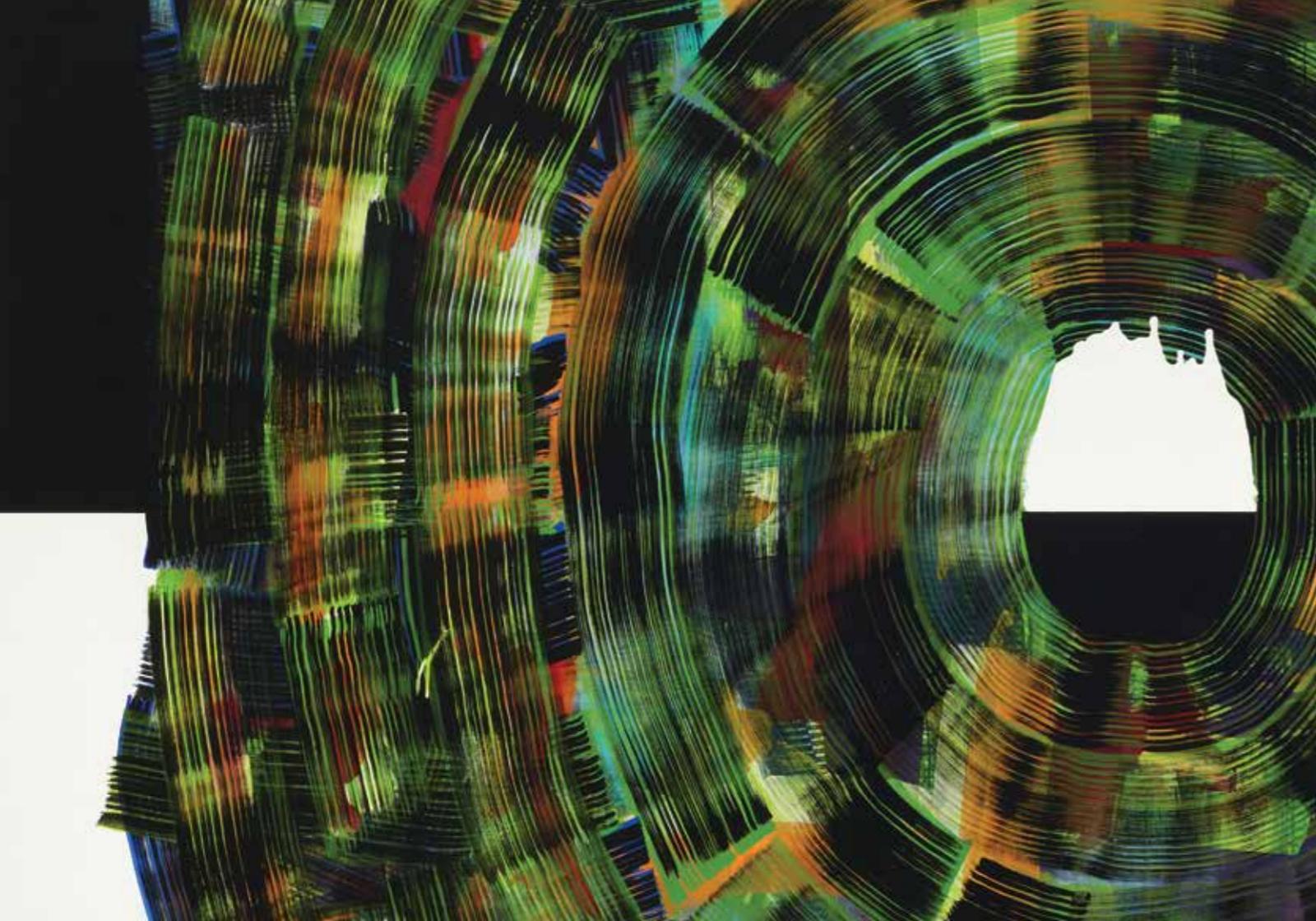


The image is a vibrant collage of numerous American flags, some appearing to be draped or layered over each other. The colors are bright and saturated, with a prominent yellow background in the center. The flags are oriented in various directions, creating a sense of movement and depth. Overlaid on this collage is the text "DUAL PURPOSE" in a bold, white, sans-serif font, centered horizontally and slightly above the vertical middle.

