

BALMER





DEREKBALMER•CATTOGALLERY

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+44 (0)20 7435 6660 • art@cattogallery.co.uk
10am - 6pm Mon - Sat • 12:30pm - 6pm Sunday and by appointment
www.cattogallery.co.uk

Solo exhibition
27 September – 15 October 2018

Derek Balmer likes to surprise himself, to challenge preconceptions and tried-and-tested solutions. He doesn't want his work to be expected or to look predictable: he wants to find it as exciting as the viewer does. To this end, he constantly explores the threshold of figuration and abstraction, deriving his raw material from reconnaissance trips abroad, to the seats of ancient civilizations (Tarquinia and Pompeii are favourite places), and to landscapes inflamed by the sun. Back in his Bristol studio, memories of foreign travel are transformed and distilled into abstracted images suggesting architecture or landscape, but also dealing largely with the formal components of painting: line, colour, shape and the gloriously inexhaustible properties of oil paint.

Patrick Heron expressed it rather well: 'I believe painting exists precisely in order to relate our subjective experience, our feelings, to our objective setting, to the world we are endlessly observing', he wrote. 'In painting, merely to observe is to subscribe to the heresy of realism; and merely to project a rhythm is to subscribe to the opposite heresy of non-figuration. Great painting lies between the two and performs the functions of both.' This is what Balmer does: relates his feelings about a specific place through a painted structure which uses colour as the dominant means of articulating the paint surface and creating an illusion of three-dimensionality. While Balmer's paintings might at first glance appear flat, they actually weave an intriguing patchwork of spatial relationships across the picture plane, punctuating (as it were) the surface of the canvas with oases and mirages of distant delight.

He aims at a formal translation of visual response, but he doesn't want it to be too controlled and restricted. Chance must also play its part, and he avoids the formulaic by courting serendipity and anything that will fire his imagination. His work operates between two kinds of reality - the visual

reality of the building or landscape observed and gloried in, and the pictorial reality of its transcription on canvas. The painting represents the moment when these two different realities are made to coincide through the individual lens of the artist's temperament. Nature is the starting point, and then the principal (and loaded) question is whether an emptying out or a gathering in follows. Sometimes one, sometimes the other, but most important is to see the options clearly in order to take full advantage of what he calls the 'constant spur of revelation'.

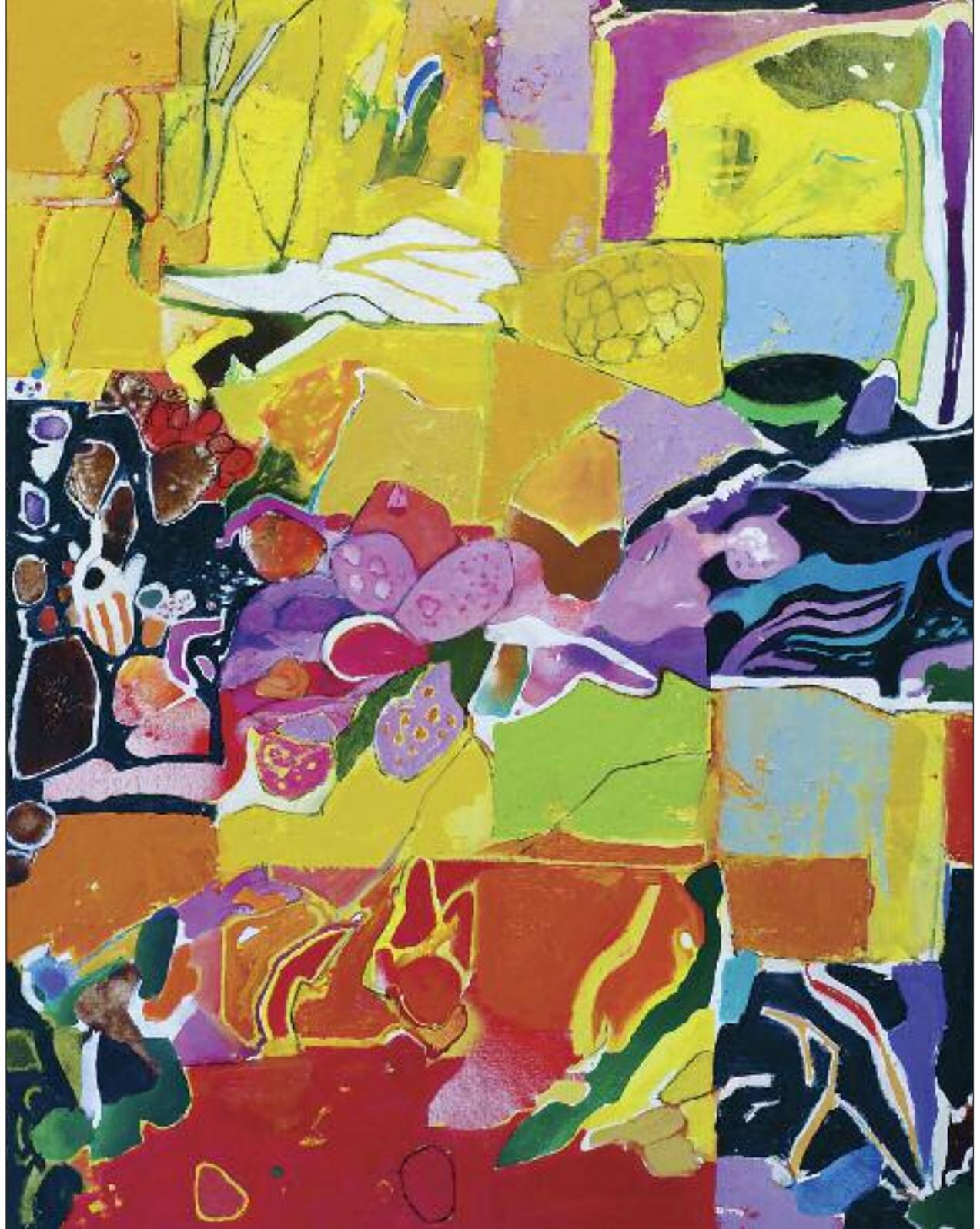
Balmer works all over the canvas, providing multiple focal points for the eye to be drawn to. In fact, looking at a Balmer painting is an intensely active and exacting process. The eye does not so much settle in one place as dart about like a butterfly over a delectable flower-bed, gathering information and aesthetic pleasure in a dozen places and relating them in the mind's eye. The act of looking is about trying to find a way in to his complex imagery. Meaning and energy are channelled through the painter during the shaping of a picture. Art is a totality of experience, for both artist and viewer, to be understood not just by the mind, but by the emotions and the body too.

As he works over a painting, altering and adapting, re-charging the emphases, removing passages of imagery, inserting others, pursuing the arbitrary mark with the intended, Balmer likes to draw over and into the paint with charcoal, a device much favoured by Roger Hilton in the 1950s. Balmer makes of this tactic something poignant, as a newly imposed linearity joins the orchestration of coloured shapes on the canvas. Sometimes the over-drawing, coming at a late stage of the painting's evolution, is the final element which leads to resolution. His procedure is essentially a pursuit of chance: making one mark and then an answering mark, following the paint until reaching the point at which he seizes control, resolves the painting and it comes to an end. (He says: 'A painting is never finished. You just have to learn to let it go.')

