



# DAN COOMBS

## UNFOLDING MAN

1ST APRIL - 15TH APRIL 2020



*"The reality of human interaction occurs at a level below language. I'm interested in the way people relate, penetrate and transform each other's consciousness and I'm trying to show the figure as part of a total matrix of other figures."* Dan Coombs

Aleph Contemporary is delighted to announce the first solo exhibition by the renowned British figurative painter Dan Coombs. Since 2003, Coombs's practise begins with a series of smallish collages, exclusively depicting and using the nude, either as a single motif and form or using multiple nudes throughout one composition. Essentially, the collages are drawings for larger paintings.

At the 'drawing stage', the nude is a photocopy (more recently the photocopy is shifted during the process of copying to create distortion and blur) fixed to the surface of the canvas amid interior and exterior arrangements of space using acrylic paint. The arrangements of the nude may appear arbitrary or random but this is a misunderstanding. Compositional decisions are both intuitive and conscious, focusing on pictorial and psychological relations between the figures, creating a tense symbiosis between an historical understanding of the nude through art history and a more personal or 'felt' contemporary awareness. A drawing that 'works' is then used to make a large dynamic painting.

The painting entitled *Windsurfers* (p.19) establishes a pictorial and psychological symbiosis with striking confidence. Built almost entirely from red and Naples yellow, it swings between playful openness and an insecure, nervous tightness. The red background or field of space suggests a curtain (hiding shame) or a bullfighters red muleta (teasing or flirting with confrontation). The sun,

peeping over the red curtain like an eye, witnesses the funny, sexually open confidence of the woman wearing red flippers, and the shrinking nervous self-esteem of the men observing her. The continuity and rhythm of the all-over painting (reminiscent of much post Second World War painting) and the ease with which the image is rendered with a cartoon openness singles this painting out as typical of the psychological drama contained within Coombs' paintings, disguised by a fresh directness. More recently, there is a sense of 'emptying out' in a series of black paintings where the nudes seem to swim, float or dance in and on the surface of a black ground, rather reminiscent of Victorian fairy photographs, evoking an upside down psychology in the spirit of Lewis Carroll.

What is manifested by these paintings comes from the interaction between the figures and their position within the composition. In *Unfolding Man*, a single male figure to the left of the painting, watches a group of figures that are his own projections or reflections. Beginning with the broken down figure at the far right of the painting (pushed almost to the point of abstraction) we gradually move from shapes and marks to a cluster or group of forms reminiscent of figures or the cumulative layers of the self. Between the polarity of fragmentation and a full form we witness a self diagnosis which mirrors itself, yielding a narrative that is about a relationship the painting has with the multi-layered structures of the individual's psyche, and a reflection on the transformative power of art.

Peter Ashton Jones, March 2020



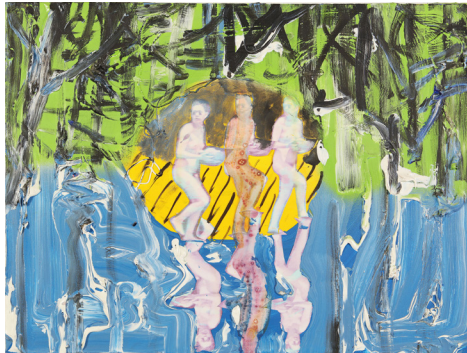
'At Sea', 2018  
Acrylic, Oil, Collage on Canvas  
60 x 45 cm  
£2,000



'Vallotton', 2018  
Oil on Canvas  
80 x 60 cm  
£2,500

This is from a series of works made in 2018, using Victorian photographs as a source and distorting them on a photocopier to stretch out or compress time. Old photographs are a view into past lives and past moments whereas painting

exists outside of time. This painting is made from an amalgam of collaged figures from different sources. The figure in the grey suit is the Swiss painter Félix Vallotton (1865-1925).



