

GALERIE KARSTEN GREVE



GIDEON RUBIN *A Stranger's Hand*

Press Kit

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Artist's quotes

For years I had an image lying on the floor of my studio of Balthus' wife and daughter by the Italian photographer, Pierpaolo Ferrari. Perhaps, in my mind, it was the link between the beauty of the two women in that photo and the beauty and elegance of a Balthus painting – or maybe it's how their bodies are positioned, which seemed to directly reference Balthus' manneristic figure compositions. It might also be the ever-relevant motif of mother-and-child, or the narrative of birth and death, that made the image so intriguing to me. Either way, this image was the first diptych in a new series of work that spans more than two years, which was inspired by vintage images, found online, of artists in their youth – mainly 20th century painters whose shapes, colours and tones have been a constant presence in my own painting practice.

I'd like to think the figures in my paintings remind the viewer of certain people or evoke memories rather than portray specific identities. My works are minimal, often there's not much there. I want the viewer to look at them and focus on the process of painting and the paint itself, focusing on certain details that I provide, such as the posture of a figure or a tree in the paintings background. It's a more abstract way of looking at a scene; it is impossible to directly identify with the characters in my paintings, I want to offer alternative ways of viewing the figures, where the viewer is also involved in completing a narrative or scene.

I work from old photographs from early 20th century family photo albums. When considering these images I look for narrative, for a scene that is open to interpretation: the more mundane and banal the image the better. I'm not interested in an individual or the specific person, I even prefer not to know any personal details. Painting from old anonymous family photographs feels like tracing a lost past or unearthing forgotten histories. I love using the bare canvas or linen and often I leave areas entirely untouched by paint so that they become an integral part of the painting. I paint a canvas again and again, the surface of the paintings revealing strata of previous paintings and scenes, so that the final scene is entrenched in multiple layers of paint and history.

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Gideon Rubin in his studio, 2020. Photo : Richard Ivey

Biography

Gideon Rubin was born in Tel Aviv, Israel, in 1973. He studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York and the Slade School of Fine Art in London, graduating in 2002. His very first solo exhibition was held in 1999. Many more followed, and his first solo exhibition to be held in a museum was hosted by the Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art in Israel in 2015. More recently, his series *Black Book* featured in exhibitions at the Freud Museum in London (2018), sponsored by Galerie Karsten Greve, and the Jerusalem Artists' House in Jerusalem (2020). Gideon Rubin's work is regularly exhibited in group exhibitions worldwide, in renowned institutions such as the FLAG Art Foundation in New York, the McEvoy Foundation for the Arts in San Francisco, the Kunstmuseum Kloster Unser Lieben Frauen in Magdeburg, Germany, the National Art Museum of China in Beijing, the Royal Academy of Arts in London and the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Gideon Rubin has also participated in several artists' residencies, the first under the Outset Contemporary Art Fund in Tel Aviv in 2013 and another under the Palazzo Monti Residency Programme in Brescia, Italy, in 2019. His work was rewarded by the Shifting Foundation in Salt Lake City, United States, in 2014. His works grace major private and public collections in Europe, the United States and the Middle East. Gideon Rubin lives and works in London.

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In the Grand Chalet, 2019, huile sur toile de lin, diptyque: 150 x 105.5 cm chaque panneau. Photo : Richard Ivey

GIDEON RUBIN

A Stranger's Hand

From 16 October to 21 November 2020

Opening on Friday 16 October from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m. - in presence of the artist.

Book signing by Gideon Rubin from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Galerie Karsten Greve is pleased to present *A Stranger's Hand*, Gideon Rubin's third solo exhibition in Paris. Through about 30 works created over the past two years, the artist once again transports us into his universe inhabited by figures made anonymous through his use of framing, posture and the systematic erasure of all individuality.

A Stranger's Hand. The exhibition's title alone evokes all the ambiguity that is typical of Gideon Rubin's work, particularly in the series of ten paintings including two diptychs that pay tribute to the 20th century artists whose influence has been so crucial to his work, including Philip Guston, Willem De Kooning and Richard Diebenkorn.

Behind this series is a photo of the wife and daughter of the painter Balthus by the Italian photographer Pierpaolo Ferrari. The composition, the placement of the bodies and the elegance of these female figures echoed Balthus' own painting in Gideon Rubin's eyes, so he naturally chose that image for his diptych *In the Grand Chalet*, the first painting of his new series.

An attentive, comprehensive interpretation of these works brings to light the special attention given to the hands of these figures, which are at the centre of each composition.

Hands are fascinating parts of the human body. They can reach out or come together in a handshake.

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They can unleash passions, be bulwarks, protective. They give away feelings, passing states or moods, they illustrate an attitude. They are creative, tools for talent and ways to express mannerisms.

Here, they crucially reveal the individuality of these figures of painters, writers and thinkers, who were so important for the artist paying tribute to them.

And yet, the word ‘stranger’ stands out in the title of the exhibition. The figures are strangers not because we do not know them, but rather because they are neither identified by a title, nor treated as individuals. The systematic erasure of the faces, of what makes someone a person, but also any reference to time or place, has been at the heart of Gideon Rubin’s artistic approach since 2001. That approach, which confronts the viewer with a stranger, also enables him to create an intimacy between viewer and representation – intimacy of the gaze that must be attentive and take the time to observe the image in the most minute details of a hairstyle, an outfit, a posture or an attitude. This attention then gradually shapes or reshapes a story from personal experience or universal knowledge, or perhaps a mix of both.

