

A painting of a bathroom interior. The scene is dimly lit, with a blue wall and a window with horizontal blinds on the right. In the foreground, a white sink is set on a white countertop. A mirror is visible on the left, reflecting part of the room. A bar of soap sits on the counter next to the sink. The overall mood is quiet and contemplative.

ERIN HOLLY

A TRANS ARRANGEMENT OF THE PAINTED SPACE

JD MALAT
GALLERY

16 November - 9 December 2023

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Embodied, scored, and arranged. These are the words Erin Holly uses to describe her artistic process. A deeply personal, musical and visceral experience which underscores Holly's new series of oil paintings depicting colourful and semi-fictional fabrications of interior spaces. Made between 2022 and 2023, these paintings come together to form Holly's first London solo exhibition *A Trans Arrangement of The Painted Space*. At the core of this exhibition lies the profound exploration of interior environments, and their connection with the politics of space and inclusion, contemporary social categorisations, and most pertinently, Holly's journey with her identity and understanding of embodiment through meditation practice.

Despite the themes of domesticity, these paintings are Holly's attempt at capturing the essence of her experiences through mark-making, style, colour and form, in which the 'interior' functions as a framework to house her personal experiences. Functioning as hypothetical restructurings of spaces which have historically been gendered or politicised, each oil painting serves as a powerful commentary on the ways capitalism has commodified the spaces we inhabit, all the while highlighting the ability of art to forge new paths of perception and existence. Holly's bold use of greens, reds and yellows, result in canvases with layered transparencies of vibrant pigments culminating in luminous soft-edged compositions. Existing outside of reality, these radiant paintings hold an emotive potency, as well as subversive possibilities to the eyes that view them, asking viewers to interrogate new ways of seeing and understanding their surrounding space. Holly sees this restructuring of space as akin to a musical arrangement, where the source material is 'rearranged' from its original form into something new that holds and gives space to the viewer.

The constructed spaces depicted in Holly's work parallel to the construction of identity and powerfully engage with the metaphor of the body as a home. Just as we build walls to define spaces, we construct the facets of our identity that society recognises and also rejects. The concept of the body as a dwelling space, or indeed, seeing one's own body in relation to space is inferred by the ubiquitous phrase 'your body is a temple' for instance. Contrastingly, Holly seeks to 'undo' or 'unlearn' *the notion of being housed in a body* and asks viewers to rethink these limitations of conflating body and space, offering a broader perspective on the concept of 'self' as an entity not confined by the walls we've built, but as a canvas on which we continually paint our evolving identities. Holly's work underscores empathetic readings of the changing 'self'; not simply as 'liminal', or 'fluid', but rather as something spacious, open and ever-expanding.

The walls of Holly's Woolwich-based studio are covered in pictures of interiors, notebook annotations, stacks of consumer magazines and 'DIY' books from the 1950's through to the present day. Holly develops her own artistic vision from these photographic source materials and aspirational interior advertisements. However, unlike the carefully procured, fixed and at times lifeless nature of the spaces in these catalogue images, Holly approaches her body of work as a living organism, allowing it to grow and develop organically. *I am deeply involved with the process of unlearning and undoing, remaking and rebuilding as a way to find spaciousness in my practice and work Holly states.*

The metaphorical relationship between the human body undergoing transformation and Holly's work becomes palpable in the fluidity of oil paint and Holly's careful attention to different painting techniques. Holly enlivens the surfaces of her paintings through a constant flux from carefully defined representational areas in the same vein of Academic Realism, to passages of expressive mark-making and abstraction, drawing attention to the process of painting itself. Her brush strokes shift, soften

and scrape across the canvas, capturing not just space but the very essence of metamorphosis.