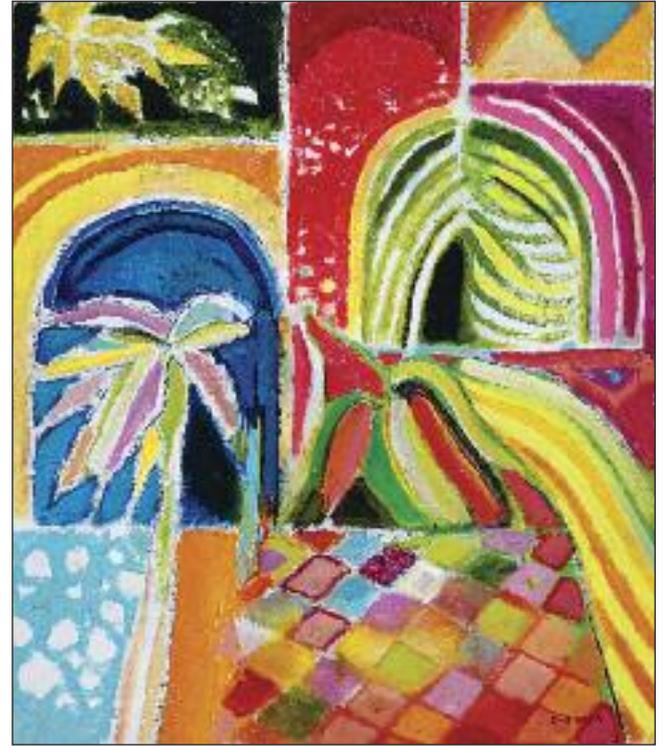
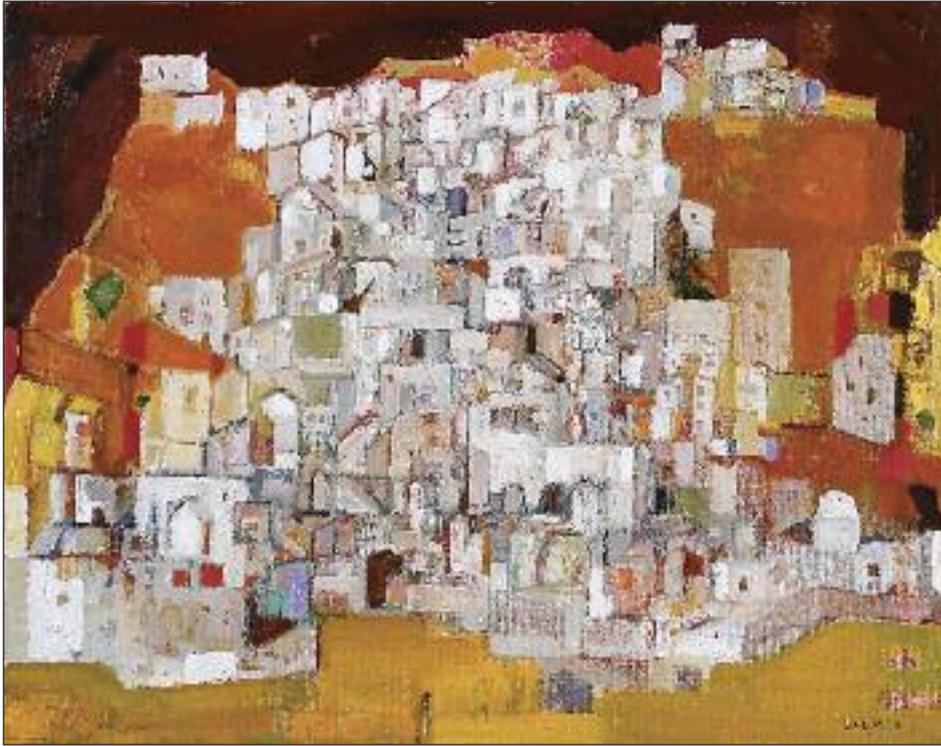
He doesn't often use black or brown, and is suspicious of 'English' green, which to him speaks far too readily of home counties trees and fields. His landscapes tend to be hotter: African or Mediterranean, joyous with colour and light. His application of paint varies from lightly stained areas where the paint is thinned with turps, to tache and dab, stripe and overlay, even crusty impasto. There is something here of the Simultanism of Robert Delaunay, great pioneer of abstraction in early 20th century Paris, with its concurrent presentation of different elements, multiple points of view, and contrasting time-scales. Balmer also admires the bold abstract visions of John Hoyland and Gillian Ayres, both artists of deep inner conviction and technical expertise who continually strove to reinvent their painterly responses to the visual world. Balmer credits their example with bringing home to him the crucial importance and seriousness of colour.

After a lifetime of experience and experiment, of learning what will work and what will not - often by a process of trial and error - many artists in their maturity allow themselves a certain stylistic freedom. Derek Balmer is one such painter. For example, *Rabat (Desert Garden)* is full of bounce and flirty curves, the paint laid on with a subtle hand in a seemingly infinite variety of shapes and textures, mixed and layered on the canvas in fruitful profusion. Balmer is witty and self-deprecating about his late style of 'anything goes'. He likens his paintings to 'out-of-control jigsaws - I don't know what the word simple means'. Yet he makes an eventual harmony of his instinctively structured explorations, he pulls their disparate complexity together into a new unity at the last possible moment, else the picture is a failure. And it is precisely this high-risk strategy which gives his painting its edge and savour. As I have written elsewhere, art should be a movement of the spirit. In Derek Balmer's new paintings, the movement is both clear and persuasive.

