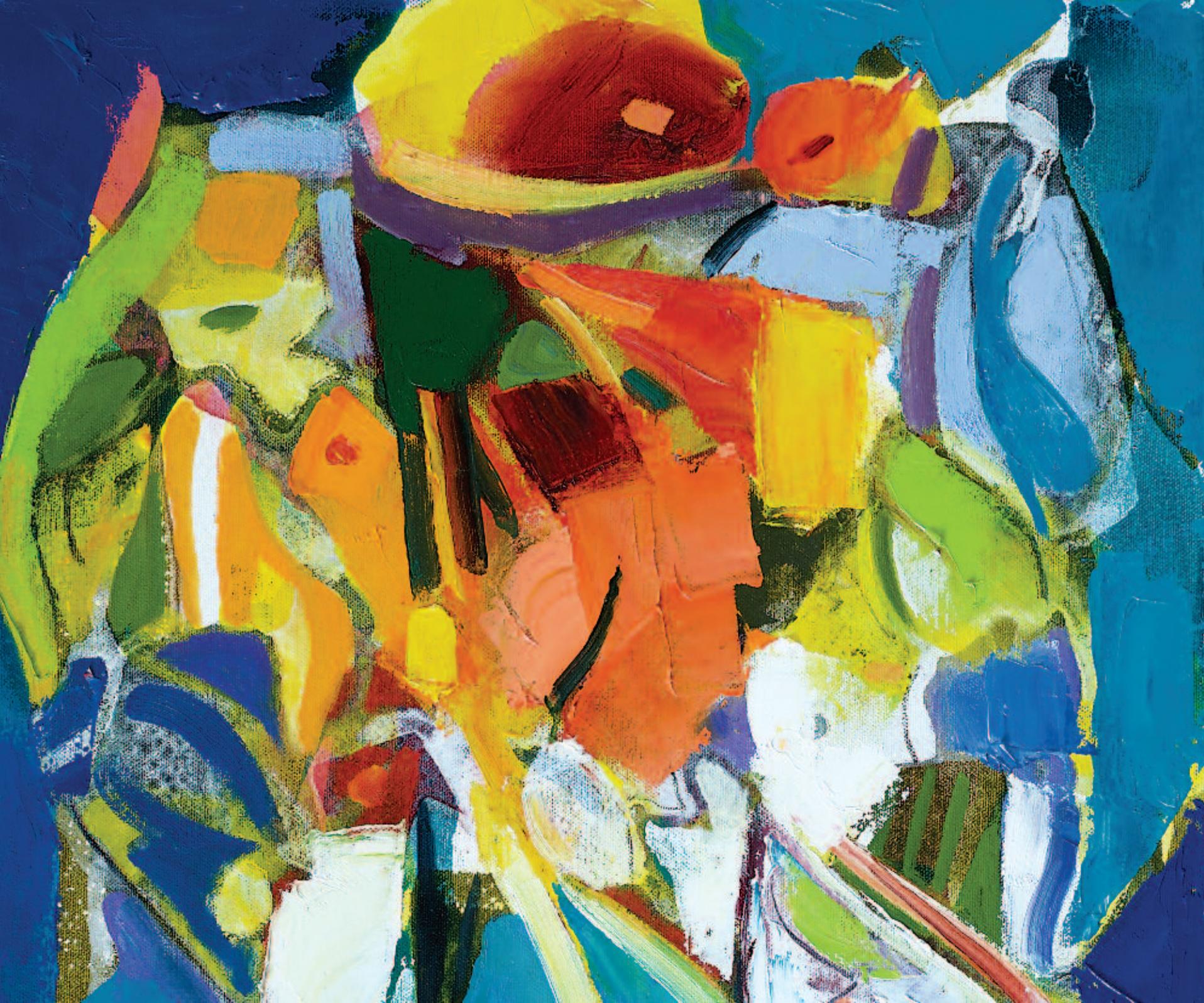




DEREK BALMER • CATTO GALLERY

March 2021



Derek Balmer • Solo exhibition • 6 – 24 March 2021

100 Heath Street • Hampstead • London NW3 1DP • 10am – 6pm Mon – Sat • 12:30pm – 6pm Sunday and by appointment
+44 (0)20 7435 6660 • art@cattogallery.co.uk • www.cattogallery.co.uk

CATTOGALLERY

Derek Balmer : Beyond the Rainbow

‘I’m interested in the idea that paint is a metaphor which seeks to visualise an unseen world of sensitivities we hold inside ourselves. I think about paint being a kind of emotional gel which is locked in place by the structure and limits of the canvas.’