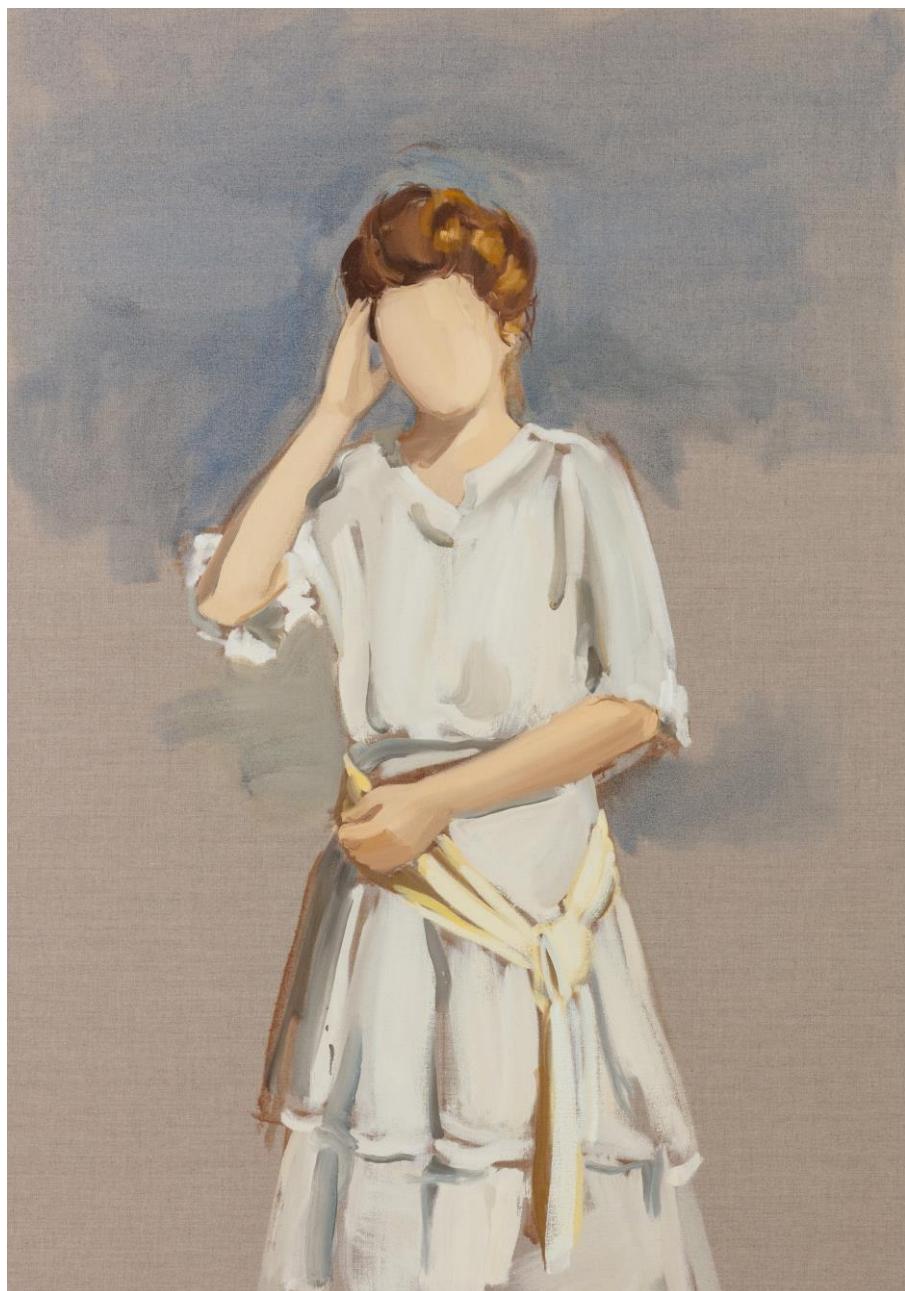
From then on, the hand is no longer that of a stranger. It has offered us the keys, unveiling the identity – either real or imagined – of the painted figure. And therein resides the beauty of Gideon Rubin’s works, which transport us into a story, complex and multi-faceted, personal and universal, invoking both past and present.

Gideon Rubin created his works using various sources, drawing from old newspapers, photos unearthed at flea markets, generic pictures in magazines, old art books and extracts from films. His portraits of artists are inspired by vintage pictures found on the Internet. He thus deliberately blends styles, eras and places to showcase the local and historical mechanisms of representation.

Identifiable at first glance thanks to his palette of sandy, pastel tones – sometimes emphasized by a luminous blue or a touch of red – the relationship between colour and its support is crucial to Rubin’s work. With a preference for linen canvases, but also working on wood and cardboard, he gives great importance to his choice of support, which appears under broad, vigorous strokes in a *non-finito* approach that lends his works a unique subtlety and lightness. His lively brushstrokes dissolve some parts of the composition in a fascinating blend of figuration and abstraction.

Gideon Rubin’s painting thus lives and breathes to the rhythm of a subtle pendulation between erasure and reconstitution, memory and imagination, generating a multitude of fictions and stories.