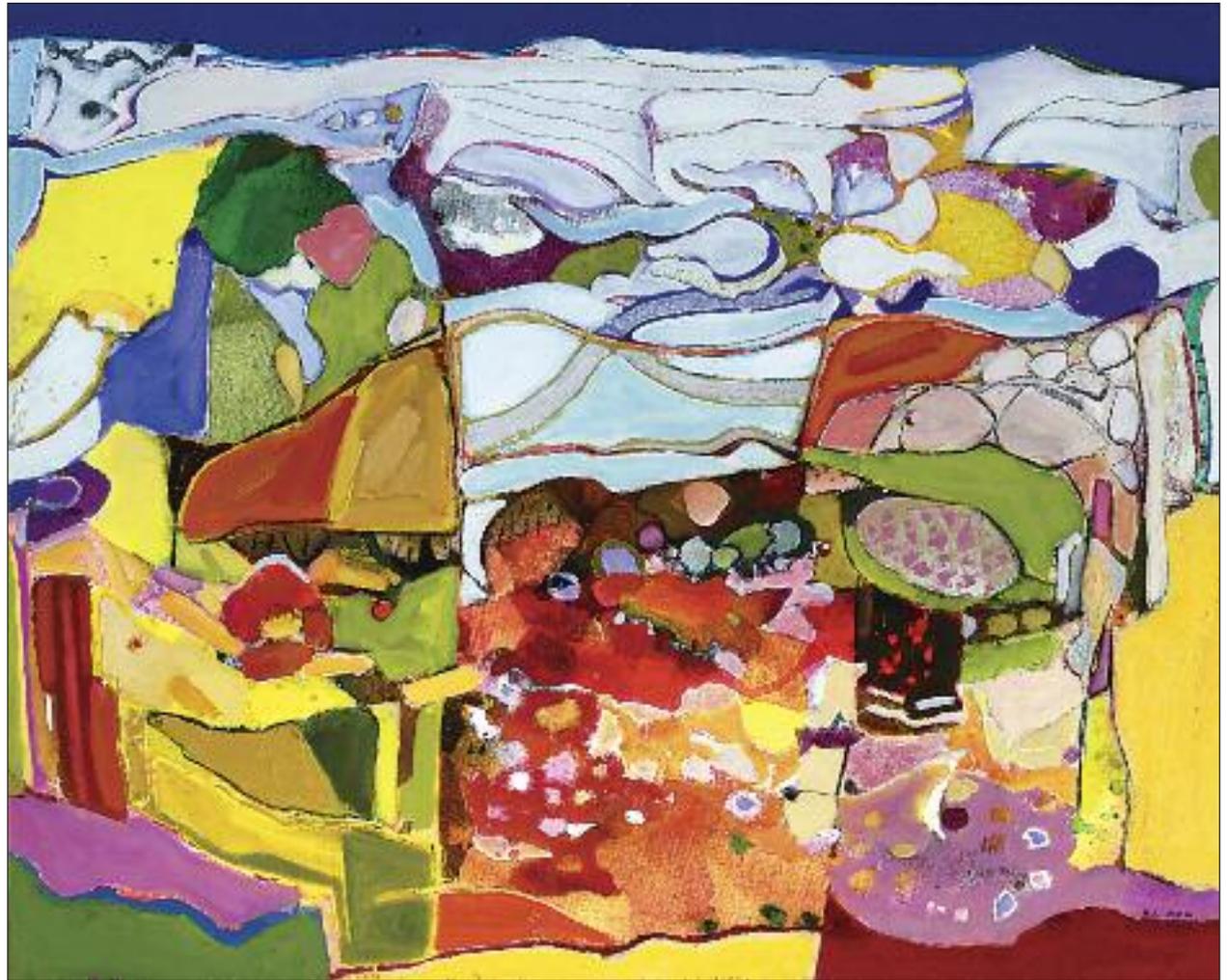
Andrew Lambirth, July 2018
Writer, critic and curator



Desert Orchid VI 2013
oil on canvas 142 x 112cm



Hill Town, Aegean 2011 oil on canvas 41 x 51cm • Afternoon in Cordoba 2014 oil on canvas 41 x 36cm



Snow Mountain 2012 oil on canvas 61 x 76cm



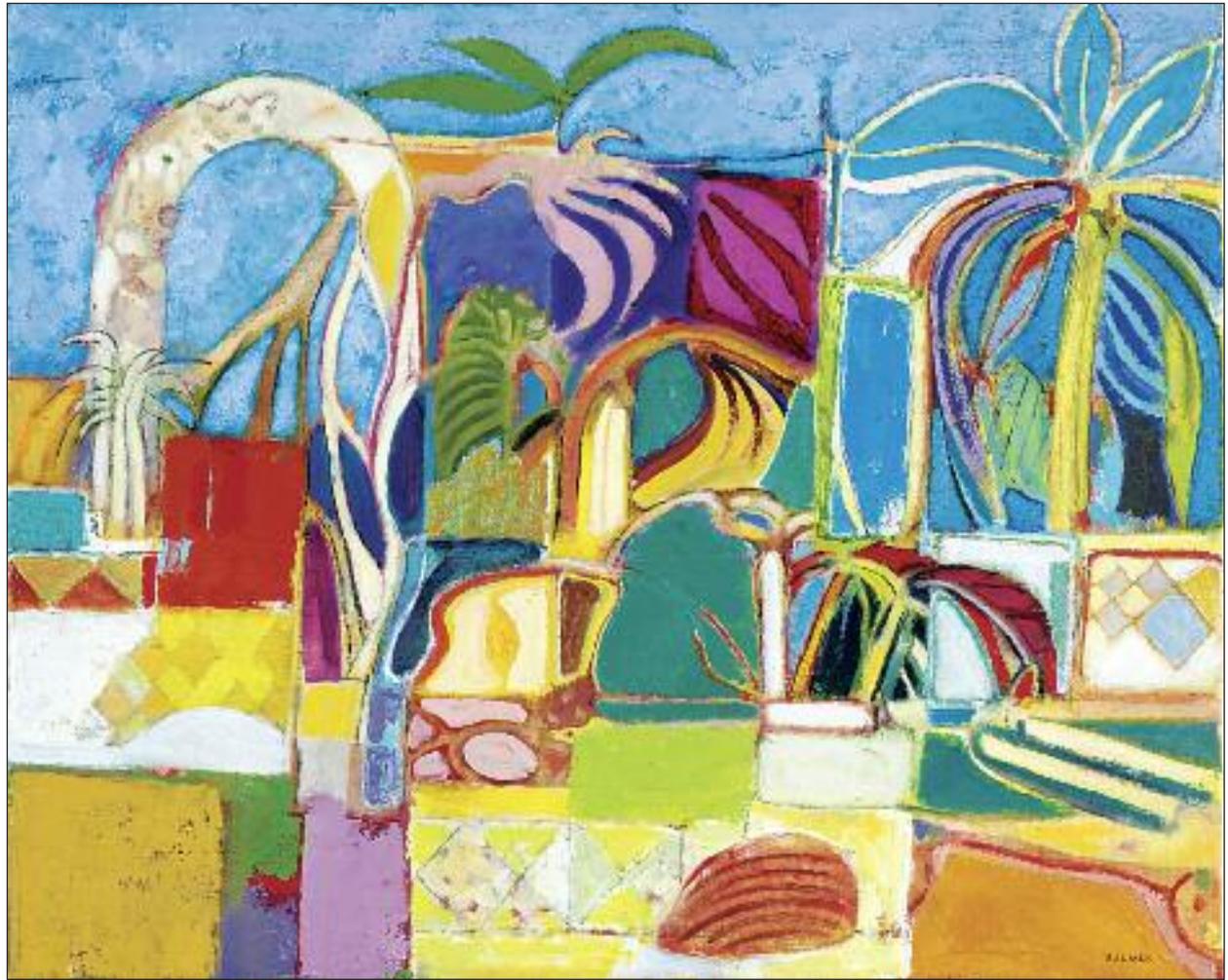
Old Tangier 2013 oil on canvas 71 x 91.5cm