Robert Priseman, painter and curator

In the mid-50s, when they were still barely 20, Derek Balmer, then studying at the The West of England College of Art, and his photographer friend John Hooper, both bought Vespa scooters and, after a year or so exploring England and Scotland, decided to depart Bristol for Paris, Venice, and Rome, this time in an ancient Riley. “The sirens of the south had been calling for years ever since I had pressed my nose against the gallery windows of Frost and Reed and seen the sunlit harbours and colour-drenched vistas of D’oily John’s evocative paintings. To hell with Euston Road and good taste. I wanted the land beyond the rainbow” Derek later recounted in his vivid 2020 memoir, *A Singular Vision*. They didn’t in fact make it as far as Rome on this occasion – the car broke down briefly in the Appenines – but nonetheless managed to see “*The Birth of Venus*” in Florence, visit Picasso’s pottery in Vallauris and soak up D’oily John’s landscapes around Nice and Cannes. And there can be barely a year since when he hasn’t made that same journey south – with Spain, Greece, Morocco, Turkey and even, on one occasion West Africa, along with Italy and France, providing the subject matter for the vast majority of his paintings ever since.

The South, its landscape and architecture, in short, holds the emotional key to that “unseen world of sensitivities” that drives Balmer, the painter, now as it always has done, and so it is tempting to speculate briefly on some of the elements that make up that world. Thus the characteristically passionate colour that has always imbued all his work would seem, somewhat like the Scottish Colourists, a reaction perhaps to the lack of

colour in his very Northern inheritance, that of an early childhood in Co. Durham. At the same time the hypersensitivity to light and to structure and composition that are always such a crucial factor in the shaping this colour can perhaps be seen to derive from the same love of pictorial purity and dynamics that made him so successful when he chose to make his living as a professional photographer in the mid-1950s. The Northern in him made for a photographer, the Southern a painter and each permeated the other to unique effect!

They are characteristics that are still very much in evidence in this new body of work but what is perhaps even more intriguing to note is how, now in his mid-80s, he has, very consciously one suspects, been feeling the need to condense and simplify these elements still further - with bold and exhilarating results. There has been a notable shift in the choice of subject matter as well: when I first wrote about a show of his work in 2005, the emphasis then seemed to be rather more on architectural interiors – ancient Roman and Byzantine churches, their catacombs and tombs, crypts, memorials and murals: they are still there, though to a lesser degree now and tending to be viewed from the outside, as an integral part of a broader landscape vision.

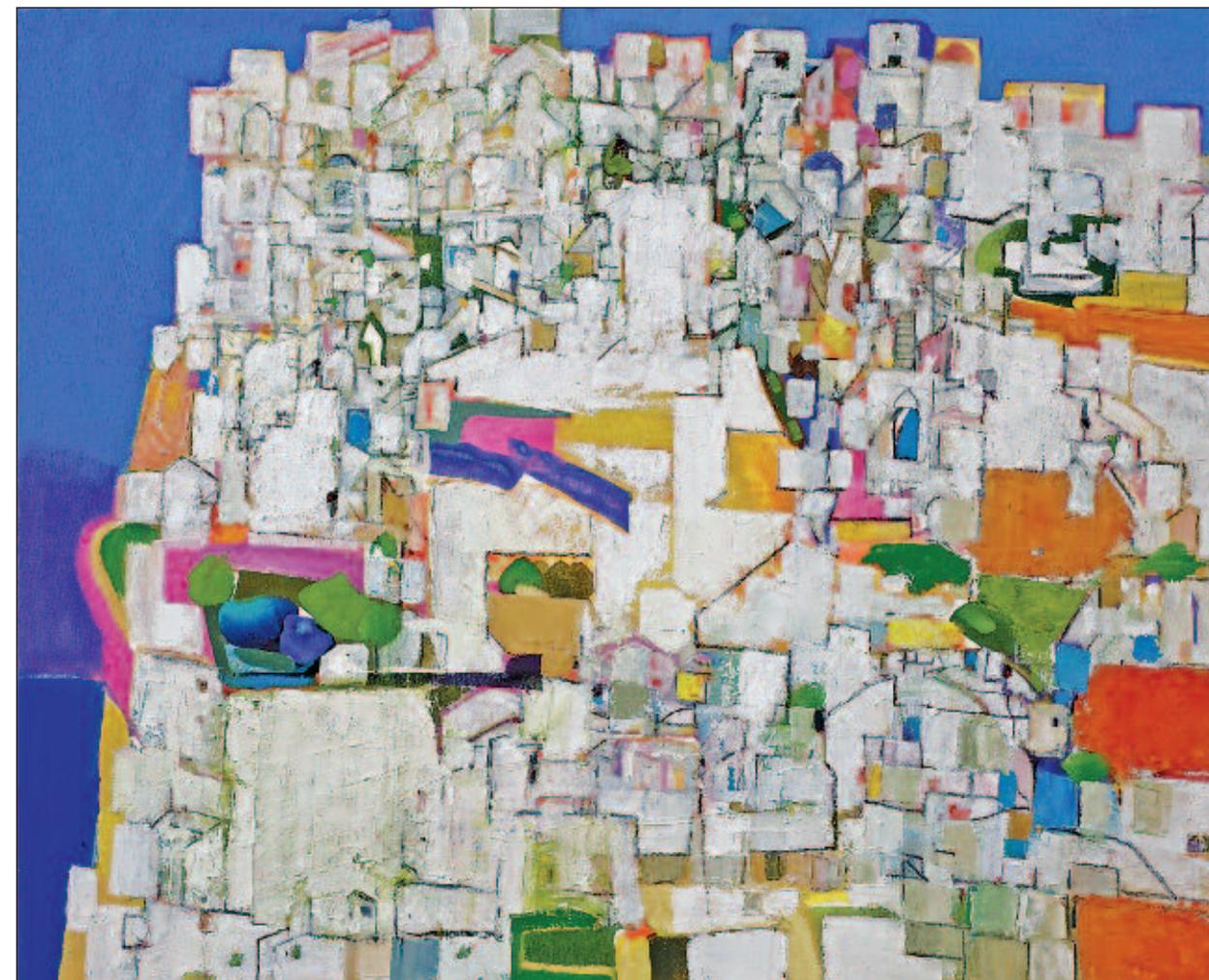
Alongside the exuberant Mediterranean landscapes, garden and flower subjects also seem to be increasingly preoccupying his artistic imagination, the artistic conundrum of trying to contain the intense sensations evoked by their vivid, unruly forms within the structure and limits of the painting’s ground evoking some of the most lyrical and acute images in the exhibition. For example *Water Lilies*, where the licking, flame-like leaves and flowers - tongues of intense purples, rusty pinks, blues and greens - create a swirling, dance-like rhythm around a core of white shapes which, in turn, subtly provide the breathing spaces that then allow the individual plant forms to retain their formal integrity. Meanwhile *Entrance to a garden, Cadiz* offers a very different solution to the

