

*Dandelion*

Ed Burkes



*Dandelion* Ed Burkes

Foundation Derbyshire  
Jonathan Vickers Fine Art Award  
2019/2020

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Front Cover  
*Dandelion*



*Days Of Heaven*  
Gouache on Paper  
10x15cm

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# Foreword *by* Rachael Grime

Over the past twenty years, the Jonathan Vickers Fine Art Award has developed into one of the most valuable art prizes in the country, with each resident artist enhancing and enriching the cultural life of Derbyshire with the unique body of work that they create.

Key to our success are the invaluable partnerships that evolve and strengthen with each residency and last year we were delighted to announce an exciting new collaboration with Mall Galleries, whereby past exhibitors of the Federation of British Artist’s Futures Award (the UK’s largest annual survey of emerging figurative art), were invited to be considered for the Vickers residency.

Not only does this initiative enable us to include an exhibition at London’s Mall Galleries as part of the Award, it also introduced us to our eighth winning artist, Ed Burkes.

Ed’s vitality and talent is palpable and he immediately embraced every opportunity that the Vickers Award provides. He overcame the challenges of living in a new place during lockdown to create a bold and intriguing collection; a collection that reflects our county

back at us in an explosion of colour and theatre, littered with references to both our traditions and our everyday.

Ed approached all aspects of the Award with enthusiasm and professionalism, sharing his insight with undergraduates at the University of Derby’s College of Arts and working closely with Derby Museums on the curation of the *Dandelion* exhibition.

Sadly, lockdown meant that certain elements of the residency, including the planned community outreach project, did not materialise but we are incredibly grateful to Ed for his unstinting commitment and energy during these difficult times.

As ever, we thank Peter Ashworth and John Nicholson, Trustees of the Jonathan Vickers Charitable Trust, whose vision and generosity made the Award a reality.

We are also extremely grateful to the members of our Award Committee and our Partners: Derby Museums, the University of Derby, Rolls-Royce plc and Mall Galleries for their ongoing support and to Anna Bromwich, Lucy Bamford and Jack Kirkland for sharing their time and expertise.



*Bulldog*  
Oil on Canvas  
120x180cm



*A Sword in His Idol's Neck*  
Oil on Canvas  
120x180cm



## Commentary by Ed Burkes



*Fee-Fi-Fo-Fum*  
Oil on Canvas  
120x180cm



*Formidable*  
Oil on Canvas  
120x180cm

Knowing little about the county when I first arrived in October 2019, I was fascinated to learn more about the rich history and heritage of Derbyshire and discover my own response to 'A Sense of Place'. Little did I know that my residency would be curtailed so abruptly by the global pandemic, requiring me to leave my studio in Derby's Banks Mill and move away from the city for a few months. This meant that, whilst I was able to continue with my painting on the theme, my initial researches stood me in good stead but the scale of my work was forced to change, no longer having the luxury of my studio in which to produce larger scale canvasses.

The Dressed well has held my attention since the start of the residency. They are a fascinating historic and community-based tradition that spills into contemporary life. Using flower petals arranged on clay, often surrounded by a border containing text, the dressed well successfully seemed to encapsulate my visual interests in the county, whilst incorporating my interest in the relationship between visual language and text.

Compositionally, along with the tradition of the practice, it raised questions that range from its origins in paganism to the redundancy of the traditional male role, right up to the contemporary poetics of the fleeting and

the wilting nature of the pigmentation of the dressed well. In an ever saturated, digitalised and documented world, the fact that these well dressings hold such vibrancy, but for such a short space of time, cements it in its longevity. They are also creations of a natural world that has itself become a crucial and highly valued part of daily life for many people during the pandemic.

I was also intrigued by a sign I see whenever I drive into Derby. When you pass the Pentagon Island there is a hedgerow that has been planted spelling out the phrase 'Derby in Bloom' in bushes and ground cover. This phrase I also found graffitied onto the abandoned building of Friar Gate Goods Yard, which has been empty for the past 50 years.

The title of the show, *Dandelion*, is a nod to the practice of well dressing. I like the word 'dandelion' and the connotations associated with it: a weed. It has origins from French, Dent de Lion or, lion's tooth which, in itself, intrigues me.

My inspiration comes from things like the observations that happen as I walk to and from my studio. A typical day involves painting, having some coffee and painting more. Banks Mill Studios are open until midnight so this really helps with the painting flow. There is just as much looking as there is actual painting. I try and pull my thoughts on the world in quite

an abstract way as visual queries that interest me vary from day to day; street signs on the way to my studio, litter in a woodland, discussions in a pub. This is all fuel for me to work from.

I try and think of the process of making images as being similar to the way music sampling can decontextualise a source but gives a referential nod under the same breath. Listening to music helps me detach from where I am in the studio and to be completely enveloped by undulating emotional responses to what I am feeling rather than what I am trying to paint. This fuels my curiosity and formulates a thread that is worth pursuing. The honest attempt is what is so seductive about painting for me.

I want people to respond to my work in a way that doesn't have to necessarily be articulated. An inherent problem of my working process is that I don't know how to clearly prompt what I'm feeling and making images helps me articulate without articulating in a way that is personal. Making art often feels like you are trying to make bread, but you keep forgetting to put the yeast in.

