



ALAN PARRY

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Exhibition dates: 18th July – 5th August

We like to think of the country as somewhere to which we can escape. A wild untamed environment, so different from the made-made city. It's not true, of course. For the most part, the countryside has been manicured, sculpted, trimmed and tamed. We still love it though.

In his beguiling new show at the Catto, Alan Parry returns again to celebrate this paradox at the heart of the English outdoors. Exhibit A has to be A Jane Austen Tale. Here, a pretty girl sits reading on a beautiful summer's day. Around her are some of the most unnatural trees you will ever see – all cones, triangles and perfect semi-circles. In front is a hedge that could be a brick wall it's so unerringly straight. And, as a final indication that we're not far from the city, a plane flies overhead.

The painting also reveals the painter's talent for composition. Manicured gardens are well-organised spaces. So are Alan's canvases. Every painting in the new collection has been meticulously arranged. Look at High Pheasant, for example. The trees lean in from the side. A dog heads in the opposite direction. The terrain undulates pleasantly. But the drama is at the centre, where a woman stops in her tracks beneath a lone bird.

We want to know more. And that's the other dimension to Alan's work. The narrative tension. Another fine example of this is Coming Home, in which a young girl runs excitedly across a garden path. Presumably, she's in sight of home and happy about it. But the painting has a dreamlike quality. Her back is turned to us. Her hair flares wildly. It feels a little unsettling.

Those familiar with Alan's work know to expect this ambiguity. Across 5 previous shows at the Catto, he has emerged as one of the UK's most imaginative rural painters – someone who combines two very English traditions. On the one hand, the prettiness of 19th century bucolic painting, and on the other the surrealism of 20th century artists like Nash. That said, the most obviously surreal work in the new show is a nod to Belgium's finest, Magritte. In The Magritte Mysteries, Alan goes deeper into the surrealism tradition than he has before as a suited man hovers inside a giant topiary wine bottle.

It's a brave new direction for the painter. And not the only one in this collection. In the Water Garden and Tropical Garden, Alan explores a very non-English terrain. This is a world of flamingos and parrots, of blue palm trees set before a pink sky. It's Henri Rousseau territory, and Alan's is an interesting take.

It looks a long way from the painter's home in Worcestershire, where he settled after a successful career as an illustrator for advertising agencies, magazine houses and book publishers in London. Alan's decision to devote himself to painting paid off. He is now a highly regarded figure on the UK art scene, and well-loved by people who appreciate psychodrama in the immaculately manicured lawns of the English shires.

CATTO GALLERY

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Botanical Garden, 80 x 70cm, Acrylic on Board



The Magritte Mysteries, 80 x 42cm, Oil on Board



The Riding Hat, 40 x 40cm, Oil on Board



The Rehearsal I, 80 x 80cm, Acrylic on Board



The Rehearsal II, 80 x 80cm, Acrylic on Board



Bareback Rider I, 80 x 60cm, Oil on Board



Bareback Rider II, 61 x 55cm, Acrylic on Board



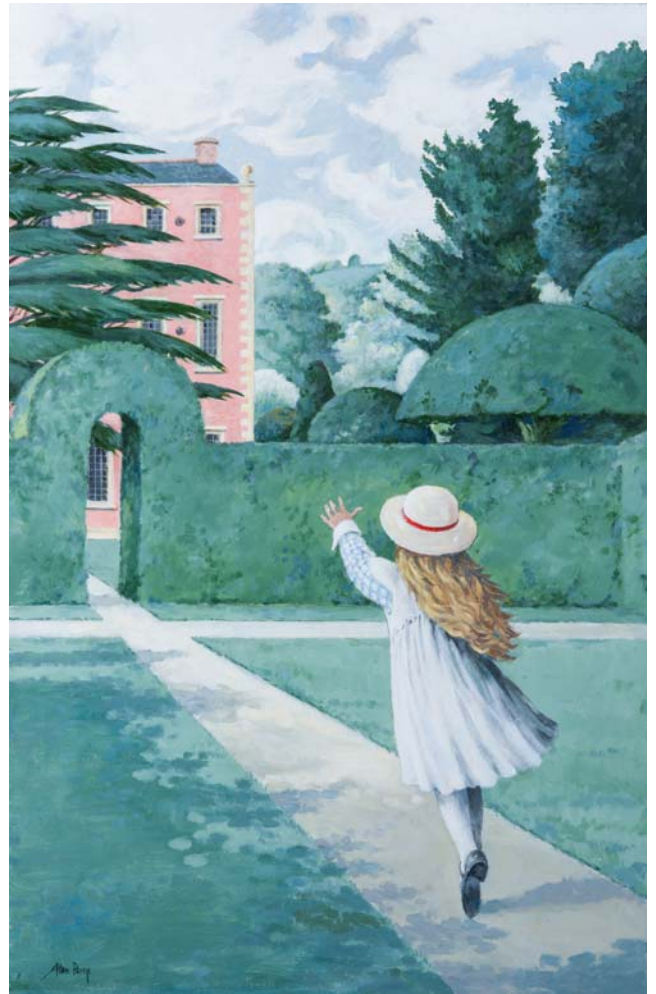
The School Hunt, 80 x 80cm, Acrylic on Board



Red and Black, 52 x 61cm, Acrylic on Board



Evening Stroll, 80 x 40cm, Acrylic on Board



Coming Home, 65 x 42cm, Acrylic on Board



A Jane Austin Tale, 52 x 61cm, Acrylic on Board



Elgar Country I, 90 x 90cm, Oil on Board



Elgar Country II, 90 x 90cm, Oil on Board



High Pheasant,
80 x 38cm, Acrylic on Board



The Cotswold Way, 90 x 90cm, Acrylic on Board



Country Girls, 63 x 90cm, Oil on Board