



extracting



NARRATIVES

JEROEN WITVLIET
NEIL McCLELLAND



JW *All Tomorrow's Parties* — *Mother*, 2017

EXTRACTING NARRATIVES

CO-CURATED BY ANGELA SOMERSET + DENISE LAWSON

THEY MAKE IT UP AS THEY GO: He says, “the classical is dead.” Then he says, “it isn’t.” Painting as an art form, still has a lot to say. Artists Jeroen Witvliet (*All Tomorrow's Parties*) and Neil McClelland (*The Perfect Nowhere*) intertwine narrative trajectories, drawing our attention to the underlying uncertainties embedded in their images and in the transitional spaces between them. Twenty large-scale paintings comprise the thematic exhibition *Extracting Narratives*, offering a classical twist on our contemporary gaze. Individually and collectively, the paintings invite contemplation, demolition and reconstruction of what is seen, known, remembered, feared, sensed and anticipated. The accumulation of imagery carefully arranged in the exhibition space instigates a roaming gaze. Roused to find meaning, we search the surface of the painted image. We stand back. We look behind the scenes. As viewers we are folded into the choreography.

All Tomorrow's Parties (Witvliet) is a series of oil paintings on canvas made with a large brush and a single hue – cadmium red light. Witvliet's choice to work in red (and in one instance, in red and black) creates a luminous glow that spills throughout the gallery and into the large street front window space, amplifying his haunting themes. *All Tomorrow's Parties* is permeated with imagery that rouses memories so vague that they slip through our fingers, leaving behind a thin patina of nostalgia and the ache to remember more clearly.

The Perfect Nowhere series (McClelland) consists of highly varnished full colour oil paintings on birch panels depicting relational scenes fused together by modulated layers of colour and shadow. In these 'Nowhere' places we witness the place of time in memory expressed through the choice of imagery, colour and the means by which the paint is used to articulate and dissolve form and space. However, the paintings also point to the untold variables, conditions and circumstances that inform the memory of place and the place of memory in the imagination. The familiar day to day gestures and events depicted in the paintings have, on one hand, a somewhat soporific effect on the viewer and at the same time the viewer cannot ever be completely at ease because of the heightened atmosphere and suspense at play in the frame.

CONNECTION INTERRUPTED RECONNECTION: The gauntlet is thrown down and we accept the challenge to join in the journey, where perceptions are shattered by encounters with the unexpected.

But are we not all wayfarers? Artists Jeroen Witvliet and Neil McClelland lead the way into a land of make and believe. At the threshold we leave some part of ourselves behind in order to enter unknown territory. We are immediately disoriented. The shadows are long and the horizon undulates with possibilities. Our looking is repeatedly interrupted and then our sightline is reconnected as we move among the works of the two artists. Tendrils of identities, relationships, mythologies and histories wind around us. We are swiftly drawn into a complex entanglement. And so we go.

Our eyes adjust: We are standing in front of the first painting entitled *The Earth Itself Grown Light*. We ask what the animal is holding up to the sky? He says, “I’m not telling.”

The exhibition space has been staged. Each of the large scale works is capable of instigating a unique tale of its own. Do we swallow their story or are we swallowed by it? We wander from room to room immersing ourselves in each of the scenes, assembling meaning from our collective fragments. We are pressed to conjure our own stories as we search for ways to fit into the grand scheme of things. Unconscious memories surface and then dissolve. The story is dreamlike. The story is harsh. This is life.

We are in flux. The real and the fantastical are enfolded within a gentle melancholy. Out of curiosity or maybe out of necessity, we manufacture hybrid narratives. The paintings of Jeroen Witvliet and Neil McClelland evoke enduring questions about the nature of our relationship to that which we are endlessly discovering and rediscovering.

FINDING HOME: We enter the space through the mother. She is on all fours, breast feeding two wolf pups. The image forewarns us of something. The energy is charged. We ask if he is the mother? He does not answer. We leave the world as we know it in order to enter another, to enter the Other. Here we meet three women wandering. Their burden is light. Their burden is heavy. They have the essential task of carrying the Mother – our beginning and our solice – the only thing that remains.

USING RED AS HIS PRIMARY COLOUR PALETTE, WITVLIET HAS CREATED EXPANSIVE PAINTINGS THAT EVOKE THE MYTHOLOGICAL, THE HISTORICAL OR SOME POSSIBLE FUTURE.

This new body of work is a continuation of my *Wayfarer* and *Sighting* series in which I explore what dislocation and the adaptation of a nomadic existence might look like and/or feel like as subject, viewer or participant. Through the manipulation and creation of 'could be landscapes' filled with referential (symbolic) objects, we are lead through what could be described as the memory of history – history not in the past tense but rather as a promise – one kept, broken or projected into an unknown future.

