

# ART WORLD

50 PAGES OF NEW WORK

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ISSUE 1 OCTOBER/NOVEMBER 2007 £5.95 US\$10 €10



**LOUISE BOURGEOIS**

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*in his Santa Monica studio*

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*and his 100 assistants*

**BOO RITSON**  
*on painting people*



# Tomory Dodge

“I’m interested in a kind of apocalyptic fantasy that seems to lurk below the surface of the American psyche.”

TOMORY DODGE’s paintings explore the rich territory between abstraction and representation. His works allude to human presence, with apparently discarded objects like clothing, litter and even a drum kit consumed by blizzards of rainbow-hued paint. For his first UK solo exhibition at Alison Jacques Gallery in London (until 10 November), Dodge takes a bolder leap into his exuberantly painted world. These new works teeter on the brink of collapse, but Dodge holds them together with virtuosic passages of painting, at times as delicate as veils of steam, at others as sticky and irksome as tar. *INTERVIEW: Ben Luke*

**What is the origin of your name, and how is it pronounced?**

It’s originally a Scottish surname. I’ve always pronounced it “Tom-or-ee” with the accent on the “Tom”.

**Is paint the subject of your paintings?**

I do enjoy paint. Its materiality has always had a central role in my work. It’s the subject in the sense that the work is really about the material’s interaction with the subject matter. I really want the two to be inseparable in a way. I want the distinction between the material and subject to be difficult to nail down, for one to flow into the other. I think that this can be seen in the way certain objects, especially in the older work, are represented by paint used in a physically apparent way. For example, a leaf may be a blob of paint, or an overloaded brushstroke could be read simultaneously as paint and a cloud. I’ve referred to this as a “precarious representation” before, one that teeters on the edge of falling apart into blobs and marks.

**Some of your marks are almost rhythmic, whilst others seem anarchic...**

I often think of the brushstrokes as being types or ideas of brushstrokes. I like the idea of there being straight ones or curved ones, zigzag ones, almost like the game Tetris. Of course, unlike Tetris, there are limitless variations of brushstrokes. But I like the idea that they exist and can be “placed” in the painting. Maybe one way to think about it is that while any brushstroke is bound to be a unique event, it could be said that there are “types” of brushstrokes, “types” of unique events. Of course, it’s more complicated than that, but I do feel like the paintings are often “built” in a way. I also rely a lot on accident, although certain passages can really get laboured over. But there’s a level of intention behind it.

**The paintings sometimes reach a**

**Are you attempting to repel as well as seduce?**

Yes. I’m interested in a kind of apocalyptic fantasy that seems to lurk below the surface of the American psyche. It’s an association of catastrophe and disaster with redemption and transcendence. It’s obvious on the fringes and with the religious fundamentalists, but I think it’s present in the everyday as well. One of the ways I try to reference this is to imply a kind of sickly if rapturous delirium in some of the work.

**The work seems to hint at both an innocent world and one on the brink of collapse. Is that how you see it?**

Again, it’s this notion of transcendence being connected to catastrophe, but I think it’s also very connected to the notion of the American West. The history of the West, especially the desert, is really full of lunatics, utopians, religious fanatics and their interaction with the undefined. It’s made for quite an interesting landscape, literally and figuratively. There’s a contrast between lofty – if insane – aspirations, and devastating failure. You get these scenes of vast beautiful landscapes with trash of one kind or another – it’s common to see things like vandalised cacti. Anything and everything is used for target practice. I think there’s a lot of playfulness leading to violence in my work that comes from this kind of thing.

**Why does the tree motif appear so frequently in your work?**

Since all trees are unique, they really lend themselves to a kind of freedom in painting. Also, a tree with debris stuck in the foliage is a powerful symbol of disorder. It brings to mind disasters, or celebrations gone amok.

**Why the interest in snow and ice?**

The Arctic is similar to the desert in a way. It’s this seductive, if threatening, vastness – an undetermined space. Icebergs are also beautiful things that now carry the implicit threat of the end of civilization. I feel that

this is what’s behind the abundant imagery in art and popular culture.

**You mentioned recently that moving away from narrative works aren’t totally abstract.**

It’s difficult for me to really say one level I’ll always associate abstraction with Abstract Expressionism, Modernism, etcetera. So, by that I have never made an abstract painting, probably never will. Many of my paintings function as representational paintings without defining any overt representation. It could be said that in this way they “resemble” abstract paintings, but they’re too spatial, too pictorial to be abstract in the classical sense. But at the same time, these distinctions may not be as they once were. The world is full of abstract grids and cubes than can be making it harder to distinguish what is abstract and what is representational.

**The background in your work often play an important role in defining space, often suggesting a sense of scale. Can you talk more about this?**

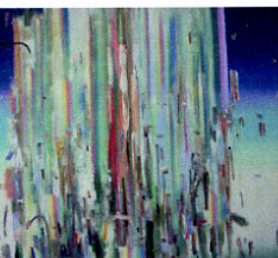
The backgrounds are often inspired by LA’s famous toxic air. Sometimes I just try to get the background spatially in the right way. The background in the painting was to imply some kind of possibly destructive, event – but also some notion of seduction.

