

# JACK SOMMERVILLE

## Rain, that's all

text by Caroline Georgea Hayes

In the pursuit of a greater art, Jack Sommerville first fled London with it, his “generic art school painting” and then England, landing in the ancient French village of Le Dorat. On his way to look at his new studio, Jack witnessed a period of continual cloudbursts: “there’s this feeling of absolution when you get hit with one [...] something pure, very, very uncomplicated, and very, very compelling about that happening, and I thought, ‘What better subject matter could I use?’ ” resulting in the production of his new show’s centrepieces, the ‘Big Rain Paintings’. Prior to his exhibition at Stallmann, Jack may predominantly be perceived as an artist through abstraction, many of his previous works gargantuan canvases dressed in hazy colour blocks with anxious strikes skewed in the centre. Now, his pieces are calmer, more focused, and lean toward the figurative, a massive transition that embraces the purity of a singular subject through a resistance to pedantic intellectualism in dedication to humility.

Jack is steadfastly honest and adamant about the limitations of painting in contrast to its subjects. While his work is “immediately compelling,” it is “definitely not earth-shaking,” which, he contends, “shouldn’t be. Nothing ever can be.” Had he attempted to imbue his paintings with half-hearted wordy explanation or compositional tact, he would have merely put an ill-fitting ‘trinket’ onto his work. This embellishment perhaps could propel him further in the art world, at least in the short term, but simply getting ahead doesn’t appear to be his intent. It would be a mistake to indulge in the “absolute obviousnesses” encouraged by institutionalised art, wherein viewers are spoon-fed critical analysis through press releases and wall descriptions, on top of already transparent work. “What I say is literally only as valuable as what you say about it, because it’s just description,” a frivolity that, according to Jack, plagues the pursuit of cultural authenticity.

Jack's resistance to intellectualising his work, however, does not come from a lack of means to effectively communicate. Conversation for him is unyieldingly calculated and restrained, revealing only what needs to be said and verbally refusing to engage with ambient hot topics that normally permeate cultural discourse. When he does start to indulge in such discussion, Jack never fails to catch himself. While speaking on the purpose of description in the art world, he suddenly halts the momentum of his thoughts, saying

**“I don't want to talk about the fucking 'future of contemporary art,' ”**

ceasing before he delves too deeply into ostentatious chit-chat. In another instance, Jack discusses the intentions behind this exhibition, prophesying it might be “a return to, well, a return.” Once again, he interrupts himself: “See, I'm falling into that meaningless language again.”

Instead of “meaningless language,” then, Jack's work is about *practice*, one that impenetrably binds his artistic production with his life. In the pursuit of a more truthful, humble art, one has to actively practice humility in the everyday. “There's no distinction between life and making art,” Jack insists, “you can't have humility in making art if you're not a humble person.” Not only is humility manifested by refusing to put “trinkets” on an “already perfect thing” — the piece's subject matter — but also in the artist's ability to take a step back from controlling the narrative and delivery of their art. Or, as Jack puts it,

**“once you get rid of the ego out of it all and your social obligations to creating clever lines then you start making good stuff.”**

This dissolution of the ego channels the mysticism of childhood: “the childlike way of thinking is a way of being that is only humble. It's not about you anymore, it's about the play. It's about the produce. It's about the fun of the experience.” In presenting his work in full vulnerability, without the comfort of ornament or descriptors, Jack is also embracing the thrill of creative reception. “I don't know how people will see my work. That's part of the fun,” he explains, liberating the cycle of the institutional status quo.

Showing an array of Jack's new work, Stallmann also debuts its own vision and place within the art world. Lina Sophie Stallmann, the gallery's founder, has a "very similar understanding of why being like a child is the best thing you can do when you're trying to extract cultural goods [...] you can have fun and not be enacting your entire career in fear because you're beholdng to these weird social nets that you've built for yourself." In a way, then, the gallery offers a new space for alternative dialogue that shows a new, light-hearted way of displaying and interpreting art.

**Those "still on the hyper-cold conceptual bandwagon," upon entering Stallmann, "might just be charmed a little bit, and not know why."**

Beholding Jack's work — largely towering pieces — in the space, one is curiously humbled. "When they're this big, then you're little, in comparison. Children are little; the fact that everything's big is important." Jack's new work possesses a timeless magnetism that emerges from its calculated moves giving way to innocent simplicity. In further justification of the scale of the Big Rain Paintings, Jack offers, very plainly: "Well, with these, you can stand under the rain."

## **Stallmann**

Schillerstraße 70, 10627 Berlin

+44 (0) 7753 914470

linastallmann@yahoo.de

**WWW.STALLMANN.CLUB**