Sinai. Blue Valley 2012-13 oil on canvas 91.5 x 122cm



Aegean III 2014 oil on canvas 51 x 61cm



Desert Garden 2011-13 oil on canvas 61 x 76cm



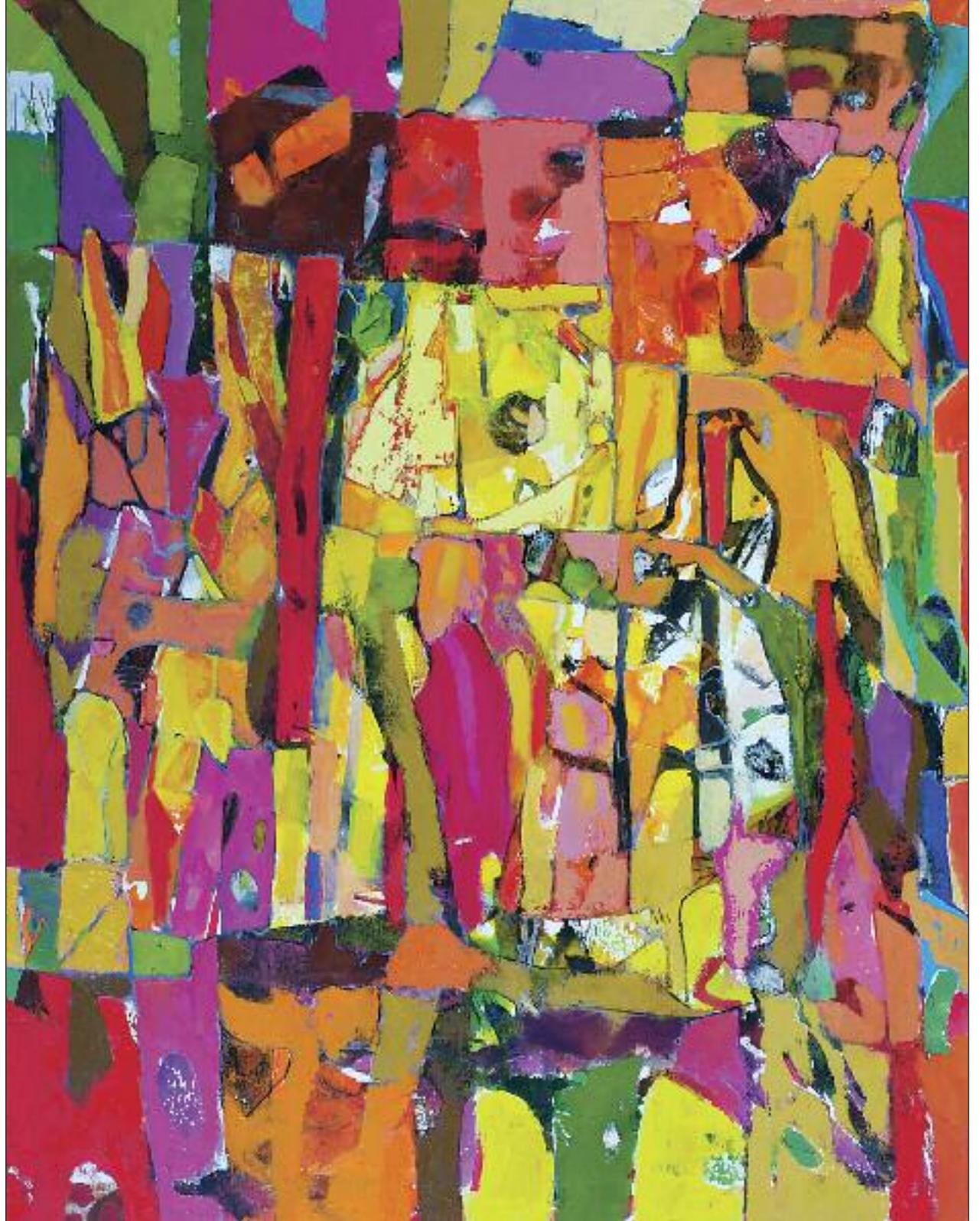


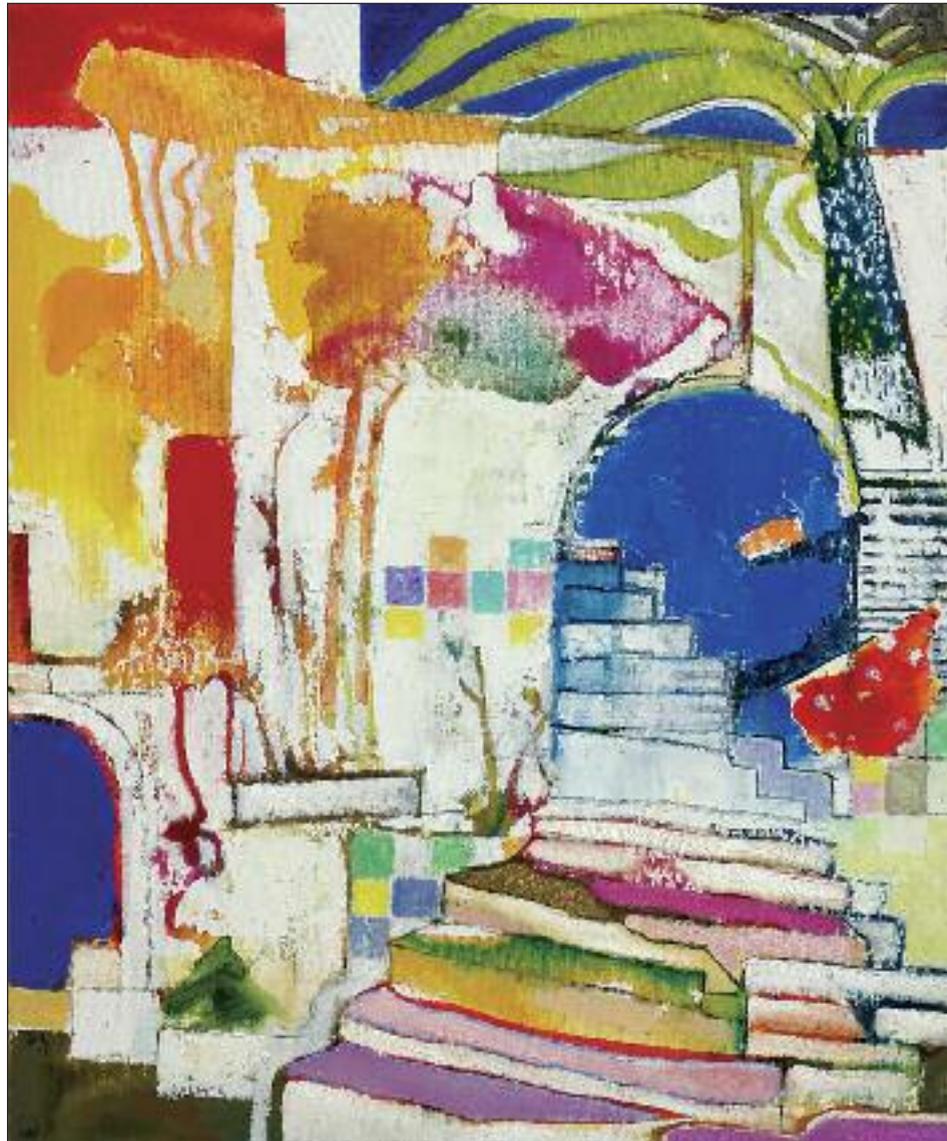




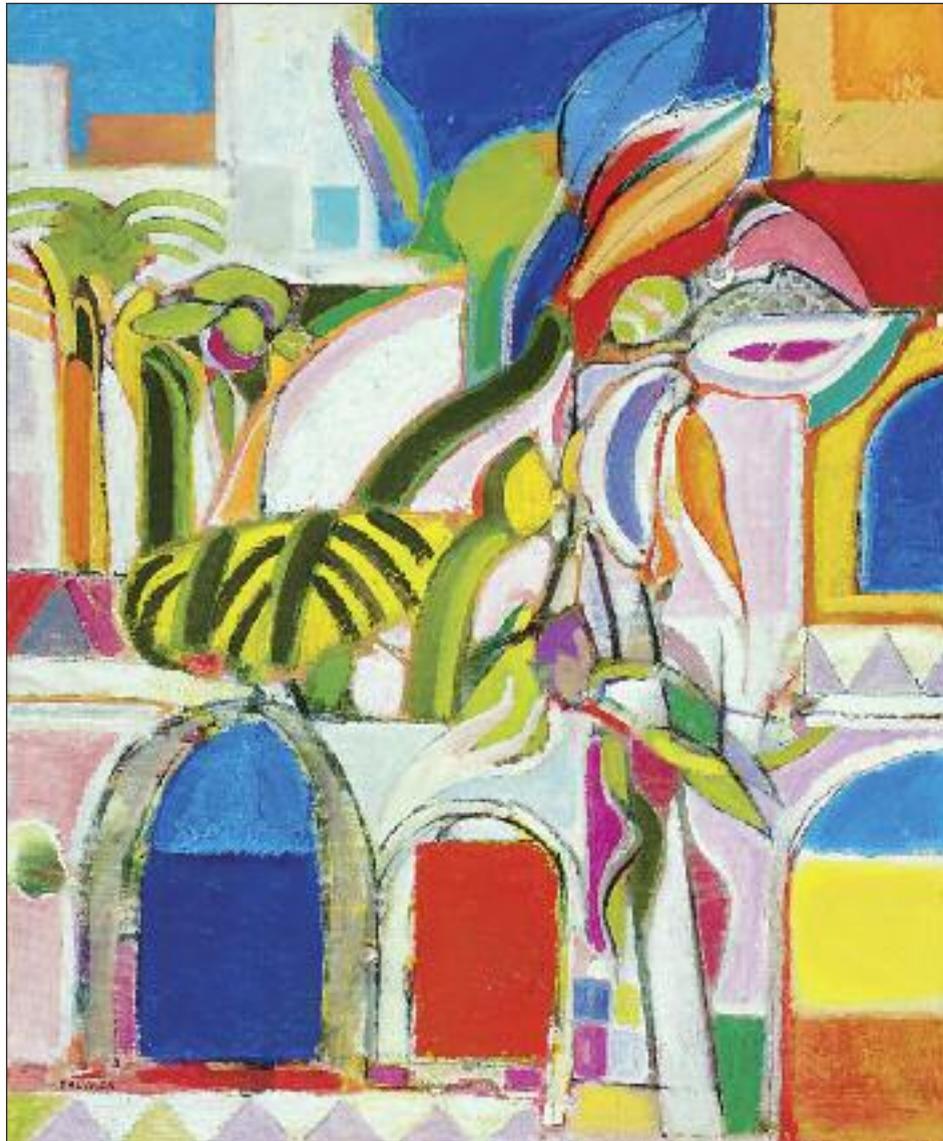


Wall Fragment, Tarquinia 2014 oil on canvas 76 x 