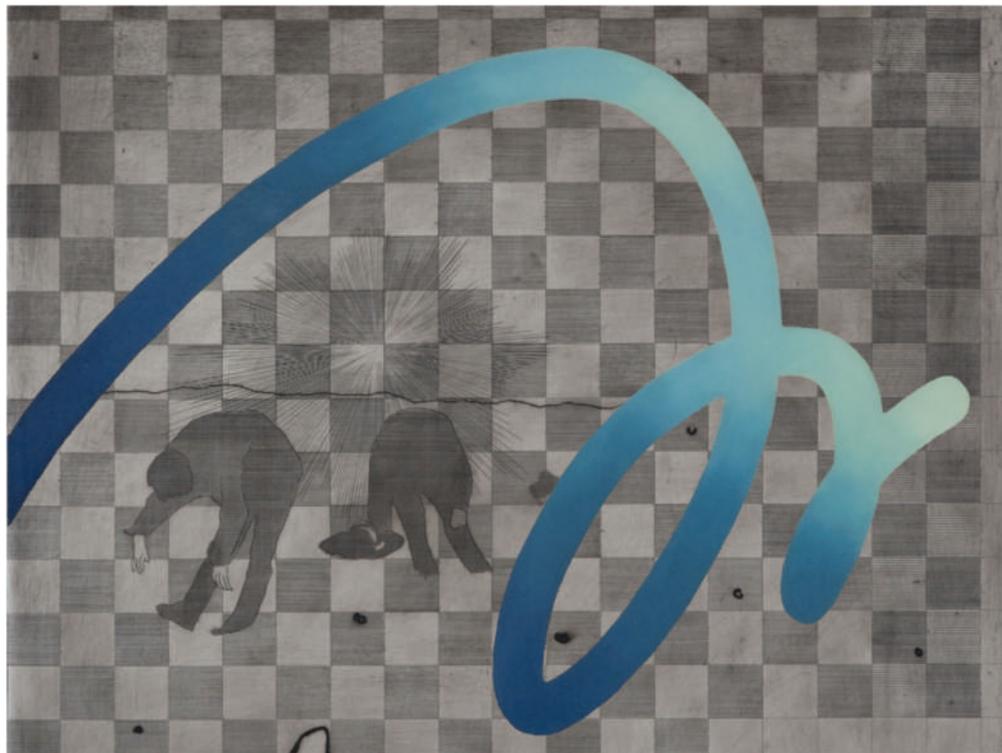


“Dither” with Chris Agnew

8 Jan — 6 Feb 2016 at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery in London, United Kingdom



Chris Agnew, *Composit-5K*, 2015, etching and oil paint on icon panel, 52 x 37 cm, detail

Landscapes and scenery come in and out of view, obscured by a dense fog of engraved, parallel lines. Jungle vistas and broken columns emit a heavenly aura of blue, or pinkish-orange light. They shine. They glow in the half-light. Elsewhere, a sullen harbour is engulfed in a Strombolian explosion of warfare, an eruption of orange and yellow lines that crash down like an asteroid shower. Perfect, stiff images from the annals of history are both obfuscated and brought to life by primal lines – zigzags, sparks, trees and flowers become doodles on the face of historical record, marked by the artist's own hand. *Dither* (8th of January - 6th of February 2016) is Chris Agnew's second solo exhibition at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, following on from his successful inaugural show in 2014.

Agnew's oeuvre deals with the construction and deconstruction of belief systems. The malleable nature of truth – as seen in political, religious, social and cultural circumstances – intrigues him. “The gap between what we know to be true and what we believe isn't always one and the same,” he has said. “Facts have a habit of falling into the gaps that beliefs have opened.” This sense of historicity, and its malleability, is echoed in Agnew's choice to use historical etchings and classical paintings as his point of reference. He employs a painstaking etching process that sees him engrave directly onto the gesso surface of primed

wooden panels. He then applies black oil paint, which he later wipes off to reveal the etching, and finally paints with precision onto areas of the surface. Agnew uses this 'permanent' technique, alongside painterly interventions, to show us just how impermanent – on its surface – information and truth can be. However, where previous works played with volume, seeing entire figures or areas obscured, blotted out or filled with tessellated patterns, Agnew's interruptions in *Dither* have taken on a more linear, and altogether more physical, aspect.

Through his etching process, Agnew removes all evidence of the artist's hand – and then, at the very final stages of creation, he reintroduces the artist's presence in the guise of permanent, semi-violent markings. In fact, one could argue, they are made after the initial 'completion' of the work, in an act of artistic self-vandalism, for Agnew takes a work that appears perfect and polished in its detail, only to score it with inerasable lines. While each panel is still laboriously prepared by the artist himself, and the engraving done by him as well, he now works in horizontal lines with the help of a ruler system, seeking to create a machine-like precision that allows the final effect to resemble a mechanically-produced print. Agnew has also removed definable narratives from the pieces. Where the works he showed in 2014's *The Mighty Grip of Fate* presented figures and stories, these new etchings put noticeable protagonists on the backburner, instead allowing Agnew's final deft scribbles to rise to the forefront.

