

A major monograph published by The Fruitmarket Gallery, *Tony Swain: Narrative Deficiencies Throughout*, includes contributions by Fiona Bradley, and Isla Leaver-Yap, and a conversation between Tony Swain and artist Karla Black. *Exhibition price £20 (£24.95 RRP)*

A limited-edition screenprint has been produced on the occasion of this exhibition. Enquire at the bookshop for more information.

Martin Creed *Work No. 1059*, 2011

Commissioned by The Fruitmarket Gallery as part of a refurbishment of The Scotsman Steps by the City of Edinburgh Council and the Edinburgh World Heritage Trust

The Fruitmarket Gallery is proud to have commissioned Martin Creed's *Work No. 1059*, a new permanent work of public sculpture on the Scotsman Steps, across the street from the Gallery. For more information pick up a leaflet or ask at the Bookshop.

Supported by Edinburgh Art Festival through the Scottish Government's Edinburgh Festivals Expo Fund, The Hope Scott Trust and the following generous individuals: Elizabeth Cowling, Sophie Crichton Stuart, Alistair and Susan Duff, Werner Keschner and Catherine Muirden, Jaap van Liere, George and Jacqui Morris, Barry Rosen in memory of Bruce Lentini and Dorothy Rosen, Robert and Nicky Wilson, Iwan and Manuela Wirth, The Zachs-Adam Family and The Fruitmarket Gallery Board of Directors



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Tony Swain

Drowned Dust, Sudden Word

Exhibition 19 April – 8 July 2012

Tony Swain (b. 1967, Lisburn, Northern Ireland) paints on newspaper, transforming printed image and text into works that are simultaneously abstract and representational. Swain studied at Liverpool Art School and Glasgow School of Art, and has shown his work in exhibitions in New York and Tel Aviv, Krakow and Naples. This exhibition presents new work made in 2011 and 2012, and shown for the first time at The Fruitmarket Gallery.

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Painting on newspaper pages may seem straightforward, but Swain's construction of each composition is complicated. He starts with a large piece of newspaper, sometimes a double-page spread, sometimes something smaller, and adds images torn or cut from other newspaper pages, what he calls 'pieced newspaper'. The term is Swain's referent for the collage techniques he uses in much of the work, as the work is a painting rather than a collage. The assemblage of printed images serves as a ground for painting on, with the images themselves the starting points for the paintings.

Swain is attracted to the colour, pattern or shape of a particular image, often drawn to its background or peripheral elements rather than the main subject of the photograph, and the composition gradually emerges from these aesthetic concerns. Swain puts aside some images for months or even years, until he finds appropriate partners for them. Text too registers visually: it is useful tonally rather than as a signifier of conceptual or metaphorical meaning. In a few irregularly-shaped works, a strip of paper might jut out or hang down as a result of what the original image inspired. Swain gives his works titles to offer viewers a way in to the work, and to encourage their own interpretation of the works themselves, his titles operate as open-ended reference points rather than overly-determined constraints.

The paintings retain the material characteristics of newspaper and paint, despite Swain's varied interventions. Newspaper itself is light, and acrylic paint tests its strength, but does not dramatically change its substance. Swain's marks sometimes completely obliterate the printed text and images, sometimes they blend with or reshape the image and other times the print bleeds through. A narrow border usually remains – either the border made by the paper or one made about the same size – and the colour bars and registration marks are often left exposed. Stuck directly to the wall, unframed, the paintings bear their weight like a newspaper held while it is being read.

Downstairs, the first group of works introduces the range of Swain's painting in both abstract and representational modes, from the green and brown fields of colour in *Lifelike surprises*, to the mountainous landscape of *Celebrate Something Else*. Although the material substance of the newspaper remains intact, Swain's actions nevertheless disrupt the newspaper's function. Sometimes the orientation is changed: the pages are turned round or upside down, as in *First time with a lasso*. The image with which the painting seems to begin – shadows of railings and a figure cast upon floor tiles – expands into a series of grid forms, and proliferates into an ambiguous image, which could be a skyscraper façade or a doorway or gateway, or something else entirely abstract.

Some of the landscapes present a vast expanse of sky or brush, with Swain's markings opening up a dramatic panoramic view, and others are more closed, claustrophobic or unsettling spaces, their ambiguous forms harbouring shadows or darkness. It is possible sometimes to imagine inhabiting one of his constructed landscapes. Upstairs, in *As well*, the largest painting in the exhibition, a vista that incorporates a sandy beach, dense jungle, four moons and war torn desert conjures up an impossible location. More representational than abstract, this landscape has the potential to take the viewer far away from where they are in the present moment, or from any real location on earth.

Swain describes what he does as 'concocting landscapes', and it is the possibility of imagined landscapes that is spellbinding. None of his works are easy to see or to understand in an instant. Instead, they hold your gaze and draw you in. As Swain himself says, 'I think a really good painting or any good work of art should still hold you and shouldn't disintegrate under your gaze no matter how exacting that gaze is. It will grab you across the room and also grab you if you are 2cm away from its surface. It will be satisfying but in some way elusive.'