

# ISOLATION INTERVIEWS

JOHNNY IZATT-LOWRY





## ISSUE 9

Continuing the Isolation Interviews: a new series of weekly artist profiles highlighting current concerns, accompanied by a selection of available works.

We know that these are precarious and uncertain times for everyone and with so many people staying at home, self-isolating or social distancing, we want to be able to continue sharing some of our favourite art and artists with you. The Isolation Interviews are a weekly series of conversations with artists that will explore how these new circumstances are affecting their practices and productivity. We'll hear how they are finding solutions - and even opportunities - and what their plans and hopes are for the future.

Brooke Benington is committed to supporting and creating opportunities for artists. We believe that this is needed now more than ever. Most artists are self-employed, often supplementing their income by working as technicians, fabricators, assistants, teachers and a whole host of other jobs. Now, many have very suddenly lost a vital source of income. With this in mind, we are accompanying each Isolation Interview with a curated selection of work by that artist, available for purchase.

Thank you for your continued support. Stay safe and look after one another.

Lily & George  
Directors, Brooke Benington



last summer when I spent a month in a small apartment in France and I quite like the change of pace. With my paintings, the process can be quite long and very focused so things tend to develop quite slowly. With drawings, I enjoy making a couple of images in a day, allowing subjects and compositions to come and go as I try out new things. I think these breaks from painting are a helpful push to make me take a step back and think about what I want to make next.

There are various repeated motifs across your paintings, often taken from the mundane or everyday, wood grain, chairs, toilet paper etc. In this time of seclusion, has your attention turned to anything in particular?

I usually source all my imagery from the internet. I like finding subjects which feel very familiar, creating slightly awkward takes on imagery which we perhaps already feel quite comfortable with. If I'm working with a subject like a chair I try to find an image which feels like a very familiar and simple representation of a chair - there's normally a lot of hunting through stock images and google searches. I like seeing how these objects can become less familiar when placed in tight and simplified compositions. I feel as if they travel further and further away from the initial subject once they've been photographed, then edited, then drawn and finally painted in pigment.

During the lockdown, without the opportunity for subjects to come to me whilst visiting places and on bus journeys, I started turning to things around me for inspiration. This was coupled with the way I normally work; viewing the world from the pool of imagery on the internet. As such my drawing became a mixture of things in my flat and older motifs such as birds and logs, which kept creeping back in.

We're now in week 9 of the lockdown in the UK, how have you spent the last month and a half in enforced isolation? Has it reshaped your practice in any way?

I've spent pretty much every day in my flat in Tooting since the lockdown began - there isn't a huge amount of space here, so I've mostly been working at the kitchen table. I started by spending the first few weeks just making drawings. It's something which I haven't really been able to do in a long while, always feeling some sort of pressure to make paintings and larger works when I'm in the studio. I'd had a similar stint of solely making drawings

Texture and pattern have always attracted me when sourcing imagery and making work. Especially with my paintings, textures such as wood grain or the repeated pattern of flowers in a field have always attracted me. I enjoy the idea of working laboriously to recreate something as every day as a field or the pattern on a log. There's something quite obsessive and slightly absurd about replicating a pattern using such a time consuming and particular process.

Could you tell us how you developed your unique hazy style for your paintings? And could you talk us through your process?

I always had problems painting with oils and acrylics, they never quite worked how I wanted them to or how I had envisioned they would in my mind. I never really felt like I had that much control over them. A



couple of summers ago, I started working with ground-up pastels on paper, using my fingers to make imagery that was quite loose and blurred, mostly of faces and fruit. I came across crepe fabric in a shop when I wanted to see how these works on paper could work on a stretched fabric. Crepe has this texture which means that it holds the pastel in its grain, allowing for delicate layers to be built up slowly with soft brushes.

I now work with dry pigments on the stretched crepe. I mix the colours together in bowls or on pieces of paper and then use a dry brush to rub them into the surface of the fabric. It's a slow and quite calming process - you have to build up layers of colour very thinly in order to get some sort of even surface and it's often hard to correct mistakes. It's a nice way to work though as the image appears slowly, with forms and details coming into



focus. The final look and feel of the work are really dictated both by the process and by the fabric. Hard lines and clear edges are pretty difficult to achieve and so forms tend to blur into one another, creating a dreamy and uncertain atmosphere. I like the sense that the image does not sit on top of the fabric, but is ingrained within it; the resulting image is formed by a combination of medium, support and process.

There's often a mysterious undertone within your paintings and drawings: silhouettes/shadows, trench coats and crows. Could you talk a little about the imagery and influences within your practice?



