



FOUND|LAND

CASS BREEN, LOUISE HARDY,
CHARLY HELYAR AND SARAH HILLS

FOUND|LAND

MORLEY GALLERY
61 WESTMINSTER ROAD
LONDON SE1 7HT

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WORDS AND CURATION BY
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*“Life can only be understood backwards
but it must be lived forwards.”*

Søren Kierkegaard

In March 2024, Cass Breen, Louise Hardy, Charly Helyar and Sarah Hills embarked on a month-long art residency in Newfoundland, Canada. The four artists arrived in the remote former fishing town of Pouch Cove, on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, in the depths of winter and were met with extreme cold weather in an alien, snow-covered landscape. Each of them came with a different attitude and approach; some armed with a plan of action, others ready to make site-responsive work inspired by their unfamiliar location. But none left unchanged. They all absorbed the experience fully, relished having time away from other pressures to focus on their practice and felt more determined than ever to continue on their paths as professional practitioners. Above all, this strengthened their relationship as a collective of colleagues and friends, begun three years earlier when they studied together on an MA in Fine Art at City & Guilds of London Art School.

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Sarah Hills
Charly's Curtain (2025)
Oil on aluminium
100 x 80 cm

Right

Sarah Hills
Pouch Cove 2 (2024)
Oil on linen
30 x 24 cm



As individuals, however, they each had their own singular experience which impacted them differently over time. An artist's creative trajectory is rarely made up of a single, linear thread. Sometimes one has to make a move backwards or sideways, before moving forwards. The effects of experiences like these may sink into the background for a while before coming to the fore, sometimes in unexpected ways. By presenting some work made during the residency, but the majority made since the artists' return, *FOUND|LAND* seeks to unveil what the artists found out about themselves and their practice, consciously or subconsciously, in the aftermath of this residency.

CASS BREEN

For Cass, the effect of the residency was mainly felt in retrospect, through reflection rather than intention. She was affected by the sense of alienation that she felt in Pouch Cove, a seemingly forgotten and lonely place at the edge of the world. However this only became apparent months after she left, once the ice had thawed and significant memories of the experience began to materialise in her sculptural work.

Materiality drove this body of work: the making took the lead and stories revealed themselves in the process. As Cass intuitively started drawing and sculpting with paper and thread back in her studio in London, the traces of her time in Newfoundland emerged. The remarkable, glowing colour at the core of the Atlantic Ocean's mighty waves is captured in bleeding indigo ink and translucent organdie fabric. Soft folds in the paper suddenly become vast, sweeping landscapes in which loose threads define the boundaries of man-made structures and running stitches become trails in the snow. Everything is covered in snow: the sailors' fishing nets, the boats, the shore, lending a haunting quality to the place. The palpable feeling of decay, the ruins of an industry in sharp decline, phantoms of things that have been and left. Inevitably, all of this left a mark.



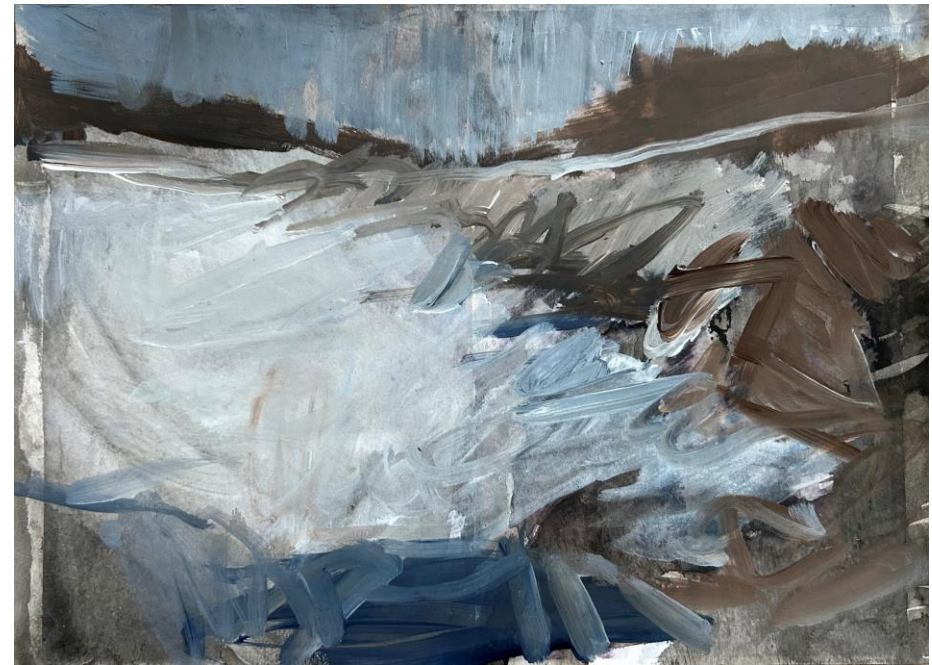
Frazil (detail) (2024)

