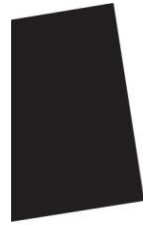


**Ross Chisholm, Jack Duplock,  
Alistair Frost, Paula Kane,  
Lee Maelzer, Penny Neville-Lee &  
Christopher Orr**  
**Essays**  
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## **Introduction**

The British painter Paul Nash wrote in 1938 of “the world that lies visibly about us, but remains unseen because it is not perceived”, he called these *Unseen Landscapes*. He was concerned to make work “made after rather than from nature, that occupy a position between the real and imagined” preferring “to remember scenes and working with a degree of estrangement that transfigures the world.”

The British relationship to landscape is long and emotional: a preciousness perhaps focused by the finite boundary of the sea that surrounds this island as much as its interior richness and variety. Represented in literature, music and painting the history of our relationship with the landscape is a changing and evolving one although at its core is a longing for the “green and pleasant land” sung about in William Blake’s Jerusalem.

Blake’s shadow as poet, painter and religious visionary haunts all who follow, however it is our changing relationship with the landscape as developments in farming, industrialisation and urbanisation that prescribe artistic production. Samuel Palmer’s (a dedicated disciple of Blake in the early Nineteen century) evocations of an English pastoral vision were wrought out of a harsher reality, his small paintings and prints are often internally framed by trees that describe a specific view of a rural idyll. As larger numbers ceased to live and work within the landscape it became something that was viewed and visited. It became a strange and foreign place as the city became familiar and everyday. A growing sense of estrangement led to a melancholic longing for, romanticisation, and a growing affection of its spaces both real and imagined.

It has been suggested that painting can provide a metaphorical boat within which it was possible to escape to somewhere else. This sense of escape is much more about effect, vision, and defining a different role for painting which combines a dreamlike atmosphere with the understood and familiar. The role of space or place within painting constantly changes. For a long time the canvas has been the metaphorical place ‘inhabited’ by an artist for thought and activity and self-expression, but in *The Valley* it features as a place on which something is pictured. The small painting has historically played a range of roles, from the essential intensity of the miniature to the jokey aside. It also offers a place for gradual and detailed exploration. The scale sets up a

deliberately one to one relationship with the person who is looking and that, in turn, mirrors the original relationship between the artist and their work.



The visual languages of popular culture - the comic book, design, film, and other media offer a broad source for the visual literacy of today's artists. Already assimilated, the quotational value of these sources ceases to be the subject and instead offers a different sense of possibility, used in the service of atmosphere rather than speaking of the kitsch and marginal. Their use continues to carry with them associations of naivety or eccentricity which have always been qualities cherished within British Art.

The work in *The Valley* refers, albeit unconsciously, to a country perhaps that remained at the edge of Modernism, somehow finding the island mentality enough to sustain it. The lack of contact and travel after the conflicts that occupied so much of the first half of the twentieth century had a lasting legacy. This brought with it a sweet defensiveness, a tendency to look back at immediate surroundings and culture with a new and heightened affection. With a growth in exotic foreign travel the British rural landscape, previously a location for the idyllic, has become ordinary or dull as it increasingly become adjacent to suburbia and the housing development. Growing from this is a new strangeness and with it a variety of possibilities.

### **Ross Chisholm**

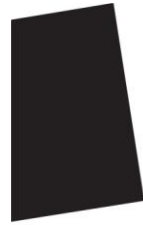
*Christmas Card to Canada* (2004), Oil on board

The presiding mood in Ross Chisholm's painting is one of fracture, the elements are brought together rather than belonging together. The imagery, derived from found slide sets, botanical reference books and art history sit together uncomfortably, never quite forming a whole. This external referencing and sourcing is highlighted by the reuse of motifs within the same image. A small boy appears three times in one image and again in other paintings. The handling of paint adds to the disjuncture, heads are obscured by blobs of viscous paint, reasserting the surface of the painting in contrast to the illusion of place within. There is the sense of a search to home these lost images, now found, but devoid of histories and context. Each painting is a tentative exploration, attempting to give narrative and meaning to these isolated individuals. Backdrops and props appear loosely sketched in, the spread of paint sometimes giving out before the scene becomes too complete. In these pictures of "other" landscapes sprout symbolic mushrooms and toadstools, as a reminder of temporality, and figures who had once smiled towards the camera of a friend or relative now appear lost and isolated. Through the deployment of a contained vocabulary of image and painted language Chisholm explores the complex and shifting relationship between distance and memory.

### **Jack Duplock**

*The Message* (2004), Mixed media

The collaged pictures that Jack Duplock makes are somewhere between posters, film stills and images dredged from paperback horror. Everything was normal: The day, street, hotel lobby, residents... then in walks a zombie gunman, half man, half fly, with revenge on his mind... The pictures dwell on blood and death with a kind of playful innocence, a childlike toying which makes



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them more alarming. The materials chosen take us back to the classroom or to the adolescent's bedroom; cardboard, ink, small tins of Humbrol paint, the red one soon to become a bucket of blood. The joins between the various elements are deliberately obvious, his attitude to imagery reflected in the gathering together of scraps, painting, and drawing for some mock brutal purpose. Yet there is also a poetic dimension and a strange beauty, in the way they confuse our sense of space and depth and conjure a vision where everything has changed places, the insect world with the human, the dead with the living, and the moving with the crystalline. His reference to the horror of film, comic book and pulp novel is allowed to remain fresh and raw in reference to its own implausible construction. The scenarios are played with and played out as if they are fantasy, nightmare and scheme all at once - a vision for future events, one in which we may have no choice but to participate: an innocent plan for the ultimate dystopia.