These 'scribbles', created with an electric drill, take mere minutes to slice through the surface of the gesso (and the hours, the days that have gone into creating the work thus far) to gouge irrevocable grooves in the work's surface. Agnew then fills them in with paint, giving them the appearance of painterly lines – yet the groove remains visible, a scar across the surface, a new topography of truth weaving its way around the image. Like doodles on the pages of an old print in a history book, he first presents us with a neutral image, a version of a 'truth', hiding all traces of himself in its production, only to come back tenfold with primal markings that underscore the real fragility of what we think of as 'truth'. And it pushes us to question the notion of the 'finished' work – when, if ever, is it finished? Can it, in being scarred and marked, be pushed even further? "I wanted to react to something spontaneously, excitingly, that you couldn't rub out, or erase," he says. "I was too focused on making beautiful works and perfect surfaces. When is a work really 'finished'? When is it 'done'? I needed some kind of resolution. Not necessarily a resolution for the image, but a resolution for myself."

These resolutions have produced works such as *Double Take*, which reveals a misty landscape beneath bold, black, lines, deft sketches of plants and trees. Or the two works in the *Forced Projection* series, with dark foggy harbour- and seascapes emblazoned with explosions and rays of light bursting over the top in vivid fiery shades of red, orange and yellow. The lines make you look, then look again. They hide, reveal, they dance and skip gleefully across the surface. "We, as an audience, can look at a mechanically-reproduced history, whether printed in a book or in a film or computer screen, yet we will never be able to stop ourselves from imposing our own thoughts on that narrative," says Agnew. "You can't dictate the narrative of a work. There are no specific subjects here anymore. I want to open a door to the idea that one has no control over history." His interventions become eruptions, lines and exclamation points. They remind us that history can be written, written over and submerged. They raise questions – is what we thought to be true really so? "This," says Agnew, "is the very contradiction."

Chris Agnew is a British visual artist, focusing on finely detailed drawing, painting and his signature technique of etching on panel. He received his BA in Contemporary Art Practice

from The University of Leeds in 2008, followed by a Masters in Fine Art at the Wimbledon College of Art in 2010. His work has been shortlisted for the Jerwood Drawing Prize in 2009 and 2010 consecutively, The Clifford Chance Postgraduate Printmaking Prize in 2010 and Saatchi's New Sensations, also in 2010. A recipient of the Jealous Graduate Print Prize 2010, Agnew's work has been exhibited in Japan, Italy and throughout the UK, including in the Royal Academy of Arts' Summer Exhibition. His work has been featured in numerous printed and online publications, including NME Magazine, The Telegraph, and on the front page of The London Evening Standard. Recent solo exhibitions include The Mighty Grip of Fate with Kristin Hjellegjerde, London (2014) and The Pomp of Circumstances at Nancy Victor Gallery, London (2012), while recent group exhibitions include Unfamiliar Ground, touring across North England, Cu Minte-a-n Pix, Saint Ink Gallery, Bucharest, and Standing on the Frontier Vol.2, Unit 24 Gallery, London (all 2014). He divides his time between London and his studio in Bucharest. Agnew is represented by Kristin Hjellegjerde, London.

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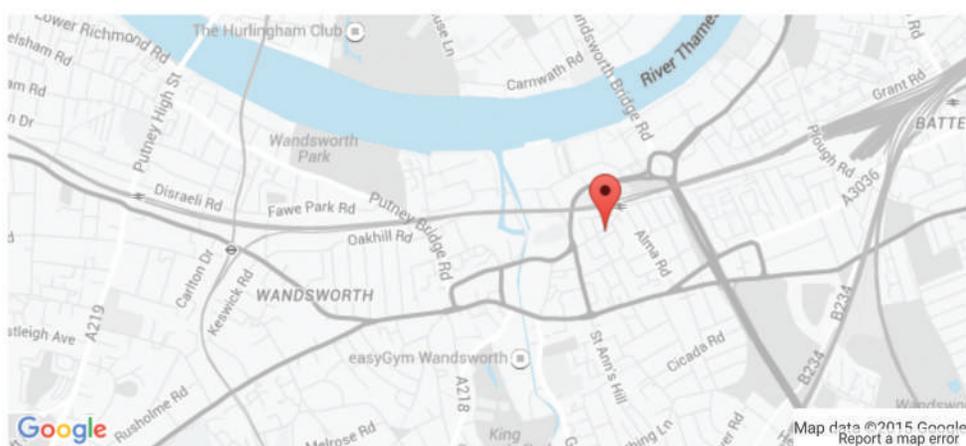
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Opening hours

Tuesday - Saturday

From 11am to 6pm





Captions

1. Chris Agnew, Forced projection II, 2015, etching and oil paint on icon panel, 52 x 37 cm
2. Chris Agnew, Variable, 2015, etching and oil paint on icon panel, 140 x 100 cm
3. Chris Agnew, Forced projection I, 2015, etching and oil paint on icon panel, 52 x 37 cm
4. Chris Agnew, Composit-MA, 2015, etching and oil paint on icon panel, 52 x 37 cm
5. Chris Agnew, Composit-MR, 2015, etching and oil paint on icon panel, 52 x 37 cm
6. Chris Agnew, Composit-VH, 2015, etching and oil paint on icon panel, 52 x 37 cm