

36.8°C

Subject to Change: Art in the Time of the Pandemic

37.5°C

Sarah Arsenault
Ce Chen
Sinde Cheung
Cathy Hayes
Caroline Ingham
Claudio Pestana
Joao Simoes-Brown

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'Subject to Change' brings together the work of seven emerging international artists responding to our everchanging political and physical environment where identities and the politics of memory keep being renegotiated.

With social and political volatility heightened, this exhibition by a group of Postgraduate alumni from Camberwell College of Arts pertinently questions the symbolic capital attached to established cultural myths, interrogates the on-going struggles in contemporary geopolitics and de-constructs the embodiment of gender and identity.

Much like the menu in a pub, where the artists came up with the premise for the exhibition, all life is subject to change, and this show is a reminder that nothing is set in stone – even public statues do not last forever. Power changes hands and always simultaneously art provides us with the inspiration to challenge oppressive narratives. In this exhibition a multidisciplinary group of artists come together to show a body of work that examines both the histories of art and contemporary socio-political discourses.

In this show one can feast on the marvel evoked by the eclectic presentation of painting and sculptural works. From Ingham's *'Enfleshing'* sculpture group of distorted embodiments suspended from wire hangers on a clothes rail, casting shadows on the surrounding walls, to Chen's paintings employing natural processes of oxidisation to depict the ephemeral elements of the Cornish landscape; the certainty of change is ever present – be it physical, social or political.

Whilst in her *'Pieta'* paintings, Hayes examines how feminine identity has been depicted throughout history and offers us a group of fluid figures in domestic settings; in *'Fag Has an Audience'*, Pestana invades the grand houses of the landed gentry and re-interprets the tradition of the interior portrait, populating the pictorial space with his Fag identity and references to landscape and social class.

Change is also evident in Cheung's *'Merry Christmas'*, where a Christmas tree, which was set on fire in a luxury mall in Hong Kong in December 2019, unsettlingly represents democratic instability. Simões-Brown presents us with *'Instar'*, a reference to the stages of development between moults of the arthropods, and Arsenault explores humanity's vulnerability as a species in *'Survival of the Fittest'*, *'Extant'*, and *'The Healing'* – both artists also examining the ever-constant presence of change.



Sarah Arsenault

Sarah Arsenault is a British-Canadian artist currently based in London. In 2019 the artist graduated from OCAD University in Toronto with a BFA in Drawing and Painting, and in 2020 the artist graduated from Camberwell College of Arts with an MA Fine Art Painting. Arsenault's work was acquired by the UAL Art Collection in 2020 and recently selected to represent UAL in the Art Toronto 2021 Exhibition. The artist's work was also long-listed for The Ruth Borchard Self-Portrait Prize 2021. Arsenault's work has been exhibited in multiple juried and group exhibitions and can be found in collections in both North America and the UK. The artist's hybrid works oscillate between abstraction and realism. Through applications of gestural abstract painting and realistic imagery, Arsenault's work fuses reality with imagination, figuration with landscape. The artist is interested in human ecology and her own relationship within the natural, social and built environments that she engages with. Keenly aware of the climate emergency, Arsenault's paintings interpret how her experiences within environments shape her view of the world and explore the interconnectedness of all things.

Survival of the Fittest, *Extant* and *The Healing* explore the precarious nature of living. Influenced by the coronavirus pandemic and the climate crisis, they look at the relationship that exists between humanity and the rest of nature, and investigate humanity's vulnerability as a species. The paintings aim to offer hope for a 'still surviving' planet, and depict a shift from an anthropocentric view of the world towards an ecocentric view for the world.