The Award has given me the opportunity to concentrate on making work without the financial burden that engulfs young artists and has been a catalyst for the continued development and sustainability of my work as a painter.



# Slowing Down *by* Anna Bromwich

Ed Burkes wants to slow things down. In this new body of work, *Dandelion*, the young winner of the Jonathan Vickers Fine Art Award puts into practice various pictorial and textual devices to slow down the comprehension of the work, holding you there in mental gymnastics while your eyes scan the painting past the three second average that museum professionals call *grazing*. With a nod to George Baselitz’s upside-down paintings, and emboldened by artists Rose Wylie and Mary T. Smith before him, he flips text emblazoned across his paintings on its head, then around corners, along arms and legs, squashes it into corners, makes and corrects spelling mistakes, breaks up words and forces you to put them back together. “When you read a word ... it slows down how you view the image.”

A flaneur of sorts, Ed’s texts are absorbed from his experiences in Derby and the countryside beyond. He puts his money where his mouth is, practising his own slowing down, looking at the details. *Derby In Bloom*, cut out in hedgerows on the side of the A52, then plastered satirically on the side of a derelict carpet factory, Derby In Bloom RIP. BULLDOG, FORWARD, POWER NOW TRIP. Phrases

borrowed from shop window fronts on the walk to the studio, plucked from full sentences distilled to their essence. Short active words that punch, that feel like the hook of a pop song, that present themselves in daily life. “I guess it’s a clashing of discordant objects and words together that become interesting when you sit with them long enough.”

Now the eyes wander across the canvas, where clashing patterns, friezes and decorative elements fight for attention. Stop and take it in. Ed has responded to the uniquely Derbyshire practice of well dressing, a tradition in which wells are adorned with decorative panels created by pressing flower petals into clay. Ed’s pictorial division of the canvas and an interest in the decorative (already existent in his work) feels pronounced here, suggestive of the well dressings. *Sweet waters flow*, is even a direct reference to a 1917 well dressing in Wirksworth. A folk art for the benefit of all walking by, Ed has absorbed them into his pantheon of references, presenting a narrative, as they do, through text and image set within a structural framework.

These small acts of communication blasted into public spaces, from scrawled

graffiti to petal friezes, are gathered up, separated from their physical contexts until they are no more than thoughts and feelings and sent to live a new life in his paintings, cared for by figures in striped clothing and big hats. These characters populate this universe into which Ed’s observations of Derby(shire) are collaged; figures sitting, contemplating, adjusting a hat, playing instruments, bent double, arms and legs akimbo. In *FORWARD*, reference to Matisse’s *Dance* seems unmistakable. *A Sword in His Idol’s Neck* hints towards passion and revenge. This is a joyful, thoughtful world, sometimes beset by tragedy.

It is also a theatrical world. The men we come across in many of Ed’s paintings, such as *Dandelion*, which lends its title to that of the exhibition, are dressed up to the nines in a way that is evocative of various yesteryears, when men were afforded a little more leeway in flamboyant fashion. ‘Victorian pomp’ Ed, who enjoys prodding at notions of masculinity in his practice, says of the formally and florally dressed men in *Dandelion*. Dand(y)lion the text reads, if you ignore the ‘e’ for the ‘y’. Derived from the French *Dent de lion*, or Lion’s Tooth, the violence of the metaphor



*FORWARD*  
Oil on Canvas  
120x180cm



*In Bloom*  
Oil on Canvas  
120x180cm



works against the delicate nature of the yellow petal, borrowed from the well dresser’s palette.

In another scene from *Lance and Corporeal* the navy makes an appearance, reference to the artist’s brother, pulling a militarised language into the decorative fray. “A kind of uniform appears on my figures. I guess that is a nod to my twin brother, he is a Royal Marine Commando and lives a totally different life to me. [It’s an] uber-macho super male-dominated line of work.” If the smart uniform has something in common with the formal attire of the dandy recurrent in this body of work, the idea of the traditional sailor’s tattoo, the DIY freedom of expression beneath the uniform and another form of folk art with punchy taglines and crude rendition, is sensed in *Fi-Fi-Fo-Fum’s* playful giant heart.

In *Bulldog*, an acrobatic-looking girl and a stripey dandy - a circus ringmaster? - pose for the camera. Ringmaster’s stripey legs are caught up in a cartoon flash, Acrobat’s are poised supplely on his shoulder, foot behind the head where his forehead bears the words R.I.P. Derby In Bloom RIP. Are they fighting or dancing? Bulldog: British grit, war-time

determination, yet also lads, testosterone. Like a tarot card reversed, as the upside-down text would indicate, the push and pull between masculine and feminine is put into play, deliberately blurring the lines. Derby is blooming here, for Ed, taking his cue from the well dressings, is a true colourist. In a spectrum of colour, a lemon yellow base follows you around this body of work, *Dandelion*, Lion’s tooth.

In our post lockdown world it’s hard not to see painting through the new lens of what we have learned from isolation. Among the characters in the *Dandelion* world are those who sit quietly in thought, or in enjoyment of the world around. *Formidable*, *Derby In Bloom*. At whichever point these paintings were created over quarantine, which imposed itself in the middle of Ed’s Derby residency, they now feel synonymous with that very specific contemplation we were collectively forced through. Many of us have slowed down as a result, noticed the details, rethought the way they see the world. Perhaps Ed’s characters, living within the confines of their friezes are showing us the way.