Holly's background as a mural painter helps us to understand the pseudo topographical nature of her paintings. The reference to topography is an intentional double entendre here, whereby it can be both literal and metaphorical in the context of Holly's practice. It denotes the arrangement of the natural and artificial physical features of an area in space, as well as the distribution of parts on the surface of or within an organ or organism. Her experiences with graffiti in Berlin and working in-situ on massive murals in the USA, Italy, Brazil, Ukraine, Australia (just to name a few) contributes to the highly personal and tangible presence of her body, her art and her surrounding space. Holly's history in mural paintings and street tagging also speaks to her research into identity and its relationship with private and public spaces. Bathrooms, a subject found across 5 of the paintings in this exhibition, represent some of the most contentious places in modern society. And whilst the bathrooms are fictional spaces in Holly's work, they exist within a system where capitalism and colonialism have reinforced divisive binaries through architecture and space. Her pseudo-topographical paintings thus point to the profound discrepancies between the authentic 'self' and one's surroundings on a universal scale.

A Trans Arrangement of The Painted Space is a landmark moment in the realm of transgender representation. Against the historical backdrop of prevailing binary gender relations and heteronormativity where trans individuals have been marginalised or sensationalised, Holly's paintings offer subtle but nuanced portrayals that transcend stereotypes and engage with much larger questions: How can we find an accepting space and place for these bodies in existing frameworks and representations? Or inversely, how does one begin to disrupt these frameworks?

It is precisely through the lens of her personal history and the centrality of process that Holly is able to grapple with these questions. In her Critical

Model Thesis for her MA Fine Art Course in 2020, Holly states:

The contrast between wanting to be taken seriously and wanting to 'muck around' with oil paint is central to my painterly investigations because it allows me to question why I feel the necessity to honour a certain type of painting production, specifically academic realism. I use the latter as a tactic to make the work relatable to a wider public, like my advertising references, but also as a way to highlight, break and poke holes in the system that has caused trauma for myself as a trans person. In this sense the reference materials are starting points, and the act of painting is therapy. It becomes a way for me to undo the images of spaces and turn them into images of possibility.

These deeply personal roots of her practice help us understand her oeuvre through two mutually inflecting themes: the depicted space, for example the lounge we see in *Tipping Point*, or the bathroom in *Real life experience*, and the painted space, the material space made of unfixed and malleable oil paint, gestures, and distortion. These stylistic explorations suggest an 'undoing' of the fixed space where marks can be alive on the canvas. The results are imaginary compositions that possess a sense of vastness and openness, where viewers are given a space to reflect on their own authentic sense of 'self', and question how that authentic 'self' can occupy space in the real world.

The physical paintings we see in this exhibition function as metaphors for change and suggest - with specific reference to art theorist David Joselit's argument - that the history of a person exists within a canvas. The physical painting thus becomes a transitory archive - or indeed, a trans arrangement of the painted space - for Holly's own self-becoming and a much wider social reckoning.

Annie Pereira, JD Malat Gallery, London © 2023



I am deeply involved with the process of unlearning and undoing, remaking and rebuilding as a way to find spaciousness in my practice and work.