pictorial issues, the suggestion of an underlying architecture to the plant-forms in the picture’s title being created by the compositional structure, essentially a series of vertical pillars of light and dark blues, blacks, oranges and greens holding the exuberant sprays of flower and plant forms in a magical tension. He shows himself to be endlessly inventive in the variety of solutions to this question of form too, with the thin, dark upright stems of the lily-pads in *Water Lilies* allowing him to engage in a rich extravagance of colour – purples, blues and pinky reds - to convey the sensation of the flowers and leaves and their reflections.

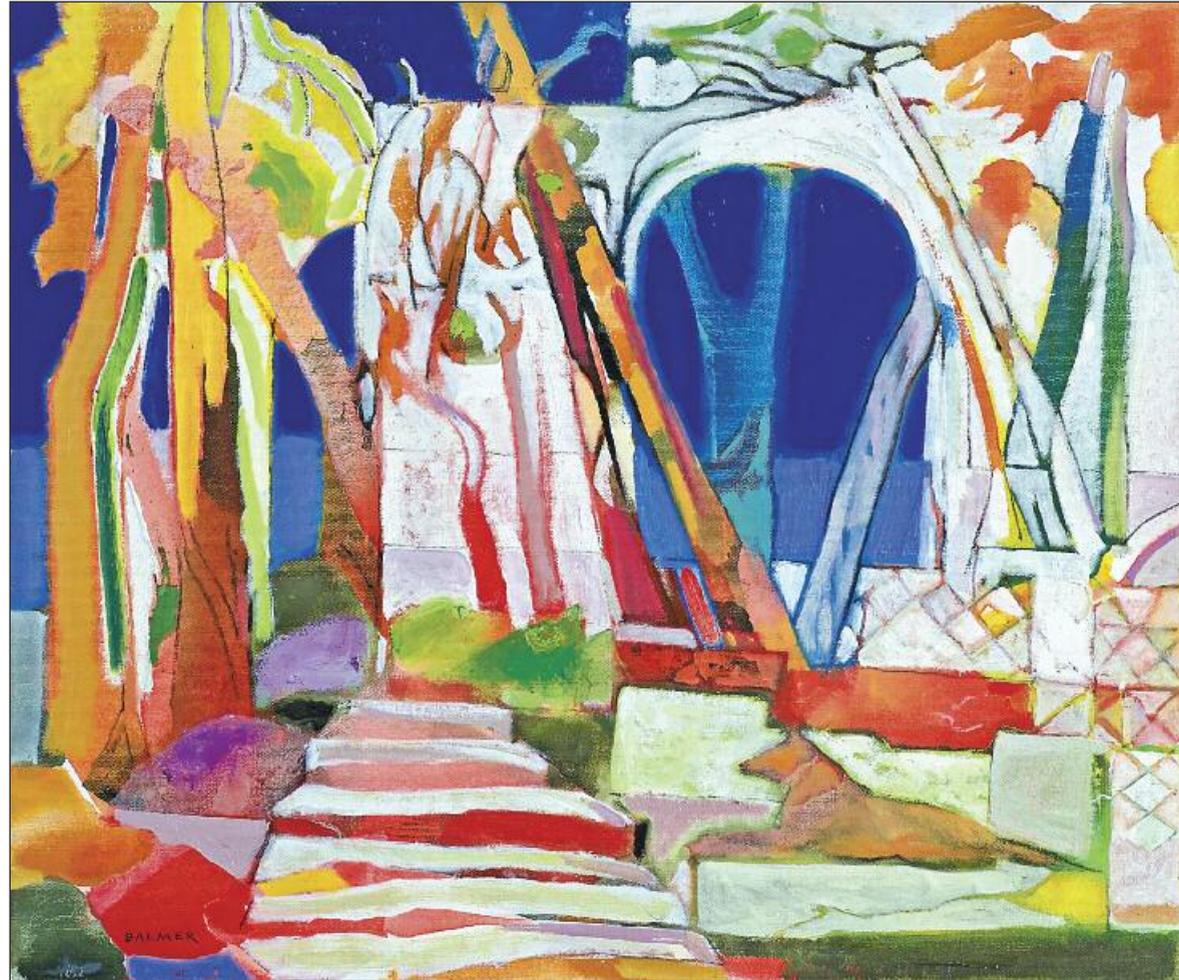
He carries these qualities effortlessly over into the landscapes too so that in a hugely complex architectural landscape like *Hill Town Aegean* the sense of a dense network of streets and buildings and small gardens finds its compositional equivalent in a flattened jigsaw of small, dark-edged, creamy-white cubes interspersed with flashes of dark blues, ochres, cool greens and purples that suggest gardens, pools and trees. Set against the flattest