

ALAN PARRY





The Importance of being a Bee 39 x 39cm

Alan Parry

7th June – 25th June 2018

CATTO GALLERY

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In June 2010 the Catto curated its first exhibition featuring paintings by Alan Parry. It was a dream debut. Visitors were entranced by the artist's irresistible visions of the English countryside in full bloom – and intrigued by the subtle suggestions of darkness buried inside them.

That debut, and his subsequent 3 solo shows have established Alan's reputation, and placed him firmly in a long tradition of English ruralists. It's a lineage he's well aware of. For example Alan is a particular admirer of the Victorian painter Samuel Palmer. It's easy to see why.

Palmer's work is very English: church spires figure prominently, so do imposing oak trees and resting shepherds. The work is beautiful. But much of the action takes place at twilight, just at the point when darkness is about to descend.

Knowing Alan's admiration for Palmer and his like is insightful. It gives us a deeper spin on his joyful works. In this new exhibition of paintings we can test our assumptions again. Present and correct is the artist's trademark combination of floral magnificence and geometric precision. But there's also that smidgen of disquiet. Everything is lovely in the garden most of the time. But then the moon comes out, and you can just make out an enigmatic figure with her back turned...

This is an allusion to *The Red Chimney*, an intriguing work from the show. It's not the only one to demonstrate Alan's uncanny way with, well, the uncanny. *The Visit* and *Listening To The Silence* convey a similar sense of mystery. And then there's *Rose Mannequin*, featuring five females with limbs made of climbing rose petals.

For all their ambiguity, these remain sumptuous paintings that reveal Alan's dreamy vision of England and her gardens. They sit alongside works such as *Red Kite* and *Tulip Walk* that rejoice in the sheer sensual pleasure of nature. One of the stand-outs in this group is *Garden Party*, with its dancing multi-coloured tulips and reddening late evening sky.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Alan is based in one of England's garden counties: Worcestershire. From there, he travels the South West to find inspiration for his work. He bases his paintings on real locations, starting with photographs or sketches.

But Alan's story didn't start in the country. He studied art in London at the Willesden and Hornsey Art Colleges, and later became a freelance artist and illustrator for advertising agencies, magazines and books. He believes his commercial career gave him a strong work ethic. Even today he paints or sketches almost every day.

Perhaps the designer in Alan is what draws him to the formality of gardens over nature untamed. For all their loveliness, his works are skilfully arranged and very stylised. In *Le Jardin Moderne*, for example, Alan carefully includes topiarised hedges that couldn't be more 'unnatural'.

Though one could never define Alan as a surrealist, such paintings do recall some of the stranger work of Paul Nash – and serve as another reminder that Alan is part of longer story. He likes to think so. "I admire Nash's work, and I have heard that comparison made. I do take inspiration from previous generations of English rural painters and would like to think I am part of that tradition," he says.

Overall, he feels his choice of career was pre-destined. And even after many decades, the practice of painting still gives him immense pleasure. "Art chose me from an early age," he says. "I had a passion for drawing and painting as a young child, and I've had tunnel vision ever since. Today, I don't know what I would do if I couldn't paint. It's like breathing to me."