**DUAL PURPOSE**



TIM ALLEN

*Are You Experienced*

Juan Bolivar

There's something that the artist Tim Allen is not telling us; I think that Tim is a spiritual kind of guy. I think his paintings are transcendental.

Now Tim will be the first to tell you that spiritual and transcendental are loaded terms, and as I picture Tim rolling these words to the back of his mind's eye, I imagine him negotiating whether he should tell us more and let us in – or leave us to consider what this might mean.

I met Tim in 1985. He was my tutor at Central St. Martins – or St. Martins as it was known then. He wasn't my personal tutor but our paths often crossed. I found out he played the guitar, he was always approachable and someone you could talk to.

The first time I saw Tim's work was at the Chisenhale Gallery in 1987. The paintings he was making at the time combined elements or tropes of landscape painting, panoramic spaces, and Rothko-like allusions to sublime vapours, with geometric motifs which reminded me of African shields (like in the film *Zulu*). The geometric shields intervened in the pictorial space acting as objects or, possible window openings, but never fully declaring themselves – remaining ambiguous entities with a spectrum of readings, from apertures, holes, or as I remember them 'shields'. A duality, or triality

of interpretations. They surveyed the territory, geometricising the landscape (geo from the Greek word meaning 'earth' and metron for 'measure'). These 'shields' or apertures connect to current elements in Tim's paintings, which he has been employing since the mid '80s, and sometimes refers to as 'lozenges'.

At the time of the Chisenhale exhibition the paintings were made through an application of layers of oil paint diluted with dammar varnish, turpentine and stand oil; a traditional recipe often used in maritime painting. Dammar varnish, as its name suggests, is a varnish but can also be used as a medium which leaves behind a semi-gloss crystal resin skin. It is characteristic in that, unlike linseed oil or other oil mediums, it doesn't form the cushion syrupy surface of oil paint – but rather acts as a mesh through which the painting can breathe.

I am of course recalling a memory of paintings seen 30 years ago, and my description indicates an essence of actual experience of the work – rather than a true 'factual' literal description of what the works were or looked like, and it is a measure of these works that after 30 years their impression still resonates in the form of feelings with depth and weight, and images of black, white, red and orange shields floating on a dammar resin-skin colourfield.

In some ways my current perception of Tim's work is always in relationship to the evidence of these earlier works.

As an outside observer however I am sure that my account of Tim's evolution is as simplistic as someone describing the Beatles' early '60s work as 'catchy love songs followed by their hippy stuff from *Sergeant Pepper* later on'. It's as simplistic as it is inaccurate, but part of my attraction to Tim's work is the way in which over a period of time we join these glimpses and form a picture or resonance of an artist's practice.

I am not sure at what point the change from oil to acrylic occurred but I remember sometime in the mid '90s seeing new paintings by Tim employing a dazzle-like lattice brushwork technique – often using a palette of high octane contrasting colours to create a shimmer effect and 'insulating' colourfield.

In a sense the motifs and former dammar vapours had been reinvented to emphasise new vibrant 'walls of colour'. The paintings became more planar or frontal, rather than suggesting the infinite sublime spatial field of earlier works. The new lattice brushwork in fact had a more utilitarian index – reminiscent of plasterwork found in a construction site or home renovation. It seemed to have been freed from the connotations

of Northern European landscape paintings and early modernism by merging instead elements of Zen calligraphy, post painterly abstraction and DIY. The paintings had opened up letting in not just different elements but different sensibilities, in that I could read them in reference to many things from *Magic Eye* posters (a craze big in the '90s where fractured abstract patterns formed or suggested 3D images brought into focus through extreme 'non-observation'), or in reference to de Kooning's use of DIY brushes which he adapted by soaking in hot water until they splayed and flared out. In Tim's case the brushes used are custom-made or adapted, often combined in multiples, such as a decorator would use for elaborate wood graining effects. These brushes exaggerate and slow down the brushmark – making it both a thing and a cipher all at once. Not quite the faux-graphic depictions of brushmarks by Lichtenstein, but certainly a mutated form of 'action painting'.