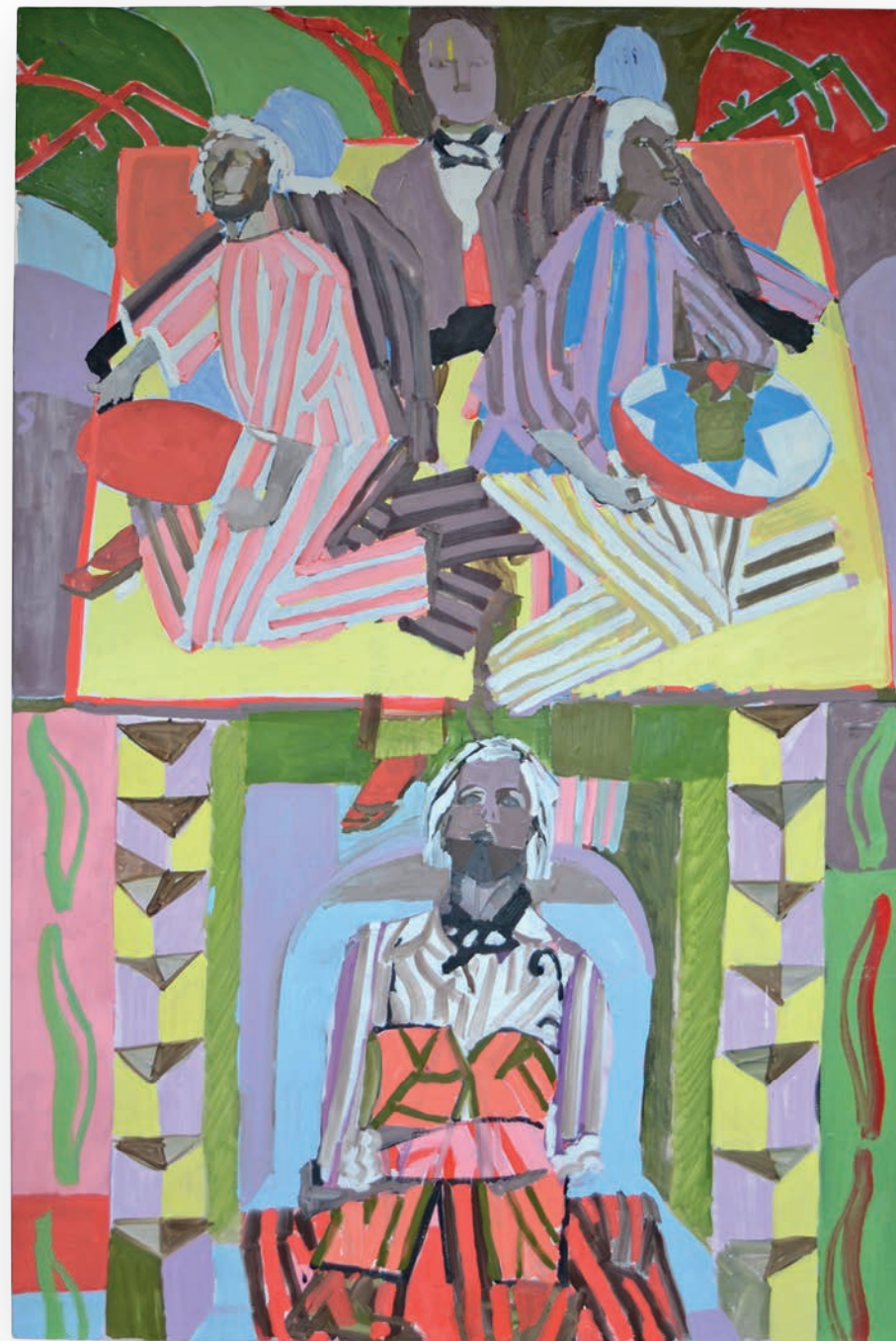


*Mid Land*  
Oil on Canvas  
120x180cm





*Sonic Sonnet*  
Oil and Collage on Canvas  
142x142cm



*sweet waters flow*  
Oil on Canvas  
120x180cm





*Lance & Corporal*  
Oil on Canvas  
142x142cm



*Dandelion*  
Oil and Collage on Canvas  
142x142cm



*Consider the Lilies*  
Oil on Canvas  
60x80cm

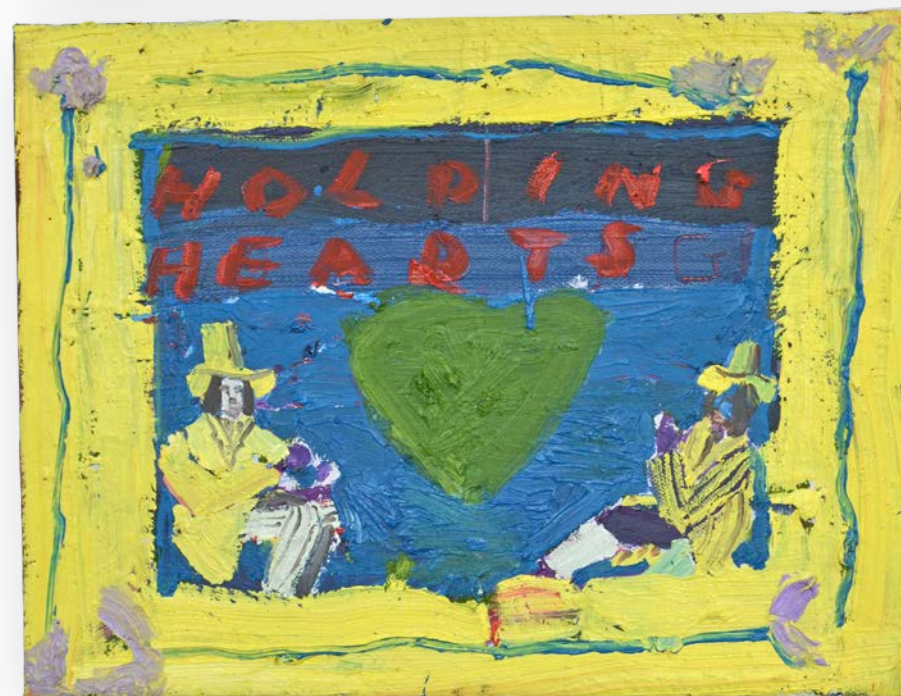




*Heart Holding*  
Oil on Canvas  
60x80cm



*big love*  
Oil on Canvas  
60x80cm

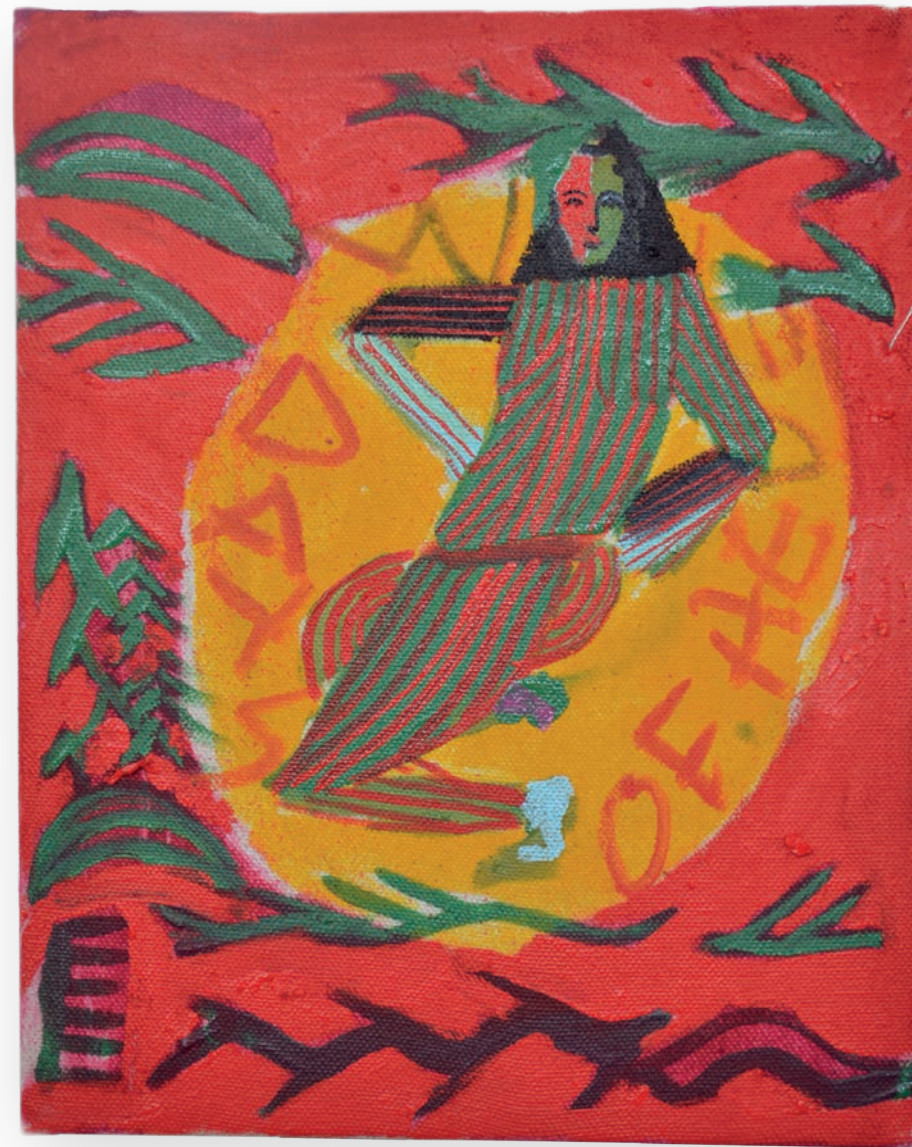


*Holding Heart*  
Oil on Canvas  
42x32cm



