

The Colour of the Colour

15th April – 7th May 2016

Karen Ciambriello

Louise Courtnell

Diane Nevitt

Lisa Stokes

Yana Trevail



The Colour of the Colour

An exhibition tracing the influence of
Robert Lenkiewicz's teaching on five artists

Karen Ciambriello | Louise Courtneil | Diane Nevitt | Lisa Stokes | Yana Trevail

15th April – 7th May 2016

Thursday 14th April 6 - 8pm PRIVATE VIEW

Friday 22nd April 2 - 4pm Louise Courtneil will give a demonstration in painting from life based upon Lenkiewicz's methods.

Thursday 28th April 6 - 8 pm Talk: 'Confessions of a Studio Assistant'.
Former Lenkiewicz studio assistant Yana Trevail will give an insight into the theatre of the artist's life, studio & libraries.

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Foreword

The Barbican studio of Robert Lenkiewicz in its heyday wasn't only a place where the artist painted. It was a world in itself, a hive of activity with a constant procession of people coming and going: sitters, studio assistants, frame makers, book dealers, patrons, friends and acolytes, as well a stream of casual visitors and the merely curious, since the doors were invariably open to the public. It also attracted numerous artists and art students, keen to learn what art colleges no longer taught: the basics of academic painting. For those who Lenkiewicz thought were serious, no matter whether they were complete beginners, art students or full-time painters, he would usually agree to help, always for free.

The informal course Lenkiewicz developed became known as 'The tone of the tone, the shape of the shape, the colour of the colour'. Occasionally using teaching methods adopted from famous teachers such as art historian Ernst Gombrich or Bauhaus Meister Johannes Itten but, more often, through his own practical demonstrations, Lenkiewicz ruthlessly deconstructed paintings into a basic visual grammar of form and colour, dark and light.

Of the five artists in this exhibition, I had been able to follow at close quarters the progress of Louise Courtneil and Diane Nevitt, two of Lenkiewicz's longer-term students, since both had their studios in my gallery, while Karen Ciambriello has always been a virtual Barbican neighbour and was a regular model for Lenkiewicz. Yana Trevail and Lisa Stokes also exhibited their work in exhibitions with me at early stages of their careers, even before, like Louise, they went on to success in prestigious national competitions such as the BP National Portrait Award and The Hunting Prize. Although since then they

R.O. Lenkiewicz. *Study of Diane Nevitt Painting, Painting, Painting, Painting, Painting ... Tone of the Tone, Shape of the Shape, Colour of the Colour.* 1996. Oil on Canvas, 61 x 61 cm.



have all gradually developed their own very different style, they have remained friends for over twenty years and appreciate how fortunate they were to have shared the unique opportunity which Lenkiewicz's generosity and unrivalled knowledge of painting gave them.

When Catherine Gillen, owner of The Brownston Gallery, asked me about an interesting theme for a show, I started to think about an exhibition which, by tracing these five artists' progress from their early student studies to recent mature work, would give some insight into Lenkiewicz as a visual educator. For just as much as teaching how to paint, Lenkiewicz was fundamentally teaching how to *look*. Irrespective of mere personal taste and stylistic prejudices, another world was revealed with a deeper understanding of how a good painting was created, illuminating the history of art from Rembrandt to Rothko.

Francis Mallett, *White Lane Press*.

The Colour of the Colour

What is meant by ‘the colour of the colour’? For the students of Robert Lenkiewicz it heralded the most exciting and final part of his disciplined, academic teaching method he called ‘the shape of the shape, the tone of the tone’ – a series of monochrome exercises of simple still lifes and self-portraits painted from direct observation. The purpose was to develop a clear understanding of shape and tone before introducing the more complex and challenging element of colour and its use. This tonal approach to interpreting the three-dimensional world requires the careful study of what the retina experiences at that moment, without any assumptions or preconceived ideas of what anything looks like: nothing is fixed, neither the object of study nor oneself. Lenkiewicz always insisted that we ‘respect the event’, whether that was recording a portrait, a still life, a landscape, a memory or a feeling. This mindful attention to the moment is intrinsic to the integrity of the painting – anything less is mere illustration. And what soon becomes clear and apparent to the attentive student is that there are all colours in all colours. The grass is not just green, but a myriad of colours that create the experience of green grass.