Erin Holly



New look for bathroom, 2020

Oil on canvas
74 x 56 3/4 x 2 in
188 x 144 x 5 cm





Progesterone, 2023

Oil on canvas
74 x 56 3/4 x 2 in
188 x 144 x 5 cm



Real life experience, 2023

Oil on canvas
69 3/4 x 69 3/4 in
177 x 177 cm





t4tt4t, 2023

Oil on canvas
69 3/4 x 69 3/4 in
177 x 177 cm



Levels I, 2023

Oil on canvas
67 7/8 x 59 5/8 in
172.5 x 151.5 cm





Levels II, 2023

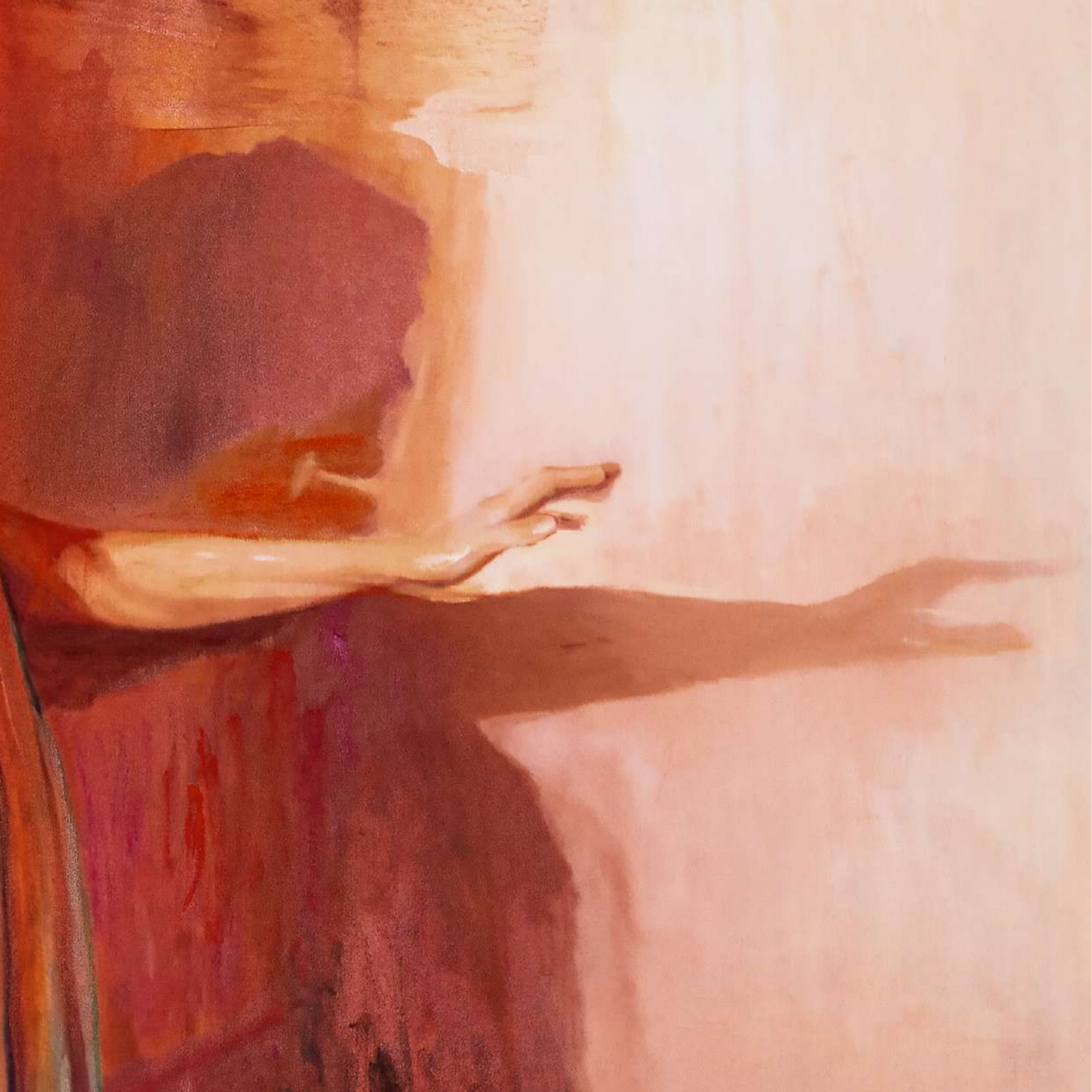
Oil on canvas
67 7/8 x 59 5/8 in
172.5 x 151.5 cm