As time went by the window, or 'lozenge' motifs grew more prominent and central to Tim's paintings, becoming the subject being examined, exploring the tensions between meaning and form in this non-hierarchical figure ground paradigm. The lozenge shapes went from being small windows or apertures to much larger entities or portals. There is an inertia exerted from them like a centrifugal vortex pulling you in, and the use

of metallic colours in some recent works serves to heighten this magnetic quality. When I think about it – the earlier works shown at the Chisenhale – may have even been two bodies of works; the horizontal landscape works and the ones with window motifs – or as I remember them – shield motifs, and I am relying on haptic memories to tell me this. What matters is the sense of inevitability of both elements being, or becoming together as they are, and as we see in his practice 30 years later today.

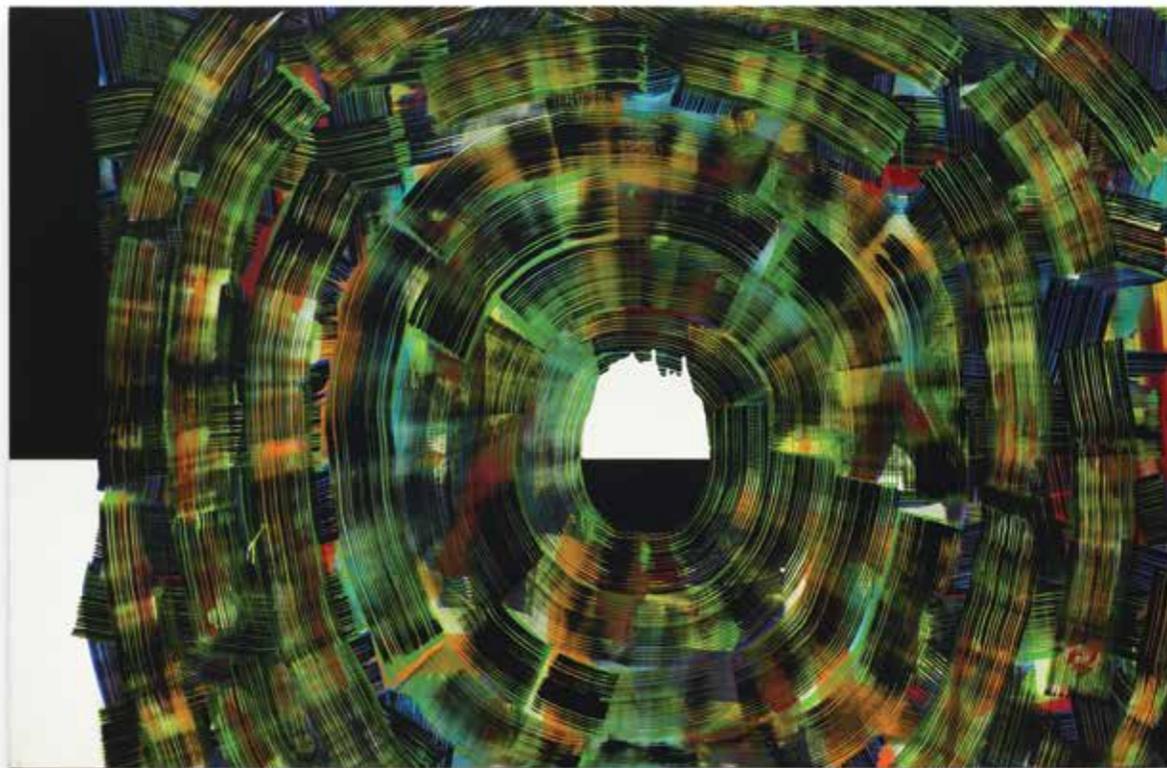
Some of these developments often took the form of site-specific wall paintings, in some instances the wall paintings were integrated into the architecture of a site occupying the walls in full; corner to corner, wall to ceiling. Other times additional walls may have been constructed to disrupt the architecture, but the result was similar in that there was an element of being enveloped or absorbed into the works more fully than if we were just looking at a 'picture'. Imagine the difference between watching a film on television and the immersive experience of the cinema with surround *Pearl & Dean* sound and you get the idea. The wall paintings are instrumental in Tim's practice in that they crop up every now and then like bridges that are being built along the way of his (re)search. They are wondrous things in that they seem to facilitate other ideas in production and point to the importance of becoming – or

being absorbed in – the object-experiences which Tim Allen's paintings provide.