of intense dark-blue backgrounds – sea or sky or both – it is a background that draws the eye quietly back to, and emphasises, the implicit 3-dimensionality of the cubic structure. Elsewhere, as in *Guadalquivir* for example, he makes use of an interlocking mosaic of larger rectangles in blues, ochres and olive greens to convey the sense of the tawny leopard-skin qualities of the hot Spanish landscape cut across by the great river, that of the picture’s title, to distinctly monumental effect for a painting just 36 x 48in!

Sixty-five years or after Derek Balmer first set out for the South in his unreliable old Riley, he returns here, yet again, only to my mind, better than ever, with a room full of light and colour that tells us, as his great artistic hero Matisse once observed of himself how he is “unable to distinguish between the feeling I have for life and my way of expressing it...”

Nicholas Usherwood, writer and curator
December 2020



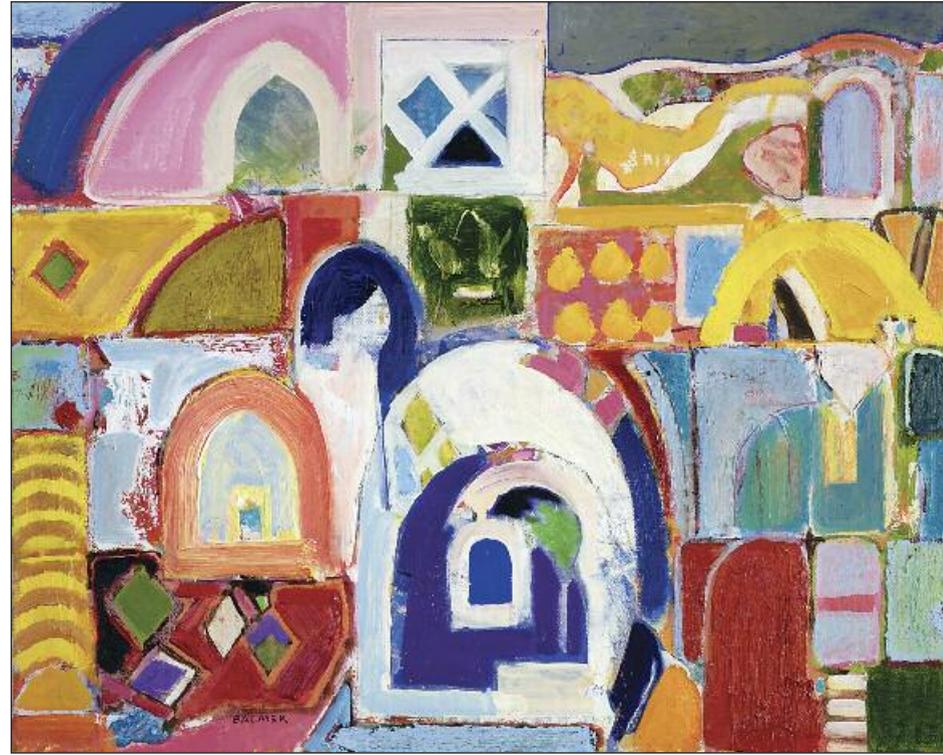
above: *Hill Town, Aegean* 2013 oil on canvas 61 x 76cm • front cover and detail on inside front cover: *Wild Flowers* 2020 oil on canvas 51 x 41cm