Cotton organdie, paper thread, indigo-dyed paper, Japanese ink on paper
35 x 140 x 30 cm

LOUISE HARDY

Louise's experience in Canada allowed her to find landscape as subject-matter again. Arriving in Newfoundland, she instinctively began working on six large canvases, a continuation of her previous series. In these paintings based on photographic source material, Louise used pre-cut stencils and layered mark-making to depict monumental fractured cityscapes. But the change of routine, pace and environment of the residency also enabled her to establish a daily drawing practice, thus breaking out of her default way of working, and to begin experimenting intensively without concern for the final product.

Once the weather cleared, Louise stepped outside and painted *en plein air*, responding to the remarkable landscape around Pouch Cove with renewed energy and immediacy. Months later, this practice continued during a subsequent residency in Southern Spain. As she broke free from the familiarity of her stencil-based process, a shift took place from the cerebral to the more physical. Letting go of a controlled way of working and relinquishing photographic sources, Louise embraced the invigorating urgency that comes with drawing from life in an unfamiliar environment.



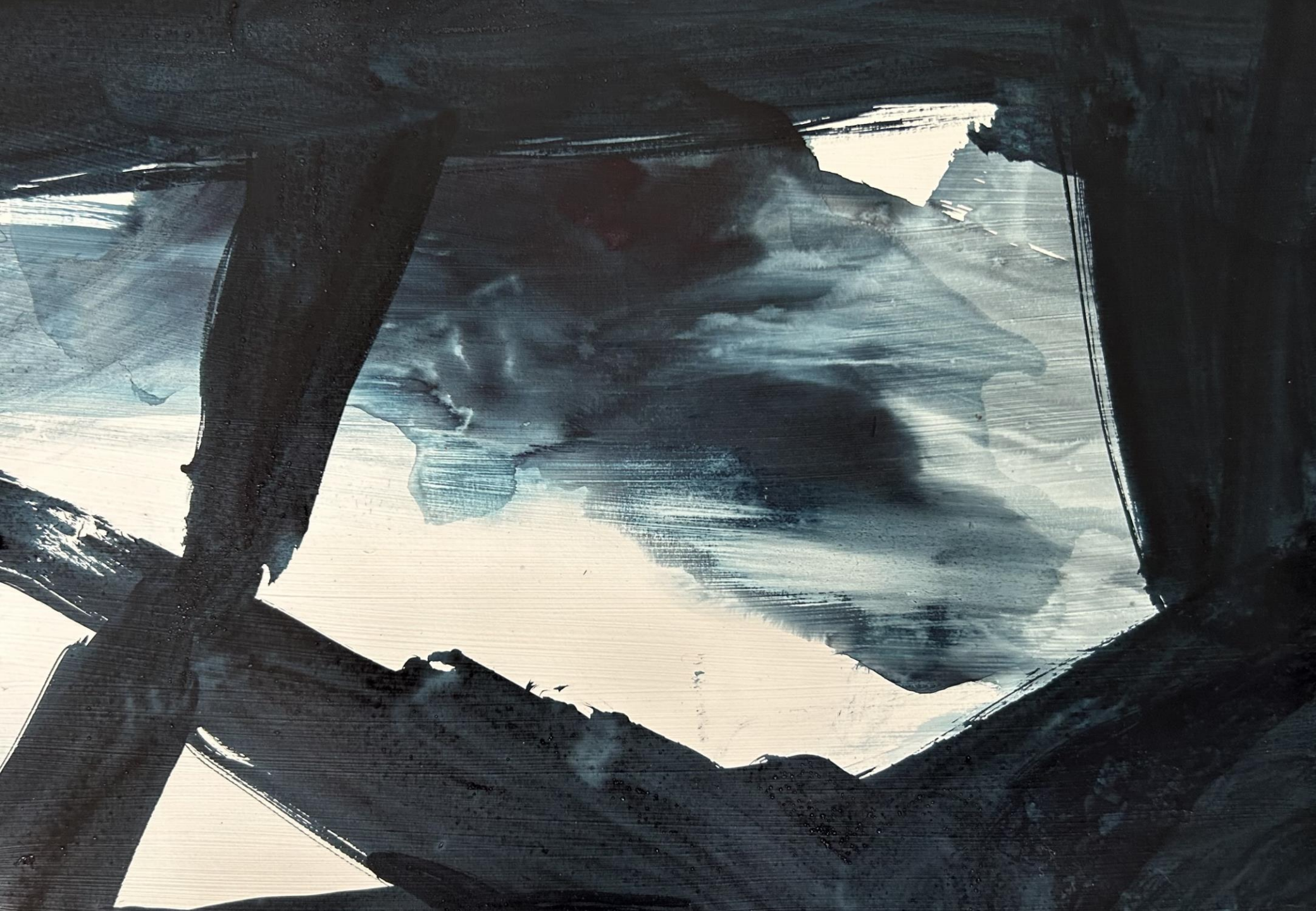
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Toward Hollow Cove I (2024)
Acrylic on paper
28 x 38cm

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The Last Sunset I (2024)
Ink on paper
25 x 35cm

In the resulting works on paper, the tumultuous vitality of nature jumps off the page. A concise brushstroke becomes a wave crashing against the bold lines of jagged cliff faces. Underneath dark interwoven marks, delicate washes of ink become storm-filled skies glimpsed through broken ruins. In a warm palette of ochres and siennas, blurred traces of a soft morning light radiate across the arid topography of mountain and rock. And suddenly, with just a few simple marks, we are transported to distant lands.