Pied Beauty 80 x 80cm



Lily Pool
80 x 56cm



Rose Mannequins 80 x 80cm



Ballet Garden II 80 x 68cm



Ballet Garden | 80 x 80cm



Lady of the Chase II 55 x 55cm



Lady of the Chase I 55 x 55cm

The Tack Room
80 x 38cm





Tulip Walk 80 x 61cm



Garden Party 80 x 80cm



Sunset Walk 80 x 80cm



Tree House 69 x 42cm



Le Jardin Moderne 61 x 122cm



Cotswold Garden 62 x 84cm



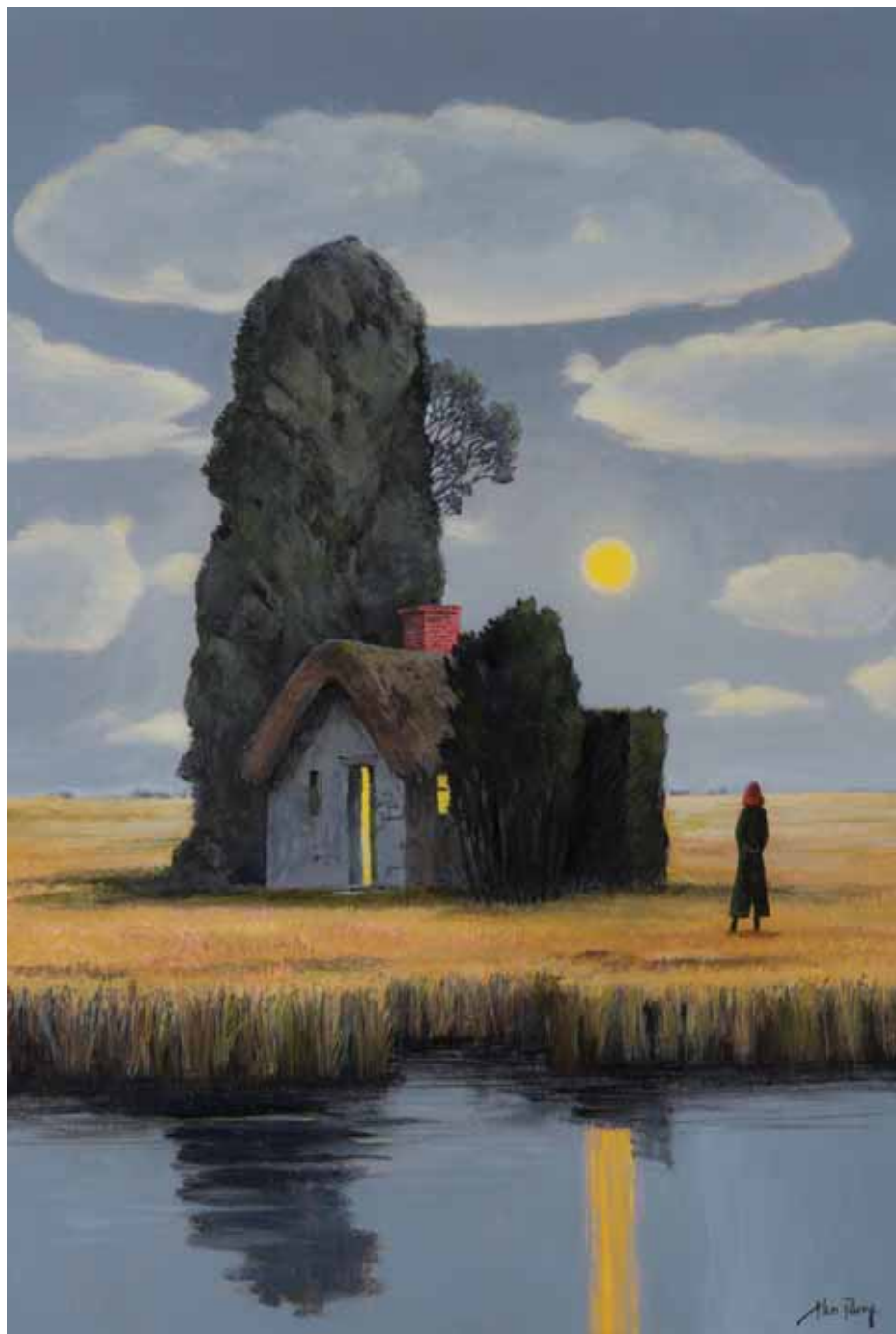
White Hunter 80 x 42cm



Red Kite 80 x 80cm



The Path 64 x 42cm