As subject/viewer/participant we are invited to contemplate the landscape, the arrangements, the purpose and the connections between images. The landscapes might seem familiar, as if we have wandered through them before. Alternately a sense of recognition might arise through another connection such as a film, a visualization from a book, or a childhood memory.

The paintings are intended to leave us hanging – like the feeling one gets when thinking that something else or something different could or should have been said, or wishing that you had taken another route or been more receptive to another. Are we mere spectators or fully involved in all that plays out around us – part of the party or standing uninvited at the door? In *All Tomorrow's Parties* there is a sense of loss – the viewer/participant is late and the party is over. And then the promise made to the spectator to become a participant shifts once more back to that nomadic existence. Grasping at straws and moving on.

PRACTICE

My paintings are informed by the day to day flow of observation, reaction, politics, interpersonal relations, desires, conflict and reflection, exposure to a barrage of imagery, ideas and news, passions and refusal to accept while linking multiple pasts into the contemporary. In response, I stubbornly embrace that which could be called the Poetic.

It is through my practice that I hope to stumble across a different way to make a connection with reality, to go beyond the immediacy of the first meeting and explore the realm that opens up when focusing more intently and repeatedly on a contemporary encounter. Linking these encounters to history, uncertainty of memory, notions of truth, power, dominance and manipulation in an attempt to get to the beyond of what we can describe, speak of or can define, form the integral parts of my research and practice. The whispering areas where the paint dissolves into something else, the silence in between the lines, the images at the periphery always escape our focus and a certain unease permeates this work.

MERGING FRAGMENTS OF THE PRESENT, THE PAST AND AN IMAGINED FUTURE, MCCLELLAND CREATES A FICTITIOUS WORLD A 'NO PLACE' IN WHICH WE MIGHT FIND SOMETHING OF OURSELVES AND OUR WORLD.

I inquire into notions of human happiness and perfectibility, the creation of Edenic paradises, disruption and dissolution of society, alienation and consumption, nature and culture, the monstrous and the beautiful, mythmaking and storytelling. I am especially drawn to the title of Paul Gauguin's painting *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* as evoking crucial questions for contemporary examination.

