

Press Release

FIONA STRICKLAND

Tulipa

4th – 26th September 2020



ABOVE: *English Florist Tulip Group Portrait - Tulipa 'Lord Stanley' Tulipa 'Talisman' Tulipa 'Joseph Paxton Flame'*, watercolour on Kelmescott vellum, 16 .14 x 24.8ins (41 x 63cm)

In September 2020 leading botanical artist Fiona Strickland will be holding her second solo show with Jonathan Cooper, Chelsea. The exhibition (which will feature 18 paintings and will be the artist's first since 2016) is dedicated to the vibrant and fragile beauty of the tulip, portrayed in the challenging medium of watercolour on vellum.

Strickland has long been drawn to tulips as a subject, finding their colour, shape, and form visually engaging, and the history of their depiction in art intellectually fascinating. Among the artistic inspirations for this body of work is the seventeenth-century *Tulip Book* of Dutch painter Jacob Marrel, which Strickland travelled to the Rijksmuseum to study at close-hand in 2016. Exploring the subject of the tulip, so integral to the history of Dutch art, also allows the artist to

Jonathan Cooper

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reconnect with her own ancestral heritage, and it is perhaps unsurprising to learn that her grandmother, who moved to Scotland from the Netherlands as a child, was a marvellous gardener who instilled a love of plants in the young Strickland by allowing her to visit the sanctuary of her tulip-filled greenhouse.



ABOVE: Fiona Strickland (right) with Marja Stijkel, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (photo Robert McNeill)

Another important artistic influence for Strickland is Dame Elizabeth Blackadder, under whom she studied at Edinburgh College of Art, and whose freedom of expression in the depiction of tulips she particularly admires. No artist painting the tulip today could do so without acknowledging the revolutionary impact of Rory McEwen (1932 – 1982) upon botanical art in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Strickland first saw McEwen's work as a student in Edinburgh, and in this exhibition embraces the challenge of depicting a subject that has become so deeply linked to his legacy, seeking to observe it anew and find personal meaning in it.

Many of the tulips depicted in the exhibition are English Florists' Tulips grown by the Wakefield and North of England Tulip Society, the only association of its kind to have survived from the nineteenth century to the present day, of which Rory McEwen was a patron. Like McEwen, having learned of the Society and joined it, Strickland was gifted prize-winning tulips from the Society's annual show to depict. After capturing these perfect specimens in watercolour at the height of their beauty, she could not bear not part with them, and has preserved their dried forms in her studio.

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Among the specimens depicted in the exhibition is the *Tulipa 'Rory McEwen'*, a Bybloemen Flame tulip that was named in McEwen's honour. It is particularly fitting that Strickland has depicted the flower on a piece of McEwen's own sheets of Kelmescott vellum, which were gifted to The Hunt Institute of Botanical Art by McEwen's family following his death in 1982. Strickland is among the few botanical artists to be given a sheet of this vellum by the Institute.



ABOVE: *Tulipa 'Rory McEwen'*, watercolour on Kelmescott vellum belonging to Rory McEwen and gifted to the artist from their collection in the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, 6.69 x 6.69ins (17 x 17cm)

Strickland first began experimenting with watercolour on vellum as a medium in 2015. Although technically challenging as a surface, it has become her favoured support due to the translucent quality with which it imbues her works. Painting meticulously and slowly, she applies the most transparent rating of watercolour paint using a 'dry brush' technique, layering subtly different shades to suggest variations in temperature and tone.

In her choice of subject Strickland aims to inspire an emotive response, and a feeling of connection with the viewer. Often depicting flowers from an unusual viewpoint or at turning points in their life cycle, her paintings act as portraits of an individual flower, rather than scientific depictions representative of a species. The small scale of her works, their jewel-like application of paint, and the use of vellum as a support connects them with the tradition of portrait miniatures, suffusing them with a sense of intimacy and preciousness.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

Fiona Strickland (b.1956, Edinburgh) is a Graduate and Post Graduate of Edinburgh College of Art. She is a multi-award winner and R.H.S. Gold Medallist, recipient of the Dawn Jolliffe Botanical Art Bursary (awarded by the Royal Horticultural Society), and the American Society of Botanical Artists and the Horticultural Society of New York's 'Best in Show', 2015. A member of the American Society of Botanical Artists, she tutors botanical art internationally, and in October 2016 taught at the ASBA's 22nd Annual Conference, held in conjunction with the Hunt Institute's International Exhibition of Botanical Art & Illustration in Pittsburgh. Her paintings are held in the R.H.S Lindley Library, the Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, the collection of Dr. Shirley Sherwood OBE, and numerous private collections in the UK, Europe, and the USA.



Established in Park Walk, Chelsea, in 1988, **Jonathan Cooper** represents exceptional living artists working internationally in traditional techniques, specialising in representational drawing, painting, photography and sculpture.

The gallery is a member of BADA (The British Antique Dealers Association), SLAD (The Society of London Art Dealers), and LAPADA (The Association of Art & Antique Dealers).and regularly exhibits at international art fairs.