Hotel garden with dog, Spain 2016 oil on canvas 51 x 61cm



Boatyard with Dog 2013 oil on canvas 61 x 76cm



Small Tangier Painting 2019 oil on canvas 25.5 x 30.5cm • Rabat 2013 oil on canvas 41 x 51cm



Tangier 2015 oil on canvas 71 x 91.5cm



Guadalquivir 2012 oil on canvas 91.5 x 122cm



Tree Felling, Tuscany 2014 oil on canvas 71 x 91.5cm

Forest Red 2020 oil on canvas 91.5 x 71cm



Forest Blue 2015 oil on canvas 122 x 91.5cm





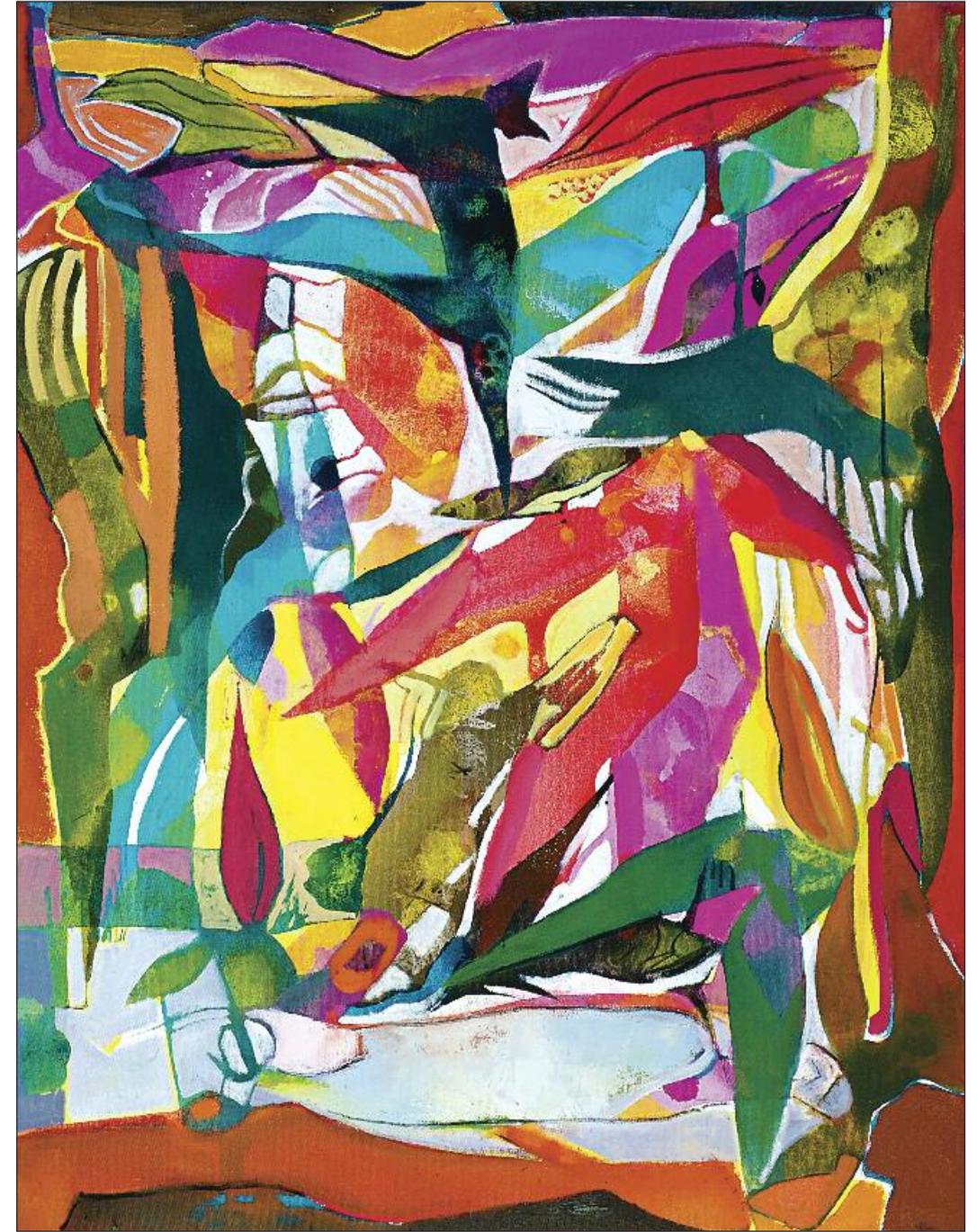
Desert Edge, Sinai 2018 oil on canvas 61 x 76cm