102cm • facing page: October Approaches 2015-16 oil on canvas 142 x 112cm





Courtyard, Merida 2015 oil on canvas 61 x 51cm



Courtyard Garden, Spain 2015-16 oil on canvas 61 x 51cm



Desert Garden, Morocco 2016 oil on canvas 51 x 61cm



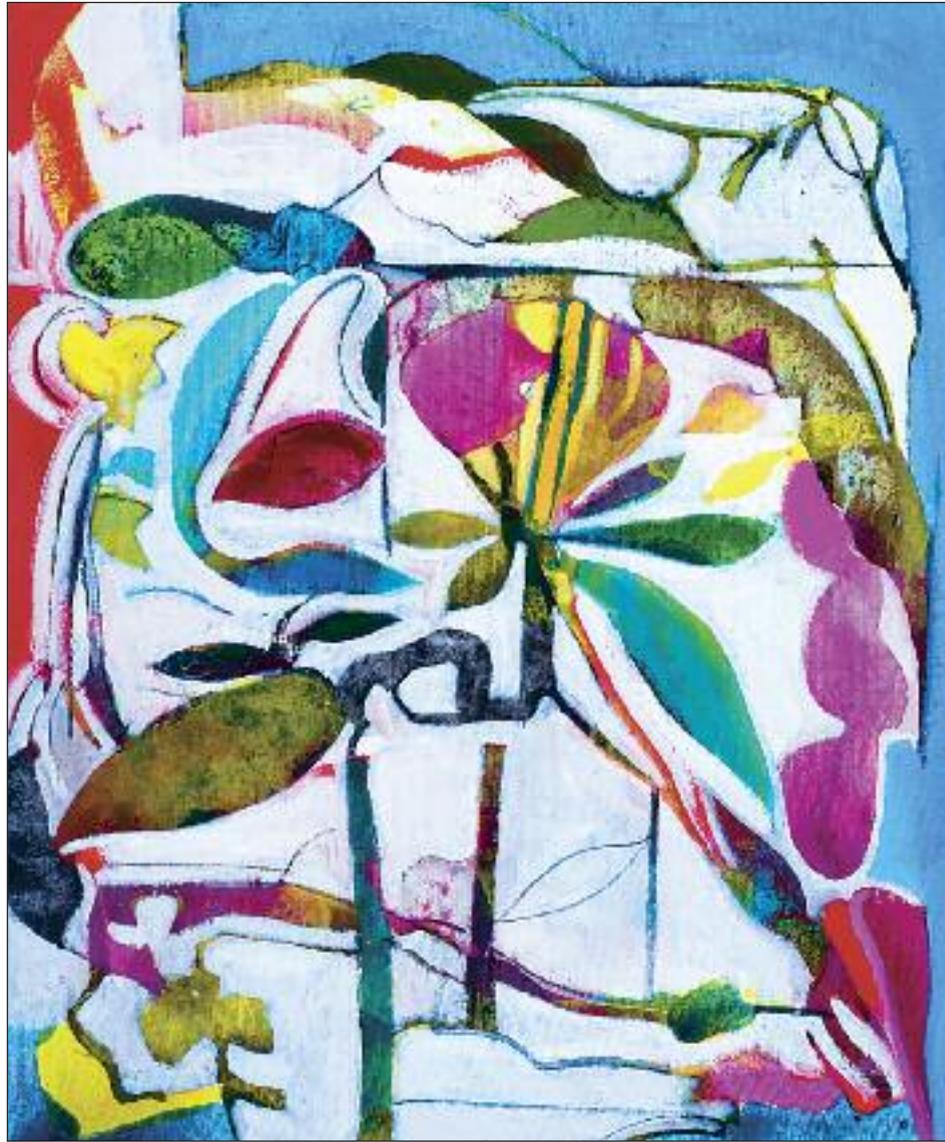
Catalan Summer 2016 oil on canvas 102 x 76cm