Survival of the Fittest, 2021
183 cm x 61 cm
Acrylic on canvas



Extant, 2021
152 cm x 102 cm
Acrylic, ink and charcoal on canvas

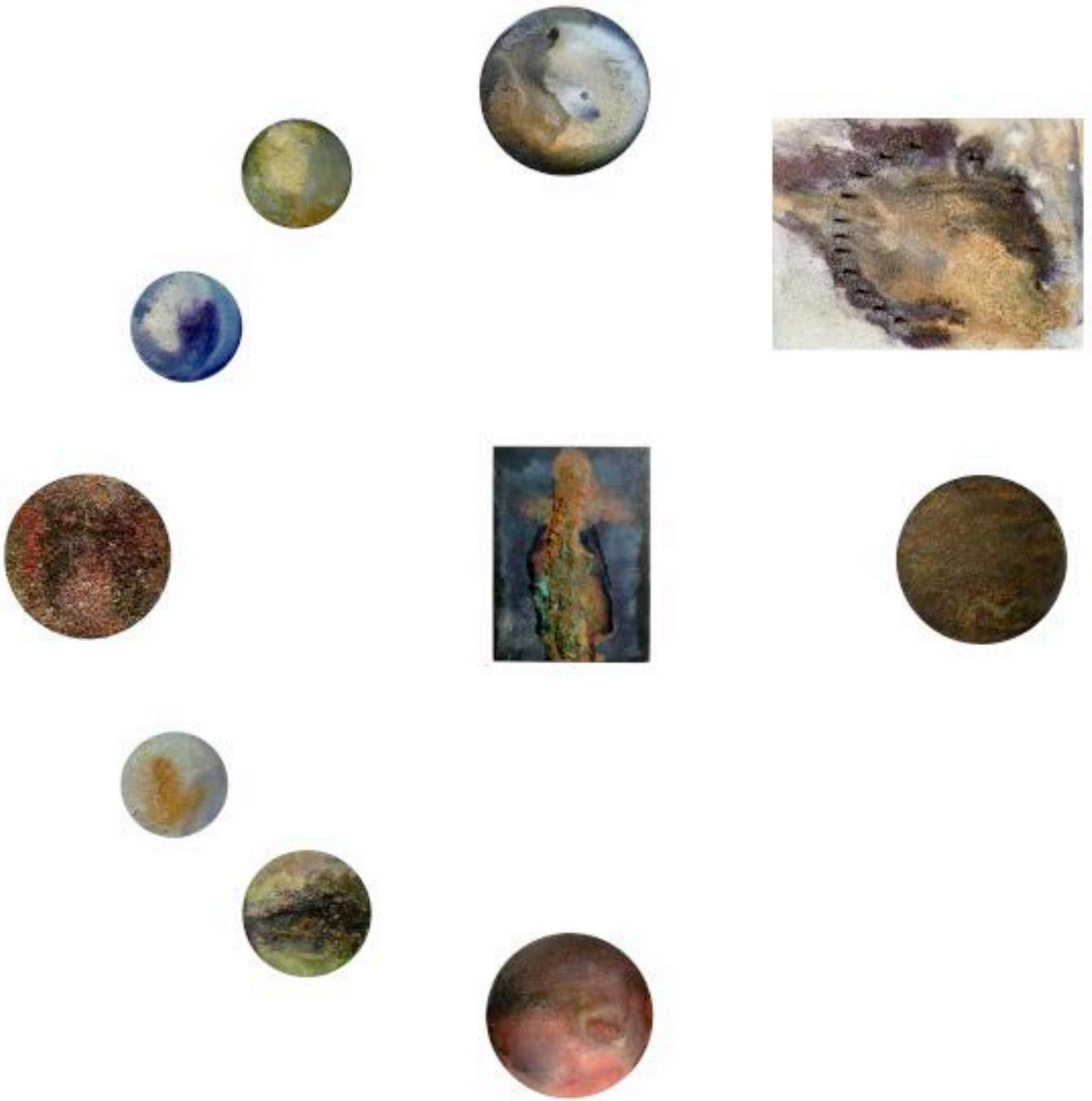
Ce Chen

Ce Chen is a visual artist currently based in Falmouth, Cornwall. Chen has adventured through various art institutions and is currently undertaking his PhD at Chelsea College of Arts. The artist has a specific interest in the relationship between (his own) identity and landscape and his work combines Illustration with other fine art techniques. Chen's work has been shown in several exhibitions in UK and abroad. In his practice the artist plays with the ideas of linearity, materiality, and time-space, as a way of challenging idealised human systems.