Harvest, Umbria 2015 oil on canvas 71 x 91.2cm



Tuscan Red 2017 oil on canvas 61 x 76cm • facing page: Water Lilies 2016 oil on canvas 91.5 x 71cm





Oasis, Desert Edge 2014 oil on canvas 91.5 x 122cm • facing page: Volterra 2015 oil on canvas 142 x 112cm





Sinai, Desert Trail with Skull 2018 oil on canvas 61 x 76cm



September Afternoon 2018 oil on canvas 71 x 91.5cm



Lily Pond 2018 oil on canvas 51 x 61cm



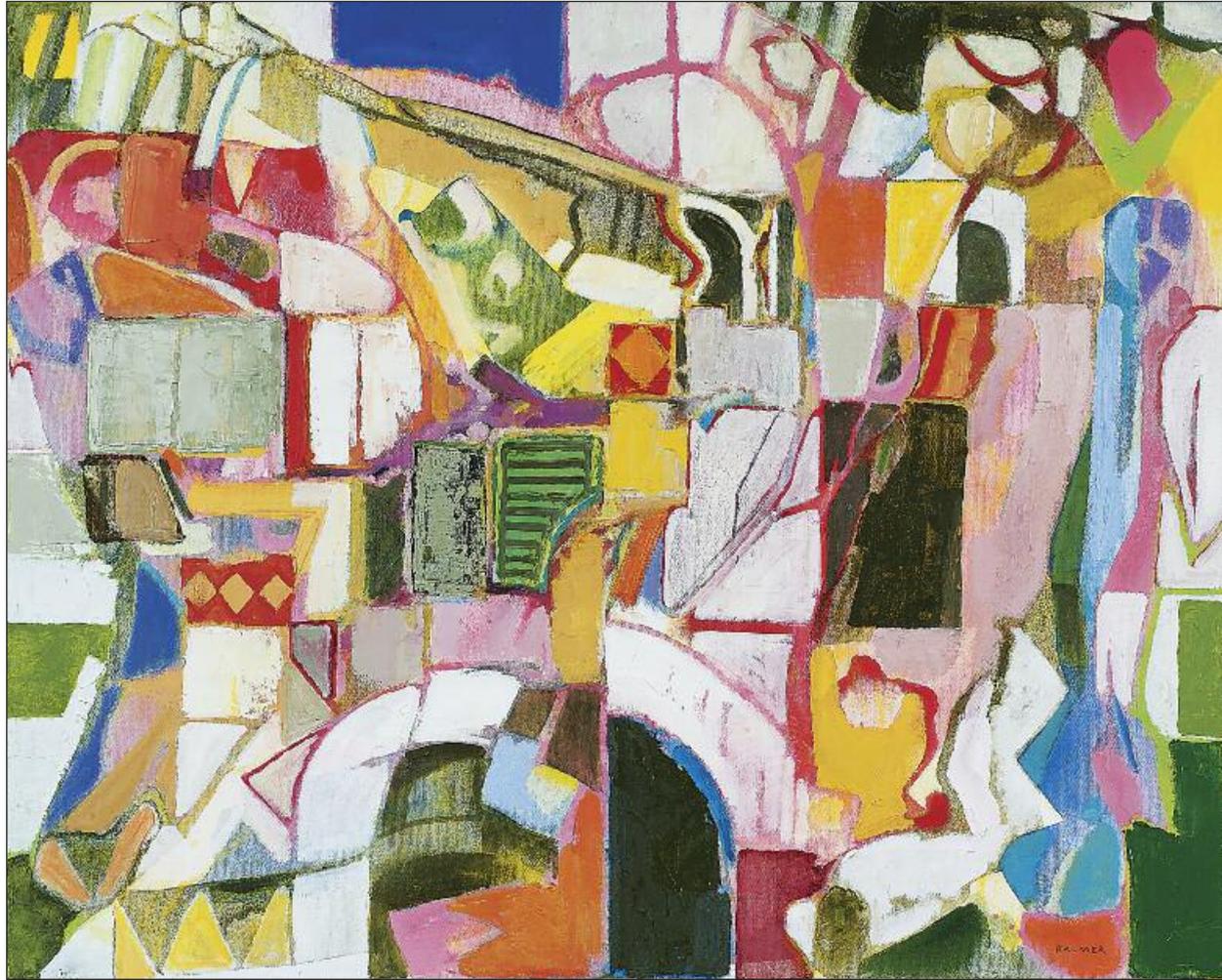
Entrance to a Garden, Cadiz 2018 oil on canvas 51 x 61cm