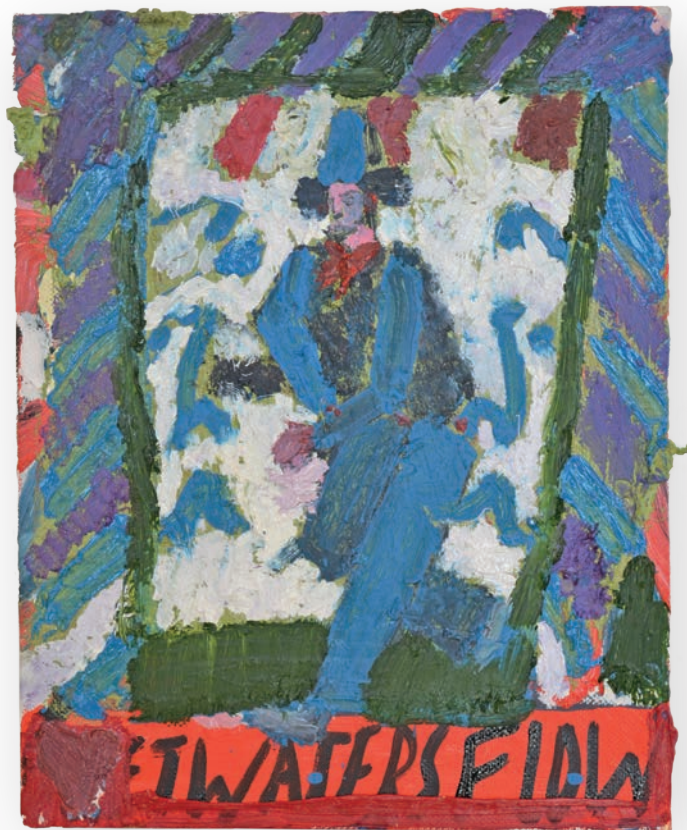


*Lily Study*  
Oil on Canvas  
25x30cm



*Days of Heaven*  
Oil on Canvas  
20x25cm





*sweet waters flow*  
Oil on Canvas  
20x25cm



*Westend*  
Oil on Canvas  
20x25cm

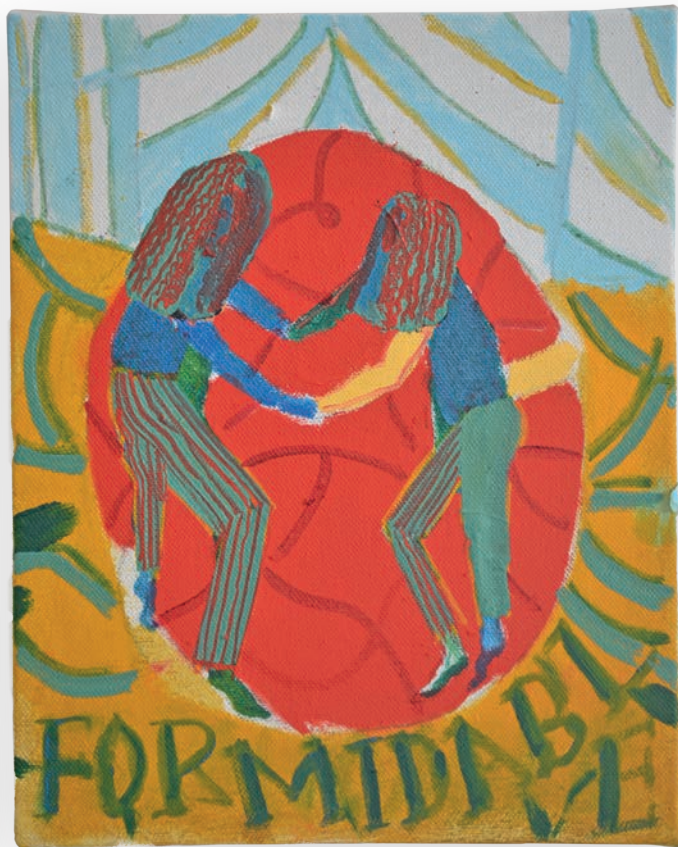


*club*  
Oil on Canvas  
42x32cm





*Fat & Love*  
Oil on Canvas  
20x25cm



*Formidable*  
Oil on Canvas  
20x25cm



*Power Trip*  
Oil on Canvas  
25x20cm





*Beautiful House Study*  
Gouache on Paper  
10x15cm



*Days Of Heaven*  
Gouache on Paper  
10x15cm





*IN BLOOM II*  
Gouache on Paper  
10x15cm