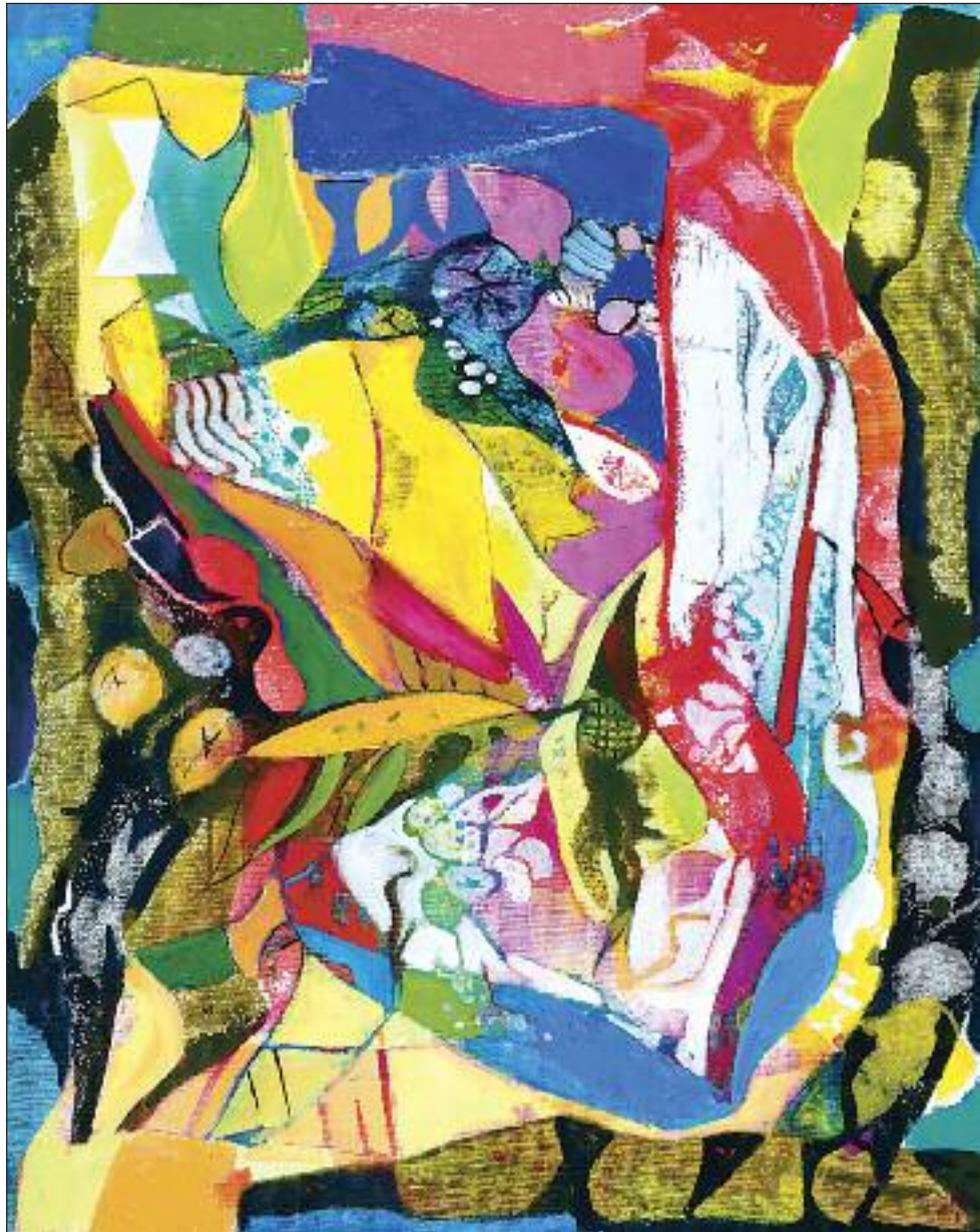
Derelict Houses, Palermo 2016 oil on canvas 71 x 91.5cm



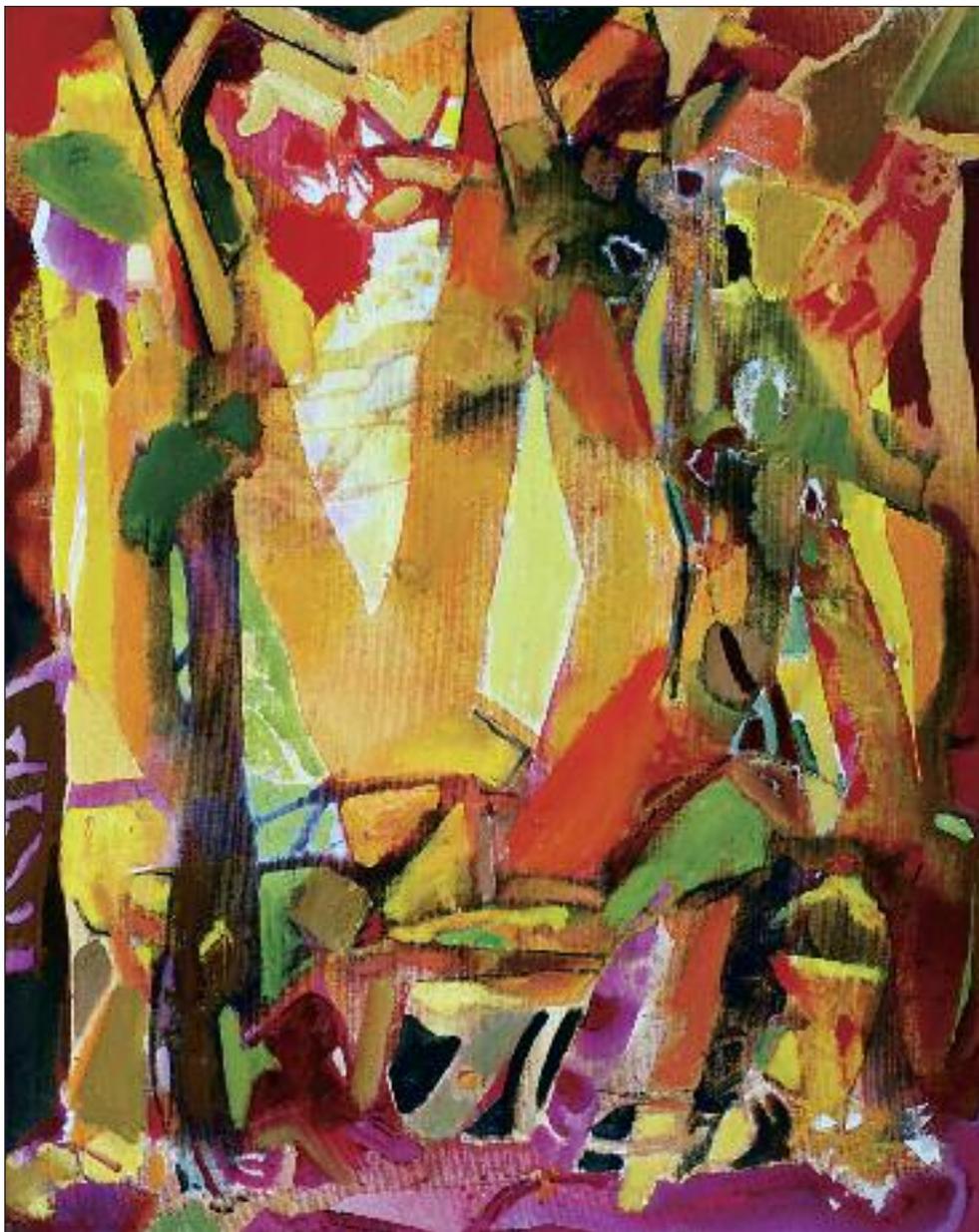
Room with a View 2016 oil on canvas 51 x 61cm