Listening to the Silence 58 x 42cm



The Visit 58 x 42cm



The Lawn 80 x 80cm



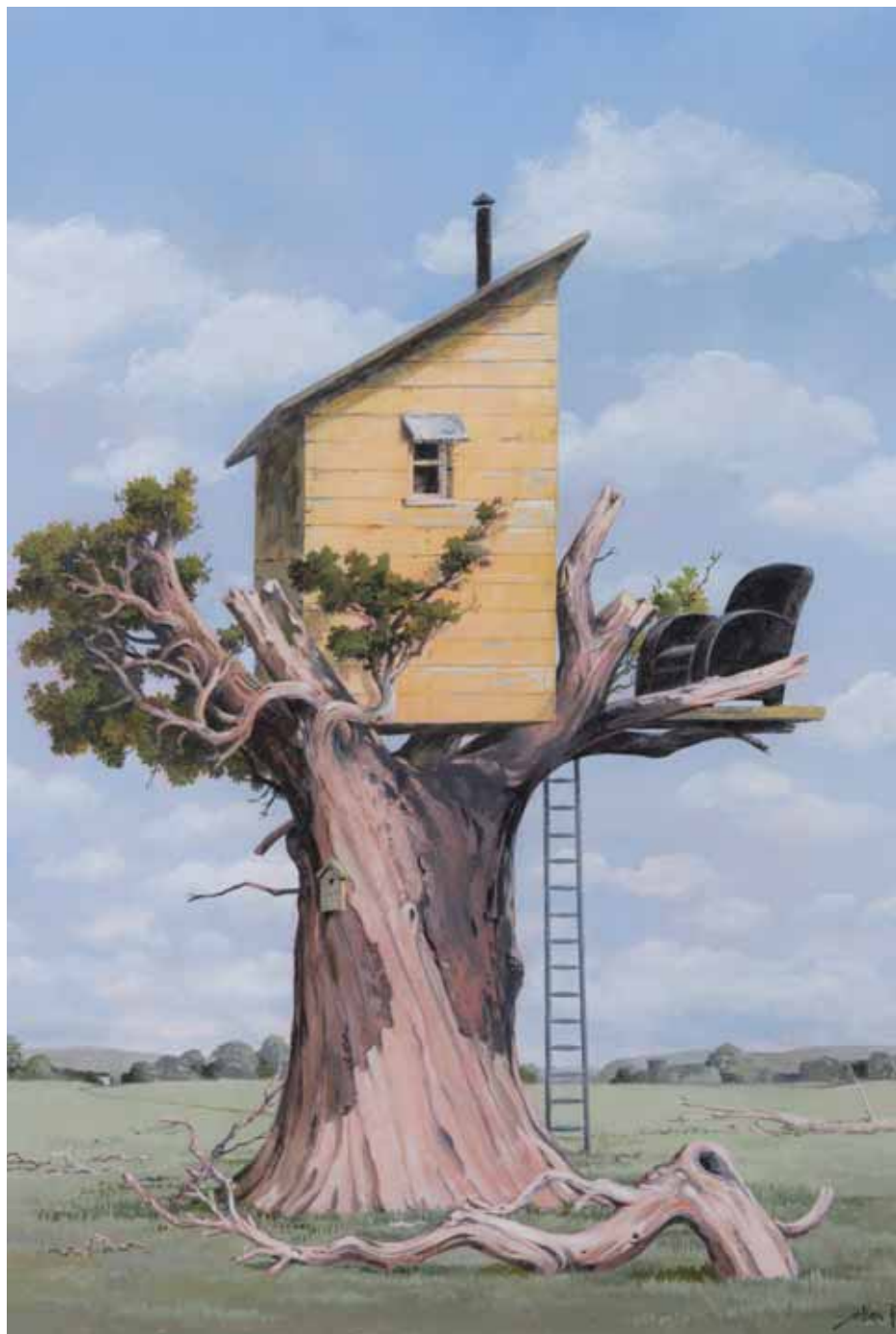
A Message 61 x 61cm



A Quiet Place 80 x 80cm



Snow Fall 61 x 61cm



Writer's Hut 70 x 54cm



The Red Chimney 61 x 42cm



Garden Room 49 x 32cm



The Match 80 x 80cm



The White Parasol 80 x 80cm



Cider Apples 61 x 61cm



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Opening times: 10am - 6pm Mon - Sat • 12.30pm - 6pm Sunday • and by appointment

Exhibition dates: 7th June – 25th June 2018