*Fire and Fleet*  
2008  
Acrylic on canvas  
213 × 335 cm



*One Foot on the Platform*  
2008  
Acrylic on canvas  
213 × 335 cm



*Perceptual flips, apocalypse*

Matthew Collings

A painter of our times, he goes to the studio as much as possible, keeps life together on other days, teaching for a living, plus sells work. The space is impressively large, very high ceilings. There's a whole other floor he built himself, I think, years ago, for storage. Intriguing paintings from the 1990s by a mutual friend are up there (Pete Watson, who died) as well as Tim's own unsold work.

The space is so vibrant and alive I always feel, whenever I visit. On the last occasion, a few months ago, I saw little paintings, very substantial, in one part, big ones in another, including one that's in this show, and ordered-off areas of paint materials.

Well it might be many studios we can think of.

*Tim, without self-consciousness can you give me a list of attributes or qualities the two paintings in Dual Purpose have?*

*"Hard edge – poured, expressive, atmospheric, conflicted, comprehensive, emotional, calculated, improvised, simple motifs but contradictory juxtapositions, resolved, continually in flux, formal elements with a very long development history."*

He can trace some things back to 1966. I agree hard edge is the first thought. They're not classic

hard edge abstracts, the mental image one might call up if someone mentioned that category of art – those Euro-American paintings from the '60s and '70s. Instead he has his own synthesis of methods he's employed in the past.

I always imagine he sees art as romantic, open, poetic, philosophical, and urgent, but is also a materialist, so he sees it as work, and the making aspect of art is as fascinating and inescapable as the picturing and poetic aspect.

His own making always had certain characteristics, as he says. I think of them as open marks, plays of transparency, and drawing with the brush. They're here now as well as masking-taped edges, pooled paint, a controlled dripping that's also drawing, and a type of imagery that suggests space and landscape as if blunt and simple signs were the only way reality could be conveyed now – so you have to get as much subtlety as you can into the process of putting them together. This last thought seems to be a rule of making for him.

He draws with the brush but the brush is often a particular stippling tool used by decorators, with a wide base holding a row of stubby bristle brushes separated by gaps. When he dips it in the paint and drags it across the canvas it makes a certain characteristic broad and subtle transparent

striated mark: graphic and linear but also clearly the mark of a brush.

A decorator's brush is a good instrument association-wise – there are de Kooning's long-haired sign writers' brushes and Braque's array of effects that decorators use for faux textures.

When drawing with the brush in this way he doesn't deal with everything you see in the painting with it. He also draws with tape: he creates brutal hard edges where two colour areas meet. And he draws by dripping.

As to what he's drawing it's not straightforward, the whole point is different types of ambiguity. He locates a factor in painting whether representational or abstract: the unavoidable aspect of spatial depth. He works with it to create paintings that are about this essential factor of all paintings but also a feeling of the real world out there with its factual and palpable textures. But also again its atmospheres and character of a projected illusion – we're all creating it all the time.

Two paintings make up the show: experiments in perception. You can't get very far back. They have severe surfaces, very emphatic, and hard edges, horizons that you can't miss, but they're

unreal, as if he's testing expectation, they go upside down – like the reflections on the lake in paintings by Munch: suddenly the ground is bright and the sky black.

*What else do you think's going on?*

*"Puncturing the picture plane with holes/apertures/vignettes. Sometimes these become flat or protruding forms. The horizon line is important, a division between one colour area and another. It can be abrupt or a magical conflict of the edge, soft and gradual, modelled, it might be aggressive or inviting."*

*One Foot on the Platform* and *Fire and Fleet* – titles I associate in the first case with the lyrics of *House of the Rising Sun* and in the second ships at sea and a burning sunset, like Turner – each have a large main area and also another one that appears to be at once part of the main thing and also separate, a shunted area, maybe. This makes me think of folded space in Veronese or de Kooning. De Kooning consciously works with Cubism whereas with Veronese if we're painters we often see his visual arrangements as having the same joyous playfulness as Cubism.

Both the paintings have a horizon off to the side and then within the central part of the canvas an inverted version of it. In the case of *Fire and*

*Fleet* the inversion keeps appearing, like visual stuttering. With *One Foot on the Platform* it's only once.