Snow Orchid 2016 oil on canvas 61 x 51cm



Wild Orchid 2016 oil on canvas 76 x 61cm



The Copse 2016 oil on canvas 76 x 61cm • facing page: Desert Valley (Sinai) 2017 oil on canvas 112 x 142cm

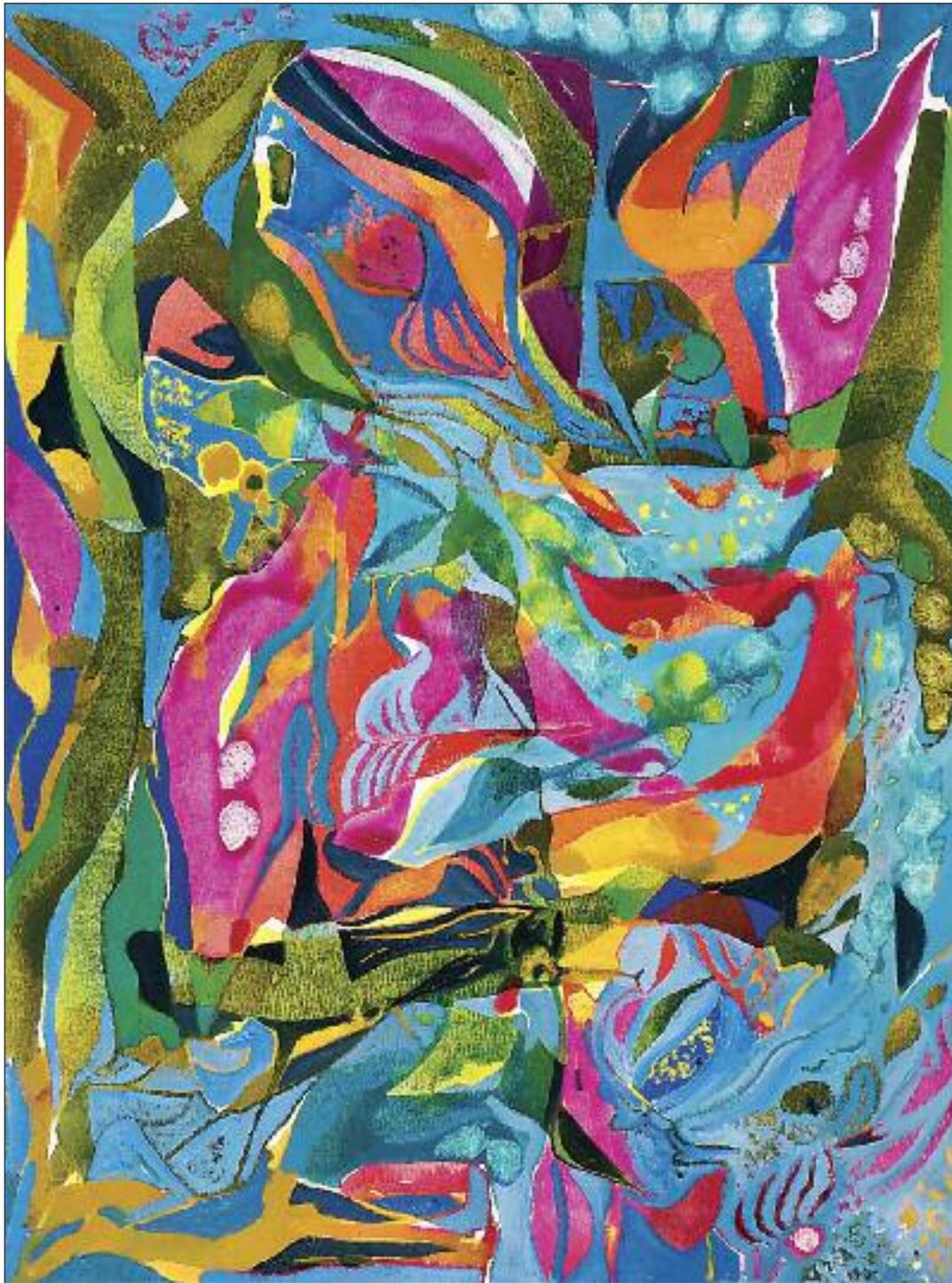




Apennine Blue 2017 oil on canvas 61 x 76cm



Those Blue Remembered Hills 2017 oil on canvas 61 x 76cm



left: Water Garden 2017
oil on canvas 122 x 91.5cm

right: Rabat (Desert Garden) 2017
oil on canvas 112 x 142cm

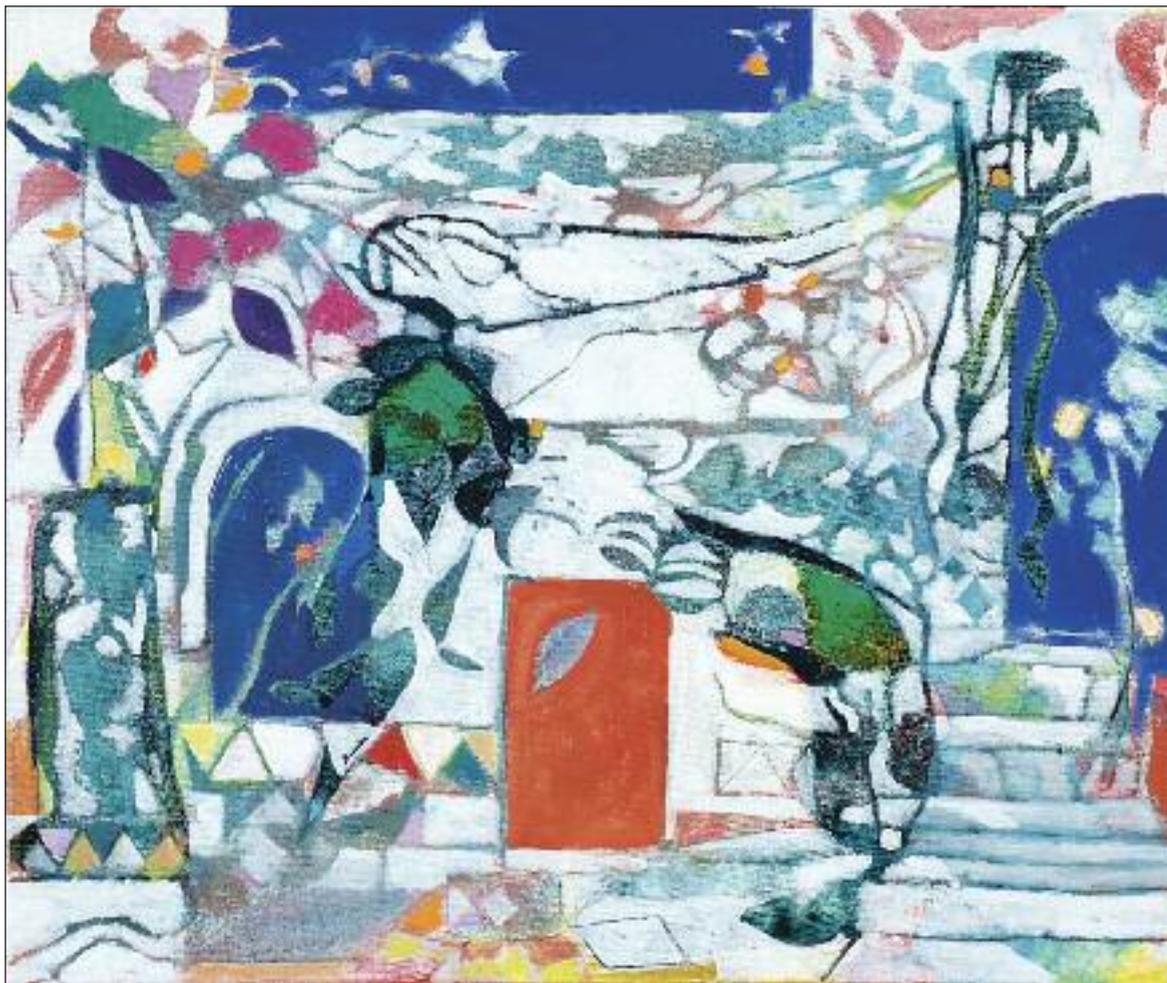




November Blue 2017 oil on canvas 51 x 61cm



Snowfall in Burgundy 2018 oil on canvas 76 x 102cm



Cadiz 2018 oil on canvas 51 x 61cm



Evening Blue 2017 oil on canvas 76 x 102cm



Florentine Blue 2018 oil on canvas 76 x 102cm



Road to Santiago 2018 oil on canvas 76 x 102cm



The Hounds of Spring
are Hard on Winters Traces
2018 oil on canvas
122 x 91.5cm

Solo exhibitions

- 1960 Fimbarrus Gallery, Bath.
- 1968 Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol.
- 1976 Bristol Museum and Art Gallery.
- 1980 Royal West of England Academy, Bristol. (Sharples Gallery)
- 1992-94 Anthony Hepworth Fine Art, Bath.
- 1993-97-2004 Gisela van Beers Gallery, London.
- 1994-2001 Anthony Hepworth Fine Art, London.
- 1995 Montpelier Sandelson, London.
- 1996-98-2000 Smelik and Stokking Gallery, The Hague, Holland.
- 2002 Smelik and Stokking Gallery, Amsterdam, Holland.
- 2003 Royal West of England Academy, Bristol. (New Gallery)
- 2005 Six Chapel Row, Bath. (with Anthony Hepworth Fine Art)
- 2005 Campden Gallery, Chipping Campden.
- 2007 Royal West of England Academy, Bristol. 'Presidents Eye' major retrospective
- 2008 Campden Gallery, Chipping Campden.
- 2010 Catto Gallery, London.
- 2011 Campden Gallery, Chipping Campden.
- 2012 Catto Gallery, London.
- 2014 Catto Gallery, London.
- 2015 Bath Contemporary, Bath.
- 2015-16 Royal West of England Academy, in conjunction with University of Bristol, *Theatre Collection*. 28 years theatre photography for the Bristol Old Vic Company
- 2016 Catto Gallery, London.
- 2018 Catto Gallery, London.

Group exhibitions

