

An Intimate Distance

Dr Christopher Crouch

Exhibition Text for Caitlin Yardley: *An Intimate Distance*

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Caitlin wrote to me about some of her work in progress (it hadn't started raining yet, and all those welcome drips and puddles that remind me of her work had yet to drip and puddle) and said that she had "a working title for the little paintings for a few hours now – a good sign". It is no easy business naming things. The titles of paintings are as important in some ways as the works themselves. Paintings have their own language and have their own two metaphorical feet to stand on, but they have to stand somewhere and do something as well as, as some would have it, just be themselves. A good title can frame a painting, and a title can change the way in which an image is understood. A named painting has an emotional and intellectual context, it retains its identity as a material thing but it has been given an identity that connects it to its maker and the wider world of ideas. The un-named object can be assimilated and adopted by the viewer who can easily impose their own interpretation on it, but once a name is attached to a work it cannot be completely possessed by the viewer without a struggle, and the ideas of the artist in creating the work will always linger.

The name of this exhibition, *An Intimate Distance* comes from the eponymous book by Rosemary Betterton. This book, read and re-read by Caitlin, is a feminist reading of the interactions between technology and culture and the female body and how they are marked by women artists. The use of the title suggests this set of paintings is not just an exhibition but also part of a larger body of ideas and work. It wasn't an easy decision choosing a name for the show; anyone who spends time with artists knows how obsessive they are about presenting their work. In Caitlin's words, it was finally chosen "for its allusions to the making of the paintings and the viewing of the paintings". On one hand the paintings are abstract and can be understood as material objects with their own aesthetic. On the other they have a conceptual and emotional origin in the lived experience of the artist's world. They are close and yet distant, aloof yet intimate, drips and puddles of paint yet distilled ideas and refined emotion.

Caitlin's work has always drawn from the wider practice of painting and the discourse of feminism. In the past her Woman Paintings emerged from de Koonings' paintings of the same name, and his paintings determined the size of her own canvases just as Caravaggio's *Penitent Magdalene* determines the size of the paintings on show in this exhibition. Donatello's depiction of the weeping Magdalene has been an inspiration too, but the influence all these works have had on Caitlin's work is not literal; when Caitlin talks of the Donatello work as "a disturbing sculpture of a gaunt woman" that is the initial identification of an image, whose content and form talks of the dripping dissolution of the body caused by grief, which then becomes the starting point for the transformation of the idea into new forms.

The process of making these paintings, of bringing material to life, is as complex as their conceptual origin. The large works on exhibition are the result of a new way of working for Caitlin. They are made with a pipette working on a canvas laid flat on the floor, where, drop by drop, fleshy blobs of paint are released to slowly fill the pool of crimson, ready to embrace them. It is a vigil of sorts, kneeling at the side of the body of work, slowly and repetitively building another way of understanding the world. Each painting is an eight-hour meditation on paint and the obsessive nature of making art. Each painting is made in close up, focusing on filling a small area at a time, letting the unity of the surface unfold by itself. Each painting explores the way in which the small fallen sacs of paint always press into each other, either floating or swallowed by the bigger pool. In this way, during Caitlin's "slow march to the end", the paintings reveal themselves through the discipline of practice, both material and intellectual, and eventually earn their title.

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