Tipping Point, 2023

Oil on canvas
67 7/8 x 59 5/8 in
172.5 x 151.5 cm





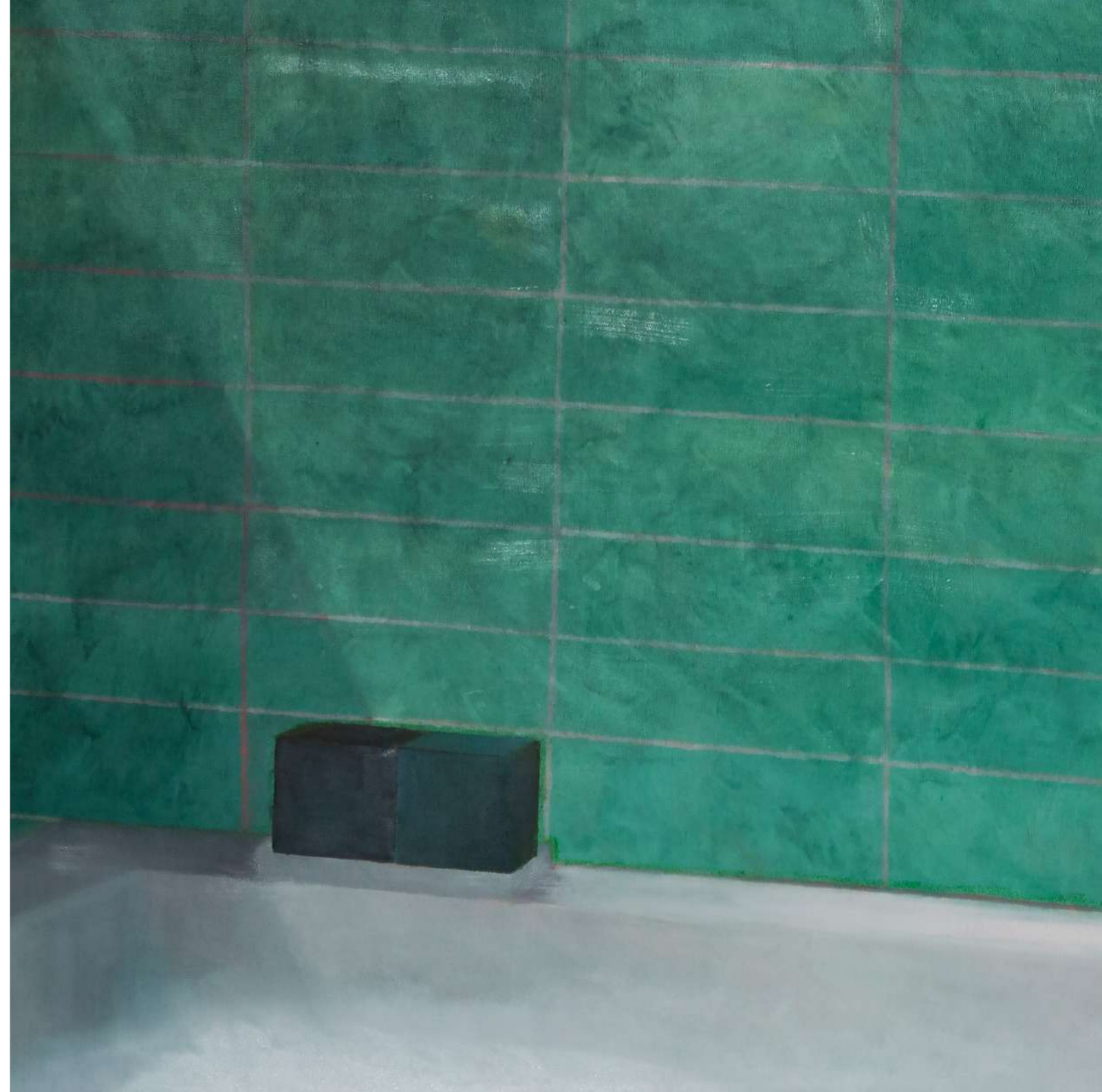
The Healer, 2023

Oil on canvas
59 7/8 x 50 3/4 in
152 x 129 cm



Refuge, 2023

Oil on canvas
31 1/2 x 39 3/8 in