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Gideon Rubin

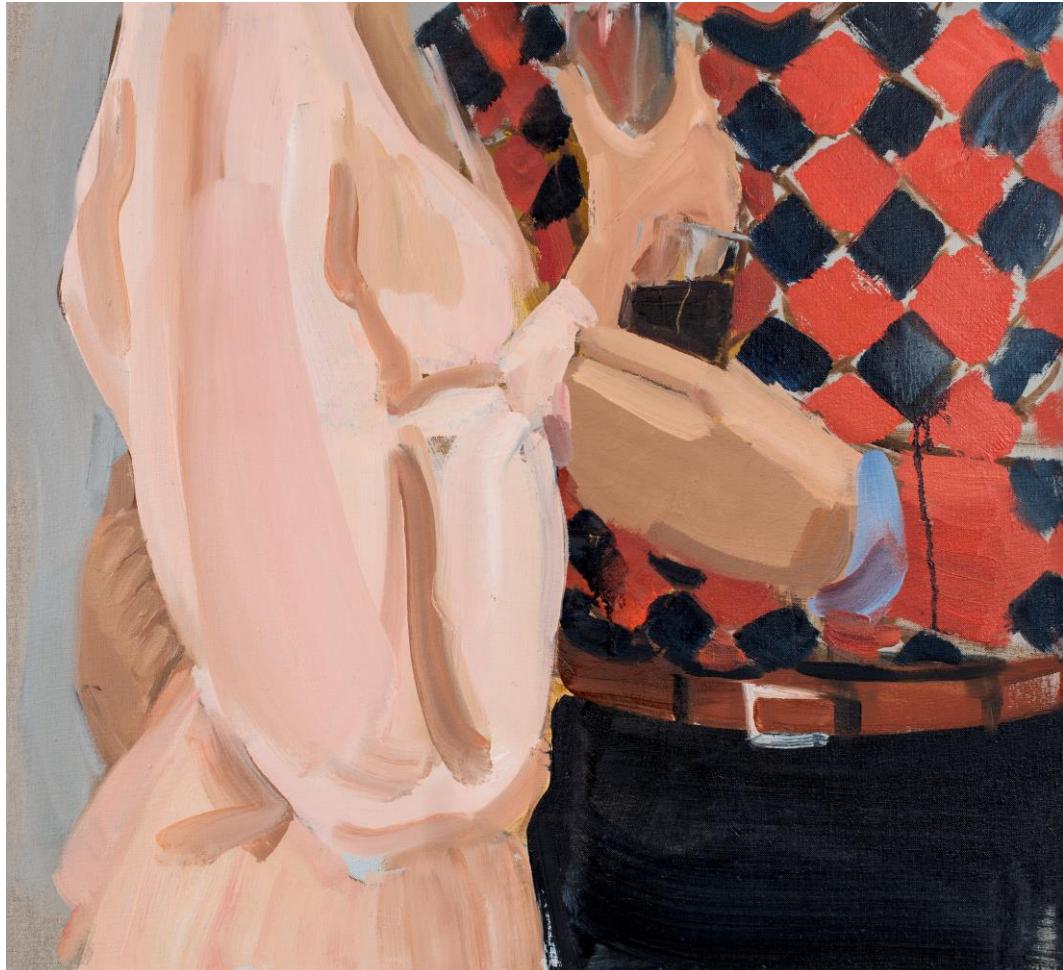
Pennsylvania morning

2020

Oil on linen

150 x 105 cm / 59 x 41 1/3 in

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Gideon Rubin

Night Out
2020
Oil on linen
55 x 60 cm / 21 2/3 x 23 2/3 in

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Gideon Rubin

Six Girls in Uniform

2019

Oil on linen

180 x 240 cm / 70 3/4 x 94 1/2 in

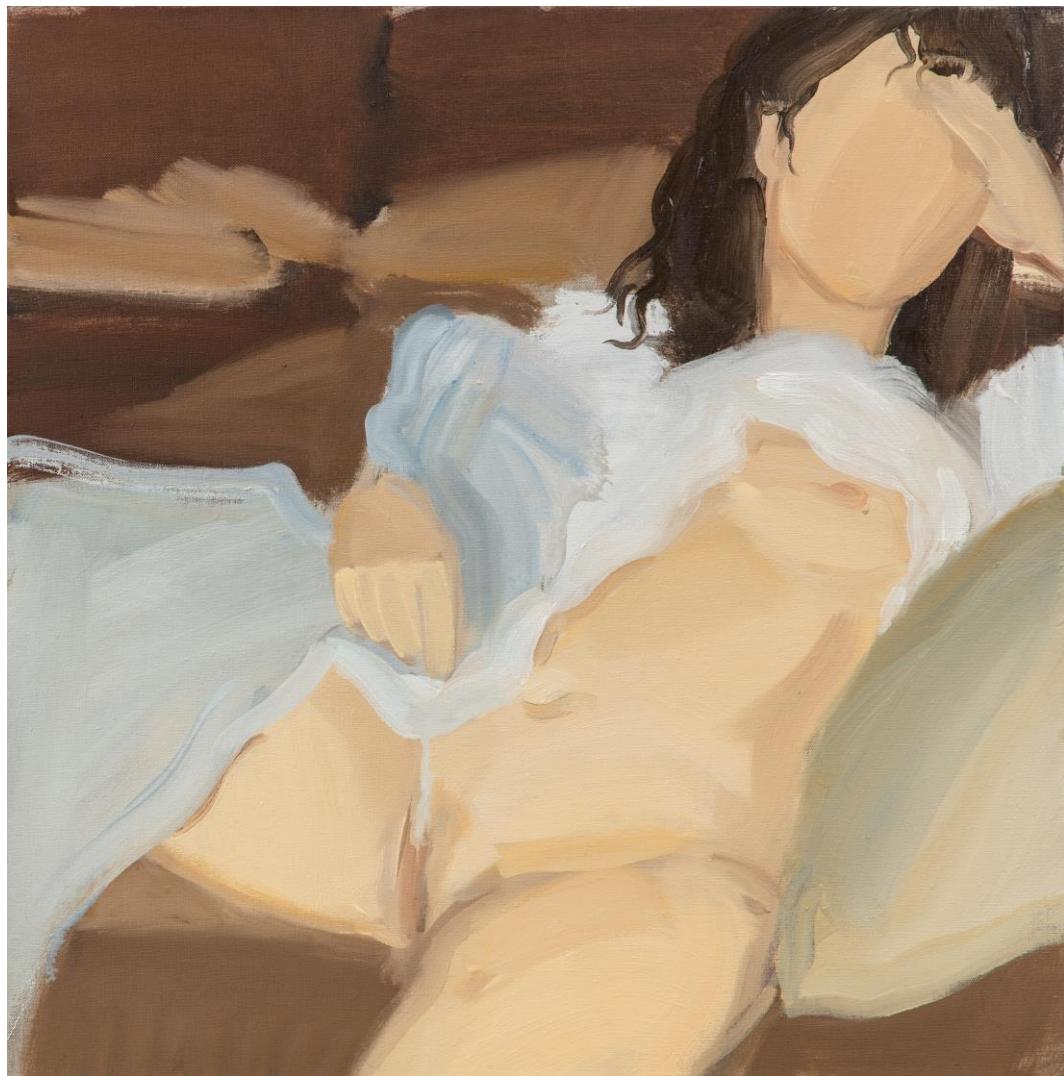
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Gideon Rubin

At Coombe Priory
2019
Oil on linen
150 x 105 cm / 59 x 41 1/3 in

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Gideon Rubin

Untitled
2019
Oil on linen
50 x 50 cm / 19 2/3 x 19 2/3 in

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Public and private collections (selection)

Fondation Francès, Senlis, FR
Herzliya Museum for Contemporary Art, Herzliya, IL
McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, San Francisco, USA
Ruinart Collection, Reims, FR
The Seavest Collection, New York, USA
Speyer Family Collection, New York, USA
Zabludowicz Collection, Londres, UK

Solo exhibitions (selection)

