

A thin rumble of traffic roils behind the teeth, punctuated with the peeps of car horns and sharp metallic screeches from the hazy city below. Clouds bloom stubbornly like thin curtains in a hot breeze, ripe with dirty atmospheres. At the Piscina Municipal de Montjuic, the mood is languid. Everyone's ears suddenly fanfare with the thick fugue. Arms fling over the creamy rumble, twisting into a cascade, and then, eyes close to welcome the cool dash upwards and skywards. Disappearing into a white firework, ripples become the gleeful laughter of leisure. Arms back now but behind the heads of gorgeous, golden recliners, hair settles and sweat hangs off the edges of the poised shoulder blades of Adonises spreading across the white tiles. The electronic jangle of music enters, promptly yet easily, and a woman prone, framed by a large blue towel, insists on sedation.

A series of twenty one plastic bags filled with resin and flecks of colour—acrylic, spray paint, charcoal—lines the perimeter of Gallery 1. Hung at about my own eye height, those affixed to the wall appear as if caught in time, like they've been thrown at the wall, the tape paused mid splat. I peer into the other crumpled globes that hang in front of the windows like I'm looking for the prize goldfish or the dusty pick n mix. It's hard not to look for other things, turn abstracted materials into recognisable, coveted objects; indeed, as the title of the installation offers, 'It Keeps Catching My Eye.'

FLOW MATTERS is Sophia Pauley's first solo presentation in Scotland and the result of her winning the RSA x Wasps Award earlier this year. Pauley is ostensibly a painter however this show demonstrates her current desire to test the limits of her own painting practice, a thirst that she explains to me, has ballooned, not without contest, whilst studying MA Painting at the Royal College of Art. In Gallery 2, a typical bold brushstroke that you might find in earlier large paintings on canvas by Pauley, becomes a thick length of dyed rope that weaves its way between chunky wooden stretchers, each façade clad with archetypal white glazed swimming pool tiles.

Pauley tells me that she is resistant to saying that the work is all about swimming. Largely it is—this is not mid-2010s sports art however, with its gym socks and energy drinks (I'm thinking about exhibitions like the group show 'Performance Fetish' at SWG3 in 2013)—although it's more about her personal experience of being a competitive swimmer. Her engagement is autotheoretical and nostalgic—a therapeutic treatment and reconfiguration of the aesthetics of outdoor training pools and the affects of adrenaline, repetition and control, and how these affective responses as they now, since the end of her swimming career, manifest in her studio practice.

The 'flow' of the exhibition title refers to psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's coining—'a state in which people are so immersed in an activity that nothing else seems to matter.' For Pauley, both the studio and the pool are sites of flow, or attempted flow. For her, the studio is more a site of contested attention—Pauley finds flow in repetitive drawing, the hand guides the mind in peaceful sweep. But what if this breaks, or one day rests frustratingly just out of reach? The flip side of flow is intense disappointment. As Csikszentmihalyi outlines, 'on the rare occasion that it happens, we feel a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like'. In our contemporary world where your attention is consistently under pressure, divided, fed back to you, Pauley asks, how possible is it to capture optimal experience or is its delicious elusive promise just enough to keep us going? Or, I wonder, what would it mean, with all its privileges, to stop, lie down and rest a while, feel the soft weave against your cheek, and let your mind wander?

The gentle clatter of children's voices, a vague splashing, and something sharp like gulls whispers from a hanging assemblage covered in metal grommets, still holding the frayed ends of blue speckled rope. I lean in close to listen, the sound barely audible over the exuberant hum of the exhibition opening. A tight saltiness emanates from a nearby plastic sack filled with bright shiny blue, that looks like an exaggerated candle or a deoxygenated blood bag. It makes me feel a bit ill, the sweetness of the hot toddy I'm drinking welcome yet heavy on my tongue. The clocks went back last week and tonight is one of those first properly bleak autumnal evenings in Glasgow where it starts to get dark at 4pm and the rain turns to an unrelenting mist. The windows of the gallery sweat with the breath of visitors, capturing the orange and red flashing lights of the night outside in optimistic streaks.

References

Kylie Minogue, 'Slow', *Body Language*, (London: Parlophone, 2003)
Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology Of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990)

SLOW

by Caitlin Merrett King

This piece of writing is a reflection upon/review of Sophia Pauley's solo exhibition *FLOW MATTERS* at The Briggait in November 2022. Caitlin was invited by Wasps to write about Sophia's work, and the two spoke online before meeting in person at the opening on a dark winter night.

Visit *FLOW MATTERS* at The Briggait in Glasgow Monday–Friday, 9:30am–5:30pm until Friday 25 November 2022.

Sophia Pauley is a British artist, brought up in Cardiff and currently in her second year of her MA studying Painting at Royal College of Art in London.

She graduated from Edinburgh University with a BA Hons in Painting in 2018 and was the recipient of the ACS Studio Award.

Caitlin Merrett King is a writer and programmer based in Glasgow. She has published writing with Sticky Fingers, MAP Magazine and Pilot Press. Her debut novella 'Always Open, Always Closed' will be published by JOAN in early 2023.

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