80 x 100 cm





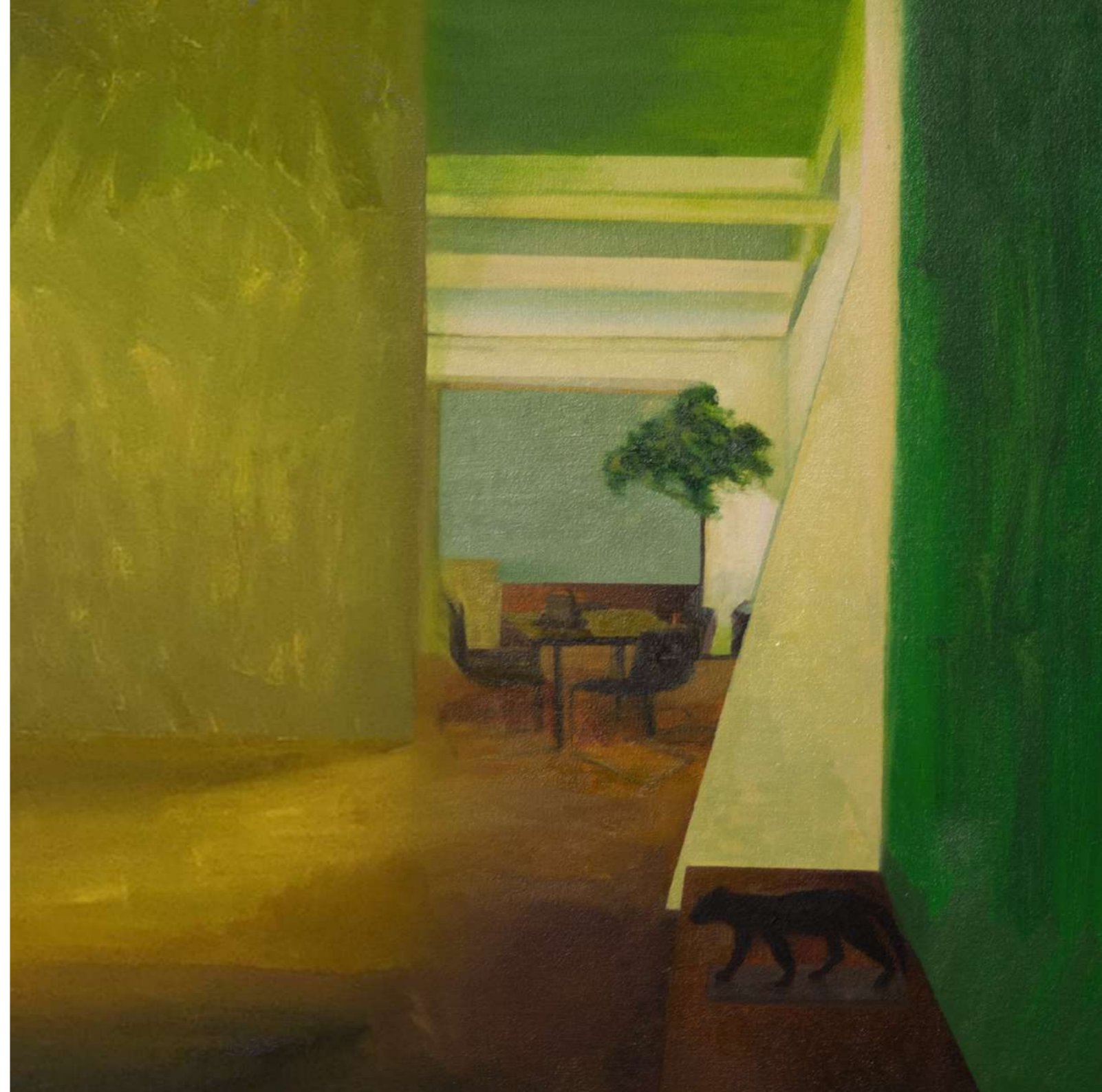
Referral, 2023

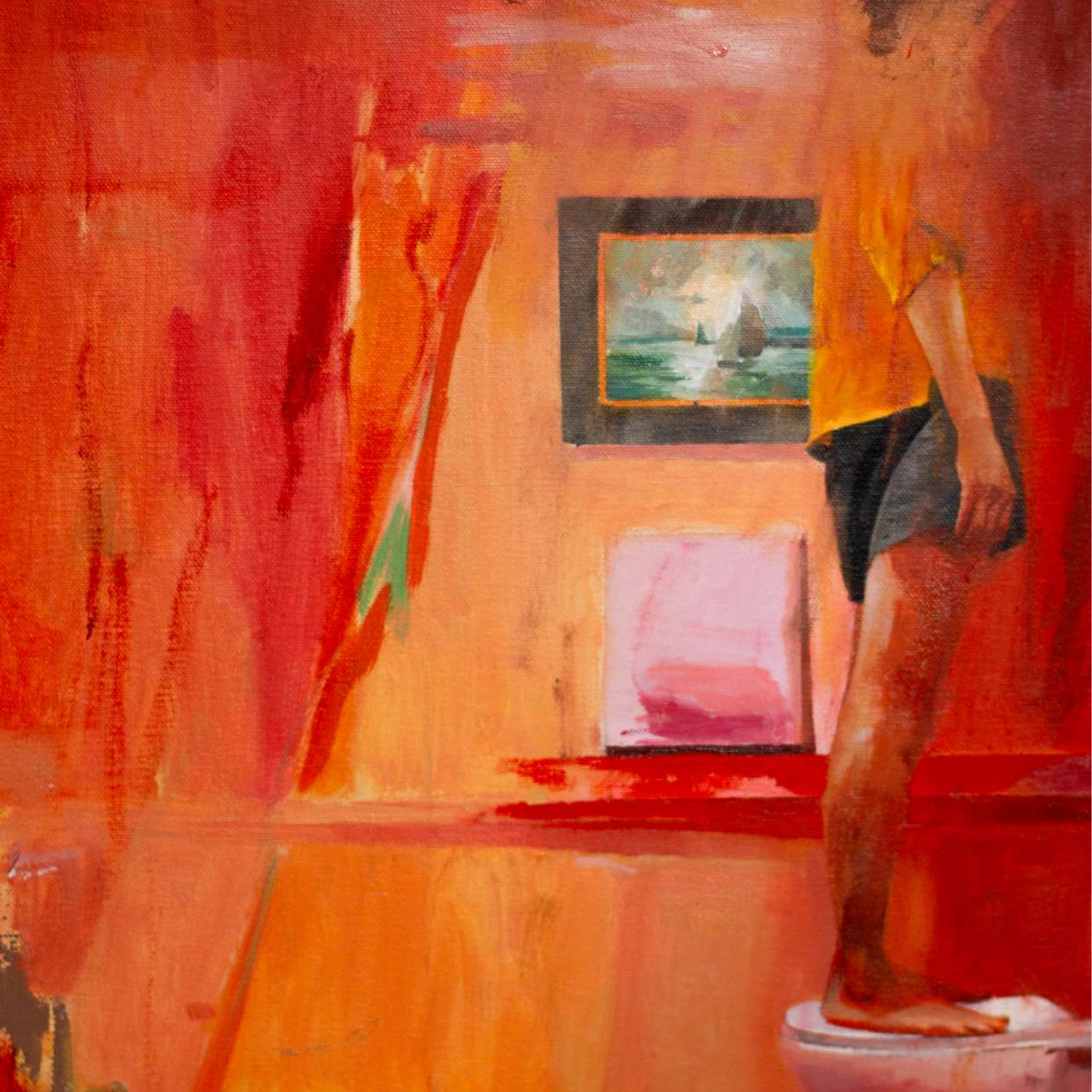
Oil on canvas
23 5/8 x 31 1/2 in
60 x 80 cm



wrong is too belong, 2023

Oil on canvas
23 5/8 x 19 3/4 in
60 x 50 cm





Scapegoat, 2023

Oil on canvas
19 3/4 x 15 3/4 in
50 x 40 cm



Repose, 2023

Oil on canvas
23 5/8 x 19 3/4 in
60 x 50 cm





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Fig. 2. Diagram for determining the value of the...