'Pier', 2010  
Oil on Canvas  
60 x 45 cm  
£2,000



'Savannah', 2014  
Oil on Canvas  
75 x 100 cm  
£4,000



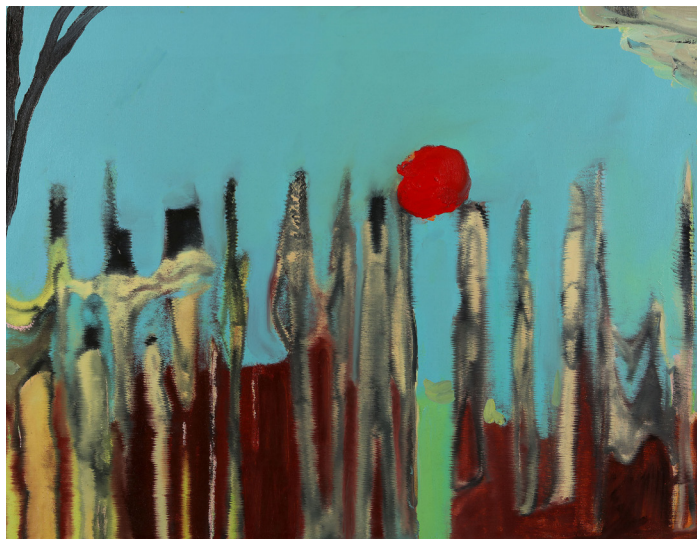
'Bathers', 2016  
Oil on Canvas  
120 x 90cm  
£5,000



'Gang', 2017  
Oil on Canvas  
100 x 75cm  
£4,000



'Lake', 2016  
Oil on Canvas  
100 x 75cm  
£4,000



'Lake II', 2016  
Oil on Canvas  
100 x 75cm  
£4,000



'Rituals', 2016  
Oil on Canvas  
100 x 75cm  
£4,000



'Dream', 2017  
Oil on Canvas  
100 x 75cm  
£4,000

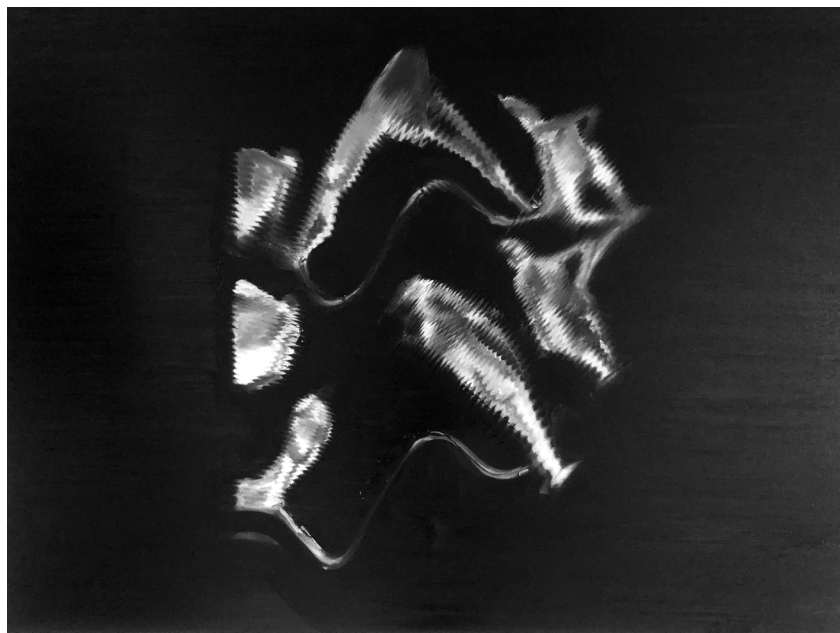
Nudity was used in the Renaissance, especially in mythological subjects, to take the painting outside of time, to make it timeless and universal. Indeed, the painting seems to exist outside of time.