- 2020 *Gideon Rubin*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, FR
 Gideon Rubin. Black Book, Jerusalem Artists' House, Jerusalem, IL
 Nof: Gideon Rubin and Eldar Farber, The Rubin Museum, Tel Aviv, IL
- 2019 *Gideon Rubin. Warning Shadows*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Köln, DE
- 2018 *Fragments*, Gallery EM, Séoul, KR
 On the Far Side of the Mirror, Galerie Karsten Greve AG, St. Moritz, CH
 The Kaiser's Daughter, Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, USA
 Gideon Rubin. Black Book, Freud Museum, London, UK
- 2017 *Gideon Rubin. Once Removed*, Pharos Centre for Contemporary Art, Nicosie, CY
- 2016 *Memory goes as far as this morning*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Chengdu, CN
 Gideon Rubin. Memory goes as far as this morning, San Jose Institute of Contemporary Art, San Jose, USA
 Gideon Rubin. Questions of Forgiveness, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, FR
- 2015 *Gideon Rubin. Memory goes as far as this Morning*, Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, Herzliya, IL
 Gideon Rubin. Delivering Newspapers, Rokeby Gallery, London, UK
- 2014 *Gideon Rubin. HUABAO / Silvia Ka Tung. Story Telling*, MistHaus, Shenzhen, CN
- 2013/14 *Gideon Rubin. On the Road*, Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, USA
- 2013 *Gideon Rubin. Last Year's Man*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, FR
- 2012 *Brief Encounters*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Köln, DE
 Measured Distance, Rokeby Gallery, London, UK
- 2011 *Gideon Rubin. Shallow Waters*, Hosfelt Gallery, New York, USA

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- 2010 *Gideon Rubin. Others*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Köln, DE
 Gideon Rubin. To Change Air a Little, Beit Bialik, Tel Aviv, IL
- 2009 *Gideon Rubin. Mexican Summer*, Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, USA
 Gideon Rubin. 1929, Rokeby Gallery, London, UK
- 2008 *Gideon Rubin. Family Album*, Segev Gallery, Tel Aviv, IL
- 2007 *Gideon Rubin. A Boy's Life*, Hosfelt Gallery, New York, USA
 Gideon Rubin, Rokeby Gallery, London, UK
- 2006 *Gideon Rubin. Red Ribbon*, Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, USA
 Gideon Rubin. Tender, Alon Segev Gallery, Tel Aviv, IL
- 2003 *Gideon Rubin. Toy Soldier*, Alon Segev Gallery, Tel Aviv, IL

Group exhibitions (selection)

- 2019 *Elements*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, FR
- 2018 *How to Travel in Time*, Apexart, New York, USA
 La mère la mer, McEvoy Foundation for the Arts, San Francisco, USA
- 2017 *Autumn Show*, Galerie Karsten Greve AG, St. Moritz, CH
 Water, Heart, Face. Jerusalem Biennale, Jerusalem, IL
 Künstlerräume II, Galerie Karsten Greve, Köln, DE
- 2015 *NOURISH*, Napa Vallery Museum, Yountville, USA
 “L'autre visage” de Tal Coat à Neumann, Galerie Univer, Paris, FR
 Words Without Letters, Alon Segev Gallery, Tel Aviv, IL
 Accrochage, Galerie Karsten Greve AG, St. Moritz, CH
- 2014/2015 *Daily Memories*, Kunstmuseum Kloster Unser Lieber Frauen, Magdeburg, DE
 Disturbing Innocence, FLAG Art Foundation, New York, USA
- 2014 *John Moores Painting Prize 2014 Exhibition*, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, UK
 Artist Rooms, Galerie Karsten Greve, Köln, DE
- 2013 *Carnaval*, Fondation Francès, Senlis, FR
- 2012 *Artists' Children. From Runge to Richter, from Dix to Picasso*, Kunsthalle Emden, Emden, DE
 To Have A Voice, The Mackintosh Museum & The Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow, UK
- 2011 *On Paper III*, Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, FR
 Facebook, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv, IL
 Formally Speaking, Haifa Museum of Art, Haifa, IL
 Lines Made By Walking, Haifa Museum of Art, Haifa, IL
 Time Flies, Hosfelt Gallery, San Francisco, USA

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2010	<i>On Paper II</i> , Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, France <i>No New Thing Under the Sun</i> , Tenant Gallery, Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK <i>Rubin Rauchwerger Farber Reshef</i> , Alon Segev Gallery, Tel Aviv, IL <i>Beijing Biennale</i> , The National Art Museum of China, Beijing, CN <i>Heads or Tails</i> , Mary Ryan Gallery, New York, USA
2009	<i>Hip-ok-rysy</i> , Mayor's and City of London Court, London, UK <i>Vivid Fantasy</i> , Kunstverein KISS, Untergröningen, DE <i>Family Traces</i> , Israel Museum, Jerusalem, IL
2008	<i>Nomenus Group Show</i> , Dactyl Foundation, New York, USA <i>Artfutures 08</i> , Bloomberg Space, London, UK <i>Israeli Art Now</i> , Naomi Arin Contemporary Art, Las Vegas, USA
2007	<i>Sequence and Repetition</i> , Jerwood Space, London, UK <i>Sequence and Repetition</i> , Beldam Gallery, London, UK
2006	<i>Britishness, Another product</i> , Cornerhouse, Manchester, UK
2005	<i>A Sharp Intake of Breath</i> , Beldam Gallery, London, UK
2004	<i>Self Portrait</i> , Alon Segev Gallery, Tel Aviv, IL <i>Trackers</i> , PM Gallery & House, London, UK <i>BP Award</i> , National Portrait Gallery, London, UK <i>2 x 2</i> , Dahl Gallery of Contemporary Art, Lucerne, CH <i>Le Salon Europeen des Jeunes Createurs 49</i> , FR, PT, ES
2002	<i>BP Award</i> , National Portrait Gallery, London, UK <i>Story Teller</i> , Kinnijoe Space, Hamburg, DE
2000	<i>Face to Face</i> , Contemporary Portraiture, London, UK
1999	<i>Young Israeli Art</i> , 555 West 25th St., New York, USA

Awards and Residencies

2019	Palazzo Monti Residency Program, Brescia, IT
2018	LA Brea Studio Residency, Los Angeles, USA
2014	Shifting Foundation Grant, Da Wang Centre, CN Sélectionnée pour I Shortlisted for I Ausgewählt für <i>John Moores Painting Prize</i> , Liverpool, UK
2013	<i>Outset residency program</i> , Tel Aviv, IL