They both have a visual idea besides that of a horizon, which is the idea of a radiating glow. In *One Foot on the Platform* it's mesmerizing: a single vast sunspot, white light at the centre. And with *Fire and Fleet* it's multiple, the island/holes glow but they're also surrounded by a glow. This other glow is seen when perception of the striated curves everywhere flips from sheer wall to deep irradiating light.

Both paintings have restricted colour but not as restricted as it might be thought at first. A general impression initially of two or three colours gives way to awareness of subsidiaries. They are leftovers but also modifiers, traces but also players (they really are doing something). The blues and purples, and pale greeny yellows, in *Fire and Fleet*, which otherwise seems to be a green and yellow, and red and white, painting, subtly enrich that initial colour impression. The same thing happens with the glinting fluorescent-seeming colour in the darkness of *One Foot on the Platform*, a painting which at first seems to be more or less black-and-white plus green.

We imagine Expressionists like Soutine or de Kooning give full rein to mark making. In fact it's

an illusion that they always allow every mark under the sun. From painting to painting there's a lot of restriction, just as there is with him. Those artists are aware as he is of the power of limits, for which the word rules could be used just as well.. When he subtly obeys rules he's set himself then restriction looks like freedom.

The striated marks done with the stippling brush are always very definite, going from a beginning point to an end point. They never swish back and forth or round and round. In cutting down the colour and the range of marks he makes something as much graphic as painterly. You're often looking at something like a design, a poster even, anyway a picture where line is important, and spaces and objects don't merge, they're crisply delineated. Yet a lot of this space is something like sky. A Constable sky is a great marvel of merged tonality. It can seem like paint was made for it. A 1960s poster is different: a realm where paint barely exists. He seems to want you to think of both these opposites at once.

In *Fire and Fleet* you're looking at twelve openings in a patterned surface: a surface made of striated curves turning this way and that. The perception of openings changes and the holes flip to objects. The enormous flat surface that bears all these openings flips into an open wavering trembling space. But there's also a ground and

sky, where nothing else happens but this division, it's on the left of all the action just described: a horizon of dark earth and blasting sky.

It is and is not a skyline in a Courbet landscape, or a distant sunrise bringing hope as a detail in the background of Rubens' *Descent from the Cross*. It's not an impression. It's not really a landscape. It's notational not descriptive. A simple sign: horizon. A stark difference: light and dark. In *One Foot on the Platform* a hole in the middle is also a disc in space.

The openings flipping to islands that appear in each of the two paintings, each have contour edges made by dripping. That is, each of the two tonally contrasting colour-areas that make up these islands has one hard straight edge and one dripping edge.

In both paintings the striated curves are beautifully delicate but the horizon lines are brutal, and the dripped edge is also a bit brutal, much more like the taped edge than the striated curves.

The drips are neither elegant nor gross. They imply movement but they don't open out the whole painting, as a new bit of drawing in a de Kooning or Soutine will open things out. Instead by contrast the drips here do something local. They make a particular and specific form for the

outer edge of the shape of each island/opening, as the shape has been placed in one painting – right in the middle – and in the other – distributed as twelve stuttering variations about the place, sometimes larger sometimes smaller, like the brothers in *Genesis* appearing to Joseph in a dream as stars.

*Fire and Fleet* has a green earth colour and yellow sky colour in its big horizon statement, but the relationship is reversed in the islands that flip to openings. Here the bright colour is earth and the dark colour sky.

Religious visions and materialist art, they're each there in *Dual Purpose* because traditions of making are always in place if you're a painter, whatever period you live in, but they're also not there, because going to the studio when you can, teaching etc, is not to be a knight or a visionary on top of a pillar in the desert, or a socialist in the *Paris Commune*, but to live now in the new weird reality of threatened eco apocalypse and right-wing groups suddenly emerging in your own street, ready to set fire to your house and murder your children, even though new escapist formulaic TV shows are constantly coming on, designed for consumption by consumer robots, which you can binge-watch, and read the reviews the next day by emotionally stunted adults in *The Guardian*.

*Do you have a complicated plan when you start?*

*"Only a simple structural one and even that can change. Improvisation is crucial. I use many tools."*

*Any routines?*

*"Always break for lunch."*

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