- 1958 Fimbarrus Gallery, Bath. *Derek Balmer, Geoff Keeling, Brian Mace, Neil Murison and Ernest Pascoe*
- 1958-63 Numerous exhibitions throughout the UK including: Woodstock Gallery, London; Bear Lane Gallery, Oxford; Laing Gallery, Newcastle; The Victoria Art Gallery, Bath; The City Gallery, Bristol and the London Group.
- 1963 West Country Painters, Hanover.
- 1963-64 Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol. *Open national* competition finalist
- 1965 Prix d'Natalie, Provence. *Winner*.
- 1966 Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol. (with Geoff Keeling)
- 1968-70 Artists of Fame and Promise, Leicester Galleries, London.
- 1982 Arnolfini Open, Bristol. *12 Artists*
- 1986 Beaux Arts, Bath.
- 1986-87 New Art Centre, London.
- 1993 Courtauld Institute of Art, London; Louise Hallet Gallery, London.
- 1995 Glyndebourne Gallery.
- 2004 Six Chapel Row, Bath.
- 2004 Campden Gallery, Chipping Campden. *Western Approaches*
- 2005-10 Royal Academy, London. *Summer Exhibition*
- 2006 Cube Gallery, Bristol.

2006 Mall Galleries, London. *Discerning Eye*
Invited Artist (Nicholas Usherwood)

2010 Browse and Darby, London, *Critic's choice*
(Andrew Lambirth, The Spectator)

2010 Browse and Darby, London. *Summer Show*

2014 Hilton Fine Art, Bath.
Campden Gallery, Chipping Campden.

2016 Bath Contemporary, Bath.
Featured painter, gallery talk

Annually since 1956
Royal West of England Academy, Bristol.

Public and private collections

Derek Balmer is represented in collections in the UK, Canada, USA, Holland, Germany, France and Switzerland.

Further resources

Dictionary of Artists in Britain since 1945.

University of the West of England.
<http://info.uwe.ac.uk/news/uwenews/news.aspx?id=165>

Royal West of England Academy, Bristol.
<http://www.rwa.org.uk/artists/derek-balmer>

Who's Who in Art.

Who's Who.

Derek Balmer HON DART PPRWA
President of the Royal West of England Academy, 2001 - 2010
Hon. D'Art UWE 2002
Pro-Chancellor UWE 2003-2010

design Tony Baldaro FCSd



above and front cover: **On the Beach** 2017 oil on canvas 92 x 122cm

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