

Jessie Stevenson: The Circling Deeps

March 24 – April 29, 2023

Private View: Thursday, March 23, 6–8pm

Curated by Émilie Streiff and Charlotte Call

Sapling is delighted to announce *Jessie Stevenson: The Circling Deeps*, curated by Émilie Streiff and Charlotte Call. The exhibition will feature expansive multi-panel paintings of abstracted marshland landscapes, as well as a suite of small and vibrant oil on wood tableaus and the artist's signature 'colour beginnings' on paper. At once euphoric and shadowy, Stevenson's recent output emanates contrasting senses of paradise and pandemonium. *The Circling Deeps* is her second solo exhibition with the gallery and presents a new direction inspired by a residency in Spain, while continuing the physical, material, and emotive concerns rooted to the beguiling atmospheres of her North Norfolk origins.

Stevenson's painting practice embodies a feeling of profound escapism, initiated by a return to her familial home in the English countryside during the pandemic. Following a peripatetic upbringing and studies in London, she was struck by the sublime nature of the surrounding fields and coastlines. The works presented in *The Circling Deeps* reflect and fragment the flat mud and creeks transpiring across the marshlands, a capricious environment with sudden shifts in lights and climes. The artist describes it as 'many worlds', ruled by tides and lunar lines – at times welcoming and at others uncanny and unsettling, a place which 'can catch you unaware of time passing.' Charged with gestural energy, her paintings play on the opacities and transparencies of the wetlands, their passages of serenity never far from more ominous and foreboding skies.

This sense of turmoil is furthered in the styles and emotions embraced by Stevenson's historic touchstones. In late 2022, she was granted the Royal Academy's Richard Ford Award and subsequently spent a month in Madrid researching the collection and archive of the Museo Nacional del Prado. There she delved into the works of Goya, spending days drawing directly from the Spanish master's *Los Disparates* etchings of tangled beasts and figures, which satirise the cruelties of war and the tumultuous societal behaviour caused by the oppressive monastic order. Stevenson's recent paintings manifest this internal and external turbulence with vivid strokes and muddied colour, simultaneously expressing the purity of pastoral isolation tainted by her return to the endless noise of the city. Wordsworth also looms large in her practice, stemming from a tome of his poetry gifted to the artist by her grandmother. She uses fragments from Wordsworth as titles to her works, Romantic in style yet poignantly relevant to contemporary existence; like Goya, the English poet's work exudes 'potent ecstasy and fickle undercurrents'.

A multi-disciplinary artist driven by process, Stevenson continues her studied investigations into materials and supports in *The Circling Deeps*. Embracing oil for its soft, mud-like consistency and fleshy finish, she manoeuvres the paint with slashes and smudges, zigzagging across the canvas as if navigating through the ridges and banks of marsh creeks. The layers and palimpsests result in perspectival warps and twisting horizons, offering a perplexing terrain for the eye to roam. The artist applies these frenetic marks in the raw tones of Goya's palette, with deep umbers, scarlets, violets, and phthalo blue. Buoyed by the visual and emotional vernacular encountered in London, Madrid, and Norfolk, Stevenson presents a dichotomy of hope and darkness, scratching the luminous surfaces of her resplendent and meandering landscapes.

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