The *Fantasia on Entropic Sea Songs* series depicts observed elements of the Cornish landscape, presenting the essential ending of material world and alluding to the linearity of time. *Fantasia on Entropic Sea Songs* symbolises the paradoxical rationalisation process of knowledges. The series encourages visitors to engage with the space by making their own associations between the works and their own understanding of the landscape. The series attempts to challenge the linearity followed when exhibiting paintings. The non-linear installation of works is expanded as the series progresses.



Oxidisation, 2021
30 cm x 30 cm
Watercolour and salt on canvas



Fantasia on Entropic Sea Songs, 2021
Various sizes
Mixed media on canvas

Sinde Cheung

Sinde Cheung is an artist from Hong Kong. In 2020 the artist graduated from Camberwell College of Arts with an MA Fine Art Painting. Cheung's recent work focuses on the protests in Hong Kong, which started in June 2019. In her work the artist explores how contemporary painting practice can examine recurrent political events and respond to a feeling of impotence in the face of oppression.

In *Merry Christmas* Cheung captured the Christmas tree that was set on fire in a luxury mall in Hong Kong in December 2019. The Christmas tree is usually 6-storey high and every year everyone looks forward to its design. Christmas is a festival associated with joy and hope, and it is a time for family and friends to meet. However, Christmas in 2019 was never the same again, things and the city are never the same again.



Merry Christmas, 2020
122 cm x 60 cm
Oil on panel



Cathy Hayes

Cathy Hayes grew up in Ireland and after gaining her degree in architecture moved to London, where she worked for many years in top design houses. At the same time Hayes studied part-time in the evenings at Chelsea School of Art. Later, an unexpected move took the artist to the Bahamas where she lived for many years along with her family, putting down roots in the community. Hayes' artistic training continued at the local art college, where the artist was invited to exhibit her work together with the head of the school. Her work was included in the Bahamian art collection The D'Aguiar Foundation and in The National Gallery of Art. Years later Hayes returned to Ireland, where she fought hard to re-situate her practice. Hayes work is represented in various collections in Ireland and The Bahamas. In 2020 the artist graduated from Camberwell College of Arts with an MA Fine Art Painting. In her practice Hayes pursues alternative perspectives on women's identities and her work seeks to reclaim women's power through re-imagining myths and stories from the past.



Pieta 1, 2020
30 cm x 30 cm
gouache and mixed media on wood



Pieta 2, 2020
30 cm x 30 cm
gouache and mixed media on wood

Pieta 3, 2020
30 cm x 30 cm
gouache and mixed media on wood



Pieta 4, 2020
30 cm x 30 cm
gouache and mixed media on wood



The Pieta series

Through ongoing efforts towards unpicking prescribed gender roles and attributes from art history, classical mythology and religion, in *The Pieta Series* Hayes examines the relationship between mother and son and highlights how essential unlearning is in regards to gender roles. The artist references *The Pieta* by Michelangelo, which epitomizes this subject in a monumental way. The artist explains: “the immense sculpture, carved from a single block of marble, has a particular feature that interests me – Mary’s undeniable appearance of youth. This has been recognized since the work’s conception, with Michelangelo’s suggestion that the purity of such virginal women allows them not to age. The persistence of such unbalanced concepts about women, have trickled down through the centuries, remaining with us today. I seek to dismantle this delusion by presenting mothers who respond with disinterest – a mother who stares fixedly at a screen or drinks her wine absentmindedly. A mother in a bathroom, denotive of the passive Bonnard nudes and finally, a mythologically inspired woman who releases her justified rage.”



Caroline Ingham

Caroline Ingham was born in London, UK, though she grew up in the north of England. In the 1980s she studied a BA in Theatre Design at Central Saint Martins and subsequently developed a career in museum exhibition design. At the British Museum she designed the 'mummy galleries' and the Enlightenment Gallery and later became Head of Design at the Natural History Museum. Maintaining her art practice throughout she studied Advance Painting Practice and Fine Art Mentoring at Morley College before completing an MA Fine Art Painting at Camberwell College of Arts in 2020. She has exhibited in shows in London at Espacio Gallery and Jeannie Avent amongst others.

