



brown madder

CLYDE HOPKINS
RECENT PAINTINGS



CHELSEAFUTURESPACE

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Text by Brandon Taylor

Afterword by Donald Smith

Front Cover Image

Fiveacre 2011 Oil on linen 120cm x 105cm

(detail)



14th February – 1st April 2012



Ron's Trippy Craft (Bucolic Hippy Painting #4) 2008/09

Oil on linen 122cm x 102cm

It is a warm world, agreeable and intense; a world of gorgeous colour populated by sponges, mushrooms and pods flowering with youthful vigour from reassuring fibres, into which a viewer can cautiously venture on his or her own terms. And yet the world of Hopkins' new paintings is not all that reassuring, it seems to me. One might be well advised to trace the steps by which the paintings were made. Their shoots and leaves, for instance, their watery inlets and sprouting vegetation, hover rather precisely between flat pictorial effect and icons of what the mind already knows. It seems that they are all drawn carefully so as to remain just outside the reach of normal classification, horticultural or otherwise. But this is as it should be; for these are paintings, after all, which implies that all growth and form must be defined in the calibrated language of line, edge, tone, and mutual adjustment inside the tautly organised rectangle of the work. And here, the viewer will first uncover the painterly nature of Hopkins' simultaneously gratifying and threatening world. First, the warm Indian yellow that covers the whole. Then the brown and purple madder that supplies the hard-wood inner armature. And then the careful drawing of mostly quadrilateral shapes, some dotted, some sprouting, that lie both flat and upright on the picture surface, ready to be inspected from a frontal position of, I would guess, about three feet. Standing at somewhere near that distance, we see that everything is in sharp focus, but also that nothing has finished growing. Organic forms appear wherever there is space for them, wobbling into life to occupy the exact space that nature, or the rules of picture-making, have created for them. We seem to know that the forms that will prosper are those that will crowd their competitors out, in this dense, almost tropical container.

Those versed in the conventions of contemporary painting will know that this language has its own special origins and destiny. In the form-world of the 1980s, that roughly defined by an axis running between Julian Schnabel in America and Antoni Tàpies in Spain, it was adventurous to engage in large anarchic drawing, with spillage and accident governing the organisation of the whole. Hopkins, at that time

one of the leading exponents of anarchist painting in London, was approaching the end of the decade in a state of painterly doubt; and in a couple of new paintings from around 1990, *Bread in Pocket* and *Corporal Trim*, he found that very flat over-painting of one shape by another gave rise to a new visual vocabulary; especially interlocked planes and the sharpened edge – and by that token a set of ambiguities of a very different kind. Large brushes were set aside in favour of smaller ones. Drips were replaced by dots, or the gauze-effect. Indefinition was replaced by the sharpness of focus that I mentioned earlier.

A kind of coastal Cubism would have been one direction to follow. But Hopkins uncovered a very different nature then, one of America and Spain together – of gates and iron-work, light and sharp-edged shadow, bright colours and lush Mediterranean growth; in short a universe where Cubism and Surrealism meet. And so we see in the new paintings, those like *Go West* and *Go East* – which in their titles already imply travel away from home – but supremely in *European Gothic* in the present show, surely a minor masterpiece in its own right, the flowering of a vocabulary that, for all its strangeness, is rich in deference as well as reference to other artists of merit that belong squarely to the European scene. Near the top of this list would be Patrick Heron, whose wobbly natural shapes, virtually Mediterranean ones, so neatly abut the edges of his elegant works, and Robert Motherwell, whose many Surrealist elegies to Spanish culture Hopkins always recognised in his bones were relevant to him. In both artists, abstraction was mixed up with the evocation of a marvellous world through form. Heron, for his part, always insisted that his paintings should not be seen as landscape, but as vivid colour-space. Motherwell's obsession with Spain was governed by his search for what he (like the rest of his generation) called authentic feeling; for 'a dialectic between the conscious (straight lines, designed shapes, weighed colour) and the unconscious (short lines, obscured shapes) resolved into a synthesis'.

Whatever lessons they once conveyed, it is clear from those two artists why we cannot use their kind of language any more. In any case, it is quite obvious that Hopkins' relation to his world is both more sceptical and more anxious than either of theirs. For one thing, we can see that he is not averse to painting what appears to be ersatz rustic patterning, or exploiting the graphic abbreviations found in cartoons – as if we any longer doubted that the ersatz and the authentic are virtually one and the same. Further, it is clear from several of his titles that these warm, imaginary spaces are primarily ones given in delirium. Hopkins himself has written of the combination of stiff breezes and paranoia that permeate the mental posture of his work. And so we begin to pick out eyes, upside-down faces, fists, swarms, even some very beautifully painted leaves that make up an image, not of a pastoral world, but of a hallucinated one. Did I or did I not see in one of Hopkins' prints the same clenched fist that occurs in Dalí's 1936 painting *Soft Construction with Boiled Beans: Premonition of Civil War* – 'a strangulation of auto-delirium', as Dalí once called that work? And who is the Bucolic Hippie who haunts the titles of several of Hopkins' paintings; one who seems to have eaten unusual mushrooms and now lies down on his back to stare at the shapes in the sky? And who scribbled that intestinal line with the wrong end of the brush, inside the body-centre of the work?