Summer Landscape with field of Blue 2018 oil on canvas 76 x 102cm



White Cliff with Beach, Aegean 2017 oil on canvas 76 x 102cm



Tetuan Revisited 2018 oil on canvas 61 x 76cm

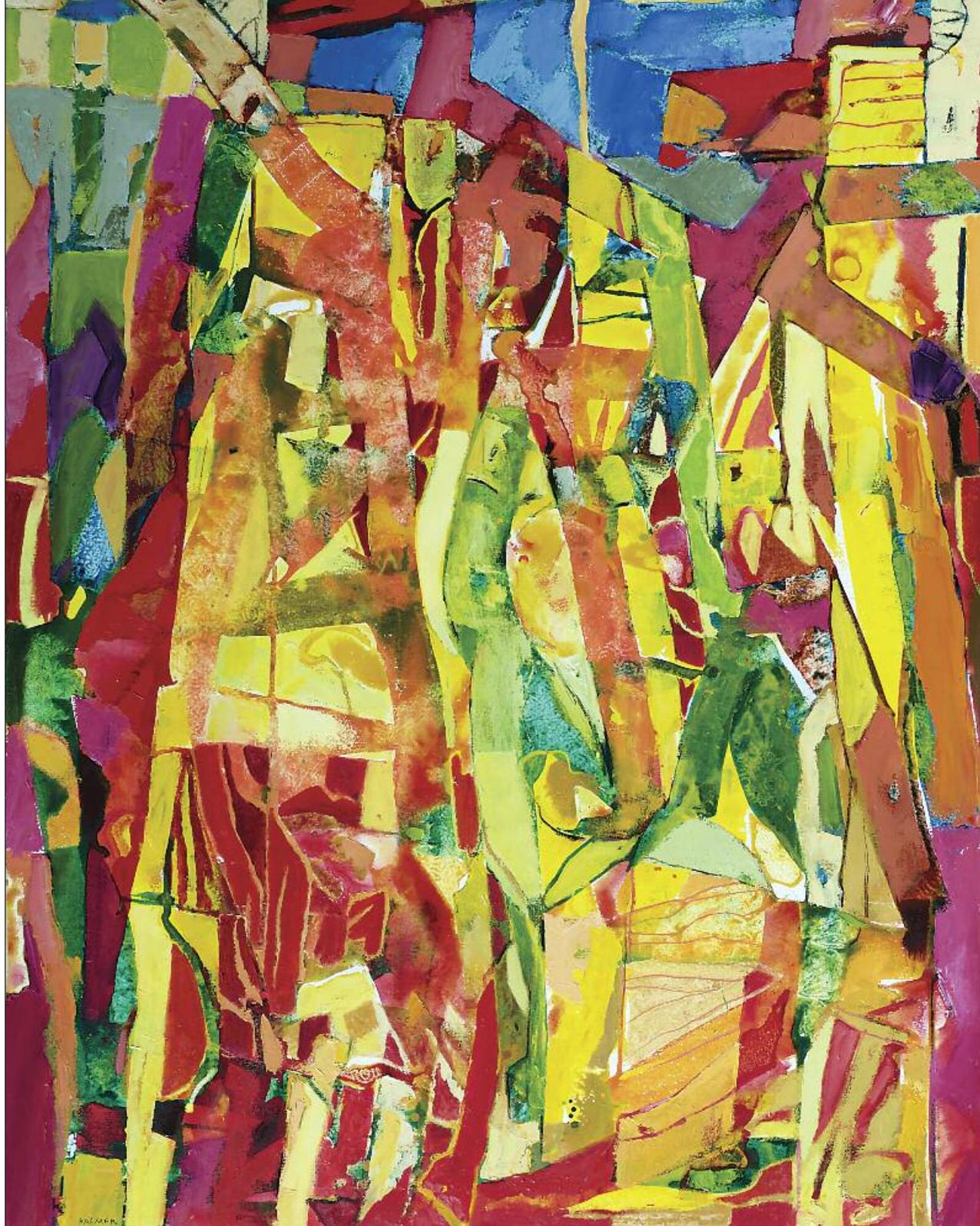


Mediterranean Afternoon (St Tropez) 2019 oil on canvas 61 x 76cm



High Sierra 2019 oil on canvas 51 x 61cm • facing page: Zafra 2019 oil on canvas 91.5 x 71cm