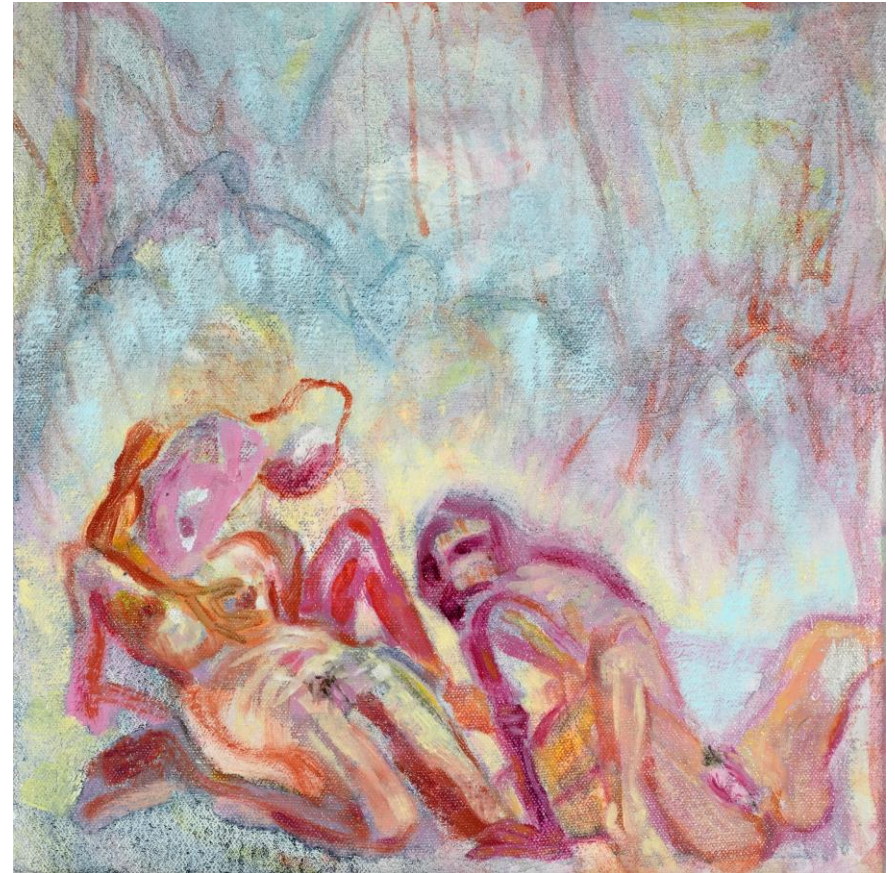


CHARLY HELYAR

During the residency, the camaraderie that was nurtured provided an essential counterpoint to the difficult themes of war and violence that Charly tackles in her work; atrocities to which she refuses to turn a blind eye.

Processions of people, caught in a state of limbo, are a recurring motif in this body of work. In *I don't know why*, lines of people, big and small, are on the move or standing still. Stripped of their most basic human rights and their autonomy, these upended refugees teeter on the edge of disempowerment as they await their fate.

In *Wanna Don't Wanna*, an ambiguous sexual act is taking place, somewhere between tenderness and violence. The splayed legs in the foreground draw us into the scene. As our eye travels across, we make eye contact with a crouching figure, head turned, caught in the act. Laying beside it, a limp body – in pleasure, in pain or unconscious? – leans into the embrace of another figure whose head is tilted attentively, a gentle hand resting on her nipple. Above, in the near distance, the faint trace of a crowd gathers silently to witness the scene, as do we.



Wanna Don't Wanna (2025)
Oil paint on cotton duck
25.5 x 25.5 cm

In looking at the best and worst of civilisation in a caring, heartfelt way, as opposed to a purely hateful or damning way, Charly reminds us that one needs to feel emotions of compassion and solidarity deeply in order to tackle challenging matters head on. Otherwise we may risk sacrificing our humanity.