*Love Honestly*  
Gouache on Paper  
9x14cm



*My Beautiful House*  
Gouache on Paper  
20x15cm





*Days of Heaven II*  
Oil on Canvas  
20x25cm



*strangulation*  
Oil on Canvas  
20x25cm



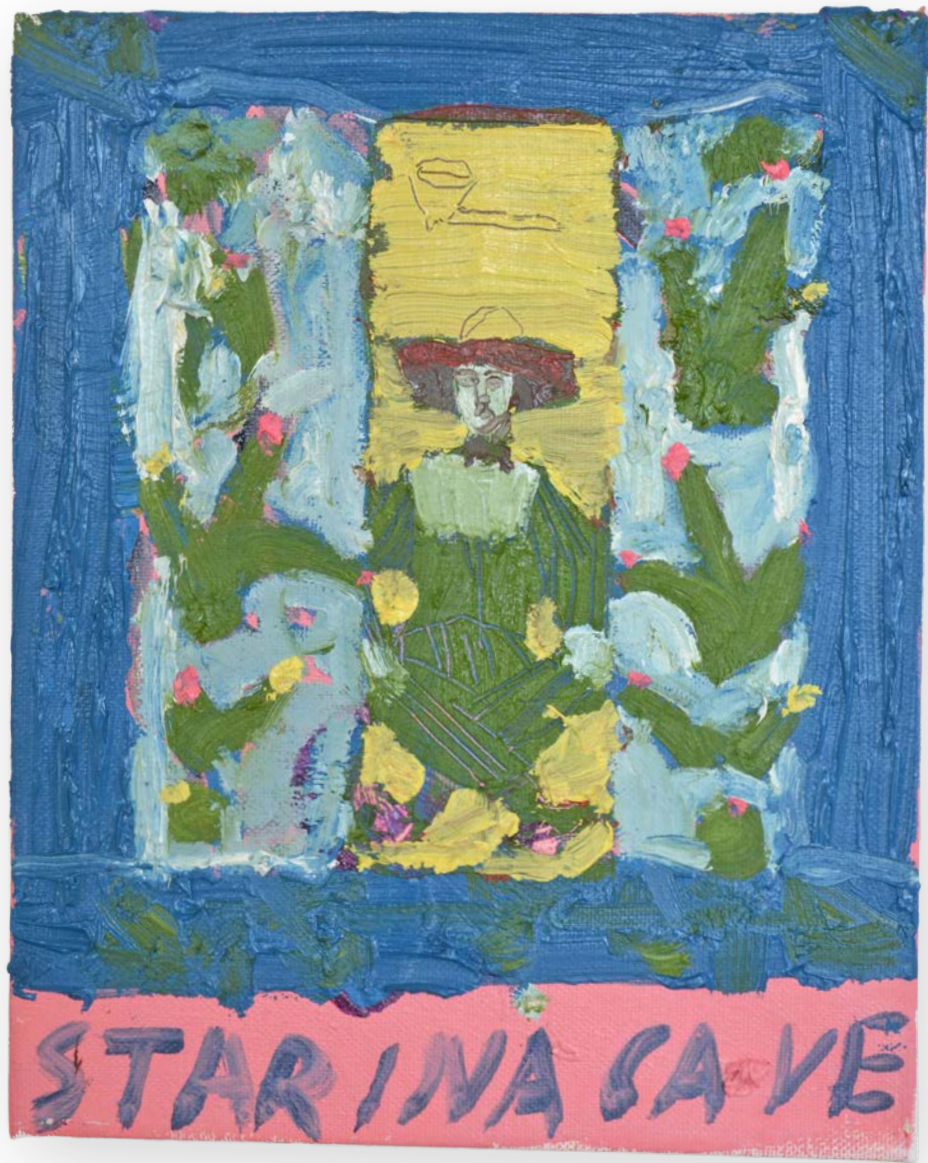


*Days of Heaven study*  
Ink on Paper  
30x22cm



*A study for Power Trip*  
Oil on Paper  
21x29cm





*A Star in a Cave*  
Oil on Canvas  
20x25cm

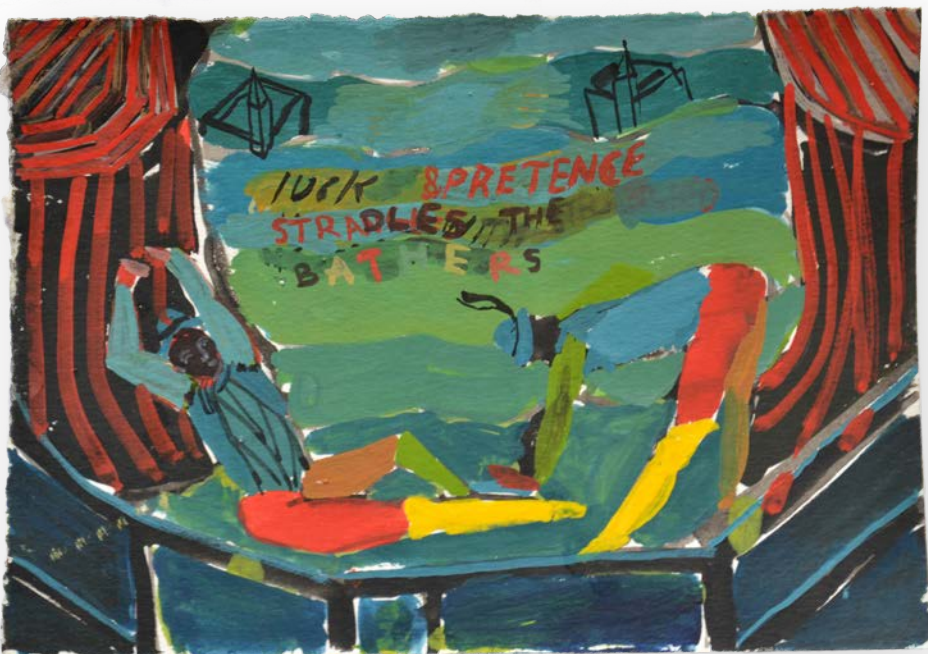


*Yes*  
Oil on Canvas  
25x20cm

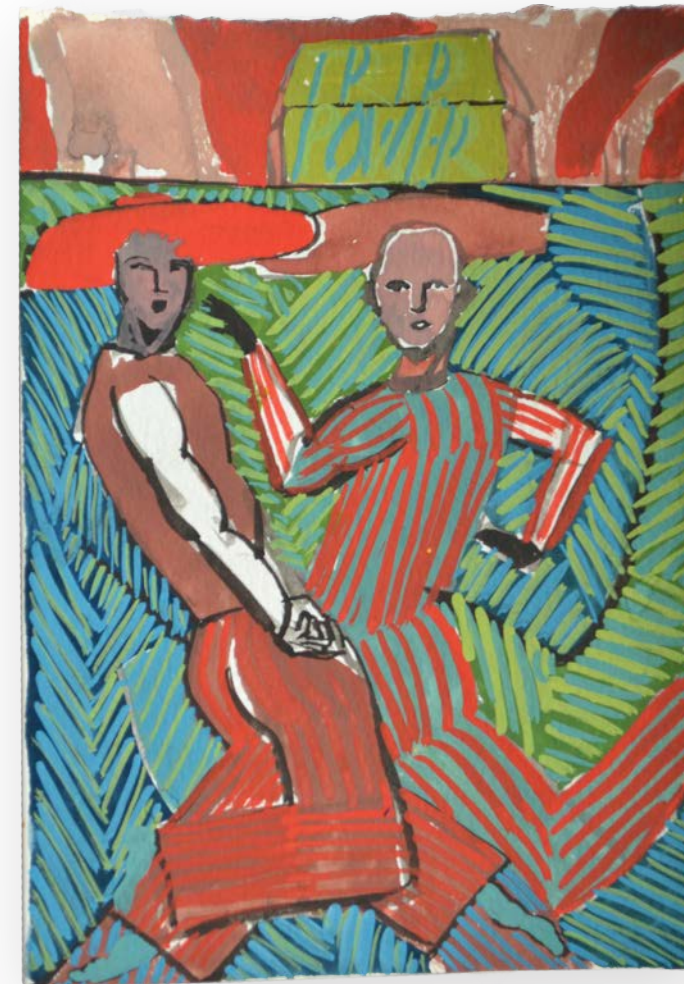




*Dancers in Uniform*  
Gouache on Paper  
20x15cm

