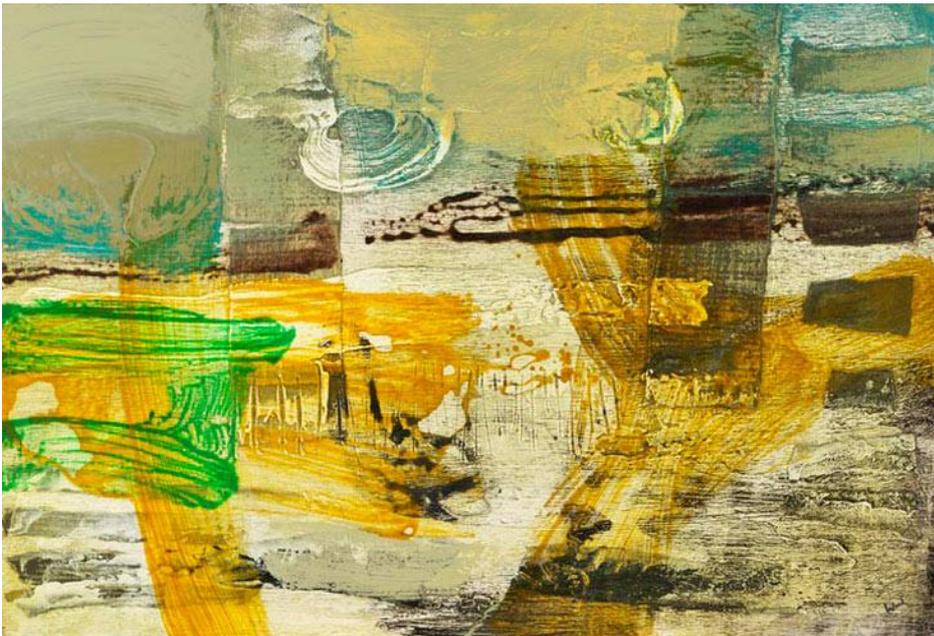


Immersion- The Art of Christopher Wood

The art of Christopher Wood RSW is defined by immersion in the materiality of painting as a transformative process. This latest body of work reflects the evolution of Wood's practice in a series of paintings and mixed media works which display the artist's tenacity and skill; balancing instinctual, spontaneous marks with structural elements of composition. Inspired by the artist's coastal environment near his home in Dunbar, Wood's palette is infused with the reflection and absorption of light to be found in ever changing elements of Scottish land and seascape. The artist's choice of colour echoes the relationship to subject in his work; defined not by naturalism but the visualisation of an interior world, both sensual and cerebral. The opaque qualities of acrylic often used in his mixed media works create subtly layered surfaces that heighten our sense of illumination through abstraction.

Rain-Wet Shore (Acrylic, Mixed Media, collage on panel) 2012 is a particularly fine example, a work that references natural elements of cloud in its circular forms and richly textural surfaces, presenting a sense of imaginative space in the conceptual arrangement of form and use of materials. The human mark is ever present in intuitive scratched, drawn and brush marks which operate in perfect counterpoint with more formal elements of the composition. The balance of vertical and horizontal forms resembles Japanese design in their economy and elegance, rendered in dominant yellow and ochre. The internal architecture of this mixed media work is nature distilled to an idea; the feeling of luminosity in the emergence of the white ground, of light hitting the glistening shore and the creation on this two dimension surface of an expansive terrain within the heart and mind of both artist and viewer.



Rain Wet Shore – acrylic, mixed media and collage on panel – 41.9cm x 62.2cm

In *Undertow* (Acrylic, mixed media on panel) 2012 it is the delicacy of the textural surface of the image that seduces; in the distressed panel, the residual stain of colour and feeling, together with the lyrical, organic forms that give the work its subtly shifting rhythm. The physical separation of raw materials feels alchemical with reactive pigment applied and scraped away as part of the creative process. This quality can also be seen in *After the Rain* (Acrylic & collage on board) 2012, where bare bones of the earth or self are exposed in bold gestural marks at the centre of the image. This small square composition reads very much like a triptych with the placement of red behind a linear separation of emulsified white and black pigment, figurative in its associations. The distressed texture of wood and the feeling of colour washed from the soul permeate this tremendously powerful composition. Wood's

handling of his chosen materials lays bare human presence in the work, in the reaction of substances or impulses within the individual unearthed by the cleansing element of water. Although of a modest scale the emotional gravitas of *After the Rain* extends beyond the physical frame. The materiality of Wood's work conveys not just a tactile engagement with forces present in the natural world but within ourselves.