'Blue Morning', 2019  
Oil on Canvas  
200 x 150 cm  
£9,000

Multiple figure compositions making abstract patterns show how human beings exist in a matrix, how we are all interconnected. As with abstract expressionism, the compositions are formed entirely intuitively, and the relations

of figures to each other and to the intervals between them become a kind of visual music. The painting seems to echo an internal state of mind. A figure sheds layers of itself like a new creature emerging from a chrysalis.



'Pavanne', 2020  
Oil on Canvas  
120 x 90cm  
£5,000

The black and white are the most recent paintings and part of an ongoing series. The simplified colour allows the stripping of composition back to an essence - the effect of images from the mind's eye, from the uncon-

scious. The paintings are still created from distorted collages of photographs of the figure. Some of the figures seem to be dividing, like different parts of the psyche. The black allows the artist to place the figures in a void.



'Unfolding Man', 2019  
Oil on Canvas  
200 x 150 cm  
£9,000



'Cassiopeia', 2020  
Oil on Canvas  
120 x 90cm  
£5,000



'The Windsurfers', 2019  
Oil on Canvas  
200 x 150 cm  
£9,000

See introductory text.



'English Corner', 2019  
Oil on Canvas  
200 x 150 cm  
£9,000



'Sirens', 2019  
Oil on Canvas  
200 x 150 cm  
£9,000



'Alone', 2019  
Oil on Canvas  
200 x 150 cm  
£9,000

## Overview

Daniel Coombs' light infused pictorial spaces are simultaneously joyful and mysterious. Illuminated abstracted landscapes are populated by nude figures and the artist's sensual and cerebral paintings may be considered a contemporary evocation of the long-standing tradition of depicting nudes in landscape - a subject favoured by artists such as Titian and Poussin, and most famously Paul Cézanne.

And yet, Coombs' work expresses in part something not quite visible but deeply poignant, described as "The reality of human interaction that occurs at a level below language. I'm interested in the way people relate, penetrate and transform each other's consciousness and I'm trying to show the figure as part of a total matrix of other figures."

In terms of formal influence, the artist points to an affinity for the work of Georg Baselitz and Philip Guston, and a particular admiration for German modern artistic practice, noting these painters' tendency to fuse figuration and abstraction. Further still, in Coombs' energetically vivid compositions we see traces of harmonious use of hue, structure and figuration. This approach is reminiscent of the poetic conceptions of landscape and figuration found in Cézanne's bather paintings particularly the use of lilting trees, elongated choreographed nudes now in Coombs' pictures intersected by swathes of colour and areas of veiling and erasure, obliterating narrative and representation. The result is a series of powerful contemporary paintings that balance the sensual pleasure of paint, landscape and the canonical nude with a more cerebral study of intertextuality.

Rosa JH Berland

## Biography

Coombs holds his MA, Painting, Royal College of Art, London and BA, Ruskin School, Oxford University. The artist is the recipient of various awards and honours including the Mark Rothko Foundation Travel Award, 2004 and the Rome Scholar in Painting Award, British School in Rome, and the St. Peter's Church Commission, Brighton, 2000. Select solo exhibits include New Art Projects, London, 2014; Fine Art Society, 2011, London; Fred Gallery, London, 2009; Mihai Nicodim Gallery, Los Angeles, 2005; The Approach, London, 2003 and 2001; Rockwell, London, 2003; The Cornerhouse, Manchester, 2002; Habitat, London, 2000; Zwemmer Gallery, London, 2000 and The Approach, London, 1999 and 1997.

The artist has also participated in over 60 international group shows. Recent exhibits include: Charlie Smith London, 2018, 2017 and 2015; Standpoint Gallery, London, 2018; Watson Farley and Williams LLP, London, 2018; Kingsgate Projects, London, 2017; Richmond Museum, 2016; Marylebone Crypt, 2016; APT, London, 2016 and Galerie Dukan, Paris, 2015.

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