Exploring areas around painting and sculpture Ingham's practice examines our relationship with our bodies at times of vulnerability and "bodily doubt" (Creamer, 2019). These ideas manifest in her practice as a deep concern with the quality and character of the materials that she uses to create 'feeling scapes' of the body: hand-painted textile assemblages that lead us to consider the structure and fragility of the physical body as well as our psychological relationship with it. She is now dedicated full-time to her practice based in Peckham London.

Enfleshing III, Rules of Six 2020

33 cm x 48 cm x 23 cm

Distemper-impregnated canvas, net, hand-dyed textiles, latex, and wire



Enfleshing I-VI, Rules of Six, 2020
153 cm x 100 cm x 48 cm
Distemper-impregnated canvas, net and hand-dyed textiles,
latex, wire and LED lights

Enfleshing I-VI, Rules of Six, 2020

In *Enfleshing I-VI* six delicate bodies are suspended from six wire coat hangers hung on a clothes rail. The work is spot lit so that as each piece gently and continuously moves they together cast a pattern of ever-changing shadows on the surrounding walls. These ghostly forms reminiscent of bodies and what once clothed and protected them become portals to our own vulnerability.

Enfleshing I-VI is a group of works made for *Rules of Six* online exhibition in December 2020. 'Rules of Six' appropriated a regulation designed to limit social contact during the pandemic as a framework for a collective, creative effort – albeit one carried out at a distance. Six artists, six works each, one shared (virtual) space.

Claudio Pestana

Claudio Pestana was born in Portugal in 1974, and lives and works between London and Dorset, England. First trained as a psychologist, Pestana also engaged in art making as a self-taught artist before receiving his MA Fine Art Painting from Camberwell College of Arts in 2020. Pestana has collaborated with other artists on several art projects and in 2020 his work was included in the London Grads Now exhibition at The Saatchi Gallery in London. In 2021 Pestana was awarded the Abbey Scholarship in Painting 2021-22 with a residency at The British School at Rome. Pestana's practice is eclectic and encompasses painting, drawing, ceramics, found objects, photography, video, sound, and text. Pestana recurrently explores themes of identity, history, nature, and violence. The artist draws particular attention to how violence is exercised through the Spectacle and representations of myths. The artist also has an interest in the politics of memory and how certain stories get to be told and remembered whilst others are suppressed and forgotten.