**Some of your imagery suggests a sense of scale.**

**Do you draw from pop culture?** Rarely, though I loved comics when I was young. I would draw my own, pages long. They were pretty good. I credit them with my learning to draw.

**Finally, if you could live with any art ever made, what would it be?**

This question really is too hard.



**actus** (2004)

canvas, 182.9 x 182.9cm

**berg** (2005)

canvas, 121.9 x 137.2cm

**ess Up** (2005)

canvas, 182.9 x 243.8cm

**afel** (2007), detail

canvas, 213.4 x 243.8cm

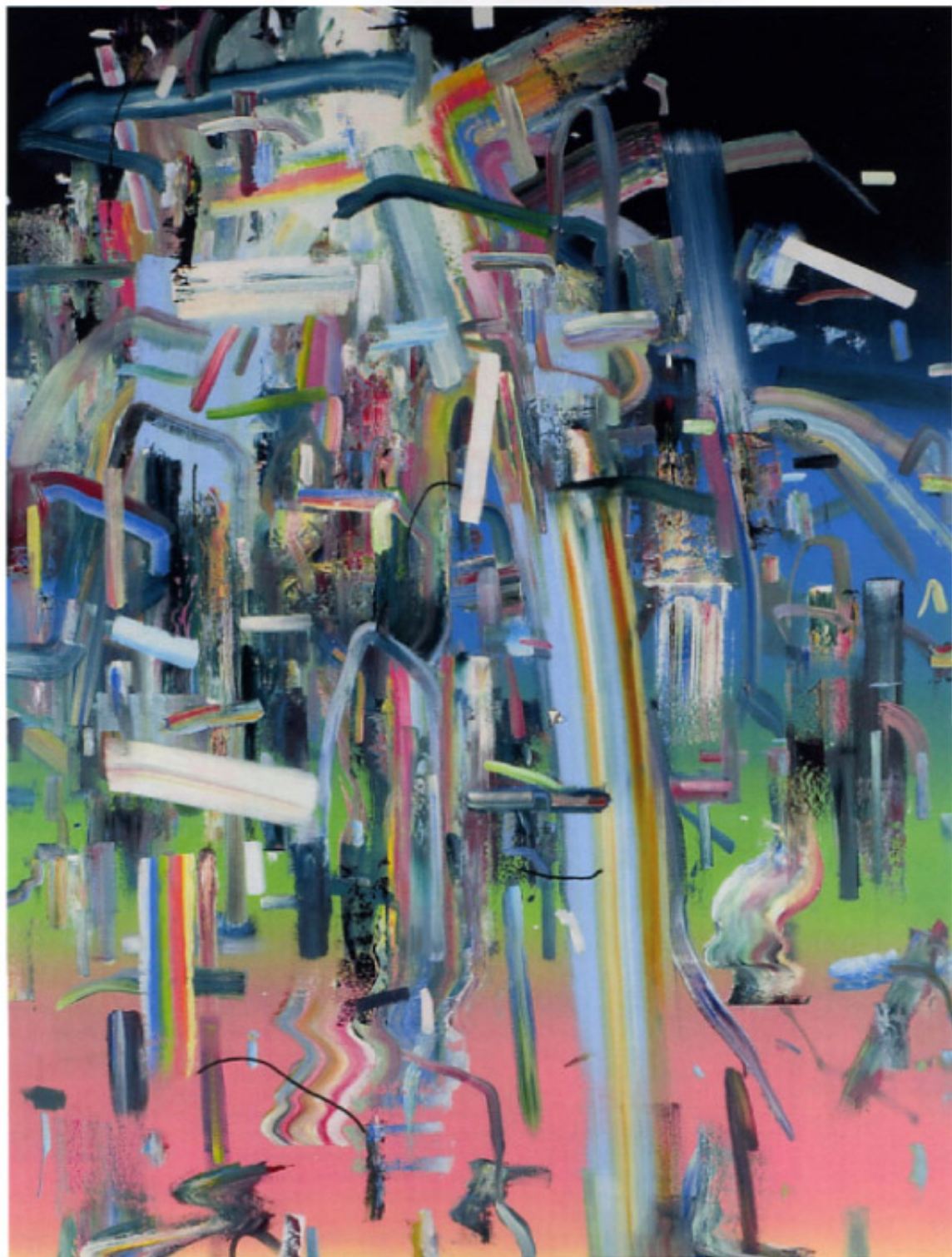


Vuelo de Brujos (2007), oil on canvas, 213 x 213 cms



1 *Tree* (2007), oil on canvas, 121.9 x 129.7 x 5.1 cm

2 *Expanse* (2007), oil on canvas, 182.9 x 243.8 x 5.1 cm



Tango Delta Oscar Seven (2007), oil on canvas, 274 x 182cms