One of the great qualities of Hopkins' new paintings, as I see them, is to have abandoned the particularly English problem of whether abstract art needs to be in some painterly relation to landscape. He has decided that it would be better to avoid the term entirely. On the contrary, it is through recollections of Dalí, Miró, even Picasso, that the artist has remembered how the sun can sharpen the shadows, heat the landscape, and probably addle the brains. Are we madder or saner now? It makes no difference. In Hopkins' new world, it is advisable to try for both.

© Brandon Taylor 2012



European Gothic 2011

Oil on linen 95cm x 110cm



Go West 2010/11
Oil on linen 70cm x 55cm



Go East 2011
Oil on linen 70.5cm x 55.2cm



Waltswood 2010
Oil on linen 95cm x 110cm



Uncomlinessse (Bucolic Hippy Painting #5) 2009/10
Oil on linen 70cm x 55cm

Clyde Hopkins was born in East Sussex in 1946 and studied Fine Art at the University of Reading in the sixties. He makes work in the APT studios, Deptford, and in St Leonards on Sea. Although principally a painter, he also makes screenprints, which are editioned and published by Advanced Graphics London.

He has exhibited his painting for over forty years, starting with a schoolboy show in the Gas Showrooms, Barrow in Furness in 1964. Exhibitions include the Serpentine Gallery, London (1978 and 1986), the Acme Gallery London (1981), Ikon Gallery Birmingham and Rochdale Art Gallery (both 1985), Salisbury Art Centre (1988), Castlefield Gallery Manchester (1989), Kunstverein Kirchzarten Germany (Kunst Europa 1991), Reg Vardy Arts Foundation, Sunderland (1994), Atkinson Gallery Millfield School (1996), *Vodka, a Stiff Breeze and Paranoia* at the London Institute Gallery (1998), Francis Graham Dixon Gallery London (1989, 1990, 1992, 1994, 1997), Galeria Joan Prats New York USA (1990 and 1994) and 116 gallery, Tenterden (2010). Later this year he will be exhibiting at the Merston Gallery near Chichester, and again at the 116 gallery in 2013.

His work has also been in numerous group exhibitions at galleries and venues throughout the UK and Europe, including the Hayward, the Whitechapel, the Axiom, the Bede, MOMA Oxford, the Woodlands Gallery Greenwich, the Royal Academy Galleries London, the Ferens Gallery Hull, Hastings Museum and Art gallery, as well as private galleries such as Flowers East, Bayer Germany, Advanced Graphics London, Martin Tinney Wales and Hilton Young Gallery Penzance. Recent group shows include *Scratching the Surface*, a four person exhibition curated by Francesca Simon, shown at Eton College (2008) and at BayArt, Cardiff in 2010, and *Uncaught Hares* at the Stephen Lawrence Gallery in 2011.

In 1980/81 he was awarded the Mark Rothko Memorial Travelling Fellowship (USA) and in 1998 the Lorne Award. The winter of 1989/90 was spent working in a studio in Barcelona. He is represented in a number of public and private collections in the UK and North America.

Throughout the seventies and early eighties, he was a visiting lecturer at many UK colleges and universities. In 1982 he was appointed Head of Painting at Winchester School of Art before moving to Chelsea College of Art as Principal Lecturer in Painting in 1990. He has acted as an external examiner to a number of graduate and undergraduate Painting courses, such as those at the Royal College of Art, the Slade School UCL, and the University of Newcastle. He left Chelsea, as a Professor of the University of the Arts London, in December 2006, and was made an Emeritus Professor in May 2008.



The Last Head of Painting

One of the reasons I returned to art school at the tender age of thirty was because there was a new Head of Painting at Chelsea. Clyde Hopkins had a formidable reputation; he had presided over an inspiring period at the art school in Winchester, he was represented by a Barcelona gallery in New York and his work had a confidence, intelligence, and visual presence that seemed to reflect the cultural energy exuding from those cities at the time.

Clyde Hopkins' era as Head of Painting at Chelsea culminated in the exhibition *Same As It Ever Was: Painting At Chelsea 1990–2007*, a major exhibition that he curated across three venues including Chelsea Futurespace. These shows reflected both his own joys and concerns as Head of Department and at the same time all of the brilliance and arguments played out in the wider field of painting during those years. The exhibition included over fifty artists – staff and alumni from his time at Chelsea – including Roger Ackling, Chris Baker, Jo Bruton, Brian Dawn Chalkley, Martin Creed, Dexter Dalwood, Angela De La Cruz, Jeff Dennis, Peter Doig, Noel Forster, Kirsten Glass, Mali Morris, David Musgrave, Chris Ofili, Trevor Sutton and Neal Tait, to name but a few.

In fact over six hundred students and a wealth of staff passed through the painting department between 1990 and 2006/07 before Clyde retired from his post and the departmental boundaries within fine art were dissolved at Chelsea. How could all of these disparate talents and opposing critical points of view possibly be accommodated within one departmental subject heading – Painting? The answer is Clyde Hopkins; he rode the storms of changing taste and differing opinion, a burgeoning art market impinging on the sanctuary of the educational institution and shifting pedagogical ideas because, he says with an almost Zen like confidence, "I feel that painting is quite capable of absorbing whatever it wants to".

This stunning new exhibition of work made in the past six years – fresh, bold, intense, colourful, confident and contemporary – proves that Clyde Hopkins the painter emerged from his time at Chelsea an even greater artist than when he arrived.

Donald Smith 2012



Downs' Towner 2006/07
Oil on linen 71cm x 56cm

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Clyde Hopkins Recent Paintings

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