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Gideon Rubin

Blue

2020

Oil on canvas

60 x 55 cm / 23 2/3 x 21 2/3 in

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Gideon Rubin

In the Grand Chalet

2019

Oil on linen

Diptych part 1: 150 x 105 cm / 59 x 41 1/3 in

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Gideon Rubin

In the Grand Chalet
2019
Oil on linen
Diptych part 2 : 150 x 105 cm / 59 x 41 1/3 in

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Gideon Rubin

Untitled
2020
Oil on linen
101 x 90 cm / 39 3/4 x 35 1/2 in

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HOUSE&GARDEN

Mai 2020



Gideon Rubin

Continuing her series, Emily Tobin meets the Israeli artist whose faceless portraits speak volumes of a missing family history

PHOTOGRAPHS JOSHUA MONAGHAN

Gideon Rubin's north London studio is populated by faceless men and women; eyes, noses and mouths have vanished. Perhaps they were painted over. Perhaps they were never there. And yet, Gideon's talent is such that a kink in a lock of hair or a cocked head can somehow be heavy with emotion; the flesh-coloured facets of a face seem to harbour a multitude of unspoken words and untold stories. Some may find these works eerie; I find them beautiful, though they are steeped in melancholy.

Gideon is the grandson of Israeli painter Reuven Rubin. But despite his artistic lineage, he studiously avoided art through school and it was not until he travelled to South America, following a stint in the Israeli army, that he picked up a paintbrush. 'I was doing it for the first time in my life and something felt right,' he says. He studied at the School of Visual Arts in New York and later at the Slade, and has lived in London ever since. 'I wanted to be a painter, ▷



HOUSEANDGARDEN.CO.UK MAY 2020 53

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not an artist,' says Gideon of that time. He was preoccupied by figuration, often turning the focus in on himself to produce self-portraits. But he had, by his own admission, painted himself 'into a corner'.

Gideon was in New York when the twin towers of the World Trade Center collapsed in 2001. He watched the tragedy unfold from a friend's rooftop. 'It was like a screen had come down. I couldn't paint how I'd painted before,' he says. 'I needed to unload this great psychological residue.' And so he began to paint abandoned toys – old dolls with missing limbs and eyes, and toy cars that, he explains, 'showed a life lived'. Slowly he shifted back to portraiture, using historical photographs as his starting point. 'I'm Israeli-Jewish from Europe and my family was destroyed in the war. We have no memories, no objects, no photographs left,' he says. 'These photographs became a vehicle for memories. I was reclaiming and recreating a past that was missing.'

Despite these featureless faces, his studio is filled with recognisable people. The maid from Manet's 1863 painting *Olympia* proffers a bunch of flowers; a red-headed prince adjusts his tie; figurative artist Alice Neel touches her hair. Gideon's works are marked by absence and yet they are entirely knowable. gideonorubin.com ▶

ANTICLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT A poster advertising one of Gideon's exhibitions in Shenzhen, China. *Black Bra*, oil on canvas, 2019. *Untitled*, oil on linen, 2020. Gideon relaxing in his studio. *Untitled*, oil on linen, 2019. Detail from *Black Pen*, oil on linen, 2019

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ART REPUBLIK

Insert Face Here

Jan to March 2016

By Melody Boh

Art Republik examines the faceless portraits of Gideon Rubin.

There is something familiar yet haunting about Gideon Rubin's works; after all, they are faceless. But they were not always that way. The Israeli-born artist was a realist painter – he has always painted portraits, and still does, but took inspiration from life and observation, sometimes taking months to complete a work. However, in 2001, the tragic event of September 11 saw Rubin witnessing the horror unfold before his eyes from his friend's rooftop, changing the way he worked and turning his back on his realist style.

Born in Tel Aviv, Israel in 1973, Rubin first graduated with a Bachelor's degree from School of Visual Art, New York before going on to complete his Master's degree with Slade School of Fine Art, University College in 2002 in London, where he continues to reside. The artist has since showcased his works in numerous solo and group exhibitions all over the world, and with works in private collections in London, Hong Kong, New York, Paris and beyond. In 2013, he undertook the Outset Israesl Bialik Residency in Tel Aviv. In 2014, he was awarded the Shifting Foundation Grant and spent time at the Da Wang Culture Highland artist residency near Shenzen, China.

Today, Rubin possesses a simpler, quasi-minimalist painting style. Drawing inspiration from old photographs, photos of celebrities or paintings by old masters, he paints faceless portraits and, on occasion, obscured landscapes. He strips his subjects bare, transforming them into unidentifiable figures. Through his abstract paintings, Rubin encourages viewers to focus on intentionally included details, and urges them to form their own narratives and consequently, the part of the process. The artist explains, “I'd like to think the figures in my paintings remind the viewer of certain people or evoke memories rather than portray specific identities... focusing on certain details that I provide, such as the posture of a figure or a tree in the paintings background. It's more abstract way of looking at a scene; it is impossible to directly identify with the characters in my paintings, I want to offer alternative ways of viewing the figures, where the viewer is also involved in completing a narrative or scene.”

A huge focus in Rubin's works is the way medium is employed. Adopting the canvas or raw linen as a preferred medium, the artist often leaves entire areas untouched in his paintings, allowing the white space to become an integral part of his works. He paints a canvas repeatedly, again and again, the surface of the paintings suggests previous layers of paints and scenes, culminating to a final scene that is entrenched in multiple layers of paint and history.

Drawn to earthy tones, Rubin works primarily with a palette that involves more tones than colours. He applies broad and bold brush strokes in subtle shades such as sandy tones, grey blues and off whites, suggesting in the simplest yet most expressive terms a life passed, a secret unearthed or a memory resurfaced, and his desire to bring these forgotten moments or people back to life again. Rubin mixes his colours with an abundance of zinc white, damar varnish and linseed oil to achieve de-saturated colours, perhaps a reflection of the faded quality of old photographs that he uses as source materials.