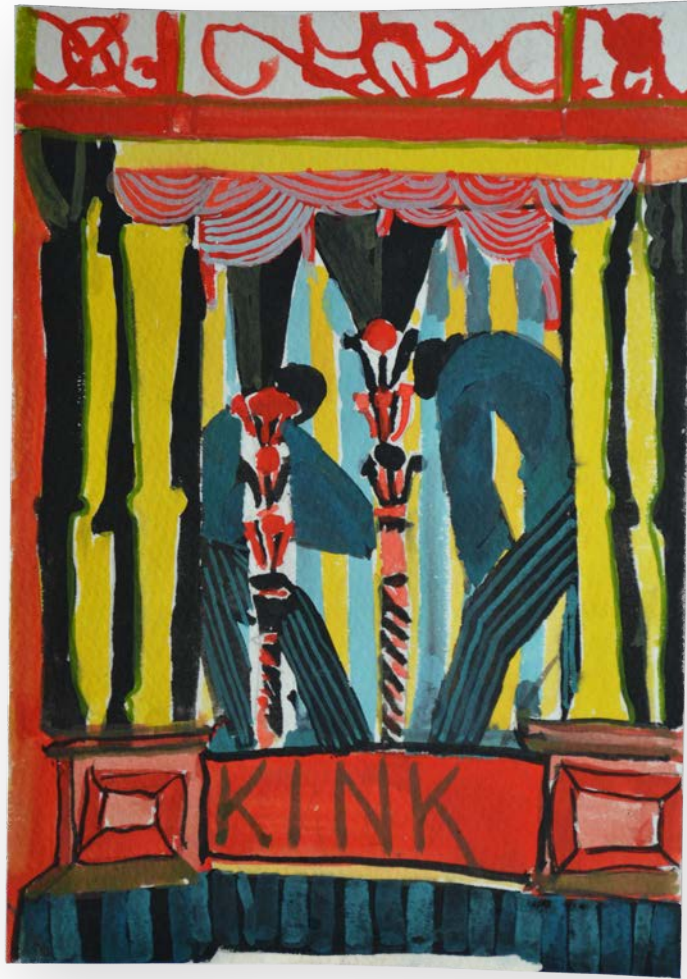


*Bathers*  
Gouache on Paper  
20x15cm



*Figures in red Hats*  
Gouache on Paper  
20x15cm

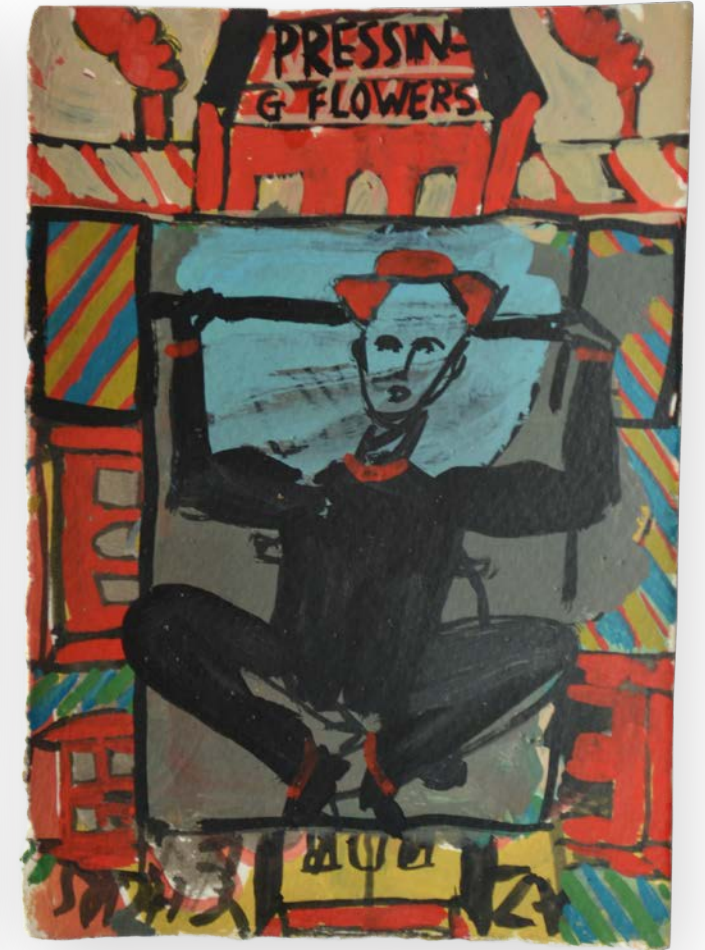




*KINK*  
Gouache on Paper  
20x15cm



*A study for YES*  
Gouache on Paper  
10x15cm



*Pressing Flowers*  
Gouache on Paper  
10x15cm





*IN BLOOM*  
Gouache on Paper  
10x15cm



*Beautiful House study*  
Gouache on Paper  
10x15cm



*Figures in Uniform*  
Gouache on Paper  
10x15cm





*Fat For Love*  
Gouache on Paper  
9x14cm



*Sailor in Uniform study*  
Gouache on Paper  
9x14cm