So for **Louise Courtneil** the delicate, cool grey of a white sheet in shadow is achieved without the use of black, but with a more complex mix of ultramarine, rose madder, raw sienna and white. She enjoys the challenge of feeling the minimal differences in the temperature of closely toned colours in her sensitively observed portrait, landscape and still-life paintings. Through her use of largely muted colours she creates paintings in which she is ‘striving for subtlety and a sense of poetry’. This is particularly evident in her still lifes in which the arrangement of colours she likens to music: ‘in my paintings each brush stroke is like a

musical note, and if we could hear the paintings the sound would be a close harmony in the minor key. Pianissimo’.

Through patient and perceptive teaching Lenkiewicz instilled in students the critical faculty of challenging and questioning every mark made on the canvas so as to realise an integrity of intent and not to rely on an acquired technique of slick mark-making. His clarion call ‘let every mark be a thought and every thought a clear one’ still rings loudly in all our ears as we constantly fight the temptations of the ego for easy praise or commercial success – which is creative destruction. The act of painting must be its own reward.

The philosopher John Locke distinguished primary or objective qualities, such as size and shape, from secondary or subjective qualities, such as colour. It is this subjective nature that interests **Karen Ciambriello**, whose figurative, idiosyncratic paintings are imbued with a joyful sense of colour. Strongly narrative, her work expresses ‘memories and experiences that are sometimes obscure, sometimes as simple as a ride in my father’s car’. Such working from memory involves a subtle, reductive process which distils the significant details. Ideas that are partly planned but that also permit the painting to have a life of its own are achieved by layering the paint, allowing images to reveal themselves. The paintings have a dreamlike quality, which her vivid use of colour intensifies.

Although as a student Lenkiewicz came to realise that technical skill was not the ultimate aim, he nevertheless continued to paint in an academic way. However, he encouraged his students to follow their own paths and to develop what he termed their own ‘private language’.

In pursuit of this it becomes apparent that the manner in which the paint is applied to the canvas is equally as important as what you are painting, that is, the image. The idea that thick paint is more expressive of an emotive frame of mind is largely due to its application being harder to control. Thin paint may appear more controlled and 'intellectual', but all painting is the result of a combination of feelings and intellect: 'I sense a scream passing through nature. I painted ... the clouds as actual blood. The colour shrieked' (Edvard Munch on his painting *The Scream*).

This difference in the thickness of paint is most noticeable in Lisa Stokes's expressionistic figurative paintings in which she attempts to 'make sense of a memory and emotion from the past and the present'. The colours are for the most part sombre and heavy as if veiled or faded with time. She is particularly drawn to Indian red (the base for all her work), olive green, Naples yellow extra pale and flesh tint as they 'evoke for me the drama, atmosphere and emotion that I want to achieve'. In more recent work her palette is mitigated by whites, bright pinks, pewter and silver, and by the use of contrasting mediums such as graphite, charcoal and ink. Constantly in pursuit of 'beautiful paint' she creates paintings that have a disquieting sense of foreboding, with meanings hidden or merely hinted at.

Lenkiewicz described as 'aesthetic cunning' the ability to 'let go of the image and respond to the paint itself, the calligraphy of the mark'. He also believed that 'there is no real distinction between figurative and abstract painting': a blue chair is as recognisable as a blue square. The main point of reference, regardless of style, becomes one of formal concerns, of the relationship between things –

tones, colours, forms, line. As Oscar Wilde said, 'mere colour, unspoiled by meaning, and unallied with definite forms, can speak to the soul in a thousand ways'.

