



OF RECKLESSNESS AND WATER

2 September - 28 November 2020

Sophie Varin's paintings exist in a push and pull relationship between distance and proximity, reaching out and slipping away, remembering and forgetting, seeing and hiding - all simultaneously creating a state she tries to induce in the spectator and imbue into the characters in her paintings. In their ambiguity we read familiar moments and emotions, they evoke half-remembered memories; how summer felt when you were seventeen, the name of the first boy who held your hand, or a glimpse of a liaison seen through the window of an apartment as you pass on the train. They are paintings that we feel at the edge of our consciousness, they are stories we've read and songs we've heard.

Night Swimming by R.E.M expresses, through its musical canvas together with Michael Stipes lyrics, a yearning for a half-remembered innocence. A moment in time, frozen in memory, revealed in glimpses.

"The photograph on the dashboard, taken years ago
Turned around backwards so the windshield shows
Every streetlight reveals the picture in reverse
Still, it's so much clearer"

We stand, with the perspective time, looking back at our earlier self. Nostalgic for the innocence and insecurities, the carelessness and the nervous joy of living. A flash of skin, the smell of the earth, the electricity of an others leg grazing your own under the water - impressions of someone we used to know or someone we used to be.

"It's not like years ago
The fear of getting caught
Of recklessness and water
They cannot see me naked
These things, they go away
Replaced by everyday"

In Ovid's Metamorphoses, it is described how Actaeon - accompanied by his hounds, their blood still high chasing deer through the forest - steps into a clearing and finds himself gazing upon the naked form of the goddess Diana bathing in a cool pool. We imagine how time slows right down, frozen by the tension of the moment, heavy with the weight of the many potential outcomes. Actaeon, an unwitting transgressor though surely not unhappy to be looking upon the legendary beauty of the Goddess. Surprise, guilt, arousal, shame; he would avert his eyes. Although perhaps she had lured him here, she was after all the goddess of the hunt and it was well known the gods would sometimes take a mortal lover. Diana in her turn had sought a private moment, to escape the stifling heat of the summer, safe in the cool shade and isolation of the forest. To be bathed by their handmaidens secure and comfortable in their company, and yet, they too are witness to her shame as she finds herself exposed. She feels stripped of her power and authority as a goddess as her agency as a woman. In a moment of rage, she splashes

**BROOKE
BENINGTON**

LONDON	lily@brookebenington.com	+44 (0)7557 036181
FULMER	george@brookebenington.com	+44 (0)7988 941056
	brookebenington.com	@brookebenington

water into her voyeurs' eyes and curses him, removing the power and control that being a man affords him and instead renders him in the form of the beast he so recently hunted. Her final words to him as he flees - "Tell, if thou can'st, the wond'rous sight disclos'd, / A Goddess naked to thy view expos'd." - mocking his inability to now share his stolen moment.

In experiencing Sophie Varin's paintings we find ourselves in the position of the unwitting witness and the active voyeur. The miniature size of the paintings seem to physically distance us from the subject matter. We spy the suggestion of a bum across the room and we have to choose to move in closer - to an intimate or perhaps uncomfortable proximity - to determine if it is indeed a young man or woman's behind or just a trick of the eye. The exhibition space is interrupted by a hanging, translucent painting on silk, so that we glimpse or are glimpsed through it. This physical detachment once again puts us in a position where we have to choose, and define our intentions. Remain partially obscured and enjoy the watery wash that is cast by the hanging painting, the greater detachment that adds to the suggestive or impressionistic air of the smaller paintings. Or, step out from its cover and fully reveal ourselves and acknowledge our desire to look more closely and examine further the artists intentions and observations. Varin's paintings deny us the passivity being a casual observer and make us confront our assumed perspective together with our privilege as the ones watching rather than the ones being watched.