

Press Release

Alison Watt: A Kind of Longing

6 Fitzroy Square
3 February – 10 March 2023

Parafin in collaboration
with Tristan Hoare

Tristan Hoare



Alison Watt, *Capra*, 2021
Oil on canvas, 80 × 80 cm
© Alison Watt 2022.
Courtesy Parafin, London.
Photo: John McKenzie

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In a unique collaboration, Parafin and Tristan Hoare are delighted to announce an exhibition of new work by Alison Watt. The exhibition continues Watt's ongoing engagement with the practice of the celebrated eighteenth-century Scottish portrait painter Allan Ramsay (1713-84), first showcased in her acclaimed exhibition, 'A Portrait Without Likeness', at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh in 2021. As the architect Robert Adam was part of Ramsay's circle (and sat for a portrait by Ramsay in 1755), Watt expressed a wish to show her new paintings in an Adam interior. This created an opportunity for a special collaboration between Parafin and Tristan Hoare, whose premises are housed in a Grade I listed Georgian house in Fitzroy Square, which was designed by Robert Adam just before his death in 1792. The building was completed by Adam's brothers James and William in 1798.

Speaking of the opportunity to show her work in a Robert Adam designed interior, Alison Watt said, 'Ramsay was a painter but he was also a writer and a thinker. His friends included some of the great philosophers, painters and architects of his age, Robert Adam among them. Ramsay was known for his love of engaging in lively conversation with his sitters, because for him, conversation was central to his understanding of them. I'd like to imagine that some of those conversations may have taken place in rooms much like those at 6 Fitzroy Square. Perhaps in the very house itself...'

Watt's new paintings originate in the artist's continuing fascination with Ramsay's portraits and the drawings and sketchbooks from his extensive archive held by the National Galleries of Scotland, to which she was granted special access. Watt, best known for her paintings of fabric and drapery, has long been an admirer of Ramsay's portraits of women, in particular, the intensely personal images of his first and second wives, Anne Bayne (died 1743) and Margaret Lindsay of Evelick (1726-82). Taking objects that appear in Ramsay's portraits and drawings – including books, a cabbage leaf, lacework, feathers and roses – as signs or symbols of aspects of the sitter's life and character, Watt's new paintings are neither portraits nor still lives, but instead extraordinary hybrids of both genres.

Speaking of the opportunity to work with Alison Watt, Tristan Hoare said: 'I have long been an admirer of Alison's painting and I am delighted to collaborate on this exhibition with Parafin, in which the conceptual and aesthetic synergy between the artworks and the eighteenth-century architecture will be evident.' Parafin founders Ben Tufnell and Matt Watkins comment on the chance to collaborate with Tristan Hoare: 'We're always looking for ways to collaborate with friends and colleagues. In the current moment, it feels good to share resources and opportunities. It's an honour to work with Tristan and his team to bring this remarkable group of paintings to London and fulfil Alison's vision for her work.'

'A Kind of Longing' takes its title from an essay by art historian Dr Tom Normand, who contributed to the exhibition catalogue of 'A Portrait Without Likeness' at the Scottish National Portrait Gallery in 2021. Normand notes that 'the physical presence of [Watt's subjects], resting within their neutral and uncertain ground, is disconcerting. They appear to speak to a connection that is lost, or only half-remembered. A kind of longing.' The exhibition will continue until 10 March 2023 at 6 Fitzroy Square.

Alison Watt

Widely regarded as one of the leading British painters working today, Alison Watt (born 1965, Greenock) first came to public attention in 1987 when she won the National Portrait Gallery's prestigious annual award while still a student at Glasgow School of Art. She subsequently became well known for her paintings of figures, often female nudes, before beginning in the late 1990s, to focus on the fabric which had previously served as backdrops or props for her compositions. Since then, Watt's paintings have continued to negotiate a position close to abstraction while remaining firmly rooted in her studies of drapery, light, the human form and her committed engagement with Old Master paintings and sculpture.

In 2006-08 Watt was Associate Artist at The National Gallery in London. Works from her residency were shown in her landmark solo exhibition, 'Phantom', at the National Gallery in 2008 and Watt was awarded an OBE in the same year. In 2014, as part of the GENERATION programme of exhibitions celebrating recent Scottish art, a retrospective exhibition of Watt's paintings was held at Perth Museum and Art Gallery, and a solo display was presented at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh.

Important recent solo exhibitions include 'Alison Watt: A Portrait Without Likeness', Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh (2021) and Inverness Museum & Art Gallery (2022), 'Alison Watt: A Shadow on the Blind', Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal (2018) and Parafin, London (2019). Recent group exhibitions include 'The Conference of The Birds', Tristan Hoare Gallery, London (2022), 'Fabric: Touch and Identity', Compton Verney, Warwickshire (2021), 'The Forest', Parafin, London (2021), 'The Modern Portrait', Scottish National Portrait Gallery (2017), 'Ages of Wonder', National Galleries of Scotland (2017), 'Facing The World: Self-Portraits from Rembrandt to Ai Weiwei', Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Lyon and Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh (2015), 'Defining Beauty', British Museum, London (2015), 'Reality: Modern & Contemporary British Painting', Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, Norwich and Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool (2014-15) and 'Autoritratto', Uffizi Gallery (2010).

Watt's work is held in many important public and private collections around the world, including the National Portrait Gallery in London, the National Galleries of Scotland, the Arts Council Collection, the British Council Collection, the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow, Southampton City Art Gallery, the US Embassy, in London, and the Uffizi in Florence.

Parafin

Parafin was founded by Ben Tufnell and Matt Watkins in 2014. The gallery represents emerging artists such as Aimée Parrott, Indrė Šerpytytė and Fred Sorrell as well as major figures including Alison Watt, Nathan Coley, Tim Head, Hamish Fulton and Nancy Holt. The gallery is active in initiating and supporting offsite projects by the artists it works with and maintains a publishing programme. Parafin regularly exhibits at international art fairs including Frieze Masters, London and The Armory Show, New York.

Tristan Hoare

Tristan Hoare, founded in 2009, is a multi-layered gallery focusing on both young and established artists working in a variety of mediums, such as ceramics, glass, painting and drawing, as well as photography. The gallery represents emerging artists such as Sydney Albertini, Kaori Tatebayashi, Paolo Colombo and Nicolas Lefebvre, as well as more established figures such as Alessandro Twombly, Flavie Audi and Taizo Kuroda.

Each year the gallery curates an ambitious exhibition with an overarching theme. 'Geometrica' (2018), 'Botanica' (2019), 'Folds' (2021) and 'The Conference of the Birds' (2022) enabled collaborations with a range of artists and galleries, combining works from the BC to the present day. The gallery is located in an original Georgian townhouse at 6 Fitzroy Square.

6 Fitzroy Square

6 Fitzroy Square is a Grade I listed Georgian townhouse designed by Robert Adam just before his death in 1792 and completed by Adam's brothers James and William in 1798. The building was intended to provide residences for aristocratic families of the time, which is reflected in its lavish proportions, Portland stone frontage and detailed exterior and interior plasterwork, visible to this day.