Based on still life and landscape, Diane Nevitt's early work employed a palette that was dominated by muted blues, greys and ochres. As her distinctive abstract style developed so too did the range of colour, including the use of metallic paint and gold leaf. Described by Lenkiewicz as 'a natural colourist', Nevitt's work is suffused with luminous and radiant colours, though she often returns to a more restricted palette. Working with no preconceived idea of how the finished paintings should be, she responds intuitively, with the colour, shapes and marks she uses, to a mood or feeling connected to her experience of places and events. She nevertheless searches for subtlety of tone and harmony of form 'similar to a piece of music'.

This recurring analogy between colour and music also shows itself in the fact that three of us play musical instruments: Louise sings, Diane plays the trumpet, and I play the cello, whilst some of us listen to music to create a particular atmosphere while working. Colours can resonate with one another, setting up vibrations and rhythms that lead the eye around the painting and affect the viewer in a sensual way. There is also a strong physicality to painting – a grace and a panache in the act of applying the paint – in which gestural marks are aligned with the colour. It is in some ways like an improvised dance to the music of the eye.

Also a performer, my (Yana Trevail's) paintings are derived from a physical engagement with the landscape and of the haunting, silent presences of abandoned

places and archaeological sites. Certain shapes, colours and forms found in these locations remind me of the interconnectedness of all things in space and time: that we are made of the same material that constitutes rock, the dust of nebulae and stars. My feelings for the deep and distant are registered on palimpsest surfaces in layers of translucent paint. Rich, gem-like colours, such as transparent red oxide, Indian yellow, pthalo blue and more recently gold leaf, are used to create unpredictable, sometimes strange, cosmological images that resonate with energy.

Five painters with distinct voices. Lenkiewicz believed that claims to absolute truth were examples of what he termed 'aesthetic fascism'. Rather, nature is in a state of flux, and all we can know of it – our ideas, our perceptions, our sensitivities – are subjective. Creativity is a connecting with that flux and hence cannot be treated as a science with rules and laws. All creative work is autobiographical and no way of experiencing the world is more or less valid or valuable than any other. We all have radically different frames of reference and unique visceral responses to the visual world, what Lenkiewicz would term 'a meal at every glance'. Painting provides an artist's life with significance, and offers to the viewer an insight into the inner world of others. In a world increasingly dominated by instant and instantly accessible images, the slow, considered process of painting with humility in the face of the inexorable beauty of existence is a rare and precious endeavour.

Yana Trevail.



*Top (l to r): Louise Courtnell, Karen Ciambriello, Diane Nevitt.
Below (l to r): Lisa Stokes, Yana Trevail.*



Louise Courtnell. *Cascading Leaves*. 2012.
Oil on canvas. 45 x 34 cm.



Louise Courtnell. *Self – hair study*. 2015.
Oil on board. 34 x 26 cm.



Yana Trevail. *The House of the Tetrastyle Atrium II*. 2011.
Oil on canvas. 106 x 122 cm.



Yana Trevail. *Montessu Spiral VI*. 2015.
Oil on canvas. 122 x 137 cm.



Lisa Stokes. *Daylight I*. 2013.
Oil and graphite on canvas. 150 x 105 cm.