### **Alistair Frost**

*Et nunc et semper* (2004), Oil on canvas

Alistair Frost's landscapes typically have a low horizon line, with the features looming over us. They give the impression that the viewer is standing at the bottom of a hill or in a valley, looking up at the land rising away from them. The world they portray is decrepit, abandoned, forlorn. Ruins and dead trees litter the scenes. The strange light effects, odd sense of scale, foreshortened depth and simplicity of construction recall in earlier paintings theatrical backdrops against which strange scenes are enacted by a series of props. *L'amour* consists of a silvery, moonlit landscape, with the ruin of a tower standing on a hill, a dead tree dominates the foreground. Hanging from the tree and scattered around the ground are black hearts that appear to have floated down from the sky. Time seems confused in Alistair Frost's paintings, or maybe absent? The laws of physics are confused as well. The moon seems to cast daylight across the landscapes, casting long shadows from castles and gravestones. Frost's paintings are full of moments like this. The melancholic yearning for a romantic idyll that never existed.

### **Paula Kane**

*Gulf* (2004), Oil on canvas

Paula Kane paints Arcadian landscapes. Using high art as her source material her vistas are fantastical eschewing the fantasy worlds of J.R.R.Tolkien or C.S.Lewis. She describes her sources as "forgotten landscapes" - the distant rocky hills behind the Madonna nurturing her baby in an Italian Renaissance altar painting and the bough from which Jean-Honoré Fragonard's girl swings in the perfect embodiment of Rococo frivolity. Kane's paintings also span continents, their differing

geographies spliced together, planted out with trees and shrubs sourced from various climates simultaneously depicting contrasting seasons. In these landscapes time is stilled, even Frederic Edwin Church's epic waterfalls seem frozen and Titian's clouds fail to drift in a quest for the perfect idyll. Banks of flowers in the foreground prohibit trespass lest they are trampled and paths, where visible, remain tantalising rather than points of access. Devoid of any inhabitants – even birds are banished, perfection is created. Her work offers the fragile fusion of different realities, familiar and



evocative yet impossible and unknowable. These are the landscapes of an urban imagination locked in the museum, the souvenir snapshot replaced by the gift shop postcard. They possess a strangeness derived from the slippage (or space) between painted quotation, their arrangement closer to the will of a gardener than some greater being. These are utopian visions haunted by their own perfection.

### **Lee Maelzer**

*Wave over House* (2004), Oil on canvas

Lee Maelzer describes places and events, rendering space and scale meticulously and skillfully. The paintings have the feel of having been made from direct observation but on second glance we see that they are full of impossibility, danger or strangeness. Something is perhaps wrong or displaced in these works, sometimes it is visible and immediate, like *Wave Over House*, and sometimes elusive and puzzling. The way in which they are described diverts this sense of dislocation momentarily, they seem 'painterly' and then become full of questions, finding a parallel in film narrative and science fiction literature. It is as if while we were looking at one thing something else has happened, or is about to happen. The events, sometimes shown and at other times alluded to, are all about collapse and suspense. There is a fascination with the various textures and surfaces of disaster; subtle shades drawing us in, diverting the eye towards the pleasurable and the haunting. The use of isolated figures is occasional yet striking and they come to inhabit the various scenes like phantoms. Pausing within or striding across partly defined landscapes they seem to suggest some scene from a dream.

### **Penny Neville-Lee**

*Out of Season* (2004), Oil on Canvas

The moon glimpsed through the matted branches of a forest shines weakly at night, a darkened log cabin appears deserted amidst the trees at the edge of a lake and a tree-house, its roof hung with light bulbs, burns like a beacon deep within the cloak of night. The images of Penny Neville-Lee's paintings are either appropriated from lifestyle magazines or adapted from her own photographs. They possess a sense of innocence and "wonderment" at the beauty of the world. Prompted by memory, photography and film, her paintings are pregnant with a longing to escape and embark upon adventure, to pretend to loose oneself in the forest and stumble across special places that gradually become assimilated into memories both real and imagined. She describes

the places pictured as “rarely glamorous or extraordinary” but from their studied normality grows a charge of mystery, anxiety and fear, fed by cinematic narratives of twigs that snap underfoot, hooting owls and things that lurk in the dark. Neville-Lee’s paintings exist in the space between what is known and what might be.

**Christopher Orr**

*If There Was Something* (2005), Oil on canvas



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Christopher Orr’s paintings show what could be random scenes torn from the pages of a child’s book. They are painted in a style reminiscent of illustrations found in Ladybird Books from 1960’s, that were current with his own childhood. They encapsulate a cosy innocence whether showing the natives of foreign and exotic lands, deadly snakes, Kings and Queens or contemporary life in Britain, all portrayed with an even handed style and in muted matt colours. Orr’s work, while maintaining a painterly neutrality, consciously move towards a more surreal sensibility in what is pictured.

His earlier paintings registered a search for strangeness recognisable in intention but not necessarily in the image. His paintings refer to a period at the end of the nineteenth century when ideas of the relationship between the possible and the improbable were current. In *Untitled (Dog & Pond)* (2003) he shifts the scale between things that are pictured: two children stand at the edge of water from which emerges a huge dog’s head deliberately out of synch with the obvious pictorial norm. Orr seamless surface combines very different places and associations, they are a reflection of a time when mass reproduction can seep through consciousness to compete with individual experience. In his most recent work he has moved away from the deliberate construction of strangeness to a heightened mood born out of a concentrated and focused intent.