

An interview with Christopher Green  
conducted by R C Sheering



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November 2012

In July 2010 Hannah Barry Gallery hosted a solo exhibition of Christopher Green's painting, entitled *Together and Afar*. In advance of two new shows in 2013, the first a joint exhibition with Bobby Dowler at Hannah Barry Gallery and the second at Art Brussels, the artist revisited this series of thirty paintings in an interview with RC Sheering. Green's current practice is best understood by reference to these older works, and to the preoccupations and attitudes that motivated him then as now. For that reason we reproduce, and discuss, those past works alongside the new.

*An interview with Christopher Green*



Inside the studio

RC SHEERING Can you explain the relationship between your most recent work and the *Between Together and Afar* series?

CHRISTOPHER GREEN Well the more recent paintings are a development of the group you're referring to.

RCS Is that why it is important that these older works be documented in print? What do they tell us about your practice now?

CG Yes. Hopefully they tell you that I'm accepting of change, and not averse to moving around. The *BTAA* series is important as it documents – in a lot of depth – a very particular time in my life.

RCS Tell us a little about the circumstances in which you started upon the *BTAA* series.

CG At the time of making the first painting in the *Between Together and Afar* series I had recently moved to London, and my emotions were in a state of unrest. I arrived in the city with five wooden panels that I'd built about a month previously – I hadn't made them with anything specific in mind, that isn't my approach. When I unboxed my paints things were still very unclear; a complete blank, a nice sensation. So I covered each board in paint, each a different colour. A couple of days later I went back to the boards. The two that I began making alterations to

cleared the way for what followed.

RCS You mention being in a state of unrest...?

CG I'd just parted from my girlfriend of six years, which is why the paintings are titled 'Between Together and Afar': although we'd physically parted, the emotional ties hadn't been cut.

RCS So all of the paintings from this group were made during that period?

CG Well, 22 of them were made while I was living alone in London, and the remaining ten were made when I was reunited with my partner about a year and a half later.

RCS So there are a total of 32 paintings in the series, but only 30 were exhibited in the *Between Together and Afar* show at Hannah Barry Gallery?

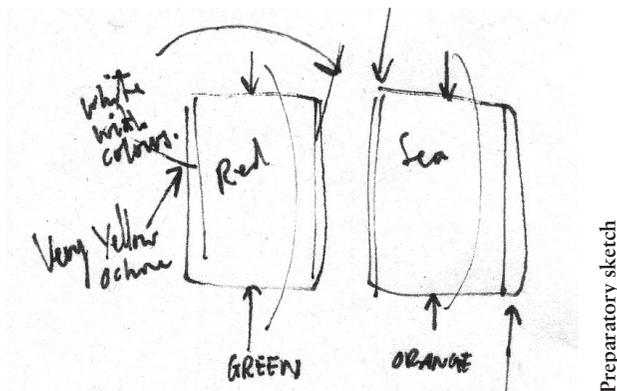
CG Yes, there are 32, of which 30 have the same formal structure; the crossing lines of graphite, the painted edges, and the graduating circles. The remaining two are those that I mentioned earlier... the two that I 'began' with. One was featured in the show – the pink painting which met you upon entering the gallery – the other was in a similar vein but wasn't included. Another of the later paintings was already with a collector overseas, hence the nice round number.

RCS Was 30 a number towards which you worked?

CG Not exactly. I didn't have a specific figure in mind in the early stages, I just felt that there was ground to be explored, ideas to be developed. I liked the idea of starting something that seemed to have a certain clarity of purpose, while simultaneously being the total opposite. It struck me that there was great potential within this odd, strangely familiar compositional framework that had arrived late one night.

RCS Familiar in what way? I can see likenesses, superficial perhaps, to Constructivism and Modernism, Minimalists including Donald Judd and Robert Mangold, even Blinky Palermo. Were these artists on your mind?

CG Familiar in the sense that the works remained both allusive and mysterious. The chosen compositional formalities; the circles, the graphite lines, the painted sides,



the central ground, remained constant through all of the subsequent paintings. There was something that struck me at the time about the simplicity of this decision, how these elements seemed both obtuse and ambiguous. In terms of the names you mentioned: I've been an admirer of Judd's furniture and Mangold's paintings for some time, but I wasn't so familiar with Palermo at the time I began this group. My motives are my own, distinct from any movement.



Robert Mangold *Column Paintings* (2004)  
© 2012 Robert Mangold, member  
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RCS Can you talk about these motives?

CG This idea of familiarity ... it got me thinking about repetition. With repetition comes reassurance; each new painting enters into a defined lineage, an order. It makes sense to me now, with the benefit of hindsight, that I should have sought stability in a work at a period of emotional volatility. But it was also, in part, a reaction to the production of contemporary art. I don't mean that I

was cynically repeating the same formula in order to fulfil a demand, but rather that I was interested in taking a risk, to putting all my eggs in one basket by committing to a single body of work for almost two years. I was interested by the notion of time and gestation. It's 'about' time, as often my work is: taking time, and being taken by time.

RCS That notion of the meaning or content of the painting emerging only with time is interesting: does that notion of spending time with the painting, of working with it, apply to your relationship with each painting as the artist or that of the viewer?

CG Both of us. In terms of their creation, some of the paintings came about very quickly, within a few days, while others took as long as a couple of months to complete. The works informed each other, as finished paintings stood around the studio while I worked on new ones. I think that viewing the paintings also requires time – the paintings change dramatically depending on the conditions under which they are seen. In some cases the graphite lines refuse to make themselves known unless viewed from a certain angle, and the halo-like 'glows' that illuminate those works with painted backs only appear in daylight. The works insist, I hope, that the viewer makes repeat visits; they refuse to be fixed.