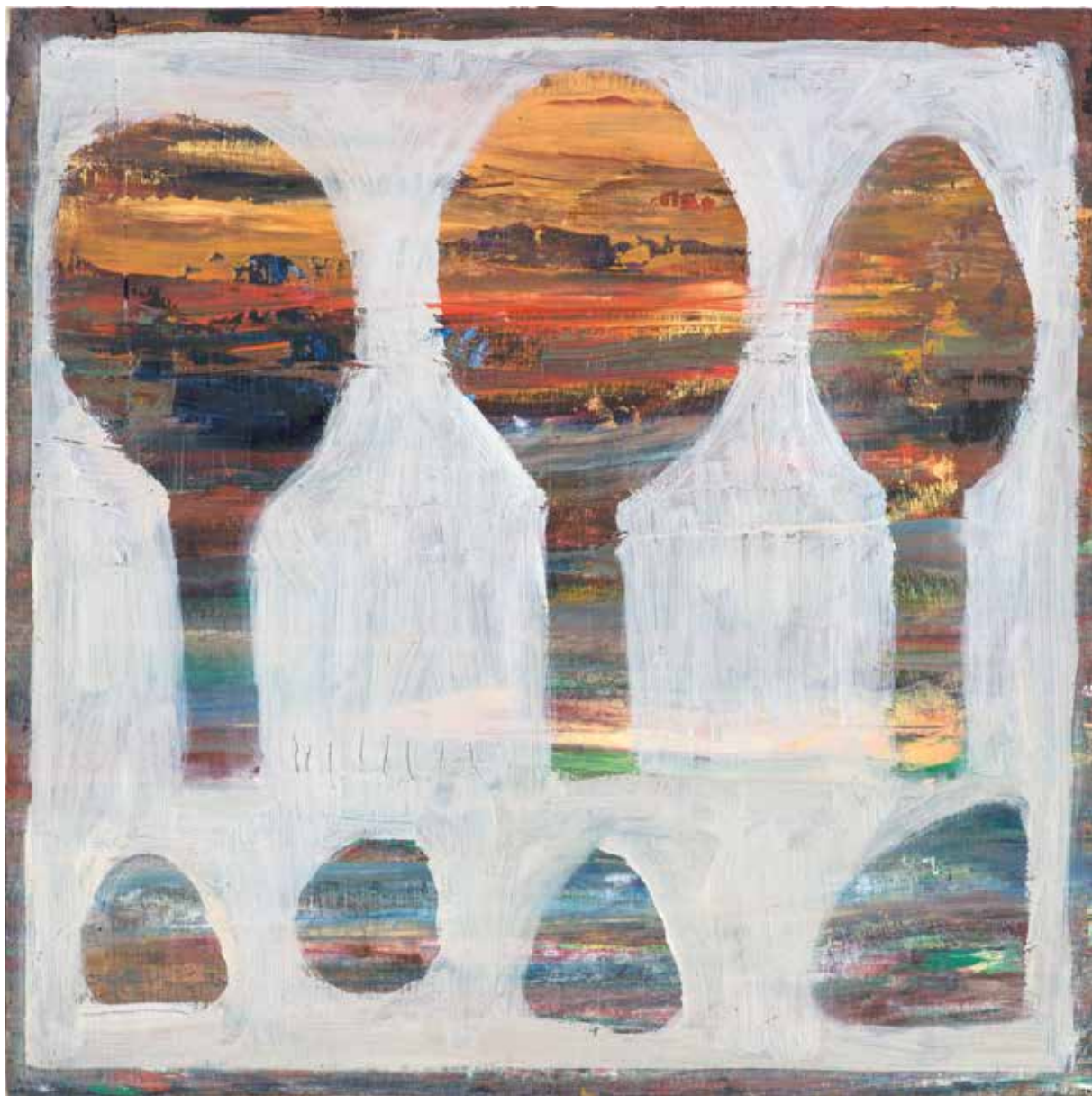
Lisa Stokes. *Nettles* 2007.
Oil on canvas. 61 x 46 cm.



Diane Nevitt. *Evening at Villa, Lake Garda*. 2005
Oil on canvas. 107 x 122 cm.



Diane Nevitt. *Evening on the Terrace, Merano*. 2008.
Oil on canvas. 107 x 122 cm.



Karen Ciambriello. *Three Trees in Hoe Approach*. 1999.
Oil on panel. 40 x 40 cm.



Karen Ciambriello. *Seven Fish at WOHO*. 2015.
Acrylic on two panels. 31 x 25.5 cm (each panel).