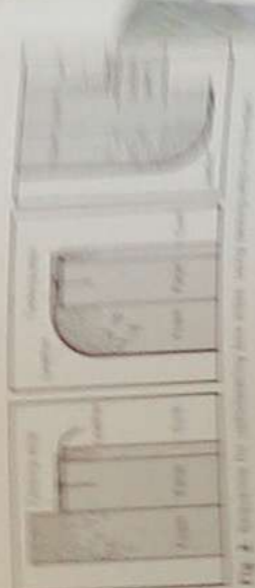


Fig. 2. Diagram for determining the value of the...

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Erin Holly

b. 1986 - United Kingdom

Lives and works in London, United Kingdom.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2023 *A Trans Arrangement of The Painted Space*,
JD Malat Gallery, London, UK
- 2022 *Victims of Circumstance*, 1963 Gallery, London, UK

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2022 *In Dedication*, The Koppel Project Hive, London, UK
- 2021 MA Show, City & Guilds London Art School, London, UK
- 2021 *Hors Champ*, PDP Gallery, Paris, France
- 2020 *Interim Show*, City & Guilds London Art School, London, UK
- 2019 *Where are you*, PDP Gallery, Los Angeles, US
- 2017 *Past, Present and Future*, 1963 Gallery, London, UK
- 2017 *WHAT THE WEEKEND IS GALLERY*, The Art Union,
Berlin, Germany

Selected Projects

- 2021 *Our Towns*, Basildon, UK
- 2020 *UK Void Projects*, Home Mural Festival, London, UK
- 2019 *Safe Mural Festival*, Olomouc, Czech Republic
- 2019 *Morphogenesis Festival*, Moscow, Russia
- 2019 *Street Art Limited Autra Caussa*, Switzerland
- 2019 *Memorie Urbane*, Fondi, Italy
- 2018 *Education is Not a Crime*, Mural Project, London, UK
- 2018 *Cheltenham Mural Festival*, Cheltenham, UK
- 2018 *Beyond Walls Mural Project*, Lynn, Boston,
Massachusetts, US

- 2018 *IBUG Arts Festival*, Chemnitz, Germany
- 2018 *Sibiu Mural Project*, Sibiu, Romania
- 2018 *Urban Vision Festival*, Aquapendente, Italy
- 2018 *Art No Cube*, Craze Exhibition & Mural, Los Angeles, USA
- 2018 *Amir House Art Residency*, Goa, India
- 2017 *Art United Us*, Odessa, Ukraine
- 2017 *UPEART Mural Festival*, Turku, Finland
- 2017 *Stillbruch Art Project*, Teufelsberg, Berlin, Germany
- 2017 *IBUG Urban Arts Festival*, Chemnitz, Germany
- 2017 *Festival Inspire Public Mural*, Moncton, Canada
- 2017 *Sibiu Mural Project*, Sibiu, Romania
- 2017 *Sub-streets Urban Art Show*, SUBgalleria, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- 2016 *Mural Commission*, Linc-Cymru Housing Association, Wales
- 2016 *Raising Awareness of Empty Buildings & Homelessness in Wales*,
Cardiff, Wales
- 2016 *IBUG Urban Arts Festival*, West Saxony, Germany
- 2015 *Empty Walls Mural Festival*, Cardiff, Wales
- 2015 *Smoke Without Fire*, Joint Exhibition with Helen Bur, The Abacus
Art Space, Cardiff, Wales
- 2015 *Mural Commission*, Cardiff Council, Cardiff, Wales
- 2012 *Empty Walls Mural Festival*, Cardiff, Wales

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