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In 2016, Rubin will kick off the new year with “Question of Forgiveness”, a solo exhibition at Galerie Karsten Greve in Paris, France from 9 January to 5 March. Borrowing imagery from old photographs and abstracting them to faceless forms, Rubin employs his characteristic abstract style to his works, once again evoking a sense of both intimacy and disconcertment.

“The paintings are intimate and unapologetically nostalgic but the work is not sentimental”, says Rubin. “Viewing these paintings might be a voyeuristic experience, but instead there’s a sense of familiarity. It’s like the memory of something that’s at the point of fading completely, or remembering a history that you were told about but never actually experienced first-hand... The insignificant moments represented are the stuff of collective memory – the minutiae that make up the meaningful part of our lives”.



Studio view, London, August 2020. Photo : Richard Ivey

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Judicaël Lavrador

In « Question of Forgiveness », exhibition brochure

Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, 2016

Gideon Rubin does not burden himself with giving a likeness to those he portrays. Which is saying little, since the people depicted on his canvases are deprived of a face. They do certainly have a head and a body, but no features, mouth, eyes, nose or wrinkles, nothing other than a dark cream or flesh coloured face outlined with unctuous brushstrokes in an apparently off-hand manner. This implies the notion that the faces of the characters belong entirely to painting, which does not mean withdrawing from it but taking advantage of this milieu to take it over, relegating to a lower level what every viewer expects: an expression from the subject portrayed, a look (even a look away), a smirk, a frown, a grimace, a smile, a hint that reveals the model's mood if not their identity. But we must do without all of that, since the brush passes it by. The titles are already an indication as they remain vague without naming anyone, without giving any date or any source, focusing as best they can on designating another focal point - *Back*, *Braid*, *Beach*, undefined terms that are also incidental since most often, the canvas is *Untitled*. Their anonymity however does not prevent the characters being portrayed from adorning a carnal sensuality and of being embodied or taking on flesh. This is true even for the landscapes, which are bushy, deciduous, hectic, if only by the ebb and flow of the brush.

Nevertheless, we must ask ourselves the question and put forth assumptions as to why these beings are represented without faces. One hypothesis is that this may relate to painting itself, or rather its history, to that of the portrait. The times when painters had their subjects pose before them, had them assume an attitude, a pose, creating a close relationship with them in the intimacy of the studio, upon which the success of the painting often depended, are long gone. The uniqueness of a portrait does not stem only from the genius of the painter or even the beauty of the model. It comes from what the two have been able to develop together, from what the one wished to show the other, and from what the other was able to capture: a mood, a flaw, a secret, an aura, a posture, a trait that declares itself discreetly in a corner of the mouth, in the shape of a chin, in the dark circles of the eyes made purple by fatigue.

But the model is now missing. They have deserted the studio, replaced by images taken from books, magazines, newspapers, flea markets, not to mention the Internet. Gideon Rubin, like many of his contemporaries paints from images found and collected through markets.

The painter is thus orphaned from their model and vice versa. These two are no longer face-to-face. The thread that united them has been broken. And it is from this break, this separation, that the portrait now reflects a genre, one might say, in mourning. This could be one reason for the disfigurement of Gideon Rubin's characters: they remain unknown to the painter and the painting itself, which has no other choice than to cultivate the effect of a delay and recognise the distance that has been hollowed out between them. The painter no longer approaches real beings, or rather only from afar, through the filter of photography. Intimacy with the model is lost. Gideon Rubin like others is in mourning for this, working to revive this past relationship as much as to forget it, working as much to make it rise again to the surface as to bury it under paint.

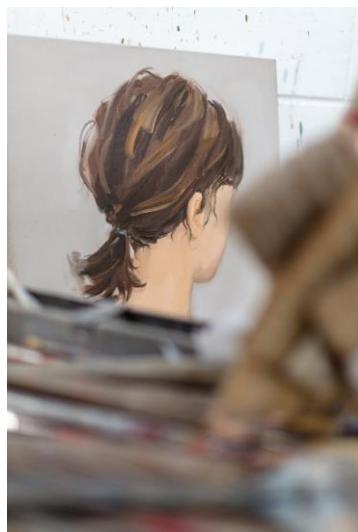
It was in fact after September 11 that he gradually abandoned his earlier way of accurately representing people. At first, he told the Guardian in 2009, he painted old dolls, small porcelain figurines made of wood or ceramic; toys bearing the image of soldiers, tiny docile avatars, but worn and tattered, that he

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collected in the street. Then, he returned to more human figures, but in the meantime, the faces had faded. He wrote, '*an eye became just a shadow, then it disappeared altogether*': that is to say, there was no longer eye or shadow. The chronology of the erasure process of the face, as the artist recounts, shows that the distance he hollows out with the real, with the actual model, has become for him almost a lifeline: the space of creation itself. To paint, he can no longer have anyone in front of him. The model has in part become untenable, invasive, cumbersome and too intimidating for the painter, who prefers not to go looking for that kind of bother.

Henceforth, a reason must be given and the subject held at a respectable distance. On the canvas, the characters appear both near and far. This double-bind, their paradoxical presence both evanescent and yet very consistent, is fed by light grey or pale blue backgrounds, which seem to swish and hide around characters who for the most part, are immobile, gracefully offering themselves for viewing. Their hazy silhouettes soak in a soft halo with brush strokes that abjure precision, that do not want to delve deeper into the subject, identify it, target it, but rather graze or perhaps probe it as though by feel. The touch of oil gives flesh to the subject, lending it at once a very firm equilibrium and at the same time, a form of fluidity. As though a very invasive absence or a highly ethereal consistency were displayed in the painting.

Not shy in the least, none of the characters seem to hide, or for that matter, look the other way. This is illustrated by the erotic figures lying lasciviously shirtless (*On the Bed*) or silk-draped with multiple cut-outs revealing here a thigh, and there, the contour of the breasts (*Kimono*). Revealed again with *Boxer*, with fists prepared, moving forward and unafraid of anything; with *Harlequin*, a blond actress, hands on hips, fully playing her role as a future, teasingly beautiful headliner, or with the girl with white gloves



(*White Glove*), a seductive starlet who coquettishly runs a hand through her cascade of black hair. Truly, none of these creatures is blushing to be there, even those, of which there are many, who ostensibly turn their backs on us. Gideon Rubin does not paint reserved or shy girls. Their hairstyles enhanced by the grace of their necks here become an object of pictorial fascination. Why? Because plaits, braids, strands that flutter beautifully here, the ponytail tied quickly with a pink scrunchie there, form knots, a kind of weaving, or complicated, intertwined self-images, even when the neck is squared, as in this redhead with bare white shoulders (*Back*) and especially when the hair (of a boy) is bordered by polo stripes (*Untitled, Back*). These intricate patterns of entwined hair suggest this: that the subject portrayed remains however quite flexible and agile, always slipping between the hands of the painter and escaping his grip.