About the artists

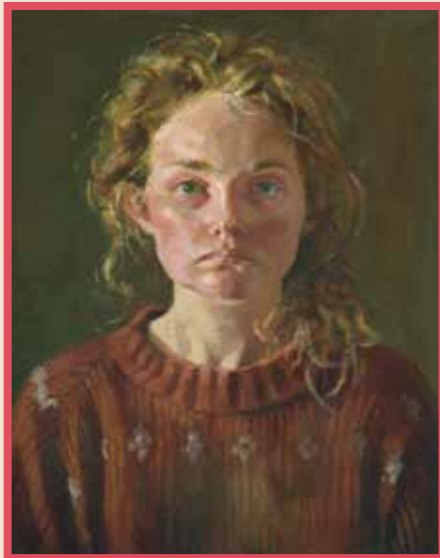
Karen Ciambriello was born in Ohio, USA. After arriving in England she attended Plymouth College of Art. In 1982 she met the artist Robert Lenkiewicz, with whom she had a long term relationship and two children. She studied under Lenkiewicz while he was devising his tutoring methods, and, with his guidance and support through the rest of his life, she developed her own private language in paint. Karen's paintings are only partly pre-planned, but through a layering of bold colour and concept, a story emerges. Her story is in the final layer; memories and experiences which are sometimes obscure, sometimes as simple as a ride in her father's car. She continues to live and work on The Barbican in Plymouth.

Louise Courtnell lives in Cornwall on the Rame Peninsula. Robert Lenkiewicz became her mentor and tutor in 1987. Her work includes landscape and still-life, whilst she maintains a particular passion for portraiture. She describes herself as 'a subtle colourist, striving for a sense of poetry within the paint itself'. She has been a regular exhibitor at the National Portrait Gallery (BP Portrait Award), having been commended for two self-portraits. Commissions have included Dr. Rowan Williams (2002), and Robert, Earl of Edgcumbe (2008). Public Collections : Royal Holloway College, University of London. Recent Still-life exhibitions at the Westcroft Gallery, Kingsand, Cornwall. Louise Courtnell runs a regular class in Kingsand following Lenkiewicz's approach to painting.

Diane Nevitt's paintings have evolved from a figurative approach to a more subjective abstract style. Initially based on still-life and landscape, they are now inspired more by memory and association. Much of her recent work has been inspired by the colours, culture and landscape of northern Italy and central Europe. Exhibitions include: New Street Gallery, Plymouth; Walton Gallery, Kensington; Cricket Fine Art, Chelsea; Leipzig International Art Fair, Germany; Art London, Chelsea. Corporate and public collections include: Government Offices for the South West; twofourtv.com; University of Plymouth. Monograph: *'Journey – The Paintings of Diane Nevitt'* (White Lane Press, 2008).

Lisa Stokes (b.1967) studied Graphic Design before moving to London to work as a Medical Artist. In 1990 she met Robert Lenkiewicz, with whom she trained and modeled for until his death in 2002. She has exhibited regularly in the BP National Portrait Award and The Hunting Prize, as well as other national competitions. Solo exhibitions include Plymouth Arts Centre and John Martin Gallery in London. Stokes' paintings explore the feelings of loss, of physical and emotional experiences when something is destroyed, forgotten or hidden. She draws inspiration from her life, her childhood and her relationships with others.

Yana Trevail (b.1958) studied Fine Art at Plymouth College of Art and Wimbledon School where she studied with Prunella Clough and Maggi Hambling. She won the Chairman's Prize in 2000 and the Meynell Fenton Prize in 2002 at the Discerning Eye Exhibition, Mall Galleries, London. She has had seven solo exhibitions and has had her work selected for numerous exhibitions including the BP Portrait Awards: National Portrait Gallery; The Hunting Art Prizes: Royal College of Art and the Royal Society of Portrait Painters. In 1975 she met the painter Robert Lenkiewicz with whom she studied and sat for. She was his studio assistant from 1997 until his death in 2002.



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