RCS You also seem to revisit certain colours?

CG Yes, there are several green paintings in here, which I suppose could just be a symptom of my self-regard. In the case of that colour the number of variations was down largely to a fascination with the dynamic properties of green: there are muddy and acidic paintings, and some very dark blue/green ones which people sometimes mistook as black.

RCS And this confusion of colour isn't too much of a problem? It seems as though a painting's individual colour is the single most important component in these works?

CG No, it's not a problem, not for me or for the works - they are as they exist at the moment the viewer encounters them. I would say that the painting's colour is perhaps the most affective ingredient, but I wouldn't go so far as to say that it's the most important component. The circles, the graphite lines, the colour of the painting's sides and/or reverse, and the central ground colour are all interrelated elements.

RCS Can you expand upon the interrelation of compositional elements? How do you arrive at the colours of the circles, sides and backs of the paintings, for instance?

CG The colour of the circles is determined by combining the colour of the central ground with that of the sides: the left side is mixed with the central ground to produce the colour of the right circles, and the right side is mixed

with the central ground to produce the colour for the left circles. Set against some of the ground colours, the graphite lines are almost invisible. With the painting titled *Between Together and Afar (Red #2) - Four Reds*, which is predominantly a bright red, the lines slowly appear as golden, whereas the same lines (I used the same brand, and weight of pencil for each painting) on a black ground appear silver.

RCS Some of the paintings have been assigned curious titles: *Watched Rape, A Swedish Love Story, The Annunciation of Lighttime*. Where did these come from?

CG The colours in *Watched Rape* relate to the rapeseed fields I passed when travelling from London to Plymouth, the freshly turned earth, luminous green grass and bright yellow rape plants. But there's a deliberate ambiguity to the phrase, because the colouring is as an association to the work of David Lynch - in particular *Twin Peaks* and *Blue Velvet*, both of which include scenes of rape.

*A Swedish Love Story* expresses my own fascination with Sweden - I spent three consecutive summers in Stockholm - but it's also the English translation of Roy Andersson's first feature film, *En Kärlekshistoria*. The colours in this painting draw upon the works he made after the bout of depression he suffered after the success of his debut. He has an incredible handle on colour.

For a time when I was making these works my studio doubled as my bedroom, and the curtain over the window



David Lynch *Blue Velvet* (1986)  
Candy Coloured Clown scene



Roy Anderson *En Kärlekshistoria* (1970)  
Opening scene

was simply a long, thin sheet of cotton that covered the bottom half of the window sashes. The studio was permanently lit, by streetlight at night and by sun during the day – a perpetual ‘Lighttime’.

RCS Do you think those fluctuating light conditions influenced the composition of the works?

CG The composition of the *BTAA* works are predetermined by the size of the boards, but certainly the light conditions under which the paintings are viewed has a profound effect on how the composed parts are seen, and consequently how the paintings are read.

RCS So what led you to give those paintings, and a handful of others, particular titles when the rest are left with generic references?

CG They are my points of reference. It’s not that these paintings are intended to symbolise or be representative of the things alluded to in their titles. There’s another painting with the title *She smells; other people’s smells...* the colours of which are derive from the packaging on the bottles of perfume that my girlfriend wore. The framework of the group, by which I mean all 32 paintings, is like a trawling net: some things are caught and brought to the surface, while others escape only to be picked up later, the second, third, tenth, or twentieth time that I dredge my imagination for all the influences upon my life at any

particular time.

RCS Do you consider this to be a finished, self-enclosed body of work? What are the elements that continue into your work now, the 2013 exhibitions at Hannah Barry Gallery and Art Brussels?

CG No, I don't consider it to be either finished or a self-enclosed body. I guess body is not the best term to be using in this case – as it suggests something complete; whole. Perhaps, instead, this one body, a child in a family household. It grows up, leaves home, but occasionally comes back to visit. It might bring its own family. It's an open house.

Plates (running clockwise from bottom left)

Installation shots  
*Together Afar* (2010)  
Hannah Barry Gallery

*Between Together and Afar*  
(*Green #6*) (2009)  
Acrylic and graphite on board  
48 × 38 × 2.7 cm

*Between Together and Afar*  
(*Brown #2*) – *Watched Rape*  
(2010)  
Acrylic and graphite on board  
40 × 30 × 3 cm

Detailed shot of the above

*Between Together and Afar*  
(*Yellow #4*) – *I May Not Always*  
*Love You* (2010)  
Acrylic and graphite on board  
40 × 30 × 3 cm

*Between Together and Afar* (*Grey*  
*#1*) – *Green + Blue + Red = Grey*  
(2009 – 2010)  
Acrylic and graphite on board  
48 × 38 × 2.7 cm

*Untitled* (2012)  
Acrylic on birch plywood board  
118 × 59 × 3 cm

*Between Together and Afar* (*Grey*  
*#2*) – *Blue + Red + Green = Grey*  
(2009 – 2010)  
Acrylic and graphite on board  
48 × 38 × 2.7 cm

*Living Quarters* (*pt. 1*) (2012)  
Oil, gesso on birch panel  
30 × 22 × 1.8 cm

*Between Together and Afar* (*Grey*  
*#3*) – *Red + Green + Blue = Grey*  
(2009 – 2010)  
Acrylic and graphite on board  
48 × 38 × 2.7 cm

*Between Together and Afar* (*Pink*  
*#1*) (2009)  
Acrylic and graphite on board  
48 × 38 × 3 cm

*Between Together and Afar* (*Blue*  
*#1*) (2009)  
Acrylic and graphite on board  
48 × 38 × 3 cm

*Untitled* (2012)  
Ingrain wallpaper adhered to  
birch plywood board  
59 × 39 × 3 cm