Untertow – acrylic, mixed media and collage on panel – 45.7cm x 50.8cm

Within this body of work *Sea Wall* (Acrylic & collage on canvas) 2006 is a seminal painting, a work of monumentality and psychological depth that defies the relatively modest scale of the canvas. The artist's handling of materials and choice of colour is particularly powerful and evocative. Deep wells of tactile colour are akin to Max Ernst's technique of decalcomania in their intensity, plunging the viewer into a pool of dark emerald, expansive as the collective unconscious. The arrangement of three overlapping geometric forms, bleached and exposed with successive tides of pigment comprise shore and barrier to the immensity of the ocean beyond. The human element within this work can be felt in the fragile edges of textiles, gradation of hue seemingly immersing both these raw materials and the viewer in archetypal depths of our own imagining. The use of found materials is inspired and the sense of balance within the composition expertly poised. It is a work of transcendental physicality, pure visual poetry sensed and felt in the artist's distillation of pictorial elements of line, tone, form, colour and texture.



Sea Wall – acrylic and collage on canvas – 2006 - 61cm x 61cm

Christopher Wood's intuitive use of materials is superbly balanced by his knowledge of visual grammar, rooted in the European tradition of Western painting and Abstract Expressionism. Wood's work references *pintura mática* or material painting of the 1950's exemplified by Antoni Tàpies and Alberto Burri whose use of materials such as marble dust, sand, pumice, burlap and tar combined with more traditional art materials redefined the discipline of painting. The influence of Braque's Cubist collages in their use of fragments of text and everyday newsprint can also be found in the artist's work. Graduating with Honours in Drawing and Painting from Edinburgh College of Art in 1984 and recipient of The James Torrance Memorial Award (RGI 1993), The Armour Award (RGI 1994), The Glasgow Art Club Fellowship (RSW 2005) and the Sir William Gillies Award (RSW 2009), Wood's distinctive work is represented internationally in private and corporate collections including: HRH Prince Charles the Duke of Rothesay, the Bank of Scotland, United Distillers, Edinburgh University, Lennox Lewis, The Demarco European Foundation, MacRoberts Solicitors, Premier Property Group and Phoenix Equity Partners. Since his first solo show in 1987 his work has continued to evolve, a process of poetic distillation clearly driven by the artist's technique and a willingness to push the boundaries of his own practice.

Grey Dawn (Acrylic/collage on paper) 2008 gives insight into the artist's creative process, a page from a sketchbook perforated at the edges, heavily textured with fragments of collaged text and delicate washes of blue, umber and green. Like *Sea Wall* there is recognition of many of the distinctive elements of Wood's practice that are refined in later works. *Spring Tide* (Oil on Canvas) 2012 is a wonderful example, a large scale composition of pure abstraction where formal structure and instinctual mark are equal partners. Wood creates

extraordinary depth in the overlap of colour, creating tension and cohesion of form, colour and mark. A vibrant composition of ultramarine, cerulean, white, orange, yellow, calligraphic black with delicately laced accents of liquefied red, the artist creates a feeling of essential energy in tune with timeless cycles of tide and season. Characteristically human presence can be felt in the work, in sections scratched and crosshatched with layers of under painting exposed in all their intricacy. This mindful archaeology of the pictorial surface reflects the artist's engagement with the art of painting and the expressive potential of raw pigment and as a means of human expression.



Grey Dawn – acrylic and collage on paper – 2008 14.6cm x 21cm

As in music, abstraction heightens the transformation of physical experience and sensation into emotive thought. *A Piece of the Wind* (Acrylic, mixed media & collage on panel) 2012 in its complex design reads like a piece of contrapuntal music with each formal element of the composition so intricately woven together that the method like the element of air is almost intangible. In abstraction we see, feel, or hear with immediacy, especially when traditional notions of subject are absent. In *Edge of Green* (Acrylic, mixed media, collage) 2012 it is the pure association of colour dominating the finely tuned composition that the viewer resoundingly responds to, a feeling which permeates our reading of the image as a whole. Throughout his career Christopher Wood's movement towards abstraction reflects immersion in his chosen environment and dynamic experimentation, grappling with the plastic elements of image making to create potent and contemplative spaces for the imagination.

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