Fag Has an Audience I, 2021
200 cm x 210 cm
Acrylic on canvas



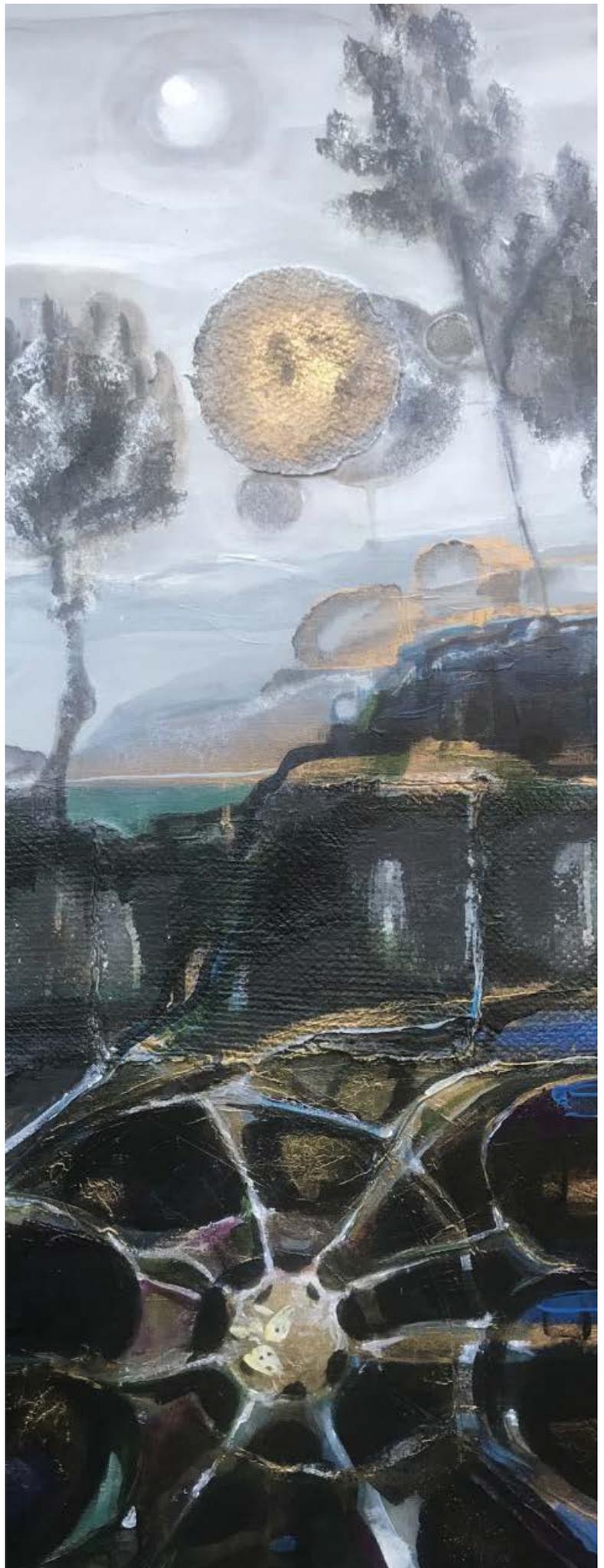
Fag Has an Audience II, 2021
200 cm x 210 cm
Acrylic on canvas

In *Fag Has an Audience*, Pestana invades the grand houses of the landed gentry and re-interprets the tradition of the interior portrait. In these paintings, Pestana populates the pictorial space with his Fag identity and references to landscape and social class. Within the narrative of these paintings there is also the suggestion that every palace has a chasm, a dark side, a cesspit. In dialogue with the two paintings is a spray-painted table lamp connected to a potato – another reference to the complexity of British history.

Joao Simoes-Brown

Joao Simoes-Brown was born in Lisbon and now lives and works in London. The artist first completed a degree in Sociology in Lisbon and later worked as an interpreter in London, before graduating from Camberwell College of Arts with an MA Fine Art Painting in 2020. Simoes-Brown current practice explores the state of change, in-betweenness and the anthropological concept of liminality. The liminal space or threshold is a step into unknown territory, a midpoint at the core of transformation. The artist's work is informed by her own experience of in-betweenness: identity is not necessarily homogeneous or set in stone, hers thrives on fluidity and redefinition. Landscape and the built environment populate the artist's figurative compositions as witnesses to histories, cultures and human presence on the planet. Simoes-Brown's works accumulate layers and overlaps of narratives, memories and identities, both real and fictional. The textures brought into the canvas enhance this aspect. The artist draws inspiration from diverse sources, from literature to snapshots taken during walks. Drawing, reading and writing are staples of Simoes-Brown's practice.

Instar One, 2021
61 cm x 91.4 cm
Acrylic paint and ink, pasted own
handmade paper, metallic gold leaf on
deep edge cotton canvas



Instar Two, 2021
61 cm x 91.4 cm
Acrylic paint and ink, pasted own
handmade paper, metallic gold leaf on
deep edge cotton canvas

In *Instar One* and *Instar Two*, Simoes-Brown references the stages of development between moults of the arthropods. In her process, the artist pasted paper to the canvas that she made out of newspaper, using this as an embedded metaphor for transience and transformation. In the papermaking process Simoes-Brown explores a method for questioning dominant narratives and for suggesting alternatives. According to author Rebecca Solnit (2006), “*Instar* implies something both celestial and ingrown, something heavenly and disastrous and perhaps change is commonly like that, a buried star, oscillating between near and far.”



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