Not having a hand on the model, giving them a free hand and rebellious locks, is thus one of the arcs behind these paintings and the art of Gideon Rubin. There is another. He who paints from photos found in bulk lots on the markets, from old magazines and unclassified, ordinary archives is attached to strangers. Unlike many of his contemporaries (Gerhard Richter, Elizabeth Peyton, Marlène Dumas, Luc Tuymans, to name only the most famous) who paint from photos certainly, but from pictures of relatives or historical figures, Gideon Rubin represents beings that he doesn't know from Adam. He does not expect us to put a name on them or for us to identify their role or social status. His painting is thus committed to total strangers. It is then a painting that attempts to get to know them, to recognise them, knowing that it is a challenge.

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The same movement towards the unknown inspires young historians today who, abandoning the great heroic figures or official memories, are turning to documents (personal writings, family albums) left by the general public who see therein decisive testimonies about society. Tiny lives expressed through images of very little; ordinary writings of unsuspected beauty and which prove to be mirrors that are rarely untrue because they were never destined to make light of a particular era. It is with this ordinary, spontaneous, genuine tone that Gideon Rubin's paintings are charged: the photos that we take for our loved ones, but that scatter with time as families gradually wither away, the transmission is interrupted, the memories are dispersed. The melancholy palette where the brownish tones of the paintings connote a faded image, a vague memory whose wilting only fans the desire to remember it. Because we sense that even if the traces of the past, these found images do not belong to us, the oblivion into which they have fallen will soon also be where our own footsteps, our own image, will inevitably slip. These characters without faces, these anonymous pictures, class photos, these beings with blurred faces and landscapes hidden in the mist, are despite all, familiar to us. Because one can assume that they will be ours one day or another, later, when others than ourselves will try to identify them.



Exhibition view, « Gideon Rubin. Questions of Forgiveness », Galerie Karsten Greve, Paris, 2016

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Gideon Rubin on the Tragic Origin of His Faceless Portraits

By Alex Greenberger

Aug. 27, 2013

Gideon Rubin's paintings are marked by disturbing absences. A brief glance at his work will have its viewer thinking that his paintings are just portraits in the traditional manner, owing perhaps a distant debt to Manet's dynamic brushwork. A second glance reveals what the paintings are missing: none of their subjects have facial features.

As a result, Rubin's work hovers between unsettling and genuinely moving, because even though the paintings have an initially jarring effect, they allow their viewers to fill in the voids with their own memories, reflecting a collective past onto an old genre. We talked with Rubin about the photographs he uses as references, finding inspiration in the Old Masters, and why 9/11 changed his work forever.

You've said that you began your paintings of faceless children when you experienced the events of 9/11 firsthand in New York. Can you talk about how that tragic even inspired your art?

Watching the events unfold from a friend's rooftop on 10th Street and Broadway was probably the most surreal and terrible thing I've ever experienced. After seeing that tragedy unfold before my eyes, I knew I couldn't paint what I was painting before that visit to New York. Prior to that trip, I was painting from life, from observation, and this included painting self-portraits that took months to finish. I remember coming back to London a few days later and feeling that if I didn't get back to painting right away, I would lose my mind. I had to communicate in a more direct style. This meant working in more simple style and finishing a work more quickly, so I began painting old, abandoned toys and dolls. Faceless portraits came a couple of years later.

You often base your paintings on photographs of children from the Victorian and Edwardian eras. What draws you to these eras specifically?

After resisting it for years, I began painting from photographs, and that got me interested in late 19th- and early 20th-century photography. I was into the style, the clothes, the way the hair looked. I also loved the anonymity of the subjects. On the one hand, these people had nothing to do with me—unlike my earlier paintings, which were of myself, my family, and my friends; on the other hand, it was as if each of these people was holding a key to a story, a history that I was trying to tap into. This thread of history—of style, people, fashion, et cetera—and storytelling is, in many ways, what I'm still trying to paint today. Now I work with a more recent photographic history, painting from photographs from the 1950s, '60s, and '70s.

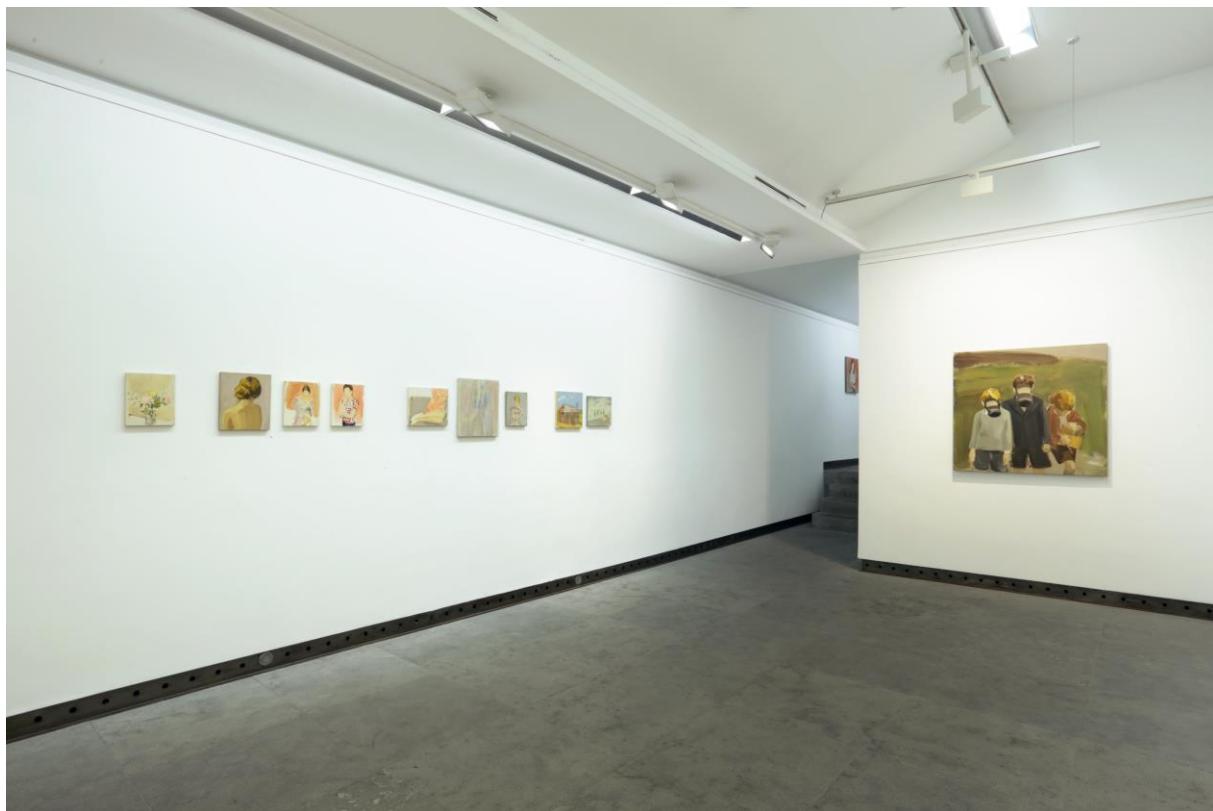
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For your paintings on cardboard, you apply your own style to remake famous historical works, like Goya's Clothed Maja or a portrait by Ingres. What are you exploring in these paintings, and why do you feel the need to update these canonical works in your hand?

