

Volt Caf 

ELIZABETH NEEL | THE PEOPLE, THE PARK, THE ORNAMENT





The NYC based artist [Elizabeth Neel](#) brings her new exhibition "The People, the Park, the Ornament" to London. In this exhibition she explores the theme of the psychological undercurrent and friction between the individual and the "landscape", be it natural, urban, ideological or emotional, in her work. Her work consist of paintings and sculptures, which blur relationships between architecture and the body, memory and action. Volt Café had the chance to ask this interesting artist some questions to get an idea of her work.

Volt Café: In your paintings you explore the theme of the psychological undercurrent and friction between the individual and the "landscape". What is your relationship with the "landscape" around you?

Elizabeth Neel: I experience the landscape as a horizontal plane supporting a set of ornaments and patterns of behavior. My relationship with the landscape is both cooperative and antagonistic. To move through space – to get from place to place or even to stand still – involves negotiation and constant muscular adjustment in response to perceptual cues.





VC: You source for anonymous images via the Internet that reflect a 'specific real world subject matter'. Which subject drew you the most for *The People, the Park, the Ornament*, and why?

EN: I work from an expanding index of images that I collect and then print out. Some are recurring sources of general reference and others are necessary for specific problem solving. For this body of work I looked often at an image of an x-ray of objects in a dog's stomach. The tissue of the dog is foggy and transparent, while the toy duck, the spoon, the spare change... all those things are very precise in comparison. The most solid objects read as the brightest lights. There is humor and pathos and pop culture in it. I also referenced an image of a snapshot of a Hokusai print. The figures in the image engage with each other in a strangely virtual space. There are aspects of architecture and flora but the narrative occurs in an abstract realm – it's hard to say what and where things are happening yet it's very convincing.

VC: Some paintings feel a bit more violent, due to a brutal rendering. Is this something you aim for? Or does it simply happen during the process of creating it?

EN: All my work depends on responsive pacing. Regardless of an idea I may have about my approach or subject, the intercession of gravity, centrifugal force etc. will occur. I provoke these forces and then respond to the results of that provocation. These forces can be manipulated and controlled but it's always a negotiation with emerging givens. I have to orchestrate marks, spaces and objects and re orchestrate them until the whole provides the viewer with both formal interest and an interwoven set of narrative association and possibilities. I suppose the speed of some responses – a swipe, a smear, a scratch, a juxtaposition – are isolated violences pervading the affect of the whole work. Life is violent in that change occurs over time. It is disturbing, exciting and comforting and becomes part of the work as it evolves – orientations change, objects are added and removed; things are created, destroyed and remembered.







VC: Can you tell us a bit more about the way you work? For example do you finish a painting at once? Or do you move from painting to sculpture and then back to the painting?

EN: I spend two weeks preparing my canvases and while they are curing I collect objects and print images... I organize things around the studio, making piles and loose conglomerations. I stand and stare a lot at things. I don't have a comfortable chair in my studio because such a thing would excuse me into physical and mental immobility. The choice to be still is an important beat in a range of rhythms but that is different from accidental laziness. I move around between painting and sculpture – When I get stuck on one problem I can move to another and that often changes requirements and opens up new solutions. When I am painting, I rotate the orientation of a work frequently – moving from a figure orientation to a landscape orientation frequently as a composition evolves and this creates directional paint motion and weight distribution. Thin paint moves differently from thick paint and the interaction between the two creates both the illusion of dimension and actual dimension. The sculptures are also constantly changing – I switch out juxtaposed objects, change the order of things, change the color... Meanwhile, a painting may be lying flat on the floor like a rug or a map while paint is setting up. Everything is in my visual field. Once paint gets stable enough not to move on its own I lift the painting up again and work against the wall. The technical need to switch between the vertical and the horizontal pose ends up bringing content to the work.

VC: Some describe your work as expressive abstraction and others as a subjective form of realism, how would you describe your work, and why?

EN: Both descriptions have some relevance. My lexicon of marks and moves, while like any language not completely stable, always consciously references the trope of abstraction. Abstraction can be understood as a very general or a very specific term – one that applies to something that has no literal consistent narrative content – or – a fine de siècle shift in Art practice that played out until the mid 20th century and has been processed through the lens of Art Historical bureaucracy. I find it useful and energizing to navigate this dicey territory. All language is composed of an inherited portion and an unstable surplus consisting of reinterpretations and reorientations that shift meaning and re-personalize it based on the conditions of the moment. The idea of subjective realism is only called into question by the codification of the notion of Abstraction. I personally don't think of it as a simple binary situation but I do like to use divisions to create pressure.





VC: What is the most important message you want to bring across with your art in this exhibition?

EN: I don't make exhibitions to teach people correct thinking about an event, a being, a behavior or an object. I create a physical situation in which visual signals provide associations for the viewer enticing them into a world of the things and ideas to which I am attracted. These things take different paths of orbit around ideas of organic and inorganic architecture, scale and the model, histories and archaeologies of Science and knowledge, and the specific texture of personal experience in relationship to those ideas.

Want to see for yourself what we are talking about? Make sure you go down to [Pilar Conrias](#), before June 20st, to see Neel's work in real life.

Pilar Conrias
54 Eastcastle Street
London W1W 8EF

Opening Hours
Monday – Friday 10am – 6pm
Saturday 11am – 6pm

Words by Nikki Neervens

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