



Jack Otway
Bloom Inward
November 6th - December 11th

There is a phenomenon in the botanical world where a diseased plant uses all its strength to produce its most beautiful blossoms and shoots just before it dies. The name for this is 'panic bloom.' It's the frantic uprising of an organism against its own demise, an insistence on flourishing in the face of decay. This concept is transferable to contexts outside of the natural world, too: economists have identified panic blooming on the stock, housing and commodity markets. Prices soar and bubbles form not as a symptom not of a healthy system, but a broken one.

Jack Otway's meticulous paintings follow a similar logic to the panic bloom: they are hyper-seductive surfaces that betray an underlying sense of threat. His paintings have two layers: one is a near-transparent glaze forming a kaleidoscopic geometric pattern, consisting of repeating lines or squares with alternating colours. Each shape is a loop or dead end, taking the viewer nowhere but deeper inside the painting itself, like a trap. The satisfying depth of Jack's fluorescent colours reinforce the hypnotic effect of these works. It's difficult to turn away and hard to look at the same time.

The crucial layer, however, is in fact the one that comes before: a gestural, acrylic monochrome that distorts and brings movement to the painting's surface. This layer lends Jack's paintings a palpable, spatial dimension and brings up connotations of fabric or folded paper. It's here that the works become corporeal and in fact almost audible. The crinkling and crumpling of a flexible material is a common noise used in ASMR, and we can almost feel it. Satisfaction merges with unease, like a pleasurable seizure. It is in the interaction between these two layers and sensations that horror comes into play.

While we often associate horror with bodily deformities and excretions, there is a different kind of horror embedded in order and efficiency. International corporations use glossy interfaces and childlike fonts to convince customers to trust them — an instrument in solidifying their control of almost every aspect of our lives in the interest of profit. Housing developments promise pastel-coloured bliss on their hoardings, hiding the ruins that lie beyond them from view. Increasingly, abstractions in the form of ratings and numbers come to define our possibilities, and we are supposed to believe in their authority.

In their book "Horror in Architecture", authors Joshua Comaroff and Ong Ker-Shing posit that "horror is the truth about abstraction". It is an instrument that allows us to peel open the envelope of global capitalism and disgorge its contents. And what emerges are not the clean, automated equations we were promised, but dust, waste, plastic and toxins.

Jack's ordered compositions embrace the language of abstraction. His works are even unceremoniously titled according to the chronology in which he makes them — in this show at Ginny on Frederick, *030*, *038*, *042*, *043* and *046*. Despite their slight nod to material and fabric, his paintings belong to their own world, a different dimension. But undoubtedly, there is a real-life spectre haunting them, a creeping infection blossoming through the surface. Faced with a world in which environmental, economic and health crises are endangering and calling into question our very survival, it's not just plants that are moved towards a flourishing, excessive will to live.

Jack Otway (1991) lives and works in London. Past solo and group exhibitions include Peter von Kant, London; Assembly House, Leeds; Union Gallery, London; Zona Mista, London; The Flat Massimo Carasi, Milan, IT and Achenbach Hagemeier, Dusseldorf, DE.

Works (from left to right):

042, 2021

Oil, acrylic, dispersion, polyester
100x100cm

030, 2021

Oil, graphite, acrylic, dispersion, polyester
100x100cm

038, 2021

Oil, acrylic, dispersion, polyester
120x120cm

046, 2021

Oil, acrylic, dispersion, pencil, polyester
100x100cm

043, 2021

Oil, graphite, acrylic, pencil, dispersion, polyester
100x100cm