A large part of my interest in history and time, especially as a painter, is in the work of the Old Masters. A trip to the Prado while I was studying at SVA pretty much changed the way I look at paintings. Copying an Old Master painting was never my interest, but painting them on a small piece of cardboard was different. Making these detailed, precious portraits on the most mundane material was so appealing to me. It's also their size, so small they felt like making stamps of the Goya, Velásquez, and Rembrandt, that I like so much. This was part of the larger series of cardboards where I was looking at various printed material, from old art history books to Vogue and Hello magazines. A Goya portrait and a photograph of Kate Moss in a bikini may be polar opposites, but they've certainly both found their way into my work, all thanks to my experience at the Prado.

Who are some of the artists who have inspired you the most?

Velásquez, Goya, Rembrandt, Manet, Morandi, Ingres, Soutine, Bacon, Alice Neel, Picasso, Balthus, Richter, Katz, Dumas, Borremans. I can go on and on.



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Your paintings are done in a muted color palette, usually in earthy tones with red accents. How did you arrive at this aesthetic?

For me, the colors I use are always based on intuition. I was always a tonal painter, more interested in tones and shades than color. That was especially true after I moved to London. Obviously, the source material—black-and-white photographs on old, yellowing paper—reflects in the work itself.

Your paintings often have a lively, spontaneous aspect, as though they were done quickly. How long does it take to produce a typical canvas?

Most of the work, regardless of the size, is done very quickly. The rest takes much longer. It can take days and weeks before I find that one brushstroke that makes the painting work. It's great when that happens.

Aside from a few landscapes, your work is almost entirely portraits. Why is portraiture your favored genre?

I was always interested in people. Now I just don't paint their facial features.

What made you want to become an artist?

I started painting after military service, when I was travelling with a friend in South America at the age of 22. Until then, I hadn't found anything I wanted to do or that I was particularly good at, so when I discovered painting, I remember thinking, "I'm not letting this go." It took some years before I could call myself an artist.

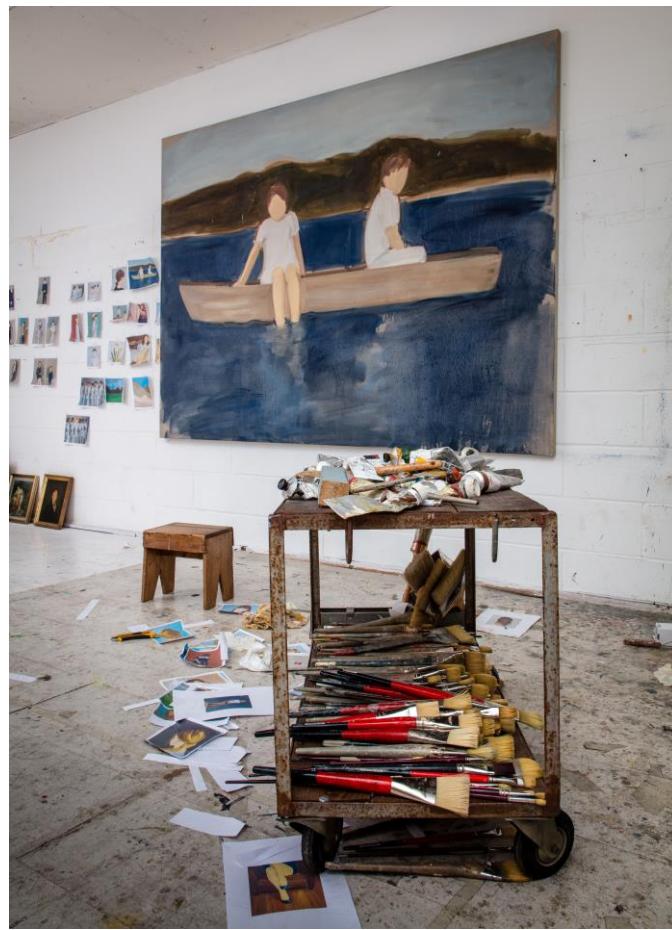
Is there anything you collect yourself?

I have some nice antique toys that I used to collect, but I'm not actively collecting them at the moment. That said, my wife and I have a small art collection that is growing slowly.

What are you working on now?

I'm working on some new paintings, landscapes and loosely dressed women mostly, but I'm also working on my second animation. It's a film of myself, sitting and drinking coffee and smoking a cigarette. I'm doing it in the old, hand-drawn style, which means I've got a lot more frames to go. I've also been invited to be an artist-in-residence in Tel Aviv, sponsored by Outset Israel. I've never made any work in Tel Aviv before, so I'm really looking forward to it.

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