

CATHERINE KURTZ PINNED



16 NOVEMBER - 21 DECEMBER 2021



Memento Mori XII, 2019, Oil on board, 17.3 x 21.4cm

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Drawing and painting find me at my most alive. Observing and recording both my subject and my own responses to that subject is the most vital and positive act. It is being in love with my chosen subject, choosing to rigorously attend to its every detail, and demand the same of the audience of my work. In choosing an object to paint I present it to the audience for their attention, I ask them to consider it, not to pass it by.

I intend that my paintings are an antidote to the dulled half-observation we all fall into, an antidote for myself, during the act of painting and drawing, an antidote for the viewer, if I succeed in compelling them to observe.

While the act of painting is joy, the choice of subject has me confronting my demons.

I choose to depict isolated or juxtaposed objects that allow me to explore various preoccupying themes. These are always acutely personal, such as the struggle I have had to live with the pressure of expectations I have felt as a woman in today's society. Or exploring ideas around mortality and the fragility of life.

The prematurely dead forms of butterflies and birds force me to confront the brutality of loss, even while I observe their great beauty and charm. There is such transience in this beauty; it is part of their vitality, their life. This beauty in death, before decay has set in, is a very tender and mysterious moment. A moment that holds life and death, presence and absence, love and loss.

In showing my personal response I hope to engender a like response to the subject in my audience. Above all, these paintings are an expression of my own, and our universal, vulnerability and mortal fragility.

TORN

These paintings hope to explore something of the reductive and skewed attitudes that colour female experience. I wanted to immerse in something seen as dominantly in the feminine domain and subvert it. The world of the domestic, and that of personal appearance, are areas where women are supposed to excel, are supposed to show great interest. They are also routinely belittled as trivial, superficial. When I think of home-making, or fashion and beauty, I think of samples. Makeup colour samples, paint samples, fabric swatches are things with which a woman is meant to be concerned, must create beauty, must be beautiful, must get it right.

I have taken fabric samples, each one potentially depicting a choice, a corner of the domestic in which I, as a woman, am meant to excel. Sheer and lacy, lingerie, floral cotton, a pretty kitchen curtain, dotty jersey, a child's jumpsuit, supple leather, a sexy skirt. Each piece of fabric is a choice, a possibility, a persona, an ideal woman, pressure, potential failure.

In tearing each strip of fabric, hanging it torn from a jagged metal nail, there is some thought about the reality of imperfection, and about the brutality of the pretty and feminine sample book we are meant to inhabit.

PINNED

I have always found specimen insects creepy, and felt uneasy about their suspended beauty. However when I came across some butterflies in an antique shop in France I suddenly saw a connection to an important memory of mine. I have been carrying around fragments of the TS Eliot poem *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock* since my teens. My memory specifically involves this passage:

*And I have known the eyes already, known them all -
The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase,
And when I am formulated, sprawling on a pin,
When I am pinned and wriggling on the wall,
Then how should I begin
To spit out all the butt-ends of my days and ways?
And how should I presume?*

The poem overall deals with mortality, the passing of our days, the experience of that passing. The image here is of man pinned, like an insect specimen, and it spoke to me. I felt that it spoke of societal and mortal limits, of people's categorization and belittling of one another. It spoke of other people's reductive expectations.

In confronting the specimen butterflies I felt the poem anew, and saw also a new link. The poem is about a man, whose life is dissected within it. But as a woman I am aware of an extra reason that women in particular are limited and categorized – their looks. The butterfly is pinned down, killed, for its beauty. It is celebrated for its vivid looks, even while its flight is curtailed, its vitality cut off, controlled, owned by the collector.

So the butterflies spoke to me both of the poem, which addresses mortality, but also of the plight of women, and myself as a woman. I chose to paint them in order to contemplate this, and to allow me to present the butterflies to the viewer through my own interpretation.

The title, *Pinned*, is a simplification of these thoughts. It means the physical act of restricting, impaling, as well as a less literal reductive pinning down.

MEMENTO MORI

In this series I hope to explore the line between life and death. It is absolute, a chasm, the greatest divide we must all cross, and yet as fine as a silk thread. It has been my intention to depict those fragile moments that somehow contain both.

The painting that has most directly inspired my painting of birds is *The Goldfinch*, by Carel Fabritius. I saw this painting shortly after leaving art school, at a point when no one I knew had seen or heard of it. I came across it accidentally while visiting The Hague to look at a Vermeer exhibition. The exhibition was stunning, and Vermeer's clarity and economy will always stay with me. But *The Goldfinch*, sitting outside the exhibition, is the picture I grew to hold most dear. However it was not until many years later that I first painted a bird, the first in this series, a juvenile goldfinch that I found dead during a particularly sad moment in my own life. I was compelled to paint it, and it was not until I had finished that painting that I thought of the connection.

What moved me in Fabritius' painting is the quality of light and line, but also the image of that delicate bird with its almost imperceptible chain keeping it from flight. In my own work the birds' flight is arrested by death. Sadly, I have been able to paint their sweet beauty, and record their lifelessness. My paintings ought not to exist, they ought to be flying above us.

We are used to seeing objects, even dead birds and animals, placed in still life arrangements on a table. But in stringing an object up, or separating it from the group, the object is seen with even greater clarity, the attention of the viewer is irresistibly drawn. In placing a bird, a dead mouse, alone, I hope to celebrate each life. But I know that I have also emphasized their vulnerability.



Torn I, 2012, Oil on board, 21.5 x 17cm



Pinned II, 2016, Oil on board, 21.5 x 17cm

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