Recently, with my paintings, I've been drawn to depicting things at night. I like the way that everything can be shrouded in blues and blacks and the different components of the composition can flow into one another. This is when some of the motifs such as the trench coats and crows entered my works. For me, they just felt like things that would inhabit this certain time of day. It was almost as if I expected to see them there, playing with this idea of what is familiar about imagery. In a weird way, I sometimes feel like I'm often trying to recreate images which I've already seen somewhere before.

With my recent drawings, created during the lockdown, I've found myself moving away from the nighttime imagery that I had been working on in the studio. Instead, I've focused more on singular objects and how they can be tightly packed into a rectangular painting format. I like the idea that these objects are changed subtly in order to become drawings, moving them further away from reality and into a realm of representation.

In the larger compositions with multiple elements, I like to play around with how I can layer objects on top of one another to give an odd sense of space. This step normally happens initially in Photoshop. In this way, I really am layering flat 'objects' on top of another and trying to create a strange sense of space. The Photoshop collages are always very clumsy-looking, but that's what attracts me to them. They always feel as if they're these awkward depictions of the real world which are asking somehow to be taken seriously as reality. I think this about my paintings too.

**These are uncertain times and our idea of what the future looks like - in the art world and beyond - changes on a daily basis. Do you have any hopes for how this moment might have a positive or transformative impact going forward?**

It's obviously so hard to say what will happen next, and my thoughts on this change from day to day. I think a sense

of collaboration and connectivity has become so important during these last few months and is something which has kept me going. Spending long periods of time working alone in the studio before lockdown had become almost too familiar for me. It's been nice to witness the ways in which the art world has moved online to stay connected, forming an interesting and accessible way to be part of a larger conversation. There's been such a breadth of new collaborations and projects across the arts which have come out of last few months - it'll be interesting and exciting to see how these develop and change over the coming months and years.

I think, like many, my mindset has changed on how I think about the future. Since the rest of the year is something which is so difficult to predict my thoughts are instead focused on how I think the next week will pan out.



## JOHNNY IZATT-LOWRY

Johnny Izatt-Lowry (b. 1995, Durham, UK) lives and works in London. He studied BFA Fine Art at Ruskin School of Art (2013-2016) and MFA Fine Art at Slade School of Art (2017-2019). Recent group exhibitions include *Slade x Heals*, Heals, London (2019); *A Raw Garden*, Fitzrovia Gallery, London (2019) and *Plants, People, Pots*, Pinch Project Space, London. In 2019 he won the Desiree Prize in Painting, at Slade School of Art and was artist in residence at PLOP, London.

[www.johnizattlowry.co.uk](http://www.johnizattlowry.co.uk)



*A Leaf*, 2020  
Pencil on paper  
14 x 21 cm  
5 1/2 x 8 1/4 in.



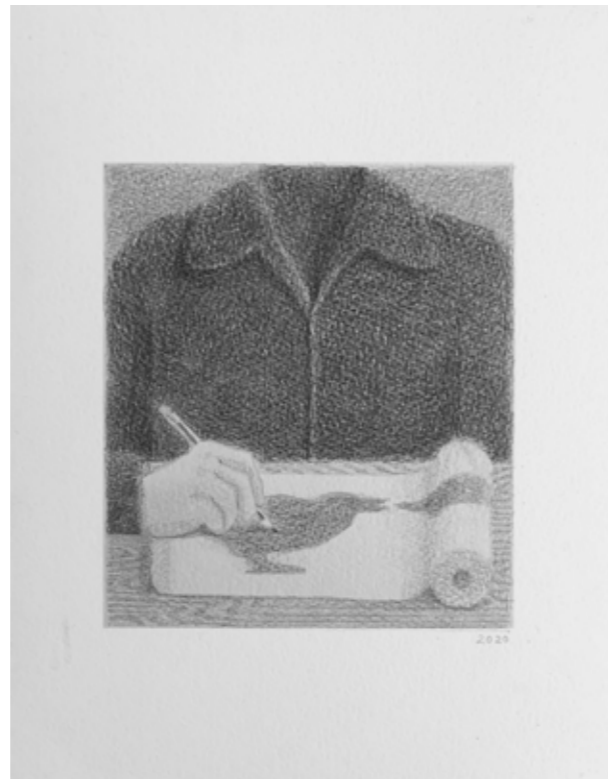
*A Flock of Birds (Shadows)*, 2020  
Pencil on paper  
14 x 21 cm  
5 1/2 x 8 1/4 in.



*Still Life on a Table*, 2019  
Pigment on crepe  
80 x 100 cm  
31 1/2 x 39 1/2 in.



*A View*, 2020  
Pencil on paper  
14 x 21 cm  
5 1/2 x 8 1/4 in.



*Study for self portrait at the kitchen table*, 2020  
Graphite on paper  
23 x 29 cm  
9 x 11 1/2 in.



*A Meeting (Shadows)*, 2019  
Pigment on paper  
57 x 76 cm  
22 1/2 x 30 in.

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