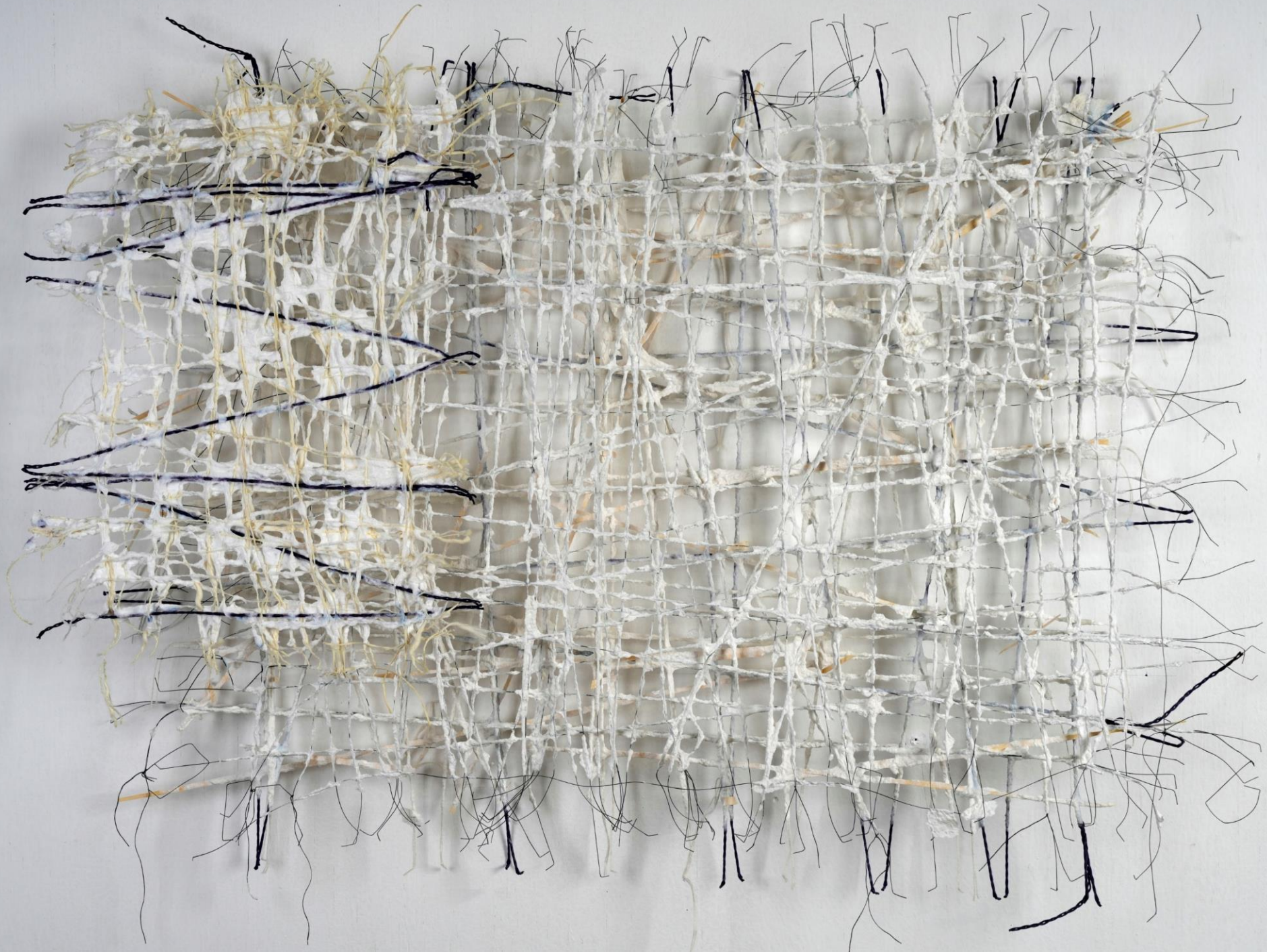
SARAH HILLS

In Sarah's still life paintings, objects take on a talismanic quality as they become the physical manifestations of a mood or feeling. A stillness emanates from these pieces; one that comes with looking at very little for some time. Yet they are alive because every painting is a portrait, carrying the message 'I am here'. Her paintings are peppered with clues that fail to provide the whole story immediately. Instead, they hold our attention by prompting further study, compelling us to ask: where have we found ourselves? Who do these objects belong to? When were they last used? Why have they been left behind like this?

Her time in Canada was a transition phase for Sarah, 'a pause between two breaths' following the intensive Masters' programme and preceding the current body of work, which continues to evolve. The tone of the work has shifted from intellectual to emotional, from looking out to looking in, and this is most apparent in her series of curtain paintings, where she has transitioned from depicting translucent veils in window frames to delicious folds of fabric up close. These new works are happening in real time; they are about the present. In *Unfolding*, it's almost as if the folds of fleshy fabric were caught dancing on their own, and happy to be doing so.



Unfolding 1 (2025)
Oil on aluminium
100 x 80 cm





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Cass Breen
Blizzard (2025)
 Paper, linen thread, hemp, oil
 60 x 80 x 12 cm

Above

Charly Helyar
Multitude (2024)
 Pen and ink on laid paper
 10.5 x 15 cm

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