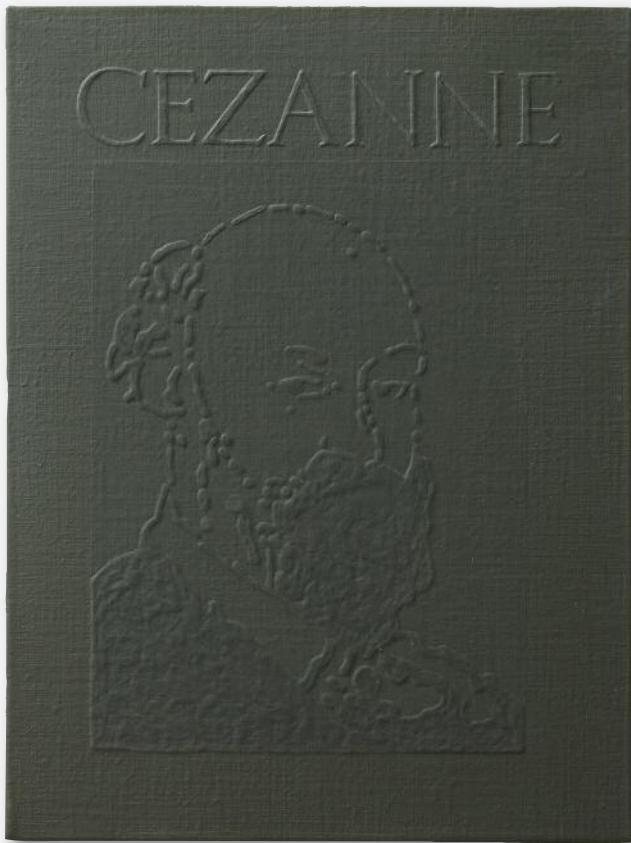
Cathecism of the Law of Storms

John Burnside & Will Maclean



Pieces of Eight

Jack Milroy



Cézanne (1948), 2012, acrylic on canvas, 40 x 30 cm

Piero della Francesca (1960), 2012, acrylic on canvas, 40 x 30 cm

Simon Morley