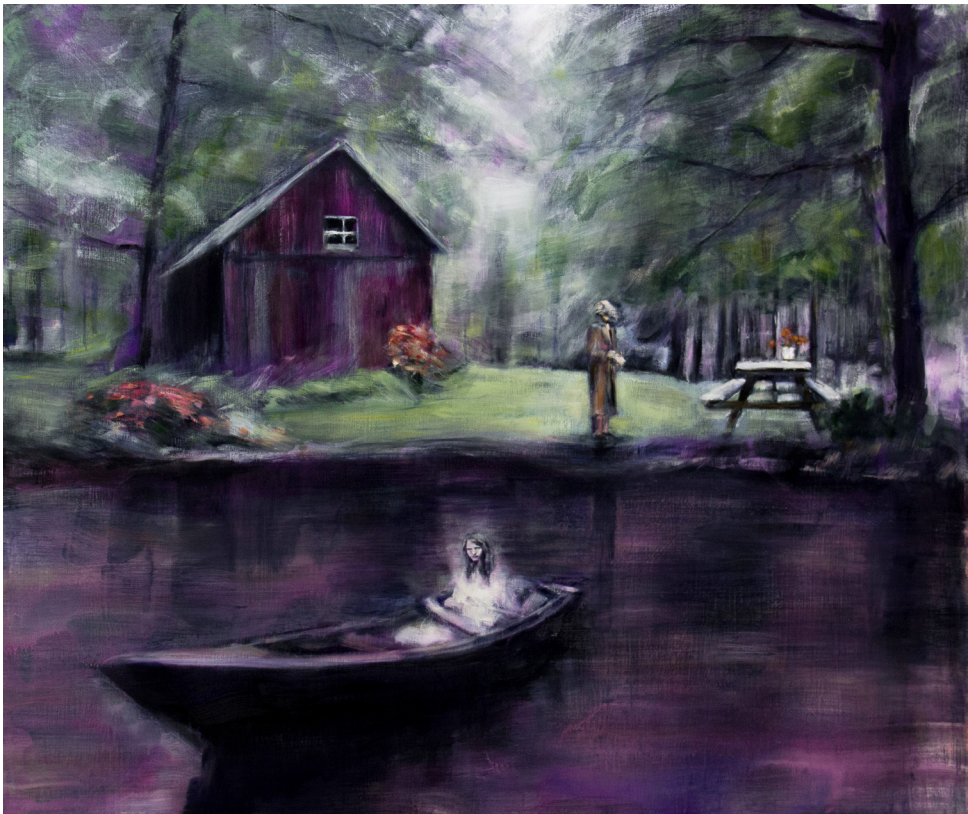
PRACTICE

I take imagery and inspiration from literature and film, along with historical art, contemporary, and personal sources. Drawing on an array of source material, I create combinations and layers of digitally edited compositions that form the basis for beginning a painting in oil. Using the qualities and possibilities of paint, I seek to convey a visceral sense of place and time to suggest what is simultaneously familiar but strange. Fragments of the real and unreal merge to create possible futures that have potential to evoke the dangers inherent in thinking that human ingenuity and technology can create a perfect society, but that might also hint at possibilities of a new beginning. I see my painting process as a form of inquiry in which I am attempting to grasp and create a sense of the utopic and dystopic contradictions that pervade our lives at this time.

NEIL MCCLELLAND is a Canadian artist originally from Quebec and currently located in Victoria, British Columbia. He received his MFA from the University of Victoria in 2014 and is a 2016 Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation grantee. Neil was the 2010 artist-in-residence at Harcourt House and an active member of the Edmonton art community during the many years he lived in Alberta. He has exhibited in artist-run, public, and commercial galleries across Canada and teaches at Vancouver Island School of Art and sessionally at the University of Victoria.

JEROEN WITVLIET is an artist born in the Netherlands. He has received his BFA from the Willem de Kooning Academie, Rotterdam, and studied at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design. Jeroen received his MFA from the University of Victoria, BC in 2014. He has had numerous solo and group exhibitions at artist run, commercial and public galleries in Europe and North America.

cover L—R
JW *All Tomorrow's Parties* — Renee, 2016
NM *There Can Be No Catastrophes*, 2016
JW *All Tomorrow's Parties* — Shelter, 2016
NM *The Earth Itself Grown Light*, 2016



NM *Now Inside the Mirror*, 2016

EXTRACTING NARRATIVES is an artistic program that brings together new work by contemporary painters Jeroen Witvliet (*All Tomorrow's Parties*) and Neil McClelland (*The Perfect Nowhere*) in an exhibition that draws attention to shifting relations found in daily life and varied stories told through the painted image. *Source Material* is a concurrent assemblage of photographs and sculptural objects by local visual arts students and alumni from NIC/ECUAD featured in CVAG's Community Space. An interactive community Make Art Project runs throughout the exhibition, beginning with an artist-led make event.



JEROEN WITVLIET ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES

OIL ON CANVAS

- 3 *All Tomorrow's Parties* — Renee, 2016
- 7 *All Tomorrow's Parties* — Ascent, 2017
- 8 *All Tomorrow's Parties* — Two Birds, 2016
- 9 *All Tomorrow's Parties* — Bleachers, 2016
- 10 *All Tomorrow's Parties* — Shelter, 2016
- 12 *All Tomorrow's Parties* — Flood, 2016
- 13 *All Tomorrow's Parties* — Departure, 2016
- 14 *All Tomorrow's Parties* — Incubation, 2016
- 16 *All Tomorrow's Parties* — Source, 2016
- 19 *All Tomorrow's Parties* — Mother, 2017
- 20 *All Tomorrow's Parties* — The Collector, 2017
- 21 *All Tomorrow's Parties* — Untitled, 2017

NEIL McCLELLAND THE PERFECT NOWHERE

OIL ON BIRCH PANEL

- 1 *The Earth Itself Grown Light*, 2016
- 2 *Beyond the Green Wall*, 2016
- 4 *Now Inside the Mirror*, 2016
- 5 *In Marvelous Captivity*, 2016
- 6 *The Gears Catch on the Minus*, 2017
- 11 *Only Myths Would Remain*, 2016
- 15 *Once in a Thousand Years*, 2017
- 17 *There Can Be No Catastrophes*, 2016
- 18 *Perhaps Voices, Perhaps Machines*, 2016

EXTRACTING NARRATIVES

EXHIBITIONS

21 January – 25 February, 2017

ALL TOMORROW'S PARTIES

paintings by Jeroen Witvliet

THE PERFECT NOWHERE

paintings by Neil McClelland

SOURCE MATERIAL

objects and images by

ECUAD/NIC Visual Arts students + alumni

EVENTS

21 January, 2017

11–1 PM MAKE ART PROJECT WORKSHOP

facilitated by Jeroen Witvliet + Neil McClelland

2 PM ARTIST TALK + ART OPENING

3 PM GRATEFUL CAKE PARTY

7 February, 2017

12 PM ARTIST TALK North Island College

Stan Hagan Theatre



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GALLERY
SHOP

TUESDAY TO SATURDAY 10-5
MONDAY TO SATURDAY 10-5

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