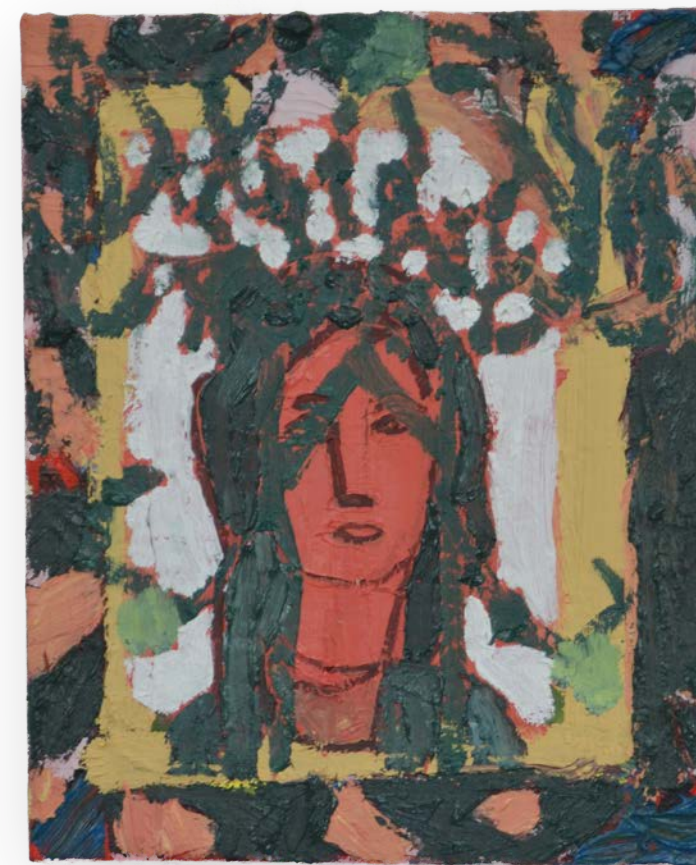


*The Midlands Enlightenment*  
Oil on Canvas  
42x52cm





*A Fight*  
Oil on Canvas  
40x30cm



*Madonna head study*  
Oil on Canvas  
20x25cm



## *Ed Burkes* Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the entirety of the Jonathan Vickers Fine Art Award team. Their support has been boundless and I want to express how much of a catalyst this past year has been to the solidification and development of my work as a painter.

Janine Derbyshire from Derby Museum & Art Gallery has been amazing, her guiding hand and huge smile will be greatly missed

when I leave Derby.

Rachael Grime's support specifically has been incredible, and without Jenny Denton's enthusiasm and vitality I think I would have derailed just after Christmas.

I especially would like to thank the city of Derby for being so awesome in its intrigue; and so fruitful in its offering.

Derby in bloom.



# Contributors



Foundation  
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galleries



The Jonathan Vickers Fine Art Award would like to thank the above organisations for their valuable contributions and involvement in the Award.