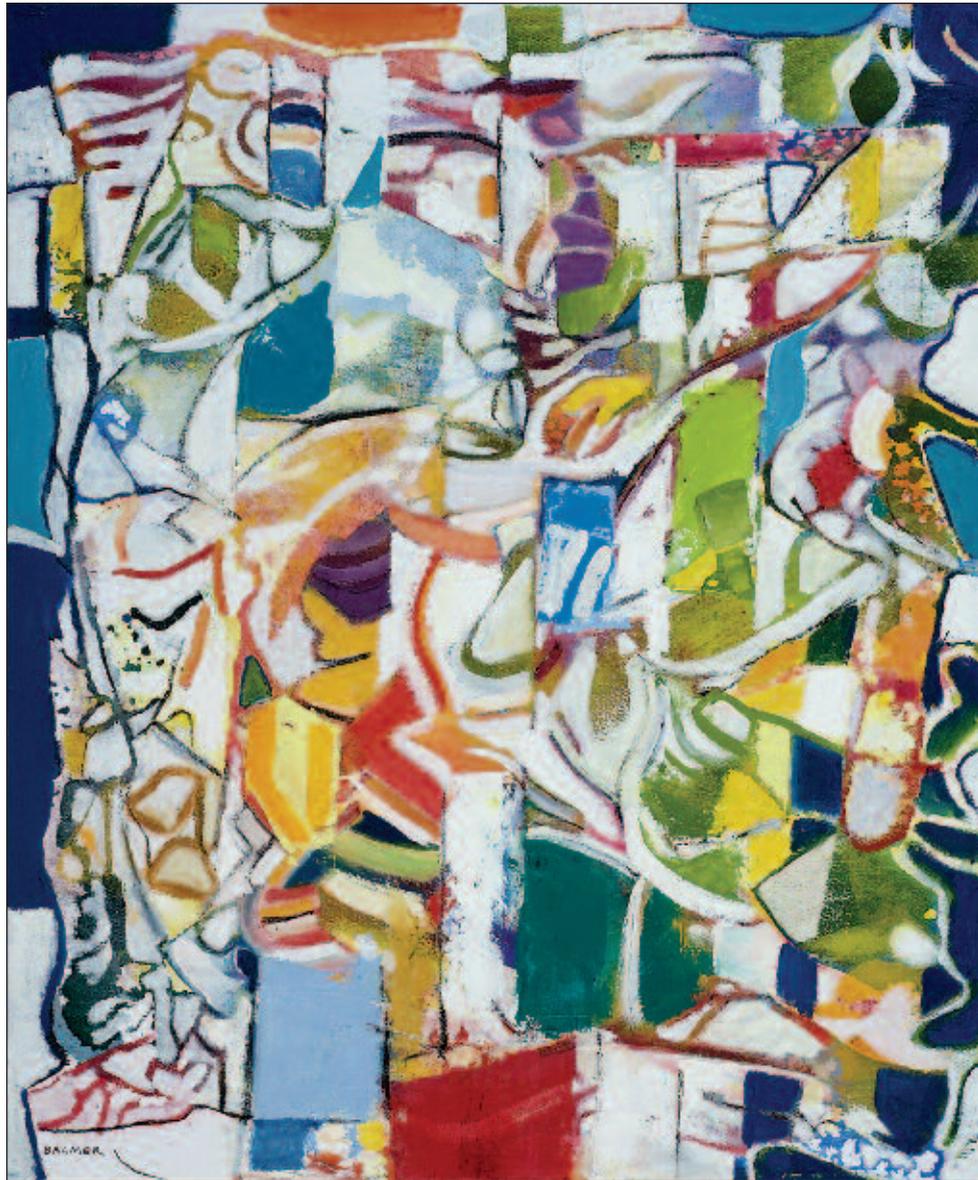




Pienza Summer 2015
oil on canvas 142 x 112cm



Entrance to a Copse 2016
oil on canvas 91.5 x 71cm



Summer Snowfall III 2019 oil on canvas 61 x 51cm



above and detail on inside back cover: Anniversary Flowers 2020 oil on canvas 41 x 51cm

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.
 2021 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](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 D ART PPRWA

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



CATTO GALLERY

100 Heath Street • Hampstead • London NW3 1DP • 10am - 6pm Mon - Sat • 12:30pm - 6pm Sunday and by appointment
+44 (0)20 7435 6660 • art@cattogallery.co.uk • www.cattogallery.co.uk